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Historical accounts of premodern Iranian women have been scant and scattered. Much of what is known must be deduced from literary and theological works, myths and folklore, travelogues, court accounts, economic records, and historical artifacts. This is the task taken up by the contributors to this valuable book, the first of a two-volume work covering women in Iran from the rise of Islam to the Islamic Republic. Chapters explain the continuity of Iranian women's roles and status in premodern Iran from shortly before the arrival of Islam through the Safavid period. Chapters 1-7 focus on women's lives in the Sassanid, Mongol, Seljuq, and Safavid periods. Chapters 8-9 explicate women's status from literature and paintings. Contributors show that Islam is not the only determinant of women's status in Iran. Changes in women's status and rights after Islam had less to do with Islam than with old practices and attitudes, the rise of urban life, and socioeconomic conditions. Religious laws and social norms affecting women reflect the influence of long-term social, economic, and cultural factors in Iranian history. Editors Nashat (history, Univ. of Illinois, Chicago) and Beck (anthropology, Washington Univ.) should be congratulated for this significant addition to the fields of gender and historical studies. Summing Up: Essential. Upper-division undergraduates and above.

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