



The Shah

By Abbas Milani

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Though his monarchy was toppled in 1979 and he died in 1980, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran, remains relevant today. He was a social reformer, a romantic egomaniac, and a deeply conflicted man and leader. Here, internationally respected author Abbas Milani gives us the definitive biography, more than ten years in the making, of the monarch who shaped Iran's modern age and with it the contemporary politics of the Middle East. The Shah's was a life filled with contradiction?he built schools, increased equality for women, and greatly reduced the power of the Shia clergy. He made Iran a global power and nationalized his country's many natural resources. But he was deeply conflicted and insecure in his powerful role. Intolerant of political dissent, he was eventually overthrown by the very people whose loyalty he so desperately sought. This comprehensive and gripping account shows us how Iran went from politically moderate monarchy to totalitarian Islamic republic. Milani reveals the complex and sweeping road that would bring the United States and Iran to where they are today.

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The Shah By Abbas Milani Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #442741 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Palgrave Macmillan
- Published on: 2012-05-22
- Released on: 2012-05-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .36" h x 1.29" w x 6.20" l, 1.17 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 496 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Over the course of almost 40 years, Mohammad Reza Shah was a colossus in Iran, the one constant in a swirl of changing loyalties, political fortunes, and pressures both domestic and international; by the end of his reign, virtually no state decision could be taken, save by him. But as this biography reveals, this accumulation of authority was more a function of the Shah's lifelong distrust of all around him than it was any indication of skill in governing, or of genuine control. Milani (Eminent Persians) paints a richly detailed picture of a complex man plagued by demons and paranoia (much of it well-founded), at once insecure and megalomaniacal. Yet the thicket of biographical detail can leaves the reader longing for more analysis. Milani regularly mentions the Shah's flights of mysticism, for instance, but doesn't place them in any context: was the Shah delusional, or is talk of divine inspiration common in Iranian political discourse? Or both? Milani's book is a good source on the life of one of the 20th century's more enigmatic figures--good enough to pique the reader's frustration that it isn't great. (Jan.)

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From Booklist

A deeply researched portrait of Mohammad Reza Pahlevi, this biography extracts the personality of the last shah of Iran from the royal grandiosity in which he lived. Milani describes him as timid, prone to vacillation, and prey to conspiracy theories, perhaps not ideal traits in an absolute monarch who initiated a modernizing revolution from above, only to be dethroned in 1979 by social forces his authoritarian policies had unleashed. Recounting the shah's childhood, Milani underscores how closely he was supervised by his father, a military officer who had seized the throne in 1925. In a 1941 political crisis that resulted in young Mohammad's ascension, the 1953 coup against the Mossadegh government, and the 1978–79 revolution, Milani depicts the shah as fretful, indecisive, and obsessed with detail, extensively citing British and American diplomatic reports about him. The shah's private life, which included three wives, alleged mistresses, and extravagances in palaces and other riches, is effectively depicted. With sympathy born of a compassion for someone in over his head, Milani's meticulous amassing of facts establishes a base for readers to form their own opinions. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

“The definitive biography... the scholarship is impressive” ?*The Washington Times*

“A finely wrought, enlightening biography.” ?*The Wall Street Journal*

“Splendidly detailed... [Milani] succeeds in turning out a thoughtful biography without rancor.” ?*The Chicago Tribune*

“Milani brings to us a whole new set of facts, culled from thousands of recently declassified British, American and Iranian documents and hundreds of interviews, making this book fresh and relevant to the current democracy movement in Iran and to U.S.-Iranian relations.” ?*San Francisco Chronicle*

“An incisive portrait of a deeply riven man and his country... A stimulating biography and a thorough examination of the makeup of an entire nation.” ?*Kirkus Reviews*

“A deeply researched portrait... The shah's private life, which included three wives, alleged mistresses, and extravagances in palaces and other riches, is effectively depicted. With sympathy born of a compassion for

someone in over his head, Milani's meticulous amassing of facts establishes a base for readers to form their own opinions.” ?*Booklist*

“Milani interviewed many who were close to Pahlavi, and makes excellent use of archives and memoirs. The result is a comprehensive portrait of a man who modernized Iran--and in doing so ensured his own downfall.” ?*Macleans*

“Abbas Milani brings to life the tragic figure of the late Shah of Iran... A refreshingly balanced biography!” ?*Fawaz Gerges, author of Journey of the Jihadist and Obama and the Middle East*

“For God's sake let us sit upon the ground/And tell sad stories of the death of kings.” Shakespeare's words from Richard II are an apt invitation to this gripping biography of Mohammed Reza Shah. The Shah of Iran, Abbas Milani shows, was a tragic figure whose inner ghosts and deep personal flaws helped to destroy the hopes that were vested in him. His downfall ushered in a nightmare from which Iran and the rest of world has yet to awaken. Milani's detailed and richly nuanced narrative enables us to understand why the “modernizing monarch” so disastrously failed.” ?*Stephen Greenblatt, author of Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*

“A skilled book, a psychological biography with a profound historical background.” ?*Shahrnush Parsipur, author of Women Without Men*

“Using previously untapped archival material... narrates a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions.” ?*Touraj Daryaee, Howard C. Baskerville Professor in the History of Iran and the Persianate World, University of California, Irvine*

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