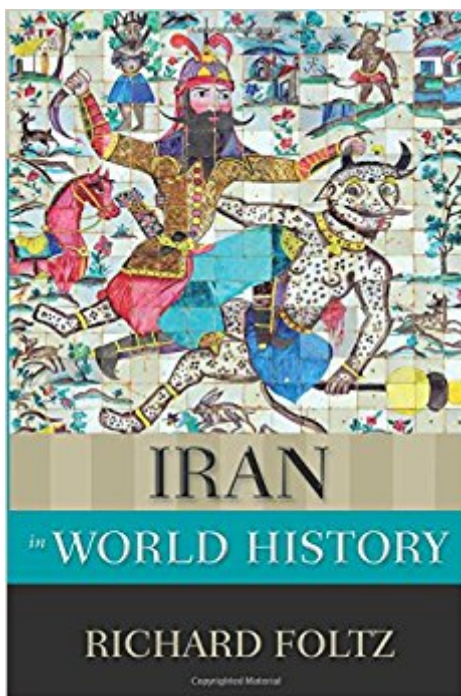


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Iran In World History (New Oxford World History)



Synopsis

Home of one of the world's most ancient and enduring civilizations, Iran has been at the nexus of world history for the past three thousand years. Situated at the crossroads between East and West, it has been marked by its encounters with other cultures and has influenced them with its own. From paradise gardens and Persian carpets to the mystical poetry of Rumi and Hafez, Iran's contributions have earned it a place among history's most refined and sophisticated societies. In this book, Richard Foltz traces the spread of Iranian culture among diverse populations ranging from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, and along the Silk Roads as far as China, from prehistoric times up to the present day. He emphasizes the range of contributions Iran has made to world history by highlighting the roles of key figures such as the ancient empire-builders Cyrus the Great and Darius I, the medieval polymath Avicenna, and early modern Mughal rulers such as Shah Jahan, who built India's celebrated Taj Mahal. From the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty by Reza Shah in 1925 until the 1979 revolution under the charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran embarked on a modernization process that led to the spread of literacy and the growth of the women's movement, making it one of the most advanced nations in the developing world. Lack of political freedoms has continued to frustrate many Iranians, however, and the country is often seen as an international pariah in the West. Iran today is rarely treated well in Western news headlines, despite remarkable achievements by individual Iranians in a wide range of fields. Encompassing religion, literature, the arts, and politics, Iran in World History offers a comprehensive history of one of the world's most influential civilizations and offers nuanced examples of its continuing role in the world today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"[I]t is particularly well written and will be a quick, enjoyable read for those interested in learning about Iranian history and culture...Essential."--CHOICE
"Any reader looking for a concise, yet all-inclusive history of Iran, or the development and interactions of world civilizations in general would enjoy Foltz's new book."--The Middle East Journal

Richard Foltz is Professor of Iranian Studies at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. He holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University and previously taught at Columbia, Brown, and the University of Florida. Having written on topics ranging from Animal Rights to Zoroastrianism, his earlier books include Religions of Iran: From Prehistory to the Present and Religions of the Silk Road.

This book is a pretty good intro and overview into Iran's history. Doesn't cover everything (no 1 book could cover over 3000 years of history) and doesn't go into extreme detail but it's a good start for people who are interested in a very misunderstood country.

The book provided detail concerning an area of the world which was a nearly total void in my earlier education. The history suggests several possibilities concerning why the Middle East will remain a source of a variety of problems for many years to come.

First rate, fascinating, lucid, and accessible scholarship, just as I would expect from Dr./Prof. Foltz. I read it in prep for a recent trip to Iran, which was a great way to get critical background for understanding the country.

respect may be too prone of the few books I did not overly criticize

This is a simply remarkable distillation. Foltz has written the best volume so far in this innovative series. This book is an extremely good introduction to Iran. It covers two thousand years of history of one of the world's great nations, a tangled and complex history, and does it very well. In addition, it covers recent decades fairly and without bias, covering the Islamic Republic (chapter 8) with flaws included. Readers interested only in current world issues could read the last three chapters and gain important understandings, although the deeper history will facilitate understanding. There are plenty of crucial facts--a quarter of the population is still Turkish and barely half speak the national language as a natal language. The origin and distinctive features of Iranian-style Islam are covered

very well. One aspect of the book is that while Iran is a nation with definite borders, historic Persian culture extends well beyond Iran's borders and remains influential to this day. Historic Persia expanded and contracted, but often included large areas of the Caucasus, what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan, and chunks of Anatolia (now the heartland of Turkey). The first three chapters discuss the rise of Persian culture and creation of the Persian empire and several dynasties, as well as relations with the Greeks and Romans. There was a lot of war but also mutual cultural influence. The Parthian rulers used Greek for their coins and were influenced by Greek culture. In 529 when Justinian closed for good the Academy in Athens, a number of scholars sought refuges in Persia, setting up a long-lasting intellectual influence that lasted into Islamic times. There is also intriguing discussion of the rise of Manichism, and--later in the book--of the origin of the Bahais, and other religious matters. Zoroasterianism is also discussed at some length. Chapter 4 covers the arrival of Islam but note the title: "The Iranization of Islam." Persian culture has had huge influence. These are complex and controversial matters, but well worth reading about. Chapter 5 covers the arrival of Turkish groups, of which one or another ruled Iran from the 1100s through the early 20th century. The book rather glosses over the Mongol era, which some books on Iran see as the most devastating event the country has ever experienced. Also note: some of the names of tribal groups have changed spelling, reflecting recent scholarship, so they may differ from what readers remember. Chapter 6 is important, covering European dominance (Britain, Russia primarily) 1722 to 1925. Some of the roots to current problems may be found here. Chapter 7 covers the Pahlavi years, and the last chapter discusses the Islamic Republic. The closest the book comes to bias is describing the Shah, the Mossadegh mess and the Shah's repressive regime.

It's too easy to see the world in vertical silos: this is Iranian history, that is Turkish history, this is Islamic, etc. It's natural to organize things in that way, but it can make a subject like Iran (or Persia) unusually daunting, as we know from casual observations of history that 1) it has a very long history and 2) it was intimately involved with many other peoples. It's all in this volume: Iran's early origins; a discussion of the Indo-European languages and where Persian fits in--and why that's an issue when you're looking into Iranian history; their dealings with both the Indian and Greek cultures; their connection to the peoples of the steppes and their influence on the Turkic peoples (another subject you might need courage to delve into); and their relationship to Arabs and Islam. Foltz went into great detail about the last part, and it was a fascinating examination of how two great cultures interacted with each other, both positively and negatively. For all of the thoroughness, it did feel at times as if it was hard to get an insight into the Iranian people because so many other related

issues were discussed. However, I think that's part of the point: one can't simply characterize group of people who have been shaped by so many diverse influences. Recommended as a primer for Iranian history

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