

INTRODUCTION

BY THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, the Qajar king Nasir al-Din Shah employed a growing number of historians at his court. Having been established only in the closing years of the eighteenth century, the Qajar dynasty felt the need to display its legitimacy through a number of cultural activities, not the least of which was history. On the surface, the relationship between the king and the historian fit a familiar pattern of patronage found in Muslim imperial courts. Much like poets who wrote panegyrics for the sovereign, historians at the court glorified the reigning dynasty in exchange for an official title, a steady stipend, and continuing imperial largesse. The Qajar imperial court thus became a magnet for talented literary and scholarly minds seeking to historicize Qajar imperial splendor. Below the surface, the status of historians and the meaning of their craft were beginning to change. With the advent of print technology in Iran, histories now took the form of portable and easily reproducible texts, in contrast to their more ornate and beautifully handwritten predecessors. The opening of modern schools likewise led to novel pedagogical uses of history. While court historians often played pioneering roles in both the promotion of print and the opening of schools, these transformations had unforeseen democratizing effects on who wrote histories and why.

On February 19, 1922, 'Abd al-Husayn Malik al-Mu'arrikhin, whose title literally meant "king of historians," petitioned the Ministry of Education, bitterly complaining about the state of education and his own fate as a historian. A scion of a famous family of Iranian court historians, he lamented the "ruin

and misfortune” that had befallen Iran since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution and blamed it all on corrupt ministers who filled important posts with unqualified and unworthy members of their own entourage. Malik al-Mu’arrikhin named names: the Minister of Education, Mirza Mumtaz al-Dawlah, had appointed the “heretical” Baha’i Alam al-Sultan Tarchi as his Head of Personnel, and Mirza Ahmad Khan, who “did not know Persian and Arabic” and had a “well-known unsavory past,” as his Minister of Endowments. The historian painted a bleak picture of the daily goings-on of the ministry in which employees “were reading newspapers and smoking cigarettes for lack of things to do” and “if they decided to write a couple of pages in the course of a full day, this would be full of mistakes.” At this point in the petition, Malik al-Mu’arrikhin appealed to his own illustrious lineage, stating “for 150 years, myself, my father, and my grandfather have rendered service to the education of the nation,” an allusion to the multivolume nineteenth-century Persian history *The Abrogator of Histories (Nasikh al-Tavarikh)*, penned by his grandfather, court-historian Muhammad Taqi Sipih, and continued by himself and his father. He ended the petition by asking the ministry for a salary of 100 *tumans* a month or a position at the Ministry of Education so that he could finish his many ongoing history projects. If he was denied his demands, he threatened, he would take his books abroad, where he could find a publisher and make a proper living.¹

It is tempting to take Malik al-Mu’arrikhin at his word about the condition of former court historians and governmental ineptitude, but a more skeptical reading of his petition suggests the breakdown of a system of imperial patronage for history writing. After all, the “king of historians” was now a mere petitioner at the gate of the Ministry of Education. Modern educational institutions had replaced the court as the main site for the funding, production, and circulation of history. New social groups outside of court circles had joined in the new pedagogical mission of the state, much to his chagrin. Ironically, Malik al-Mu’arrikhin did not demand a return to the old system of court patronage; he merely wanted the Ministry of Education to act as his new patron.

These institutional and social transformations in the writing of history affected how various strata of Iranian society understood the past. Prior to these changes, many would look to the medieval epic poet Abu al-Qasim Firdawsī’s *Shahnamah*—the “Book of Kings”—for historical and mythical narratives of pre-Islamic kings and heroes. Nomads might turn to tribal lore and genealogies transmitted orally from generation to generation. Pious Muslims would hear tales of Abrahamic prophets, hagiographies of the Prophet Muhammad,

and in the case of the majority Shi'i population, stories of the Imams told from the pulpit, in religious schools, and from the mouths of wandering storytellers in public squares and coffeehouses. Finally, higher-ranking government officials, the literati, and urban notables connected to the imperial court could read officially sanctioned chronicles legitimizing the ruling dynasty. By 1900, the emergence of new institutions and medias for the production, circulation, and contestation of history began to reshape fundamentally the understanding of the past. This book provides a novel perspective on the relationships between institutions, the position of individual historians within a particular field of cultural production, and the contours of a specific historical discourse. It argues that the complex sets of interactions among a wide cross section of Iranian society—scholars, schoolteachers, students, intellectuals, women activists, government officials, and poets—were crucial in defining Iranian nationalism through the writing of history.

To tell this story, I draw on published histories, textbooks, school curricula, pedagogical manuals, poetry, periodicals, memoirs, unpublished letters, and speeches. The story begins at the Iranian imperial court, where certain officials embarked on translating and publishing histories of Iran and other countries. By the turn of the twentieth century, two further interconnected transformations structured new modes of writing history: first, the formation of a public sphere through the proliferation of voluntary associations, newspapers, and independent publishers facilitated the writing of publically oriented histories; second, the significant expansion of modern schools—often autonomous from the state—increased the potential readership of histories, particularly in the form of textbooks. Starting in the early 1920s, however, the state increasingly dominated the press and the schools, thereby creating more standardized nationalist narratives.

If an underlying principle united much of early twentieth-century Iranian historiography it was the need to emphasize continuities over ruptures. By stressing continuities, historians sought to authenticate Iran as a single and unsevered geographical entity existing from time immemorial.² Faced with evidence that conflicted with their nationalist logic—evidence emanating from the ethnic, geographical, and linguistic diversity of the past and the present—these historians redoubled their rhetorical efforts to assert the homogeneity of the nation in both time and space. They therefore wrote local histories as a means of symbolically integrating diverse provinces, cities, and tribes into a single nationalist rubric, and they wrote literary histories to demonstrate that poets,

philosophers, and *littérateurs* preserved a “national spirit” during periods of political fragmentation. The centralizing state increasingly forced contending visions of history into a standardized narrative by the late 1920s and 1930s.

In light of these trends, I pose a series of interconnected questions: How did patronage networks, schools, and state cultural institutions shape the writing and pedagogy of history? How did the writing of local, literary, national, and world histories inform and define Iranian nationalism? What were the social profiles of Iranian historians and what bearing did these have on their understanding of the past? And finally, how did the marginalized—women, religious minorities and heterodox movements, and tribal and ethnic groups—represent themselves in history and how were they represented by official discourses?

Nationalism Beyond the “West” and the Colonies

Unlike the dynastic, tribal, or religious historiography common to many Persian-speaking societies, modern historiography assumes the existence of a nation as an ontological reality and the primary category through which to study the past. Challenging this assumption, several scholars have shown that nationalism is a relatively recent invention.³ Eric Hobsbawm argues that nationalisms were “invented traditions,” by which he means “a set of practices” intended “to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”⁴ Others have shifted attention away from the question of whether or not the nation was fabricated, focusing instead on the “style in which they [communities] are imagined.”⁵ In Benedict Anderson’s famous formulation, nationalism originated in the Americas and Europe but was later “pirated” by other parts of the world.⁶

Anderson’s account of the origins and spread of nationalism elicited an incisive criticism from postcolonial scholar Partha Chatterjee: “If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?”⁷ Chatterjee claims that anticolonial nationalism instead created its own “inner,” “spiritual” domain of sovereignty—meaning language, religion, and family life—as a site for asserting difference in relation to the colonizers, although in the “outer” domains of statecraft, modular nationalism persisted.⁸ Building on Chatterjee’s critical insights, Dipesh Chakrabarty has identified the need to “provincialize Europe” by finding ways of speaking about non-Western societies outside of the “*clichéd and shorthand*

forms” of Western social science categories that take European history as a universal model.⁹ Chatterjee’s emphasis on language and religion as the “authentic” locus of communal identity vis-à-vis a universalistic political understanding of the nation-state and Chakrabarty’s contrasting of the universalizing tendencies of Western social science to the multiplicity of non-Western experiences both operate on a false binary between a romantic notion of an “authentic” non-West and a single and totalizing “West” rooted in the Enlightenment.¹⁰

The debate on nationalism all too often revolves around the neat dichotomy between the colonizer and colonized and the West and non-West. The question of how to speak of nationalism outside the colonizer/colonized paradigm in places such as China, Turkey, and Iran poses a serious challenge to historians and social scientists. To break this methodological impasse, this book situates Iranian nationalist historiography within a comparative framework not only in Western and colonial contexts, but also in non-Western and non-colonial countries so as to highlight the particularities of the Iranian case.

Nationalism and Historiography

Studies comparing Iranian nationalism with the “Western” experience often reproduce the teleological assumptions of the modernization paradigm in which non-Western nations lagged behind their Western counterparts on the same linear path to development.¹¹ To varying degrees, studies of nationalism in Iran address historiography, whether as a “derivative discourse” of European Orientalism, a series of narratives emerging out of a broader Indo-Iranian Persianate world, or repositories of territorially bound and racial conceptions of Iran. Mostafa Vaziri argues that Iranian nationalists passively and uncritically appropriated European Orientalist conceptions of Iran as a nation.¹² Recent scholarship reveals that Iranian nationalists were active agents in the “refashioning” and “invention of national selves” in relation not only to Europe but also to India.¹³ Employing the insights of borderland studies, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet emphasizes the crucial place of territorial nationalism and frontiers while critiquing the idea of “imagined communities” for not elaborating on how land, because of its “palpable” and “physical” nature, “lent a certain materiality” to how the nation was imagined.¹⁴ According to Afshin Marashi, Iranian nationalism converged through the interactions of state and society, with the state acting as the “agent of that common and sharply delineated culture.” In his view, print capitalism, state monuments, changes in public spaces, museums, and

rituals of commemoration helped forge the Iranian nation.¹⁵ These recent studies treat Iranian historiography as a nationalist narrative and tend to downplay the location of individual historians within a particular set of social networks and institutional contexts.¹⁶

Given the overall absence of professionalization among historians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those who wrote histories are often categorized as intellectuals who championed modernity in a “traditional” environment.¹⁷ Whereas the category of *intellectual* is useful in that it is sufficiently broad to capture the range of activities in which leading Iranian historians were engaged, it is too narrow a category to encompass all those who wrote and translated histories. Not all Iranian historians were “intellectuals” per se; many were teachers, educators, statesmen, clerics, religious seminaries, poets, bureaucrats, and journalists. Peter Novick’s assessment of the prevailing approaches to American historiography ring true for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iran, in which a handful of “great men” of historiography are given attention over the many other practitioners of history:

Practically all the work that has been done in the history of historical thought is biographical: studies of an outstanding individual historian, or at most of two or three outstanding individuals. Even historiographical works in historiography which are not explicitly biographical typically devote themselves to no more than a dozen major figures. If, when dealing with the outside world, historians have repudiated the “great man theory of history,” there appears to be a residual great man theory of historiography.¹⁸

Surveys of Iranian historiography often betray objectivist assumptions by lamenting the lack of full utilization of primary sources (particularly archival ones), the absence of “scientific” methods, and the ideological use of history by amateur historians.¹⁹ Reacting against these objectivist readings of historiography as constituting either success or failure (mostly failure), recent historians have attempted to explore the relationship between history, nationalism, and ideology. Ali Gheissari has criticized an earlier generation of historians for their “formalist” understanding of the development of Iranian historiography—an understanding that neglects the broader political and intellectual milieu and merely decries the lack of a “scientific” approach without reference to how “scientific” language itself can be ideologically driven.²⁰ Scholars have filled many of the lacuna in the study of historiography, including the “paranoid style” of certain Iranian historians, architectural historiography, Marxist historiography, Islamist

historiography, gender and sexuality in historiography, and the role of history in crafting and imagining the nation.²¹

This book builds on this scholarship by engaging with recent studies of education and professionalization to shed light on the institutional contexts for the production and circulation of history.²² Histories of education provide us with detailed accounts of state pedagogical projects and the ways in which Iranians “translated” Western ideas of education according to their own contexts.²³ Closely related to these education histories are studies of class formation.²⁴ The salaried middle class, which included civil servants, doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers, and teachers, emerged in the aftermath of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. The middle class relied on new educational institutions for their consecration and professionalization.²⁵ In his study of early twentieth-century Aleppo, Keith Watenpaugh characterizes historicist thinking as hegemonic among the middle class because they were most concerned with using the past to “inform” the present and “shape” the future.²⁶ Cyrus Schayegh’s astute observation about medical professionalization is equally applicable to the professionalization of historians: “One consequence of science’s focus on application and education in Iran was that the gap between Iranian modernizing professionals and the general modern middle-class public was much smaller than the differences in Europe between scientists and the bourgeois public.”²⁷ Similarly, in the field of history, professional historians and “the middle-class public” were not worlds apart. In fact, historians came from a range of socio-economic and occupational backgrounds irreducible to a single class.

History at the Intersection of the Court, the School, and the Public

Situating Iranian nationalist historiography within a comparative framework brings into sharp relief the methodological challenges associated with such a study. In trying to understand the specific trajectories of historiography in Iran, it is not enough merely to measure it by a European yardstick or to lump it uncritically with the “non-West” and colonized world. Three prevailing approaches to historiography—as professionalization, as state ideology, and as a colonial and communal contestation—will be considered before elaborating on the method adopted here.

The first approach traces the formation of an academic community, the institutions associated with it, and the means by which professional historians differentiate themselves from “amateur” historians.²⁸ In the Egyptian context,

Yoav Di-Capua has argued that professionalization occurred through training in both European and Egyptian institutions of higher learning, and via the creation and use of a state-patronized 'Abdin archives in the 1920s.²⁹ In early twentieth-century Iran, however, professional research did not center on a state archive, and the University of Tehran did not immediately train doctoral students to be university professors.

A second approach construes historiography as ideology. In states where an authoritarian ruler took a personal interest in the crafting of an official version of history, this method is warranted.³⁰ In interwar Turkey, for example, nationalist historiography was the ideological handmaiden of Kemalism. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, interacted intellectually with the historians who articulated the Turkish History Thesis (*Türk Tarih Tezi*), which held that the Turks were the ancestors of all civilizations. The Turkish state promoted the Turkish History Thesis through the official Turkish Historical Foundation (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*), the 1931 History Congress, and the journal *Tarih*.³¹ In contrast, Atatürk's analogue in Iran, Riza Shah, played no similar significant role in directing Iranian nationalist historiography, nor did the Iranian state establish official institutions or journals dedicated exclusively to the propagation of a particular vision of history, although Riza Shah did have an impact on Iranian nationalist discourse more generally.

In colonial India, the specter of colonial domination and communal violence loomed large in the writing of national history.³² The tension between British colonial historians and their Indian counterparts over how they narrated the Indian past has led Ranajit Guha to comment, "Since the Indian past had already been appropriated by colonialist discourse for reasons of state, its reclamation could only be achieved by expropriating the expropriators."³³ In many colonial contexts, historiography is often framed as a contestation of the past between the colonizers and the colonized, especially given the colonial domination of educational institutions. But because Iran was never formally colonized, its nationalist historiography cannot be cast within a colonizer/colonized binary. Although anti-imperialism constituted one motivation for the writing of history in Iran, it was by no means the only consideration.

For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most Iranian historians had no specialization or formal training in history as a discipline. Historians generally did not embark on an archive-centered project of bringing to light new sources while keeping abreast of cutting-edge historiographical trends that might give them a corporate sense of identity vis-à-vis "amateur"

historians. Nor were they firmly incorporated into a state-driven propaganda program of proposing new theories of world history with journals and conferences dedicated to history at their disposal. Unlike historians in such places as colonial India, Iranian historians were not rewriting national histories vis-à-vis European colonial historiography.

What methods best address the case of Iranian historiography given its unique set of circumstances? Questions posed by two social theorists, Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas, are useful starting points for an alternative framework for studying Iranian historiography. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the field, or the space through which individuals take a series of positions corresponding to their social backgrounds, is constructive in unpacking the relations between individual historians, institutions, and prevailing historical discourses.³⁴ Historians in Iran operated within a field of historiographical production in which their position within institutions and in relation to dominant discourses is crucial to making sense of their particular reading of history. Two clear examples of such institutions are the imperial Qajar court bureaus and the schools: the socioeconomic background of authors, their patronage networks, and the consequent ideological constraints had a direct bearing on how they narrated history. This book builds on Bourdieu's insights by historicizing the field and demonstrating how differing political contexts can potentially constrain and enable various types of historical discourse.³⁵

The critical scholarship on the public sphere as articulated by Jürgen Habermas and his interlocutors may similarly be fruitfully applied to the study of Iranian historiography.³⁶ According to Habermas's initial formulation, the European bourgeoisie came together in the eighteenth century as private individuals to create the public sphere. The public sphere was an autonomous space of intellectual exchange and intended for the "rational" articulation of a range of positions, often dealing with state activities but not beholden to its coercive influence and authority. Newspapers were crucial to the public sphere; they went from being mere instruments for reporting the news to being a medium for shaping public opinion. Subsequent critics pointed out the shortcomings of Habermas's single and undifferentiated bourgeois public sphere. Nancy Fraser has argued instead that there have always been a host of "subaltern counter-publics" consisting of "nationalist publics, populist peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics."³⁷

At the heart of this and similar critiques is a question insufficiently addressed by Habermas in his initial work: How do power and social position

affect the public sphere? For Habermas, the ideal bourgeois public sphere is autonomous from state power, and the appeal to reason becomes an equalizing force between the various protagonists partaking in a particular debate. But in practice it is highly questionable as to whether or not individuals and collectivities every fully transcend their social locations when engaged in public debate. It might be more instructive to follow Craig Calhoun and put Habermas's concept of the public sphere into dialogue with Bourdieu's idea of the field. In other words, studies of the public sphere must make reference to the position of writers in relation to multiple fields of power.³⁸

Before exploring the particularities of the public sphere in Iran, it should be noted that printing was central to the new forms of history writing examined here. Beginning with the increase of publishing at the Qajar court in the latter half of the nineteenth century, histories appeared in printed form, either as separate books or as serialized articles in a newspaper or magazine. The rise of printing therefore coincided with new forms of history writing associated with the modern state, education, and the public. For much of the nineteenth century, the Qajar court dominated Persian printing through its publishing of books and later gazettes and newspapers within the borders of Iran.³⁹ Despite its wider adoption in the early nineteenth century, print technology was not immediately popular. Besides being prohibitively costly, the earliest printing presses produced texts in moveable type resembling the simple *naskh* script. Given Iranians' aesthetic preference for the more flowing *nast'aliq* script, the market for printed books was hardly guaranteed by the mere introduction of the new technology.⁴⁰ Instead, it took several decades for printed books to rise in popularity. The invention of lithography, which allowed for the reproduction of *nast'aliq* texts at a cheaper cost, initiated what Nile Green has called the "Stanhope Revolution" in Persian print.⁴¹ Lithography allowed printing to occur outside of government circles, thereby contributing to the formation of a public sphere.

Although there are no reliable histories of book print runs, by the late nineteenth century printed books produced in Iran were in relatively high circulation.⁴² In its earliest stages, because of the costs involved, printing was largely the domain of the state. As new, less expensive print technologies such as lithography were developed, independent presses emerged for other purposes. Foremost among these were educational uses. Iranian modern schools, in contrast to contemporary religious seminary schools, required their students to read printed books. In the Islamic *maktab* and *madrasah* schools, a

higher premium was placed on the oral recitation of books and on face-to-face interactions between teachers and students. As part of their advanced studies, seminary students often hand-copied their texts. Modern schools operated on a wholly different logic. Students still interacted with their instructors in class, but teachers delivered a single lesson to a group of students who listened rather than providing one-to-one instruction for each student. Another considerable difference between modern schools and Islamic seminary education was the expectation that students in the modern schools would read the printed text in private rather than in the group setting of the classroom. In a sense, modern schools created consumers for printed texts.⁴³ Because history was an integral part of the modern school curriculum, there was a growing demand for printed history textbooks.

In conformity with prevailing cultural tastes, the earliest history textbooks were lithographed. By the 1910s and early 1920s, however, most textbooks—and most printed books in general—were produced using moveable type. This was in part because moveable type presses became cheaper and previous aesthetic tastes came to play less of a role in consumption patterns. In the 1920s, as the state invested more in a system of standardized education, subsidies ensured relatively low prices for state-sponsored textbooks. A growing market for the consumption of books alongside increasing literacy meant that independent publishers, who now often benefited from the same technological tools as the state, could publish and circulate printed books for relatively low prices.⁴⁴

The formation of the public sphere in Iran enabled new modes of historical writing insofar as a broad spectrum of political and social movements employed history to craft a genealogy for their present-oriented programs. Representatives of these movements utilized a range of historical genres, including biographies and local, literary, tribal, regional, national, and religious histories. As a result, a striking feature of Iranian periodicals was the abundance of serialized histories and biographies in both scholarly journals and more popular newspapers and magazines. Scholarship on the public sphere and on the field share an underlying concern with autonomy. The formation of a public sphere assumes that its participants enjoy a level of autonomy so as to debate openly and critique without fear of state censure. Bourdieu's study of the field was even more explicit than the scholarship on the public sphere in its focus on autonomy: the level of autonomy enjoyed by a cultural field relative to state power or market forces has a direct bearing on the positions individuals take within it.⁴⁵ In light of this, how does autonomy, at the level of both indi-

viduals and institutions, have consequences for how history is written? What strategies do those who find themselves in a dominated position utilize either to contest or to integrate themselves into hegemonic state narratives of history? And how did the state's relationship with historians change over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

A fundamental challenge to studying historiography in Iran is how to define the historians in the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods given their occupational diversity. Iranian historians represented the full gamut of literate groups, from court notables, poets, chroniclers, religious clerics, secretaries, government officials, and journalists to students and teachers. Paradoxically, the absence of professionalization among historians opened up the writing of history to a wide cross section of society. In America, by the 1920s and 1930s the views of professional historians became less relevant to the reading public because educators replaced them as the authors of school textbooks, and popular historians replaced them in the public realm. In Iran, the case was different: historians, professional or not, were writing and translating history textbooks for an increasing number of students and a growing reading public.⁴⁶ History teachers came to have enormous influence over the articulation of Iranian grand narratives, even if by the interwar period their social status and opportunities for further upward social mobility, along with that of most teachers, had diminished considerably.

History, in the sense discussed in this book, constituted a "science." Iranians writing history usually invoked "the science of history" (*ilm-i tarikh*) in order to differentiate their works from earlier chronicles. The science of history entailed a "scientifically authenticated and authorized" version of the past in the service of "legitimizing political and cultural values" and being "instrumentalized for national purposes."⁴⁷ Among the key questions that Iranian historians hoped to address through the science of history were the reasons for the rise and fall of nations on a global scale. Whereas in earlier periods the word *history* often appeared in Persian book titles in the plural, as *histories* (*tavarikh*)—literally, "dates"—most of the printed histories surveyed here spoke of only a singular history (*tarikh*). This shift away from a plurality of histories, or a multitude of dates often brought together annalistically, suggests a transformation in the understanding of history toward a mode of inquiry constituting a single, objective, and scientifically accessible truth.⁴⁸ As part of this process, Iranian historians were typically "integrative" nationalists. Ervand Abrahamian argues that Iranian integrative nationalism entailed overcoming the linguistic, religious, tribal, and

ethnic diversity of Iran.⁴⁹ Using similar language, Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski claim that Egyptian “integral nationalists” focused on historical continuities and saw the relationship between Arabs and Egyptians after the Islamic invasions as one of symbiosis rather than conflict.⁵⁰ Iranian nationalists subscribed to an integrated vision of history, in both time and space, that not only emphasized continuities between the pre-Islamic, Islamic, and modern periods, but also incorporated various localities—provinces, cities, and towns—into a broader Iranian narrative through local histories.



The many voices of Iranian historians can be understood only through their institutional and public entanglements. The Qajar court’s creation of the Translation and Publication Bureaus in the mid-nineteenth century marked a break with previous patterns of court patronage for official chroniclers. The court charged government officials with the task of translating and composing histories not only to bolster the legitimacy of the Iranian imperial monarchy, but also to seek out autocratic top-down models for modernization in the biographies of European monarchs. By the late nineteenth century and especially as a result of the 1906 Iranian Constitutional Revolution, historians outside the court gained a measure of autonomy from the patronage and authority of the Qajar state. This autonomy was reflected in their selection of histories on revolution, anti-imperialism, and democracy for translation into Persian.

By far the most significant institutional development came with the proliferation of modern schools in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Although the state fully supported this endeavor, many schools opened through the initiative of private education pioneers. The relatively autonomous character of most of these schools and educational associations—which often received no funding from the state—facilitated the writing of diverse historical narratives rarely seen in later periods when the state standardized education. Constitutionalist historians highlighted the civic function of history, emphasizing the centrality of the “people” and the “nation” as agents of political change instead of monarchs and their ministers.

This relative educational autonomy was short-lived. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the Ministry of Education sought to monopolize all forms of education as part of a broad state program of centralization and standardization. The establishment of the Teachers’ Training College in 1919 heralded a new era in which the state professionalized teachers and system-

atically imposed standardized curricula on private, foreign, and state schools. Primary and secondary schools, colleges, and the University of Tehran as well as military colleges, adult classes, and government propaganda institutions all provided the state with media for circulating statist nationalist narratives throughout society. As autonomous educational institutions became fewer, and with the professionalization of teaching, historical narratives became more uniform by the late 1920s and 1930s.

Whereas men dominated the writing of histories at the imperial court and in schools, feminists carved out a significant niche for themselves in writing histories in the press. The women's press of the late 1910s and 1920s became a site for the articulation of histories promoting female education, rights, and political involvement. Facing fierce resistance to their reforms, feminists were compelled to rewrite the history of Muslim women to prove the compatibility of their proposed social reforms with Islam. The Pahlavi state forcibly shut down most women's newspapers by the late 1920s. In exchange, the state granted women more legal rights and officially sponsored girls' education. The few women writing histories in the 1930s reflected this bargain with the state: they erased from their histories the agency of the women's movement in bringing about these changes by ascribing all impetus for reforms to the fatherly figure of Riza Shah.

In most histories produced at the imperial court and for schools, the histories of tribes, provinces, and cities were usually excluded. Local historians felt it necessary to symbolically integrate the local into the national. Local histories written during and shortly after the constitutional era (1906–1911) cast local populations as defenders of constitutionalism against domestic and foreign threats as evidence of their civic patriotism. During the 1920s and 1930s, when nationalist anxieties about secessionism and regional autonomy prevailed, local historians sought to discredit decentralist visions of history and politics. As a result, histories of the provinces, particularly where autonomist or secessionist movements had once flourished, became preoccupied with proving the uniform Iranian national character of provincial populations. Finally, urban histories unabashedly celebrated the Pahlavi state's modernization program by depicting provincial cities as containing dilapidated monuments, narrow streets, and structural economic problems before the state transformed it through restoration programs and the expansion of schools, government buildings, banks, and modern roads.

Literature, especially poetry, was a crucial dimension of early twentieth-century Iranian national self-fashioning. Yet pride in Persian poetry did not

necessarily entail a territorialized definition of literature. Through the press debates, epistolary exchanges, and writing of literary histories, nationalists recast Persian literature as a geographically bound concept. By doing so, they excluded contributions from and cross-fertilizations with peoples beyond the boundaries of the modern Iranian nation-state. Transnational debates about the Persian literary canon, centering around the English scholar Edward Granville Browne, were crucial to hardening nationalist conceptualizations of literature. During the interwar period, educators wrote literary histories as a means of showing continuities in Iranian history despite political domination by “foreign” rulers. In this way, literary histories mirrored local histories in their integrative function, albeit in time rather than in space.

Trends in the writing of history cannot be divorced from their institutional, material, and public contexts. Far from being the domain of a select few “great men,” a relatively broad cross section of literate Iranians wrote histories for divergent purposes ranging from the legitimization of state rule, the reform and modernization of society, and the promotion of official nationalism to the endorsement of a revolutionary cause, the assertion of collective citizenship rights, and the advancement of women’s rights. Not all voices were given the same weight: the fact that certain segments of the population were excluded from histories based on race, ethnicity, gender, or religion was partly a function of the political situation, the autonomy of schools and printing, and the career opportunities available to aspiring historians. The writing of history in Iran did not have a single self-evident teleological purpose; instead, it reflected the diverse dispositions of its practitioners as they navigated and responded to the political, social, and cultural dislocations of their time.