

Documentary Photography and Historical Memory in Iran: The Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911)

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Summary

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) happened at the end of the early modern Iranian era. It was a momentous socio-cultural and political event aimed at overthrowing the totalitarian regime and replacing it with a national government. Struggles between supporters of the constitution and the government transformed the life of the Iranian people to an unprecedented and unparalleled extent in the country's history. During the revolution, the medium of photography was a stimulating factor inviting people to participate in the movement. For the first time, both government and revolutionaries widely used photographs and postcards for political propaganda, more often than telegraphs, letters, and government decrees. This study analyses the available photographs and postcards from the Iranian Constitutional Revolution to understand the content, function, and progress of photographic trends of this era. Some of the photographers of this period had political tendencies or featured political activists. Consequently, political photographs and postcards did not represent an unbiased documentation of historical events. Furthermore, some photographs were produced with the intent to be commercialized. Through a detailed study of these photographs, the visual traditions of Iranian photography, cast by the revolutionary culture of the time, will be revealed. Ultimately, this research will explore the transformation of photography and its adaptation to the needs of the historical era. The influential role of photography as a visual medium in shaping the Iranian historical memory is substantial. The impact of historical memory which is made possible by photographs is so compelling, specifically, when it comes to the art of constructing the narration of the Constitutional Revolution.

Image credit: Sayyid ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Kāshānī, Post Card, Pejhan Collection, 1908.