



EDUCATION XVI. SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

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No standardized schoolbooks existed in Persia before the advent of the modern educational system. The first were written by European teachers at the *Dār al-fonūn* in the mid-19th century. They were translated by Persian assistants and printed at the school's own press for distribution only among the students. A collection of fifteen textbooks from the *Dār al-fonūn* held in the library of the Ministry of Education (*Wezārat-e āmūzeš o parvareš*) shows that the emphasis was on mathematics and the exact sciences: *Jabr o moqābela* by Alexandre Buhler (tr. 'Abd-al-Rasūl Eṣfahānī), 1274/1857; *Mizān al-ḥesāb* and *Elm-e masāḥat. Hendesa wa motallatāt*, both by August Kržiž (tr. Mīrzā Moḥammad Zakī), 1274/1857; *Oṣūl-e dīn* by 'Alī b. Rostam Tabrīzī, 1276/1859; *Kaššāf al-ḥesāb* by 'Abd-al-Ġaffār Najm-al-Molk, 1290/1873; *Mizān al-ṣarf* by Maḥdīqolī Khan, 1291/1874; *Oṣūl-e 'elm-e fīzīk*, 1294/1877, and *Oṣūl-e 'elm-e ḥesāb*, 1296/1879, both by 'Alī Khan; *Mokālama-ye farānsa be fārsī* by 'Alī-Akbar Farāhānī, 1300/1883; *Oṣūl-e 'elm-e jabr o moqābela* by Āqā Khan Mohandes, 1302/1885; *Ṣarf-e afāl-e farānsa* by Mozayyan-al-Dawla, 1304/1887; *Oṣūl-e 'elm-e jabr o moqābela*, *Oṣūl-e 'elm-e šīmī*, and *Oṣūl-e 'elm-e šīmī-e ma'danī*, all by Kāzem Mo'tamed-al-Soltān, 1306/1889; and *Bedāyat al-ḥesāb* by 'Abd-al-Ġaffār Najm-al-Molk, 1310/1893.



The foundation of Dār al-fonūn and the subsequent increase in Persians traveling abroad gradually inspired notions of reforming the Persian educational system and led to establishment of [Anjoman-e ma'āref](#), a private educational society led by prominent Persians. They and teachers in Anjoman schools published a number of textbooks: four on arithmetic, two on geometry, two on astronomy, one on health science, one on geography, one on social studies, and one on literature. In the postconstitutional period textbooks by individual authors were usually submitted to the Ministry of Education for approval, but in 1929 the cabinet decreed that preparation of primary-school textbooks was to be controlled by the ministry; this decree was, however, implemented only gradually, and some authors continued to write and publish schoolbooks as before. In 1938 the cabinet required that textbooks meet standards formulated by the ministry. A committee of teachers and university professors with experience in writing textbooks was named, primarily to ensure that reverence for the shah was propagated in the schools. The committee selected two to three authors, most of them university professors, for each book. Many of these textbooks were unsuccessful, because the authors were not familiar with the needs of students at elementary and secondary levels. The forced abdication of the shah in 1941 initiated a new era of freedom of expression, from which textbook authors also benefited.

In 1955 the Royal Organization for Social Services (Sāzmān-e šāhanšāhī-e *ḵadamāt-e ejtemā'ī*), founded in 1947 and nominally headed by the shah's sister Ašraf Pahlavī, decided to publish seventeen textbooks for the first four grades of primary school and distribute them free of charge (see ix, above). A number of authors were selected, and a group of experienced teachers was chosen to evaluate the new textbooks. They were published, with the financial assistance of the Iran-U.S. Mutual Fund, by the American-based Mo'assasa-ye entešarāt-e Ferānklīn ([Franklin Publishing Company](#); see [EDITING](#)). Between 1951 and 1963 authors tended to collaborate on such books. In general the quality and presentation of textbooks improved. Unfortunately, authors increased their demands for royalties, sometimes to as much as 25 percent, and the profiteering attitude of publishers toward the end of the 1950s led to higher prices. Rising prices combined with publishers' inability to keep up with the increasing number of students finally led the government to reimpose a monopoly on schoolbooks in 1963.

The cabinet appointed several committees to examine existing textbooks and to choose one in each field to be sanctioned for use in schools. In addition, two



organizations were founded for the publication of new textbooks: Sāzmān-e ketābhā-ye darsī and Šerkat-e čāp-e ofset. The advantage of the new arrangement was twofold: lower prices for the public and better distribution of books nationwide. The disadvantage was elimination of competition and a certain dogmatism. The educational reforms of 1966 (see vii, above) called for new textbooks adapted to the new curricula.

Since the revolution of 1979 there has been a thorough overhaul of the contents of textbooks. Energetic efforts have been made to Islamize them to fit the ideologically oriented curriculum, laying great emphasis on koranic doctrines. Textbooks in use before the revolution have been “purified” and cleared of “the misguidance and decadence of the despotic former regime,” as well as foreign “cultural influences” (Ministry of Education, p. 23, apud Mehran, p. 36). The process of “purification” was accomplished within two years. By 1986 700 topics from 636 primary- and secondary-school textbooks had been changed, “especially in social sciences, humanities, and religious studies” (Mehran, p. 37). Approximately 10 percent of the school textbooks currently in use in Persia have been written since the revolution; the remaining 90 percent are revised versions of books in use previously and are constantly subjected to ideological revision (Eṭṭelā’āt, 10 Ordibehešt 1365 Š./30 April 1986, apud Mehran, p. 37). Sāzmān-e ketābhā-ye darsī (Organization of Textbook Research) in the Ministry of Education is composed of twenty research groups; each is charged with the task of revising the ideological content of textbooks for elementary and secondary schools and for teachers’-training institutions. Members of the ‘*olamā*’ (religious authorities) are included in the groups dealing with the humanities and social sciences (Mehran, pp. 37-38). In the new textbooks secular figures like scientists, writers, poets, and political personalities are never presented as role models, whereas Persian religious figures like Ayatollah Sayyed Nūr-al-Dīn Šīrāzī, Sayyed Ḥasan Modarres, and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Rūḥ-Allāh Komeynī; qq.v.); prophets like Moses, Jesus, and Moḥammad; and the Shi’ite imams have been elevated into figures for emulation (Mehren, pp. 39, 38).



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