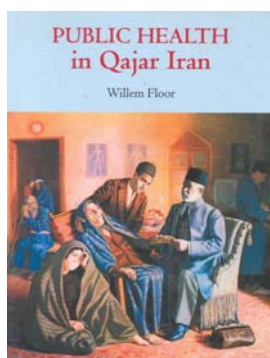
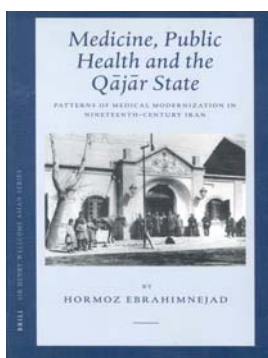

 Book Review

MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN QAJAR ERA; IRAN

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The *Qajar dynasty* (1794 – 1925) in Iran was preceded by the late 18th century *Zands*. Historically, the second half of the 19th century is the beginning of modernization in Iran. *Mirza Taqhi Khan Amir Kabir*, the Chief Minister of *Naser-ad-Din Shah Qajar*, the fourth king of Qajar dynasty, was a great reformist who was heavily involved in Iran's modernization process including medicine. The foundation of *Dar-al-Fonun* (i.e. House of Techniques), the first modern higher educational institution in 1851, is considered as one of the most important efforts of Amir Kabir. The students were mainly taught by European teachers with aid of local translators.¹

According to Dr. Floor, Iran in the Qajar era had a total population of around five million in 1800 that rose to almost nine million in 1900. The majority of the population was rural and engaged in agriculture. By 1900, the urban population had more than doubled and represented some 18% with three towns having more than 100,000 inhabitants: *Tehran* with about 280,000, *Tabriz* with 200,000, and *Isfahan* with 100,000. Four other towns had each 50,000 inhabitants or more. The people in

Iran in Qajar period suffered from a broad range of diseases.²

The historiography of medicine in Iran has usually focused on what, the so-called “the Golden Age of the Persian Medicine,” i.e. the period between the 9th and 14th centuries.³

The 19th century, however, has only been studied scarcely. Until recently, there have been no books and only a few papers available in English that dealt with actual picture of medicine and public health in 19th and early 20th century in Iran.^{2,3}

Fortunately, currently two valuable books are published in English on the above-mentioned subject. They are:

The book entitled “*Medicine, Public Health and Qajar State—Pattern of Medical Modernization in Nineteenth Century Iran*” by *Hormoz Ebrahimnejad*, PhD in history from University of Sorbonne, Paris. The book provides surprising new insight into the interrelation of medical practice, and public health during Qajar dynasty in Iran. This 263-page book consists of two major parts: 1) “*The institutional and theoretical changes in traditional medicine*” and 2) “*On the benefits, the maintenance, and the Statutes of State Hospital.*” The “*State Hospital*” or “*Marizkhaneh-ye Dowlati*” was the first modern hospital in Tehran, opened in 1852.³ Each part is divided into multiple chapters, covering a wide range of topics and provides a clear information on the public health and medicine in Iran during the 19th century.

Part one has the following chapters:

Chapter 1: a cursory review of hospitals including hospitals in the prehistoric era and antiquity, Islamic period, organization and administration;

Chapter 2: public health and sociopolitical changes;

Chapter 3: the manuscript, the author, and the hospital;

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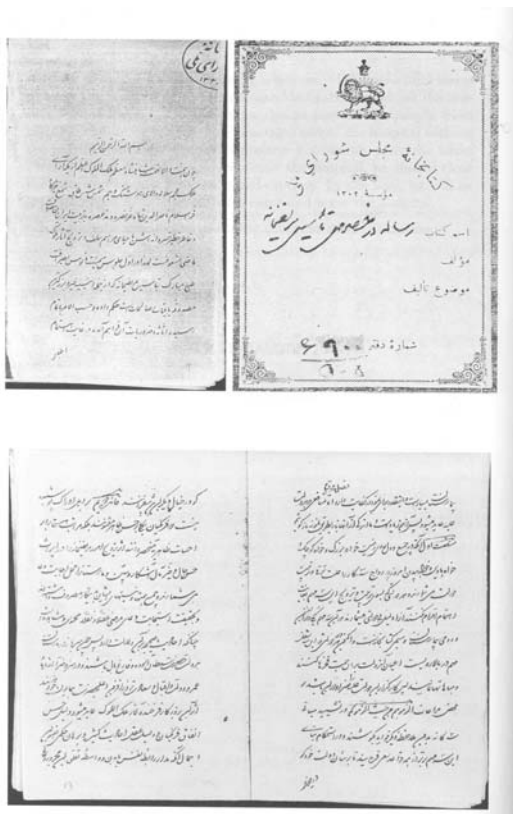


Figure 1. Manuscript 505 on the establishment of public hospitals in Iran.³

Chapter 4: traditional medicine and modernization; and

Chapter 5: towards the epistemology of medical modernization.

Part two consists of 13 sections. They are devoted to an anonymous Persian manuscript. This manuscript discusses the establishment of the “*State Hospital*” or “*Marizkhaneh-ye Dowlati*” in Tehran. A copy of this manuscript is available at the Iranian Parliament Library (Majles Library) (Figure 1). A Persian text of this manuscript (Manuscript 505) is included in the *Dr. Ebrahimnejad’s* book.

At the end, a useful bibliography and name and

subject indices are provided. There are also eight historical illustrations.³

Another book entitled “*Public Health in Qajar Iran*” is written by *Willem Floor* with doctoral degree from University of Leiden who studied development economics, nonwestern sociology as well as Persian and Arabic, and Islamology. *Dr. Floor* has published extensively on the socioeconomic history of Iran.² His present study on medicine and public health in Qajar era in Iran provides the readers an overview of public hygiene, major prevalent diseases, and practice of medicine at that time. *Dr. Floor* has drawn the data necessary for his research mainly from those European observers who have reported on actual practice of medicine, prevalence, and treatment of diseases during Qajar dynasty. Most of these observers were physicians who had practiced medicine in Iran. The book consists of six chapters:

Chapter 1: introduction;

Chapter 2: main diseases;

Chapter 3: public hygiene;

Chapter 4: medical knowledge;

Chapter 5: medical institutional infrastructure; and

Chapter 6: the progress of modern medicine.

At the end of this book, there are three appendices, a bibliography, and an index. The book concludes with impact of western medicine on the traditional medicine institutions and public health in Qajar era in Iran. Some historical pictures are also added to the text.²

References

- 1 Kiddie NP. *Modern Iran, Root and Results of Revolution*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; 2003: 48 – 49.
- 2 Floor W. *Public Health in Qajar Iran*. Washington, DC: Mage Publishers; 2004: 11.
- 3 Ebrahimnejad H. *Medicine, Public Health and Qajar State, Pattern of Medical Modernization in Nineteenth Century Iran*. Leiden-Boston: Brill Publication; 2004: 5.