"archives.ir". Linked Archives in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Access Restrictions to Records: An Archival Science Outlook*

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Abstract. This paper presents some preliminary findings of a study on the online databases developed since the 2010s by the heritage and research institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the aim of making publicly available an extensive number of digital surrogates of archival records.

Keywords: Iran, access restrictions to archives, digital technology, control of knowledge, official history.

1　Introduction

Does a forty-year time frame represent an appropriate length of time for State and society to come to terms with the trauma of violence which involved a radical change in political and ideological structures? More than forty years after the Iranian Revolution (1979), the regime that came to power in the country is still alive, and so are the memories of the post-revolutionary massacres [1]. Multiple actors inside and outside of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) are involved today in the competing interpretations of a contested past, bound up with conflicts of collective memories and individual experiences of "victors" and "vanquished". The state-sanctioned denial, approval and justification of violence are confronted with calls for awareness on the reality of oppression and for a lasting change of the political culture based on cruelty and physical elimination of suspects and real opponents.

Archival records are the fundamental issue in these claims to establish the "truth". The original archives are not easily accessible in the IRI. Documents regarding the revolutionary replacement of the Pahlavi rule with an Islamic republic under the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini coherently fall under the category of "confidential" because they contain "government secrets". This is all the more important since significant "archival data" were made publicly available by the heritage and research institutions of the IRI in the last decade. This unprecedented mobilization of the past provides insight into the Iranian history and international relations in the 20th century. Based on an extensive number of digital surrogates of archival records and oral history sources, the ever-growing online databases form a network providing immense volumes of

information in open access. As part of the memorialization process, they also intend to provide authoritative knowledge of the past and serve as a tool to assert the political legacy of the 1979 Islamic revolution. Sometimes, this digital material is used as historical source by Iranian and International scholars working on Iran, often without critical assessment of the conditions of creation of the original archival records and distribution of their digital surrogates. However, the question is how to ensure a quality control on this historical data in terms of trustworthiness.

Recently, a nuanced body of critical works on archives in the Middle East has discussed the actors, documentation practices, and archiving initiatives in relation to the construction of identities, political powers, States and their ideological foundations [2]. However, a historical perspective on archives in Iran remains outside the scope of the critical debate, particularly with regard to access and dissemination practices engendered by modern digital technologies [3]. Yet, this is a crucial issue. The online release of archives in the IRI, considered in relation to the problem of openness of the original archives, leads to a need for in-depth thinking on the sources available for professional communities and civil society to participate in debates on religious, philosophical, political and ideological lines, on which are based the revolutionary and political Islam. Indeed, careful thought should be given to what and why is released and, what is harder to find, what and why is not released.

This paper presents a part of the ongoing OFF-SITE research project, conducting an off-site ethnography of post-revolution Iran [4]. Following the conceptual paradigm of *Agnotology* as the study of ignorance [5], and theoretical and methodological discussions conducted by the experts on archival science [6], I examine the online archival databases on contemporary history (*târikh-e mo'asser*) developed in the IRI with regard to the issues of authenticity, integrity, traceability, and, consequently, credibility of the archives and, more broadly, historical sources in a digital environment [7] in the so-called "post-truth" era we live in [8]. The analysis is based on 7 (seven) out of 14 (fourteen) databases identified so far. With reference to the domain name ".ir", the OFF-SITE project team calls this network of databases "archives.ir". How do these databases relate to each other and to State institutions? What are their relation to archival theory? How transparent are the digital processing of archival records? How and which conceptual frame of reference do they provide for the understanding of the past? I try to understand these issues in a historical perspective, with regard to the foundation of the Iranian archival system since the 1950s, also referring to studies on political, social and moral economy of the 1979 revolution [9], writing of history in Iran [10], and control on Internet in the IRI [11].

First of all, the phenomenon of "archives.ir" has to be put in the context of access restrictions to original archival records. Below are some reference points.

2   Restrictions on Access to Records in Iran: A Regime of Inflexible and Unrestricted State Secrecy

In May 1970 (Ordibehesht 1349), a law inaugurated the Iran National Archives Organization as a new tool to assist the Iranian state operating under the Pahlavi rule

in solidifying its sovereignty and political legitimacy through centralization and perpetuation of its own documentary traces [12]. Indeed, the archives being subject to codified law were defined as the documents in all media "prepared or received by the government apparatus" [13]. Thus, the basic archival law in Iran asserted that only the documents of the governmental bodies and government-affiliated agencies had to be considered as being of national importance. It also implemented the concept of archives as a confined space to be controlled by the State. Some parallels can be drawn with the state-centeredness of the modern European national archives: their access, initially reserved for state administrators and jurists, was progressively broadened over the course of the nineteenth century [14]. The 1970 Iranian archival law introduced the issue of access restrictions as far too broad, implying an unduly wide leeway. There was only passing mention of "confidential documents" and those "harming the rights of individuals or government interests", without further definition [15]. A 40-year limit was introduced for the storage of all records in the relevant governmental bodies and agencies [16]. During this period, records could be made available only for competent legal authorities. What would happen after the expiry of the 40-year period remained particularly unclear. The 1970 law was implying that, potentially, after 40 years a special announcement of the relevant governmental body, or a special decision of the Iran National Documents Organization's Council [17] might be required to definitive remove access restrictions [18]. Specific circumstances, categories or thematic clusters of documents, that might permit the period of access restrictions to be extended, were not specified [19].

The vagueness around the issue of access restrictions in the 1970 law became the major guiding principle for further regulations before and after the 1979 revolution. Two acts ratified in 1975 [20] specified two categories of sensitive government documents, namely "secret" [21] and "confidential" [22]. Yet, there was still a large margin of uncertainty. The government bodies were left to decide about the degree of sensitivity of the document, and to assess when to remove it from the "secret" or "confidential" categories. No time limits, even approximate, were considered as if the documents were not supposed to switch to the "historical records" category to become publicly accountable and publicly owned. The acts retained a regime of total and permanent secrecy.

Very quickly, the political regime established in 1979 paid particular attention to archives. A bylaw was passed in summer 1983 (Tir 1362). Still lacking clarity and transparency, it stated that records were not accessible to the public "at least" during the 40-year period [23]. However, the following-up of records after the expiry of the stipulated period remained in a state of uncertainty and unpredictability.

The current state of access to information, which leads directly to the phenomenon of Iranian Linked Archives databases, is the Publication and Free Access to Information Act ratified in January 2009 (Bahman 1387) [24], with some clauses clarified by further bylaws [25]. These regulations are intended to ensure the right of access to information in the IRI. Nevertheless, consciously or not, many provisions, concepts, and procedures still remain unclear, undefined, and unaddressed, thus significantly reducing their effectiveness [26]. "Historical records" as a category of public information are not addressed in the 2009 Act. This would require further consideration.

Only a few remarks may be provided in this paper. Like the Laws on Right to Information adopted in other countries, the Iranian 2009 Act does logically prohibit access to several categories of information. Apart from sensitive information related to privacy protection, medical secrets, and commercial interests [27], classified government secrets, information that can compromise public security and comfort, or prevention and detection of crimes [28] are also listed. Yet, the 2009 Act does not mention any mean to request a special exemption or waiver for individuals who are not "competent authority" [29]. Nor does it make any specific provision for requirements to remove confidential information (be it a single line or a word) from a document in order to make it available to the public. A culture of undisputed secrecy seems to prevail, perhaps also because the commission responsible for the application of the 2009 Act is housed at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance [30], known for limiting access to information.

The 2009 Act required the public and private institutions to make the non-classified information publicly available in digital format through Internet resources [31]. This clearly is what renewed the impetus for technological modernity at the heritage and research institutions in the IRI, leading namely to the massive creation of "archives.ir" I will further discuss. This digital exercise follows the pattern of the writing of history through the publications of primary historical documents which, as K.S. Aghaie notes, have proliferated in the post-revolutionary Islamist historiography [32]. In fact, I would argue that the online archival databases are intended to become today the main publicly and easily available historical source material in the IRI, threatening to replace definitely the original archives. Indeed, the 2009 Act prohibits forcing the disseminators of information to disclose their sources [33]. Thus, paradoxically enough, the Act, which promotes the publicity of information, also offers the means to make original archives permanently inaccessible. Besides, since only the rights of access to information of natural persons of Iranian citizenship and of Iranian legal entities are discussed in the 2009 Act and bylaws, the non-Iranians risk facing additional barriers to historical records kept in the Iranian repositories.

3   Creators of "archives.ir"

The institutional framework of "archives.ir" is the most visible. It is an extensive network of private and public institutions of a different, often "mixed" nature. The dominant activity (archive centre, library, museum, historical society, research institute or team) is always supplemented by no less important functions of, respectively, collecting records or books, conducting oral history interviews and doing research. The institutions being particularly active in the networked digital dissemination of archival material were established after the 1979 Islamic revolution under the Khomeini years in Iran (1979-1989) [34], or after Khomeini's death [35]. They were created for the purpose of (re)writing the history of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran [36], in order to bring historical, political and social studies in line with ideological frames of revolutionary and political Islam. Moreover, some of them have recovered the archival holdings of pre-revolutionary institutions, or documents requisi-

tioned from the political and economic elite of the Pahlavi regime. Today, these institutions refer to each other and form a powerful network, which falls under the authority of the High Council of the Cultural Revolution, formed in 1984 in continuation of the Cultural Revolution (1980-1983) [37].

While the institutional settings for the implementation of "archives.ir" are clear, it is very difficult to identify the individuals who manage information content. The Iranian Linked Archives stand out as an impersonal corporate structure, without any personified authorities, and very little or no indication on the division of labor and individual accountabilities. Some databases do not mention the people in charge for their conception, for the selection of archival records digitized and put online, for the organization of digital surrogates, and for the creation of contextual metadata information [38]. Others provide haphazardly the names of those responsible for the content of specific sections [39]. It appears that different people are involved in the management of digital content. However, no details are provided about the places of employment, duties or functions of the individuals mentioned. The search for additional information online, through social networks or other resources about the institution concerned, is laborious and does not always help.

Finally, the Iranian Linked Archives network does not seem to include the users. Spaces for public participation are regularly provided in template forms available at the bottom of the Web pages with digital surrogates [40]. However, no trace of interactive communication with wide audience is displayed.

The "digital documentary ecosystem" [41], maintained by the heritage and research institutions of the IRI, also raises concerns regarding the quality or, more aptly put, trustworthiness of the raw research data that is made available online.

4   Neither Traced nor Traceable: Random Pieces of the Past with Lost Contextual Identity

The goal of the online disclosure of archival material is ambiguously formulated. The institutions responsible for the databases refer to the "dissemination of historical sources" in order to create a "favourable environment for research" [42]. Some mention however information warfare [43]. The vocabulary of war used in this case to define the writing of history and the digital dissemination of archival documents clearly indicates its use as a political and ideological weapon. It takes place within a stronger strategic framework outlined in 2012 by a senior Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps official, stating that a war in cyberspace was more dangerous than a physical war [44]. The "archives.ir" bring together an enormous mass of heterogeneous materials in the form of digitized copies and born digital transcripts: personal and official correspondence, financial documentation, memorandums on political gatherings, inventories of property, obituaries, personal daily notes, photos, declarations, old maps, press clippings, etc. This diversity is remarkable, but raises concerns, since, as was pointed out, the notion of "bringing together" offers a number of possibilities [45]. Several key observations are to be made.

Following the line that transparency is a way to allow objectivity in the disordered digital environment [46], the first thing to note is the almost total absence of any methodological statement underpinning the online release of digital surrogates. Multiple transitory decisions and discussions on the criteria used to select archival records and to group their digital surrogates online tend to be a "black box" lacking openness of process. Digital surrogates may be accessed through thematic collections focused on individual, event, custom or issue [47], or groups formed upon random association of documents [48]. Photographs often form groups separated from textual archival records [49]. Metadata associated with a group of digital surrogates or a single digital surrogate provides no information on what might be called the original "contextual identity" [50] of the archival holdings as a whole and of the records from which the digital content originated [51]. No contextual elements allow tracing the pathways and functions of the records in the work of administrations and officials at the time of their creation. A highly variable and confusing mixture of public and private areas, and of social, economic and political fields in digital collections is alarming. One collection can be made of digital surrogates dealing with a broad chronological span, and addressing issues from the fields of politics, public education, health, taxes, popular uprisings, trade or prisons. It can include correspondence from people being in different occupations or from different societal groupings [52]. This suggests that digital curators do not see a problem in generating the content of one collection from the records deriving from the activities of different bodies or individuals, thus violating and distorting the evidential value inherent in the organic interrelationships that originally existed between records, human agents, their activities and the functions they were holding while creating records [53].

Thus, the conceptual model implemented in "archives.ir" is based on the idea of archival record as an isolated, decontextualized item, in which only text content is taken as evidence, without any consideration of the associated contexts to provide insight into the processes, purposes, and activities that led to the creation of records [54]. Such a content-based approach does not allow any latitude in interpretation when one seeks to use digital surrogates as historical sources. Neither may one produce any causality analysis, nor is it possible to guarantee the integrity and reliability of the information contained in digital surrogates. Moreover, digitized copies become integrated in a strong conceptual basis. Some ideas are briefly articulated below.

5 "archives.ir": Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Contemporary History

Some contributors to the Iranian archival databases criticize an "emotional attitude" to the history which, being "devoid of logical thinking", tends to produce an "imaginative storytelling" [55]. Bringing to the forefront digitized copies of archival material, they claim to produce an impartial, "evidence-based" data about the past. Yet, a closer look reveals quite clearly a strong conceptual frame built upon the following thematic lines: 1. The Shi'i ulama as the leading revolutionary and political force, and the only one which better reflects (and therefore protects) Iran's "national

character". 2. The foreign, especially Western evil influences competing for domination at Iran and aimed at destroying its culture. 3. The pre-revolutionary corrupt economic and political elite, especially that of the Pahlavi dynasty, supporting foreign evil influences because of money and privileges, and repressing the "Iranian people" which is an undifferentiated and undefined category, subliminally associated to those who were "powerless", "oppressed" and "impoverished" by the monarchic rule. These themes are in line with "conspiratorial modes of reasoning", to use Houchang Chehabi's expression [56], and fit in with the ideas about the past emerged after 1979 under the influence of new ideological references established by Ayatollah Khomeini and his clerical followers, namely the concept of *velayat-e faqih* [57]. A nuanced analysis is required. These major themes are interlinked and completing each other. They are introduced, for example, through the massive posting online of a certain type of records, namely financial documentation and lists of properties and jewelry of the Pahlavi dynasty [58]; or through highlighting a particular social group, namely Shia clergy which is often discussed in relation to the Shah's repressions and protest movement before 1979 [59]; or else through the powerful visual images transmitting signals about the individuals concerned [60]. Additional "born digital" information (brief introductory notices, analytical articles, transcripts of testimonies and interviews) strengthens the baseline for understanding digital copies of archival material. It "helps" to categorize individuals through honorary titles ("great", "pious scholar", "servant", "popular", "martyr", "great life") or through remarks diminishing their value. While little digital copies relate to the 1980s, the 1979 revolution is extremely present. In fact, this is a major methodological problem. The past is "analysed" retroactively through the revolution as the culminating point and the logical outcome, thus simplifying and streamlining complex processes, people's motivations, and eliminating those who do not fit with this representation models.

6   Conclusion

Lacking transparency and openness of process, the online archival databases maintained by the heritage and research institutions of the IRI remain a subjective exercise. Contexts in which the original records were created, their primary functions and evolution of their life cycle are not documented and left unconsidered. The role of human agents in assembling digital surrogates together emerges as the major determinant of the categories on which the digital collections are created. This suggests selectivity, which involves privileging of some issues and interpretations over others. Indeed, the border line between "interpreting the past" and "giving public access to records" turns out to be very hazy. Archival documents are removed from repositories and brought together in a digital "controllable" mass. They are replaced in a new, intellectually created environment, where the interpretations of the past are constructed through the emotional and imaginative appeal of associated preconceived ideas and images. "archives.ir" produce a commemorative or accusatory mythology, which relies on the ideological references of today and extremely simplifies causalities and processes of the past.

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3. The following journals, hosted by the National Library and Archives of the IRI, are the main platforms in which peculiar issues of the management and of the use of archives in research are discussed: Faslnâme-ye Ârchiv-e Melli [National Archives Quarterly], ed. since 2015, http://www.nlai.ir/archives-quarterly, last accessed 2021/06/22. Faslnâme-ye Ganjine-ye Asnâd [Treasure of Documents Quarterly], ed. since 1991, http://ganjineh.nlai.ir/, last accessed 2021/06/22. With regard to archival science, the authors of the articles published in these journals take a very hands-on approach. They develop an intense interest in digital information technology, emphasizing namely its usefulness for the preservation and communication purposes. The challenges that the digital technology pose regarding the theoretical and philosophical approaches of archival science, namely concerns for evidence as associated contexts providing insight into the processes, activities, and events that led to the records' creation are poorly considered. The archival and librarian fields do not seem to be clearly distinguished. Regarding the use of archives in research, these journals are in line with the official writing of history discussed shortly further in this paper.
   Interesting critical assessments on the use of and access to archives are occasionally provided by scholars studying specific subjects and having concrete field experiences. Some examples: Cronin, S.: Writing the History of Modern Iran: A Comment on Approaches and Sources. Iran 36, 175-184 (1998). DOI: 10.2307/4299983. Mahendrarajah, S.: Archival Research in Iran and Afghanistan. MELA Notes 89, 22-28 (2016).
4. The OFF-SITE research project, launched by the anthropologist Chowra Makaremi and funded by the European Research Council, is conducted by an interdisciplinary team hosted at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris, France. OFF-SITE general presentation, https://offsite.hypotheses.org/, last accessed 2021/06/17. Some research findings, namely a chronology of the post-revolutionary decade in Iran, and an investigation of sources regarding this period with a critical assessment of actors involved in their creation, collection, processing, and dissemination, will be presented in a database we are currently creating.
5. Proctor, R.N., Schiebinger, L. (eds.): Agnotology. The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance. 1st ed. Stanford University Press, Stanford (2008).
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7. In this regard, there are helpful critical assessments of the "document" and "information" as evidence in the digital environment, conducted by the analysts working in the field of computerised communications networks and documentary computer science, such as Bruno Bachimont, Camille Paloque-Berges, Joshua Sternfeld, David Weinberger, and others.

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13. The 1970 archive law. Article 1.

14. Berger, S.: The role of national archives in constructing national master narratives in Europe. Archival Science 13, 1-22 (2013). DOI: 10.1007/s10502-012-9188-z.

15. The 1970 archive law. Articles 5 and 6.

16. The 1970 archive law. Article 6.

17. After much debate, it was decided that the Iran National Documents Organization's Council would comprise of the following individuals: Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Culture and Arts, Attorney General, Secretary General of the Administrative and Employment Affairs Organization of Iran, Prosecutor of the Audit Office, two experts in culture

and history of Iran proposed by the Ministry of Science and Education. See the 1970 archive law. Article 4.

18. The 1970 archive law. Article 6.

19. There was only one exception. However, it has not addressed the lack of clarity on a disclosure procedure to be implemented after 40 years, and provided an extra layer of secrecy. The Ministry of War has been excluded from the provisions of the 1970 archive law (Article 8). Its records should be managed at the discretion of the competent body formed by the Ministry. Thus, the law made the military records more secretive. Thus, the military secrets have been given a special place within the state secrecy issues.

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21. Whose disclosure was against the interests of the state, with two sub-levels of the unlawful disclosure that would cause irreparable damage, first, to the foundation of the government and the bedrock of the regime, and, second, to public interest and national security.

22. Whose disclosure was against special administrative interests of the government bodies, also including two sub-levels of the unlawful disclosure that would, first, disrupt the orderly functioning of the bodies, and, second, cause internal turmoil in the bodies.

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    Interestingly enough, the bylaw adopted in November 2014 (Azar 1393) refers to the acts regarding the secret and confidential government documents ratified by the Shah's government in 1975 (Article 1, d). See English translation of the 2014 bylaw in Article 19: Iran: Review of the Publication and Free Access to Information Act 2009. Legal analysis, pp. 44-47 (2017). Text of analysis, https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-review-of-the-publication-and-free-access-to-information-act-2009-2/, last accessed 2021/06/16.

    This strongly suggests that, even if the Shah's government was expecting to make clearer the time limits regarding the removal of secrecy and confidentiality of the government documents, no regulations were made on this point before the 1979 revolution. Also, the legislation on access to documents in I.R. Iran is appeared to be a continuation of the choices made and the strategy established by the Shah's government.

26. See detailed discussion in the study cited above: Article 19: Iran: Review of the Publication and Free Access to Information Act 2009. Legal analysis (2017). Text of analysis, https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-review-of-the-publication-and-free-access-to-information-act-2009-2/, last accessed 2021/06/16.

27. The 2009 Free Access to Information Act. Articles 14 and 16.

28. The 2009 Free Access to Information Act. Articles 13 and 17.
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   The Islamic Revolution Information Center (IRIC) was established in 2013 by the Islamic Revolution Literature Office, created in 1993. IRIC Homepage, http://22bahman.ir, last accessed 2021/06/16.
   The History Research Foundation of Iran (HRFI) started to work in 2003. HRFI Homepage, http://bonyadtarikhbook.ir, last accessed 2021/06/16.
36. Chehabi, H.E.: The Paranoid Style in Iranian Historiography. In: Atabaki, T. (ed.): Iran in the 20th century: Historiography and Political Culture, p. 165. 1st ed. I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, Iran Heritage Foundation, London, New York (2009).
37. For reference see Tajmazinani, A.: From Cultural Revolution to Cultural Engineering: Cultural Policy Post-Revolutionary Iran. 1st ed. Routledge, London (2017). Fazeli, N.: Politics of Culture in Iran: Anthropology, Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century. 1st ed. Routledge, New York (2006). I thank one of my team colleagues working on Cultural Revolution in Iran for pointing out these studies.
38. Thus, the database of the CHDS, an authoritative institution responsible for the historical intelligence records, does not provide any information on the individuals involved in its administration. See example of one of the CHDS' digital collections made of randomly selected archival documents: collection of the SAVAK documents on the ideas and activities of Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969), an Iranian thinker and writer who produced a critique of

western   technology   and   its   influence   in   Iran, https://historydocuments.ir/?page=post&id=3379, last accessed 2021/06/27. The CHDS database provide also a big number of very large thematic collections, called "digital books". People responsible for these "books" are also rendered completely anonymous. See example: the first volume of the "digital book" dedicated to Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani (1911-1979), a senior Shi'a Islamic Scholar who had influence and became chairman of the Revolutionary Council which was de facto the Iran's ruling body after the 1979 revolution, https://historydocuments.org/sanad/?page=books_doc&id=65, last accessed 2021/06/27. Neither introduction, nor individual pages of the "book" are signed.

39. In that respect, the IICHS database provides for some sections the names of peoples selecting archival documents to be put online in digital form and, consequently, creating contextual information. See examples: http://www.iichs.ir/s/1803, http://www.iichs.ir/s/1811, http://www.iichs.ir/s/19529, last accessed 2021/06/27.

40. Thus, the CHDS database provides the number of times the Web page with digital surrogates and their born digital transcripts was viewed, but no comments from audience were published. See example, https://historydocuments.ir/?page=post&id=1755, last accessed 2021/06/27.

41. To use the Camille Paloque-Berges's term. Paloque-Berges, C.: Les sources nativement numériques pour les sciences humaines et sociales. Histoire@Politique [en ligne] 30, 231 (2016). DOI: 10.3917/HP.030.0221.

42. The IICHS statement, http://www.iichs.ir/Pages/2/Page/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9 %87-%D9%85%D8%A7/, last accessed 2021/06/20.

43. The CHDS website, while stating that the aim of the online release of archives is to facilitate access to historical sources, also quotes Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei mentioning that the world lives today the "era of soft war". The previous sentence explains that "the enemies, thinkers and ill-wishers of the great and historical nation of Iran […] intend to create a rift and to change the historical and cultural identity" of Iran.
CHDS statement: https://historydocuments.ir/?page=about, last accessed 2021/06/20.

44. Sulmeyer, M.: Cyberspace: A Growing Domain for Iranian Disruption. In: Hicks, K.H., Dalton, M.G. (eds.): Deterring Iran after the Nuclear Deal (CSIS Reports), p. 34. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Boulder, New York, London (2017).

45. Yeo, G.: The Conceptual Fonds and the Physical Collection. Archivaria 73 (April), 45 (2012). https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13384, last accessed 2021/07/01.

46. Weinberger, D.: Transparency Is the New Objectivity. Joho the Blog (2009), https://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/2009/07/19/transparency-is-the-new-objectivity/, last accessed 2021/06/20.
Yeo, G.: Trust and Context in Cyberspace. Archives and Records 34(2), 218 (2013). DOI: 10.1080/23257962.2013.825207.

47. See examples of thematic collections:
IICHS database, thematic collections of digitized documents regarding the life and activities of the Pahlavi family or Shia clerics, especially high-ranking Twelver Shia clergy, Ayatollahs, Iran in the world wars, nationalization of the Iranian oil industry led by the future prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddegh, in 1951, cases of famine, Iranian police, land reform in the 1960s, etc.
http://www.iichs.ir/p/Photo.aspx?sid=54&title=%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C% D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AF, last accessed 2021/06/20.

CHDS database, thematic collections of digitized documents regarding the Shia clerics, politicians, or Islamic revolution,
https://historydocuments.org/sanad/?page=books&id=&start=1, last accessed 2021/06/20.

48. See examples of collections randomly associating digital surrogates:
IICHS database, http://www.iichs.ir/p/Photo.aspx?sid=3&title=%D8%A8%D8%A7-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AF, last accessed 2021/06/20.
IRDC database, http://www.irdc.ir/fa/services/5, last accessed 2021/06/20.
CHDS database, https://historydocuments.ir/?page=documents&id=18, last accessed 2021/06/20.

49. Photograph collections are also organized thematically or randomly. See examples:
IICHS database, numbered photo collection,
http://www.iichs.ir/p/Photo.aspx?sid=4&title=%D8%A8%D8%A7-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1, last accessed 2021/06/20.
IICHS database, thematic photo collections regarding the Shia clerics or figures of the Islamic revolution recognized as such by the current political regime,
http://www.iichs.ir/p/Photo.aspx?sid=9&title=%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B9%DA%A9%D8%B3, last accessed 2021/06/20.
IRDC database, thematic photo collection with regard to the demonstrations of June 5 and 6, 1963, in Iran protesting against the arrest of Ayatollah Khomeini after his denouncement of several reforms started by the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and designed to be a way toward modernization, which was considered by several senior Iranian Shia religious scholars to be a threat to Islam,
http://www.irdc.ir/fa/news/6889/%D9%82%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%85-15-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-1342-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1, last accessed 2021/06/20.

50. Duranti, L.: Whose truth? Records and archives as evidence in the era of post-truth and disinformation. In: Brown, C. (ed.): Archival Futures, p. 21. 1st ed. Facet Publishing, London (2018). DOI: 10.29085/9781783302192.003.

51. Neither relevant archival references (titles, reference codes) nor important contextual elements (information on creators, provenencial context, chain of custody, etc.) are available. Some databases provide "archive numbers". IICHS database, http://www.iichs.ir/s/14019, last accessed 2021/06/20. Move the mouse pointer over the JPEG files to display small accompanying icons providing short descriptions and "archive numbers". This is not a general practice, and it comes up with more questions than answers. The compositions of "archive numbers" have little in common, and their meaning is unclear, also because the archival finding aids regarding physical archival holdings are never supplied.

52. The following collection in the IICHS database is a telling example: Collection 43, http://www.iichs.ir/s/5818, last accessed 2021/06/28. It contains, first, several documents relating to the Persian constitution of 1906, created under Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar (1896-1907) and abolished by Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar (1907-1909), with the subsequent dissolution of the National Consultative Assembly (Majles). A statement of protest made by a group of Persian patriots against William Morgan Shuster (1877-1960), an American lawyer appointed as treasurer-general of Persia by Majles in 1911, falls in some

sense within the scope of the issues of the constitutional movement. The other documents, however, are drawn from a very disparate set of problematic lines and chronological sequences: an official letter attributed to Nasser al-Din Shah (1848-1896) on how the Persian officials had to report to the Shah, a preliminary contract for the construction of a wireless telegraph station and a lamp factory in Tehran signed by the Soviet trade representative in Iran V.F. Kulak and Reza Khan as the Iranian Minister of War, an undated price list of paper mill objects in French francs; an invitation to the former Deputy Minister of Finance and businessman Abdolhassan Diba (1894-1982) to the meeting of the anti-opium assembly held in 1926 under the presidency of the Minister of Finance Morteza Gholi Bayat (1890-1958).

53. We refer to the fundamental concern expressed by the archival community regarding the contexts and processes through which records were created and evolved over time. These issues have been extensively discussed in the professional literature. For reference see Cook, T.: The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions. Archivaria 35 (January), 24-37 (1993). https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11882, last accessed 2021/07/01. Nougaret C.: Classement et description: des principes à la pratique. In: Favier, J. (dir.): La pratique archivistique française, pp. 133-186. 1st ed. Archives Nationales, Paris (1993). Yeo, G.: The Conceptual Fonds and the Physical Collection. Archivaria 73, 43-80 (2012). https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13384, last accessed 2021/07/01. Tognoli, N.B., Guimarães, J.A.C.: Provenance as a knowledge organization principle. Knowledge Organization 46 (7), 558-568 (2019). DOI: 10.5771/0943-7444-2019-7-558. Also in: Hjørland, B., Gnoli, C. (eds.): ISKO Encyclopaedia of Knowledge Organization, http://www.isko.org/cyclo/provenance, last accessed 2021/06/21.

54. Gilliland-Swetland, A.: Enduring Paradigm, New Opportunities: The Value of the Archival Perspective in the Digital Environment. CLIR Publication No. 89, p. 10. Council on Library and Information Resources, Washington, DC (2000).
DOI: 10.1108/LHT.2000.18.4.383.4.

55. See a brief essay on the topic introducing digital collections about the Pahlavi dynasty, IICHS database, http://www.iichs.ir/s/3300, last accessed 2021/07/01.

56. Chehabi, H.E.: The Paranoid Style in Iranian Historiography. In: Atabaki, T. (ed.): Iran in the 20th century: Historiography and Political Culture, pp. 155-176. 1st ed. I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, Iran Heritage Foundation, London, New York (2009). According to Houchang Chehabi, since the Constitutional Revolution, Iranians at all levels of society were progressively socialized into the confident belief that hostile conspiracies were threatening Iran, with consequences on political culture and Iranian historical narratives.

57. For reference see Abrahamian, E.: Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic, pp. 14-39. 1st ed. I.B. Tauris, London; University of California Press, Berkeley (1993). Aghaie, K.S.: Islamist Historiography in Post-Revolutionary Iran. In: Atabaki, T. (ed.): Iran in the 20th century: Historiography and Political Culture, pp. 233-263. 1st ed. I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, Iran Heritage Foundation, London, New York (2009). Kadivar, M.A.: The Ayatollahs and the Republic: The religious establishment in Iran and its interaction with the Islamic Republic. Pomeps Studies 28. Islam in a changing Middle East. New Analysis of Shia Politics, 6-9 (2017).

58. The IICHS series of digital collections dedicated to the members of the Pahlavi dynasty is a good illustration in this respect. IICHS database, The Pahlavi: 1st volume, http://www.iichs.ir/s/3300, last accessed 2021/07/01.

59. The members of Shi'i clergy are the most important social group discussed in the thematic collections of the CHDS database. Out of 214 digital collections, 60 collections are entire-

ly dedicated to them. CHDS database, list of thematic collections, https://historydocuments.org/sanad/?page=books, last accessed 2021/07/01. This is without taking account of the isolated digitized copies directly or indirectly related to them in other collections.

60. An interesting example is the representation of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari (1906-1986) compared to the representation of Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Hossein Ali Tabatabai Borujerdi (1875-1961). Discussion about their representations through photograph collections in the IICHS database is complex. I limit myself to mentioning some striking differences. Shariatmadari, who favoured the Shiite practice of keeping clerics away from politics and was known to be a critic of Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini, is symbolically deprived of authority in the IICHS digital photo collections. We never see him praying, but he is often shown as a "political militant", namely in association with the short-lived Muslim People's Republic party (1979-1980), of which he was a clerical advisor. The photo selected to represent the end of his life shows him to be completely alone on his death bed, noticeably thin and exhausted, as if loneliness and abandonment would be the logical outcomes of his life. IICHS database, photo collection about Shariatmadari, http://www.iichs.ir/s/5052, last accessed 2021/07/01. Borudjerdi, who died long before the 1979 revolution, is always shown in the middle of a big crowd, in pious, religious or scientific context. On his death bed, we see him in a supportive environment, surrounded by intellectuals and doctors. Numerous photos show also a huge crowd involved in his funeral ceremony. IICHS database, photo collections about Borudjerdi, http://www.iichs.ir/s/3398, http://www.iichs.ir/s/3399, last accessed 2021/07/01.