CHOICE, November 2005

In the past two decades, numerous books have appeared in English discussing the Iranian revolution, Iranian women, the role of religion in Iranian society, etc. Most of these books lack a comprehensive historical overview of Iranian society from a social scientific perspective. Garthwaite (history, Dartmouth College), who has years of fieldwork in Iran and extensive knowledge of the role of pastoral nomads in Iranian politics (Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran, 1983), fills the gap with this panoramic view of Iranian history from the first Persian dynasty in 558 BCE to the present day. Using dynastic rule as a basis for periodization of Iranian history and using identity as a cultural theme, the author offers an overview of social, cultural, political, and economic life during the Achaemenians, Seleucids, Parthians, Sasanians, Safavids, Qajars, and Pahlavis. He also discusses the life of Persians during the rule of Alexander, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and the clerics in the past quarter century. This book is not a dry historical narrative but an excellent, rigorous, yet generally accessible overview of Persians in history based on the latest scholarship on Iranian society and history. Summing Up: Essential. All levels/libraries. -- A. Mahdi, Ohio Wesleyan University