

by Warren L. Nelson
When you want to read a book about Iran that's informative, it's hard to know where to start. There's just so much out there. What's good? What's bad? What's readable? What's tedious?

If you try on your own to sort out all that's been written on Iran, pretty soon you'll be like that guy in the picture to the right—overwhelmed by all that's out there.

A few months ago, the *Iran Times* convened a panel of scholars and asked them to sort through the many thousands of books published about "modern" Iran in English and to produce a list for our readers. In fact, two lists.

The first list comprises 12 books that are a good place to start—hence, "The Starter Shelf." The second list—imaginatively called "The Second Shelf"—comprises 30 more books that provide more detail and comprehensiveness.

The first list is not a list of the "best" books on Iran. This isn't Oscar night at the library. The point of fashioning this list was to reward the readers, not the writers. The point was to choose books that would help those interested in Iran get a quality start. So these are quality books—well-written, well-researched, covering a range of topics on modern Iran—history, economics, politics, religion, gender. They are either broad in scope—like a century of history in *Roots of Revolution*—or focused on an especially important issue—like *The Constitution of Iran*, which unravels contemporary politics.

Making the selections was a struggle. These are, of course, subjective judgments. What looked to some panelists like a good title for the list early in the process didn't look like the best choice later on. Perhaps if the selection process had gone on a few more months, the list would have been different.

No one would pretend this is the perfect list. There is no perfect list. But the panel and the *Iran Times* offers it as a helpful guide to readers who don't want to waste their time sidetracked by poorly written, tendentious or sloppy works.

Our main restriction was that these books concern "modern Iran," so you won't find anything here about Darius or the Mongol invasion. And "modern Iran" worked out essentially to mean the 19th and 20th centuries.

Our panel of seven members is scattered from California to England, so they couldn't meet face-to-face. They worked through e-mail and mail, starting in December.

First, each of the seven, working alone, nominated any number of books they thought deserved attention. That gave us 111 titles. Next, working from that composite list, they each named 10 books for the Starter Shelf. The result was a consensus on six books, but then the panel's choices differed.

The *Iran Times* then drafted a potential list of 15 books and asked the panel to respond. This produced several amendments that panel members voted on, ending up with the list of 12 titles published here.

A similar series of narrowing iterations produced the list of 30 books for the Second Shelf.

The result is a selection of quality books—the Starter Shelf geared toward books the panel thought provided a sound and broad introduction to modern Iran. The *Iran Times* pressed the panel to find something on economics for the Starter Shelf, given that so many stories in the *Iran Times* deal with economics. Readers will notice there is no economics book on the Starter Shelf, all three selections are on the Second Shelf. As one panel member commented, "There is no readable book—the economy just isn't a 'readable' subject."

While these are quality books, they are not necessarily readily available books. Many are out-of-print. Given that publishers these days are dumping books from their warehouses so fast you'd think the warehouses were on fire, we saw no way to deal with this. To confine the list to in-print books would have narrowed the list so much as to deprive readers of many first-rate selections.

The out-of-print books will be available in major urban libraries. But those living in mid-sized cities may not find many. The good news is that there are now many shopping services for out-of-print books. Readers with Internet service can go to such electronic book shops as Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com where they will be told if a book is out of print; most such services will perform a search for out-of-print titles.

We hope you will find the Starter Shelf will give you a good start at your evening's reading on Iran and that the Second Shelf will provide a, well, second intellectual kick.

Good reading.

Too many books; too little time overwhelmed by all the books on Iran?

This panel of seven scholars helps sort them out

The Starter Shelf

TOPIC: Post-revolutionary history and politics
Reign of the Ayatollahs, by Shaul Bakhash—This is the classic work—if one can be a classic in just 15 years—on how Ayatollah Khomeini consolidated power. It is written by a man who was a reporter for the pre-revolutionary English-language *Kayhan International* and is now a professor at George Mason University in Virginia. The text has the breezy writing of a journalist and the intellectual polish of the scholar. It stops in 1983, but by then the basic direction of the revolution had been fixed.

The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic, by Asghar Schirazi—This suffers from a misleading title. It ought perhaps to be titled: How the regime manipulated ideology in order to create a functioning 20th century government.

It was written in 1997, so it is relatively current. It is admittedly a little tougher read than most books on this list, but it is well worth the effort. It was written by a scholar in German and then translated, which is normally good reason to avoid a book. But this one is unique, well-translated and opens a fresh window on how the Islamic Republic really functions day-to-day.

TOPIC: The long run-up to the revolution
Roots of Revolution, by Nikki R. Keddie—This book and the one below are histories of 20th century Iran up to the revolution. They are complementary, not duplicative. Both are written by scholars who know how to write for the general reader. Keddie's book is the lead size of Abrahamian's and thus might be better to start with. Keddie covers

the same time frame with different emphases. Among other things, she shows how the rulers of modern Iran have only been seriously challenged when the bazaar, the intelligentsia, the workers and the clergy have united. Keddie's book is also noteworthy for weaving in economic, anthropological and cultural factors.

Iran Between Two Revolutions, by Ervand Abrahamian—Do not be discouraged by Abrahamian's Introduction, which reads like an academic quarterly. It's good reading thereafter. Abrahamian can pack so many facts into a sentence you'll think he used a shoe-horn. The book explains how changing social structures led to new politics in the 20th century. For centuries shahs ruled by exploiting ethnic and regional differences, in the Persian version of divide and conquer. The 20th century brought class structure to Iran, uniting, for example, bazaar merchants who had long looked at merchants from other cities as veritable foreigners. This is probably the single most important book on Iran today.

TOPIC: Nationalism in Iran
Nationalism and Religion are the two ideologies or "urges" that drive modern Iran. One can't understand the society without tackling both.

Nationalism in Iran, by Richard W. Cottam—Cottam's book was published in 1964, but remains to this day a classic. It might better be titled "Nationalism in Iran" because a key point is the often competitive nationalisms of various ethnic groups, liberal modernists and religious nationalists. The author was personally close to leading members of the National Front.

Unsettling Iranian Nationalism, ed. by James A. Bill and Wm. Roger Louis—This is a collection of 13 essays dealing with the high water mark of Iranian nationalism under the 1950-53 premiership of Mohammad Mossadegh. This book provides interesting background ma-

terial and interpretation that helps explain the often bitter view of the United States manifested by the Islamic Republic today.

TOPIC: Religion
Shia Islam, by Moojan Momen—Who's the sixth Imam? What's Moharram all about? Where are the key shrines and why are they key? This is a one-volume encyclopedia on Shiite Islam—all you ever wanted to know but were afraid to ask. Entries are arranged alphabetically and range in length from one sentence to several pages. No, it's not bedtime reading. But it's a solid reference work. It's also the perfect book for the American spouses or children of Shiite Iranians.

TOPIC: People and the "feel" of Iran
Most books talk at the reader—lecture, discourse, explain, analyze. That's important. But these two books give the reader a "feel" for what Iran and its people are all about.

Daughter of Persia, by Sattareh Farman-Farman—Subtitled "A Woman's Journey From Her Father's Haven Through the Islamic Revolution," this is a riveting personal story that breathes life and humanity into the many sociological studies of how Iran's early encounters with the West and modernity brought upheaval and dislocation to Iranian society. Daughter of Persia provides a real human dimension.

Mantle of the Prophet, by Roy Mottahedeh—This unique book is a personal interpretation of the Islamic Revolution portrayed through the eyes of a cleric of traditional theological education. Mottahedeh presents a cavalcade of historical religious and political figures, but remains throughout focused on the life of Ali Hashemi, his protagonist, and Hashemi's apprenticeship in life, illuminating the nature of fundamentalism in human terms.

TOPIC: Foreign policy
The Eagle and the Lion: The tragedy of American-Iranian Relations, by James A. Bill—Published in 1988, this covers pre-1950 Iran-American relations in 50 pages, then devotes 300 pages to the period from Mohammad Mossadegh to Ollie North in a very readable and anecdote-packed history with colorful profiles of the major actors. At the back of the book is a separate 150-page section analyzing the way American policy, and to a lesser extent Iranian policy, were formed and mis-formed.

TOPIC: Women and Gender
Vells and Words, by Farzaneh Milani—An enjoyable read, this book tells how Iranian women write about themselves and their status in society. Concentrating on six prominent writers, Milani discusses the social restrictions that throughout the centuries trapped Iranian women. It's about a lot more than the chador.

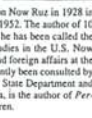
The Panelists

The *Iran Times* wishes to thank the seven panelists for the time they have devoted since last December to developing these two reading lists.

James A. Bill is professor of government at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Born in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, in 1939, he received M.A. degrees from Penn State and Princeton and a Ph.D. in politics from Princeton in 1968. He and his wife, Anne Marie, first traveled to Iran on their honeymoon and lived there in 1965-67 while Jim did research. Jim has been back to Iran a dozen times since. When not writing or teaching, he enjoys fishing, golfing and stamp collecting.



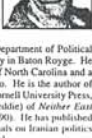
Rouhollah K. Ramazani was born on New Row in 1928 in Tehran and emigrated to the U.S. in 1952. The author of 10 books on Iran and the Persian Gulf, he has been called the "dean" of Iranian foreign policy studies in the U.S. Now professor emeritus of government and foreign affairs at the University of Virginia, he has frequently been consulted by the UN as well as the White House, State Department and other U.S. agencies. His wife, Nieta, is the author of *Persian Cooking*. They have four children.



John Foran, 43, is professor of sociology and director of Latin American and Iberian Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. Born in Holyoke, Massachusetts, he became a student of the Iranian revolution in 1978, his first year in graduate school. He received his B.A. in French and European Studies from Amherst College, his M.A. in sociology from UC Santa Barbara and his Ph.D. in sociology from UC Berkeley. He now works primarily on Third World revolutions in comparative perspective.



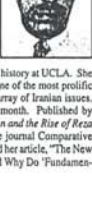
Mark Gairowski teaches in the Department of Political Science at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He has a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina and a B.A. from the University of Chicago. He is the author of *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah* (Cornell University Press, 1991) and co-editor (with Nikki Keddie) of *Neither East Nor West* (Yale University Press, 1996). He has published numerous articles in scholarly journals on Iranian politics and on democracy in the Third World.



Eric Hooglund, a native of Maine, is visiting fellow in Iranian studies at the Middle East Center, St. Anthony's College, Oxford University. He received his Ph.D. and Masters degrees in international relations from Johns Hopkins University. He first went to Iran as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1966 and has been a student of Iranian society and politics ever since. He has conducted field research there before, during and after the Islamic Revolution, most recently in each of the past four summers.



Nikki Keddie is professor emerita of history at UCLA. She has lived three years in Iran and is one of the most prolific writers and editors of works on an array of Iranian issues. Her newest book is appearing this month. Published by Mazda Press, it is entitled, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of the Khan 1796-1925*. Last October, the journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History* carried her article, "The New Religious Politics: Where, When and Why Do 'Fundamentalisms' Appear?"



Anna Enayat is a senior associate member of St. Anthony's College, Oxford University. She worked in Iran from 1964-77, first as a research associate at the Center for Economic Research at Tehran University and then as lecturer in sociology at TU. From 1986 to 1997, she edited *Middle East* books for I. B. Tauris, a major publishing house for scholarly work. She is now director of Hepson Books, a literary and publishing agency with a Middle East focus. Spare time involves politics, running, film and historical novels.

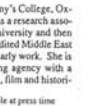


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TOPIC: The Constitutional Revolution
The Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, by Jafar Afary—When we say "revolution" and "Iran," the association is with the 1979 Islamic revolution. But the Islamic Revolution moved across Iran in the shadow of the Constitutional Revolution

and political discontent that permeated Iran in the 1960s and 1970s.

Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism, by H. E. Chehabi—The story of Mehdi Bazargan's party, the Liberation Movement of Iran. An excellent account of his efforts to synthesize Shiism and modernity. It helps one to understand today's Khatami phenomenon as well as laymen as a superior class of opposition politicians in the 1960s and 1970s.

TOPIC: The Pahlavi Dynasty
Land and Revolution in Iran 1960-1980, by Eric Hooglund—For two decades before the revolution, the Shah's land reform program was held up in much of the Western media as a stupendous accomplishment. Hooglund interviewed villagers to get the story behind the statistics. In this "scholarly expose," he demonstrates that the benefits for the peasantry were negligible.

Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran, by Shahrooz Akhavi—"Contemporary" is relative. Published in 1980, this is about clergy-strikes in the Pahlavi period or how the Pahlavi monarchy thought they kept the clerics in rein. *The Shah and I*, by Asadollah Alam—The diaries of the Shah's court minister. Anecdote-filled. A fun read, albeit self-serving like all diaries.

TOPIC: Foreign Policy
Revolutionary Iran, by R. K. Ramazani—The United States isn't the only foreign concern Tehran has. This book shows how the revolutionary regime views and deals with the whole world—eradicating Israel, subverting the Gulf, making a mark in Lebanon. It makes the very key point that even in the wild days immediately after the revolution, foreign policy makers never lost touch with pragmatism even while pursuing revolutionary goals.

Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State, by Mark J. Gasiorowski—Guess who's the client state, and guess who's doing the building. A solid work on how Iran and America got where they are today.

All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran, by Gary Sick—President Carter's senior aide on Iran recounts the gloomy story of the revolution and hostage crisis as seen from the White House.

The Second Shelf

TOPIC: The broad sweep
Fragile Resistance, by John Foran—The Starter Shelf included two broad sweep books (*Iran Between Two Revolutions* and *Roots of Revolution*). This is another excellent work giving a third perspective on the broad sweep of Iran, this one going back to 1500.

The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation, by Susan Mackey—This is an introductory book by a skilled professional writer intended for an audience that is unfamiliar with Iran. Eminently readable and broad in its sweep, some panel members were concerned about simplifications and occasional errors.

Iran: At War With History, by John Limbert—Written by one of the brightest—one of the few to speak Farsi—this is an excellent survey book. Limbert gives an introduction to geography, economics, ethnic groups, culture, mythology, history and politics—and all in just 144 pages.

TOPIC: Politics and political philosophy
Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic, by Ervand Abrahamian—Thoughtful and intelligent analysis of Khomeini's philosophy gets way beyond the bumper stickers of "atantask" and "fundamentalist."

Parliamentary Iran in Revolutionary Iran, by Ilhamian Bakhtiari—The Majlis at work. This book incorporates interviews with more than 60 Majlis deputies.

An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati, by Ali Rahnama—the man who greatly influenced the thinking of young Iranians before the revolution, but did not live to see that revolution. Considerable intellectual history of the 1960s and 1970s.

Modern Islamic Political Thought, by Hamid Enayat—"We talk a lot about Shiism vs. Western thought. This is a comprehensive survey of Islamic political thought that points out Shia and Sunni differences.

TOPIC: Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, by Hamid Dabashi—A comprehensive account of how Iran's religious intellectuals managed to "theologize" the social

of how Lur tribal women cope with adversity and devise strategies to overcome the strictures of customs, tradition, poverty and social circumstance.

TOPIC: The people and "feel" of Iran
Garden of the Brave in War, by Terence O'Donnell—A truly unique book on the elite, yet thoughtful, about an American's 15-year tenure on a farm in Iran. Everyone assumed "that I was engaged in intelligence work. I was. But for the reader, not any spy agency."

The Qashqai of Iran, by Lois Beck. A valuable anthropological study of one of Iran's largest tribes and its fate after the revolution.

Khanes and Qajar Dynasties: The Khakhs of the Bakhtiari in Iran, by Gene R. Garthwaite—The story of the most politically active tribe in Iran and how it made its weight felt in the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties.

The Elementary Structures of Political Life, by Grace Goodell—"All politics is local." Who Speaks? Tip O'Neill taught us that in Iran, too. This book shows the impact that agro-industries had on villagers whose lands were expropriated.

TOPIC: Miscellaneous Language
Power and Status in Iran, by William O. Beeman—A unique and fascinating book that addresses the question: "What does he really mean when he says...?" Hard going at times, this is not bedtime reading, but it is rewarding.

The Iranian Mojahedin, by Ervand Abrahamian—The definitive work on an organization, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, that gets considerable if exaggerated attention in the Western media.

Law of Desire, by Shalila Haeri—This is a fascinating sociological study of the institution of *siqeh*, temporary marriage, filled with interviews with both men and women. Learn how unattached women go to the mosque and signal to men that they want a temporary husband!

TOPIC: Women and Gender
Women and the Political Process in 20th Century Iran, by Parvin Paidar—Academic and not for the night table, this provides the best coverage of women before and after the revolution.

Crowning Anguish, by Taj Al-Saltana—The memoirs of a feminist (before anyone knew the term), the daughter of Nasserredin Shah, a woman of intelligence and a skilled observer of her Iran. Lots of fascinating detail on court life.

Women of Deh Koh, by Erika Friedl—A delightful and charming read about village life with such chapter titles as: "Setara, six proposals, four engagements and three husbands the wiser." A vivid account

of almost the entire last half of the 19th century.

The Strangling of Shuster, by W. Morgan Shuster—Shuster's first person account of the years he spent in Iran after he was hired to straighten out the regime's tangled finances. No, not an accountant's report, but the story of the first major encounter with an American with Iran—and with the European powers that didn't wish him success. Published in 1912 and recently reprinted.

TOPIC: Economics
The Iranian Economy under the Islamic Republic, by Jahangir Amouzegar—Not an easy read, but the most comprehensive work on contemporary economic policy.

And on this shocking note, we end our list, though there is lots more out there we haven't touched—architecture, miniatures, cuisine, and about 2,000 years of history.