
Rudi Matthee
This article, an adapted version of chapter 3 of the author’s book, *The Structure of Central Authority in Qajar Iran 1871-1896* (Atlanta, 1997), uses a Weberian paradigm to analyze the nature an evolution of Nāṣer al-Dīn’s kingship. Nāṣer al-Dīn’s staying power, the author argues, is attributable to his skillful manipulation of various elements in traditional kingship and his equally astute utilization of modern concepts. He made sure to fulfill the shah’s traditional role of dispenser of justice to the people. He cajoled and placated his underlings with the customary honors and emoluments. He helped generate a political theory that accommodated kingship within the prevailing belief system, making religious and state interests run parallel, and he carefully maintained a balance between his need for support from local forces and their dependence on him. The death of Amīr Kabīr and the introduction of the telegraph enabled him to centralize his authority. In the end he was neither a traditional chief nor the leader of a modern country.
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