



Iran: A Modern History

Abbas Amanat

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This history of modern Iran is not a survey in the conventional sense, but an ambitious exploration of the nation that offers a revealing look at how events, people, and institutions are shaped by trends and currents that sometimes reach back hundreds of years. Abbas Amanat covers the dynasties, revolutions, civil wars, foreign occupation, and new Islamic regime of this complex period in history.

Amanat combines chronological and thematic approaches, exploring events with lasting implications for modern Iran and the world. Drawing on the latest historical scholarship and emphasizing the twentieth century in its coverage, the book addresses debates about Iran's culture and politics. Political history is the driving focus of this narrative based on decades of research and study, which is layered with discussions of literature, music, and the arts; ideology and religion; economy and society; and cultural identity and heritage.

Iran: A Modern History Details

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From Reader Review Iran: A Modern History for online ebook

mohammed munir uddin says

This book is amazing I personally love it ????

Jon Glazer says

This is an excellent history of Iran over the past 500 years. Just as I had hoped, I learned a lot about the country's unique past and how it influences current events.

Despite its length the book held my interest all the way through. Unfortunately the proofreader seems to have nodded off around page 400 or so; the latter half of the book is riddled with an astounding number of typos, spelling mistakes, and inappropriate tense usage. Within the space of about 20 pages the word "message" is twice written as "massage", causing some unintentional humor. Women are referred to as "reproductive unites"; I can only assume the author meant "reproductive units". The beautiful Shahyad Tower is referred to as Shayhad Tower, which is a bit like describing one of America's landmarks as The Statute of Liberty. Presumably the author's brother (who designed the tower) never read the galley proofs.

Obviously these are all minor criticisms but they do slightly undermine the author's extensive knowledge and erudition . I hope these many errors will be corrected in subsequent editions.

Tony Gualtieri says

This is a long book that covers a great deal of history, much of it either unfamiliar to me or known through the distorting lens of western propaganda. It reaches back as far as the foundation of the Safavid Empire around 1500 and proceeds logarithmically up to events as recent as the Green Revolution of 2009.

Miraculously, the author maintains a coherent narrative throughout the text. It's readable and has just the right amount of information to hold the attention of someone ignorant of even the basics of the material covered.

Phillip says

3.75 / 5.0

NOT AS MUCH OF A SLOG AS 1000 PAGES FORESHADOWED. INVERTED STRUCTURE IN THAT EARLY / MIDDLE HISTORY IS DETAILED AND MODERN / POST WWII IS SKIMMED OVER. DETAILED INCLUSION OF ARTS INFLUENCE THROUGHOUT. COMPLICATED SUBJECT ORGANIZED WELL AND RELATIVELY EASY TO ABSORB. GLAD I READ IT; GLAD I'M DONE.

Jerome says

My rating may be a bit low, but this book just had too much detail for my needs. It got to be tedious and I sort of cherrypicked through about half of it to get to the parts I was interested in.

Shane Hill says

Great read this massive tome.....over 900 pages of Iranian history from the start of the Safavid Dynasty to the dismal present of the mad mullahs!!

Toni says

I have always loved history and Persia holds a special place in my heart, so I was very excited to see this book offered on NetGalley. When I initially requested this book, I did not realize that it was some 1000 pages long. I was momentarily intimidated and thought it would take me months to get through it. Most history books tend to be somewhat and tedious to read and I was unsure of what to expect. I needn't have worried, however. Mr. Amanat writes in an engaging style and I was pulled in quite easily.

The book cover 500 hundred years of Persian and modern Iranian history and the author's knowledge and authority on the subject is apparent throughout. The Persian empire's history is among the most fascinating in the world. This book does not disappoint. It is detailed and the reader is fortunate to get a comprehensive picture of a complex and intriguing country with rich traditions and a unique culture.

I would definitely recommend this book to readers interested in history and expanding their knowledge on the region. I will also be buying a copy for my personal library so that I can go back to certain periods and reread them at a slower pace. My 13-year old son is also a history buff and while he may not be ready for this book yet, he will be one day.

Thank you to NetGalley and the publisher for providing a free copy of the book.

John Nordin says

Iran has always fascinated me, its on my 'bucket list' of places to go. Amanat give you 900 pages of the last 5-600 hundred years of Iran right up to the present. The complexity of real life is on display. The British and the Russians tried to carve up the place, the current regime is so atypical of Muslim history and thought, and US bungling made it worse.

Jim says

For a generation, the word Iran has conjured up a variety of images and thoughts here in the west some filled with hope and others of a more pejorative nature. As a college senior, this reviewer remembers the

frustration, futility, and anger, of America and the West, during the events of 1979 and 1980 when the United States embassy in the capital of Tehran was overrun and the staff taken hostage for over a year.

Since then, Iran, as an Islamic Republic, has been much maligned and disregarded by the America and the West in the forty years since the fall of perhaps the last of Pahlavi Shah. It has also brought turmoil to the American political scene since the late 1970's (the Iran-Contra scandal, aka Irangate, of the mid-1980's for instance).

But when the opportunity to review Abbas Amanat's new history of his native country Iran: A Modern History (2017, Yale University Press) was made available to this reviewer, I eagerly began to read it with the hopes of understand the events of 1979 and the history of the nation and people who were behind them.

I was not disappointed. What I found was the history of a proud and resilient people with a dynamic and turbulent past and present.

Amanat's book begins in 1501 with the Safavid Dynasty and ends with an insightful analysis of why the nation of Iran has been able to exist. But there is more to this book than the historical narrative of the seven dynasties through which Iran has passed to the current Islamic Republic. This is a book in which the cultural history of Iran is also told - architecture, literature, music, and from the mid-20th century to today - film. It is also a book in which the depth and tenacity of the Shia branch of Islam is shown and has been a major part, according to Amanat, of Iran's survival, thriving, and identity.

Iran: A Modern History, is a history that has depth and breadth to it. If you are a first time reader of Iranian history, this book will challenge you, as it did this reviewer, with a scholar's, and a native son's, understanding and analysis of Iran. But you will discover a perspective, a very long perspective, on a nation who has sat astride history of both the east, and since the 18th and 19th centuries (and before, really) the west. A position that created external tensions with Russia and England and internal tensions between the Muslim clerics, the progressive element seeking democratic forms of government, and the deeply rooted supporters of monarchy.

I really enjoyed this book. It helped me to understand the turbulent nature of contemporary Iran as well as the reasons behind much of what has happened since 1979.

It is a book that would be great for book clubs, as well as probably upper class history classes as well as graduate level history and perhaps in Christian seminaries as part of the study of Islam and the Muslim world.

I gave this book a five-star rating on Goodreads!

Note: I received a kindle copy of this book from the publisher via Net Galley in exchange for a review. I was not required to write a positive review.

Stephen Morrissey says

Amanat's book is a magisterial history of Iran, and with some additional editing and more elegantly flowing prose, could have earned more stars from this reviewer. Amanat's strength lies in tracing the vast political, economic, social, and religious history of Iran from the beginnings of the Safavid Empire in the 1500s

through the consolidation of Khomeini's Islamic Revolution in 1989. Amidst dueling dynastic heirs, countless invasions, and the tensions between the monarchy, the bureaucracy, and the Shi'i religion, Amanat provides a portrait of a country in the thorough and detailed way of a Norman Davies or Richard J. Evans.

Unfortunately, the book is pock-marked with grammatical and spelling mistakes that mar the flow of the history being told. Particularly troublesome is the lack of the word "the" before capitalized terms, as well as numerous other grammatical mistakes that leaves one scratching their head as far as the editor's role in releasing this book (note that I read the Kindle, and so I cannot comment on whether such errors are in the print version).

Amanat leaves the reader with the sense that the Islamic Republic of Iran that we encounter today bears striking resemblance to the Pahlavi and past imperial predecessors, though suffused with the Qom-ified veneer of Shi'i Islam. The best way to understand Iran, in the context of its place in the world, its nuclear ambitions, and its posture towards the West, may not be Islam, but the country's long and troubled history with those beyond its borders of the Zagros Mountains.

Hadrian says

I went to read this book after realizing how little I knew about the political history of Iran and its causes. When I needed a few educated non-specialists with questions, they would bring up the US-assisted coup against Mossadegh in 1953, or something from antiquity, and most everybody knows about the role of the clergy and proxy war with the Saudis these days. But there is scarce discussion of how we got from the coup to now, and even less knowledge of what happened before 1953.

This volume is mostly a political history of Iran. Amanat emphasizes the use of philosophies drawn from Persian history and Shi'a Islam, but their changes and adaptation. Likewise, he draws distinctions between the center of political power and the periphery of ethnic minorities, religious groups, political factions, etc. This framework helped me understand some of the more abstruse discussions. To break up the political discussions, Amanat has long asides in intellectual and history - he includes Shariari, Bazargan, and Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, of course, but he even crams in some discussions on Hedayat, Kiarostami, and Googoosh.

The history is divided into four sections. The first begins with the start of the Safavid period from 1501 to 1736 and continues through the "unhappy interregnum" before the beginning of the Qajar Dynasty in 1799. This is a foundational starting point because it allows Amanat to introduce the declaration of Twelver-Shi'a Islam as an official religion under Shah Isma'il I. By the reign of Nader Shah (r. 1736-1747), his attempt to introduce an alternate school of legal and political jurisprudence led to his overthrow and assassination.

The second part discusses the Qajars (1794-1925) through the 'long 19th century'. This situates Persia in the middle of global colonialism (maneuvering between Russia and Great Britain), and also the rise of the Babi movement (an antecedent to what is called Baha'i), and a Constitutional Revolution between 1905-1911, which led to the establishment of a parliament.

This leaves over six hundred pages for the last two parts of the book. Part three starts with the rise of Reza Pahlavi amid the global chaos of the First World War and ends with his dynasty's fall in 1979. The first Pahlavi cast himself as a builder and a modernizer, who would build a new centralized Iranian state with a judiciary, railways, a national bank, banning of veils. This would come on the backs of oil revenues, and at the expense of minorities and those on the fringe. His son would continue this project, but Amanat suggests

that he ignored or understated the strength of other political factions, and was given to egotism.

Part four covers the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 to 2009. There is a substantial discussion of the *velayat-e faqih*, which he translates as the Guardianship of the Jurist, or the legal fusion of religion and state. He claims that many supporting scriptures and hadiths were taken "out of context", but the concept of church and state unifying, or a return to a "purer", more "authentic" Iran did not spring from a vacuum. (He makes a sly dig and comparison to Saudi Wahhabism). He ends his volume with the 2009 election of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and the Green Movement, and two lines from Hafez, rendered into imperfect English:

"Anything sweeter than the sound of love I haven't heard /
Memorable echoes remain under this revolving dome."

I found this book to be an impressive single-volume history. I could see this used as a textbook, or perhaps for a persistent and dedicated general reader - but a specialist would better evaluate it on their own terms.

Joseph says

Iran: A Modern History by Abbas Amanat is a detailed five hundred year history of Iran. Amanat received his B.A. from Tehran University in Social Sciences in 1971 and his D.Phil. from the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Oxford University in 1981. He is a Professor of History and International Studies and Director of the Yale Program in Iranian Studies. Amanat is a historian of Iran and Shia Islam, and the modern Middle East. He specializes in Qajar Iran as well as the history of messianic and apocalyptic movements in the Islamic world.

For many, Iran became a fixture in American politics 1979 with the revolution and the taking of American hostages by college students. Iran was in the news again with talk of Reagan and the hostage release and later arms for hostages. Today Iran is the news as the US and others work to stop their nuclear weapons development. For those with a sense of history, President Hassan Rouhani seemed to mimic Woodrow Wilson with his statement that "Death to America" is not directed to American people but to the actions of the American government.

Iran (or Persia) has a long a history and a deep culture that is detailed in Amanat's book. Culture in arts and life adds greatly to a country's history, changing it from a detailed listing of events and adding a human factor. This is, unfortunately, missing from many histories that are not typically Western. Culture adds to the reader's understanding.

That being said, the revealing of the history is done with great detail and clarity. Perhaps the best thing about a well-written history is it explains how a country became what it is today. Why is Iran anti- American (government)? Why is Iran so concerned about its security? Are nuclear weapons a power grab or just a deterrent? Why do so many allies of the US have full diplomatic relations with Iran? How can one Muslim state be at odds with nearly all other Muslim states?

I found the period between World War and World War II the most interesting and, for my part, the most unexpected. This is the birth of modern Iran and its regional and international struggles. Here too is where the internal struggle between conservative Islam and Western culture seem to clash and continue to struggle

even today.

Iran has a rich history that is a struggle. That history also explains why present-day Iran evolved into what it is. For many Americans, it seems more like a Cold War situation, a representation of worldwide terrorism. To Iran, it sees a world ready to exploit any weakness and remembers every betrayal on the world stage. This is a book that will bring a broader understanding of a country that only preconceptions exist. The first step in better relations is understanding. Amanat does a tremendous job of educating the reader, even a reader with a background in history.

Ali says

Iran is a country with a rich and complex history. The book "Iran: A Modern History" by Abbas Amanat provides a comprehensive overview of the country's past and present. It covers the Persian Empire, the Islamic Revolution, and the current political situation. The book is well-written and easy to read, making it a great resource for anyone interested in Iranian history. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to learn more about this fascinating country.

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

See more of my book reviews on my blog, [Literary Flits](#)

Clocking in at a thousand pages, *Iran: A Modern History* is easy three times as long as books I usually choose so it is with all credit to Abbas Amanat's engaging writing that I happily immersed myself in this history for the best part of a week. I was fascinated to discover the rich history of this ancient nation and, although I have already forgotten many names, I do feel that I have a stronger understanding of Iran's culture and her people as a result. I certainly appreciated the differences in not viewing this history through British eyes and, in common with a depressing number of history and historical fiction books I read over the past few years, Britain's actions reveal our government to have been (and still be?) duplicitous, selfish and greedy.

In common with many (all?) countries, Iran's history is primarily a story of violent men, but I liked that

Amanat makes a point of frequently stepping away from war to also show us beauty. Artworks are reproduced in colour and black and white, plus I loved reading poetry and song lyrics, descriptions of theatre and film productions and even seeing a couple of satirical political cartoons. Such artistic creations are important to Iranian culture and their inclusion helped me to have a greater understanding. There are also maps which I think in a printed book would show various warring factions in a seemingly perpetual struggle for territory, however these details aren't reproduced in the ebook format so I was confused by the exact timelines of particular battles.

I quite expected to read *Iran: A Modern History* in sections around other books and for reading it to feel like studying or work! Instead I was keen to keep reading and exploring Iranian history. Amanat draws out human stories and individual characters so this book didn't feel dry. I often enjoyed reading for several hours at a time! The 20th century, as Iran swings from one cultural extreme to another, takes a disproportionate number of pages compared to medieval times. Understanding the historic events that led there, albeit in an overview, is very satisfying. Readers do need a certain level of commitment to get the most out of this book I think, however I would recommend it for history buffs and fans of historians such as Simon Schama. A good book for long winter evenings!
