Iran has been a crossroads of civilizations since time immemorial. Its location and physical geography have always made it a favoured and often inevitable corridor for land-based military expeditions and commercial traffic, imperialism and the reaction to it, particularly reform attempts. Especially with regard to the period since 1500, this emphasis has come at the expense of studying relations with countries adjacent to Iran - a situation that is no doubt reinforced by a tendency among Iranians themselves to overlook and ignore the region around them in their eagerness to adopt - or resist - things Western. A different approach, one that looks also at neighbours and at culture and political relations, should offer us much new information.

The immense importance of the complex interaction between Iran and the outside world has long been recognized, but scholars traditionally have been selective in the attention paid to main currents and individual aspects. From the wars against classical Greece to the Iranian Revolution, their focus has typically been Iran's relations with Europe, and later the United States, revolving around commercial traffic, imperialism and the reaction to it, particularly reform attempts. Especially with regard to the period since 1500, this emphasis has come at the expense of studying relations with countries adjacent to Iran - a situation that is no doubt reinforced by a tendency among Iranians themselves to overlook and ignore the region around them in their eagerness to adopt - or resist - things Western. A different approach, one that looks also at neighbours and at culture and political relations, should offer us much new information.

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