

Reviews

La Révolution constitutionnelle à Tabriz: à travers les Archives diplomatiques françaises (1906-1909), Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam, Saint-Denis: Editions Connaissances et Savoirs, 2016, ISBN-10: 2-7539-0316-6, 606 pp.

While British, Russian, American and Persian early twentieth century archival materials have been available in print since then, to date France has not published many of its government documents. Therefore, Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam's book is appreciated as a significant effort to fill this lacuna. His carefully annotated compilation of A. L. M. Nicolas' consular reports sent to the French foreign ministry constitutes an important contribution for historians of the constitutional movement in Tabriz during the period of the First Majles, the coup of 1908 ushering in the so-called "Lesser Despotism," and the bloody resistance in Tabriz that led to the restoration of the constitution. Nicolas was an eminent French scholar/diplomat born in Rasht, who headed the French consulate in Tabriz throughout those fateful years and beyond. His perfect knowledge of the Persian language, culture and society enabled him to write insightful analyses of the major events that he witnessed in that important city in northern Iran. Throughout that particular period when he sympathized with the constitutionalists' cause, he was often in contact with its leaders, especially the members of the local Anjoman. The reports are some of the most objective, though nuanced, of the foreign dispatches sent by other envoys in the country. For instance, in contrast

to Nicolas, the French ambassador to Tehran at that time, Raymond Lecomte, was vehemently opposed to the entire movement, dismissing its leadership condescendingly as pathetic, incompetent imitators of the French 1879 revolutionaries, with no possible chance of success. He did not miss any opportunity to intrigue against them. With the possible exception of a very few British diplomats stationed in Iran at the same time, most diplomats and officials, especially the Russians, held equally negative opinions about the constitutionalists.

In a short but instructive biography, the author has gathered interesting information on Nicolas' education, his scholarly interest in the Babi movement of the mid-nineteenth century, about which he published many books and essays, and his conversion to Azali Bābism, a fact that was not known heretofore, at least to this reviewer. Nicolas' reports, and a few others written by his replacement in Tabriz during his leave of absence, including one report from Lecomte, form the main part of the volume, providing a precious primary source for the history of Tabriz covering the period 1906-9. A lengthy biographical list of the main Iranian and foreign participants in these events usefully complements the information gathered from these diplomatic dispatches. In addition, Nasiri-Moghaddam has written an introductory survey of the history of the constitutional movement in the period under consideration. Here, the text leaves much to be desired.

Despite an impressive, comprehensive bibliography of both Persian and foreign primary and secondary sources that accompanies a short outline of the current research on the subject, the sixty-one-page historical narrative is outdated. Many if not most of the secondary sources published in the last two decades or so offer revisionist perspectives of the revolution and its conflicting ideological composition, often debunking parts of the earlier writings of Mirza Mohammad Nāzem al-Islam Kermani, Ahmad Kasravi, or E. G. Browne. Nasiri-Moghaddam's introductory essay bears the mark of this latter group rather than more contemporary publications. The reader is not sufficiently informed about the ideological diversity that characterized the movement, especially in Tabriz where Russian social democracy had greatly influenced many of its leaders, who clashed with not only the traditionalist ulama, such as Mirza Hasan Aqa Mujtahid, but also with those who supported it, like the Shaikhi mujtahid, Mirza Ali Theqat al-Islam. Similarly, the "progressive" constitutionalists played a dominant role in defining the movement, as the author has noted in his expose but without distinguishing the more moderate elements, such as Yusef Khan Mostashār al-Dowleh, from radicals like Hasan Taqizādeh. In fact, the latter is hardly mentioned even though he is among the best known constitutionalist leaders in Tabriz, and had considerable impact on the events leading to the formation of the First and also the Second Majles, until his political demise in mid-1910.

This shortcoming, however, in no way detracts from the book's outstanding contribution to the state of research on the constitutional revolution. The author's intention, after all, was not to write another historical monograph. He has produced a valuable and highly reliable source of reference for historians and lay readers interested in the events that ushered in the era of modern Iran, referred to as *Iran-e now*

(New Iran) by the intelligentsia of that time. We should look forward to Nasiri-Moghaddam's future publications.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2018.1452112>

Gender and Dance in Modern Iran: Biopolitics on Stage, Ida Meftahi, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, ISBN 978-1-138-80404-3 (hbk), 185 pp.

Early on in the introduction of her book, Ida Meftahi notes that “dancing bodies have provided evidence for competing representations of modernity, urbanity, and Islam throughout the twentieth century.” In the following seven chapters of this refreshingly innovative book she provides the evidence.

The story begins in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, when modernizers turned to theater to propagate an Iranian nationalism that aimed at moral regeneration. Often based on the tales contained in classical Persian poetry, many plays and operettas included dance scenes. The modernists' conceptions of women's emancipation precluded assigning female roles to men, as had been the traditional practice, but few Muslim women were ready to go on stage. Directors and theater companies solved the problem by hiring non-Muslim women, some natives of Iran, others immigrants fleeing the Bolshevik revolution. With time, Muslim women's inhibitions lessened and they began to appear on stage. The “national dance style” that emerged in the 1940s was in many ways an “invented tradition,” as it evinced only limited continuity with the vernacular dancing of earlier times: women dancers had to be chaste but charming, and their stage presence was meant to visualize a progressive interpretation of Iranian history. This development culminated in the founding of a National Ballet Company in 1956 but ended abruptly with the revolution of 1979.

The next chapter discusses the circumstances surrounding the continued activities of the so-called *mutribs*, musicians who had dominated musical life before the advent of the modernists' cultural hegemony. Nationalists and Marxists agreed that they represented illiteracy and backwardness and that their art was *mubtazal* (degenerate). Their time was not up yet, however, for they came to perform in the cafés around Lālehzār Street in central Tehran after the practitioners of “national dance” left these for more “respectable” state-sponsored venues.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the figure of the cabaret dancer, the former focusing on live performances on stage, the latter on the depiction of cabarets in the popular films of pre-revolutionary Iran, the much derided *film-e fārsi*. These chapters have the great merit of rescuing a number of remarkable women from oblivion and telling the stories of their lives, thereby shattering the myth that all those who