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Some Notes on the Early Minutes of the Iranian Parliament

Abstract While the debates of the first term of Iranian Parliament—the National Consultative Assembly, or Majles (1906-1908)—have long been an important source for historians and other scholars, no serious effort has ever been undertaken to try and properly understand this historical source. As a result, a number of misconceptions exist about the debates of the early parliament and what survives as their minutes. The present paper aims to dispel some of these misconceptions by focusing on two issues: 1) whether—and to what extent—what survived to our day (by the virtue of being published in the Majles newspaper) should be considered the official minutes of the parliament; 2) what were some of the characteristics of the later edition of the minutes published as the supplement to the Official Gazette of Iran. This is achieved by the careful analysis of a number of sources, mainly the debates themselves, legal documents, periodicals and memoirs.

Keywords Iran, constitutionalism, minutes, debates, parliament

1 Introduction

The full, verbatim record of the debates of the first term of the Majles that is, Iranian parliament (1906–1908)—would for obvious reasons constitute an important historical source for the political, social etc. history of Iran, as well as the study of the development of the legal language.



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Unfortunately, such a record does not exist. While it is often argued¹ that the complete minutes or debates of the body, at that time known mainly as the National Consultative Assembly² were lost following the royalist attack on the parliament, I do not believe it necessarily had to be the case, as will be soon explained. Regardless, however, of the erstwhile existence of such a complete record, what is generally consulted by the researchers are the more or less abridged minutes of the Assembly, published in the newspaper *Majles*,³ and four decades later republished as the supplement to the Official Gazette (*Ruznameh-ye Rasmi*) of Iran.

These minutes, although used extensively by the scholars, have never themselves been an object of a meticulous study, which would examine the way in which they were prepared, language used, political bias of the editors of the journal etc. In one of the most extensive and multi-faced studies of the Constitutional Revolution (Chehabi and Martin 2010), not a single paper was dedicated to the subject, although there had been papers on related topics, such as the history of the press and the creation of the public sphere;⁴ none of these subjects, however, could be understood without the proper appreciation of the parliamentary debates as published in the official press of the period. One cannot but to notice—as Ian Harris did for the scholars using the early British parliamentary reports—that these scholars treat their source as a ‘defective Hansard’ (Harris 2007: 258–259) instead of a historical source in its own right, which has to be carefully analyzed. In fact, apart from the brief analyses of sources in the historical works,⁵ and the studies of the press of the period (Zaker Hoseyni 1395 [2016–2017]), to this date the only published study even briefly addressing the subjects laid above has been Naser Soltani’s critical analysis of a rather recent re-reedition (reedition of the supplements reedition) of the Minutes (Soltani 1388 [2009]; republished in 1390 [2011]).

This, paired with shortcomings of the reedition of the Minutes in the Official Gazette’s supplement—which has generally been the text consid-

¹ For example, in the appendix to the *Ruznameh-ye Rasmi* (Official Gazette) of Iran, where the minutes of the parliaments have been republished. More on that below.

² In that pioneering period numerous names were used interchangeably, with the consistent used of the official names being adopted later. Hence, I used mostly the term *Majles*. When put in italics, the term *Majles* is going to refer to the newspaper under that title (see below).

³ More on this newspaper can be found in Sadr-e Hashemi (1364 [1985–1986]: 4, 183–188), and on its publisher in Afrasiyabi (1388).

⁴ Most importantly Nabavi (2010), which holds some relevance to the study of the way in which the parliamentary debates were disseminated among the people, as it discusses the readership of the press.

⁵ Especially Adamiyat (n.d.: 16–17) and to a lesser extent Kasravi (2537 [1978–1979]: 273).

ered by the scholars⁶—has led even scholars of renown to make largely inaccurate observations regarding the source. This was done in spite of their having access to both the original source and the later reedition in the Official Gazette. Yet, as they did not have a proper study at their disposal, they did not know the origin or the exact nature and character of the sources they used. One of the best examples here may be Mangol Bayat in her seminal *Iran's First Revolution*. Firstly, in the bibliography she gives an inaccurate date of the creation of the source, i.e. 1909;⁷ in fact, to my knowledge, no such edition or copy of the Minutes exists. She also lists a newspaper titled *Mozakerat-e Majles* which, actually, did not exist (Mangol Bayat 1991: 297). Furthermore, in one note she observes that the lack of mention of the details of a certain discussion was due to the Minute's editors' decision to omit any religious debates in the public account of the debates (Mangol Bayat 1991, 283–84 note 34). While there might have been such a policy, the account she referenced—found in the supplement of the Official Gazette—does not confirm this, as it was not a part of the official account, especially as published in the newspaper *Majles*. Instead, it was a report from the newspaper *Habl al-Matin*, published in Calcutta (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 21 Zulqa'edah 1324: 17),⁸ which the editor of the supplement of the Official Gazette copied—without mentioning his source—and edited, mostly stylistically. Thus, Bayat based her view of the lack of inclusion of certain details in the official narrative of the parliament on the lack of inclusion of these details in an emigree newspaper report on a parliamentary setting. Thus, without the understanding of the true nature and origin of the Official Gazette's reedition, it is virtually impossible to comment on the parliamentary reporting in the period. Interestingly, a mistake slightly similar to the first and minor one made by Bayat can be also found in Adamiyat's historical writings, generally considered very diligent and based on the original and official sources:⁹ he gives the date 1320 (1941–1942) instead of the spring of 1325 (1946) as the date of the publication of the Minutes as the supplement to the Gazette. In this case, however, it was probably just a simple misreading (Adamiyat n.d.: 405). Also Janet Afary in her well-known study confused the supplement's reedition with the original document from the period,

⁶ Especially since it has been made available online: <http://www.ical.ir/ical/fa/Content/cat/5187/دوره%20اول%20مجلس%20ملی>. Accessed 27 April 2022.

⁷ While it is possible that she is referring to the debates of the later term of the parliament, this is highly unlikely. Had it been the case it would have been specified in the text and the bibliography.

⁸ Later, the 'local' editions of this newspaper were also published in Tehran and Rasht.

⁹ Adamiyat even went as far as to criticize the general lack of attention paid to the official documents and sources in Iranian historiography (Adamiyat 1346 [1967]).

dating it for 1906–1907 (Afary 1996: 404). It has to be pointed out that it would not have been hard for any of these authors to access either *Majles*, or *Habl al-Matin (Calcutta)*, as they were among the most available newspapers of the period.

Given that even renowned scholars fall into such pitfalls, it is thus necessary to conduct a proper study of the minutes. The paper at hand obviously cannot remedy all misconceptions, nor can it shed light on all the necessary issues. Instead, it focuses on two subjects: 1) the way the minutes were prepared (in the section which could be called ‘the minutes and their sources’); 2) some of the characteristics, mostly shortcomings, of the minutes as published in the supplement to the Official Gazette of Iran, which is to this day the most widely used version (especially since they have been made available online). It would be also tempting to include the overview of the subjects discussed in the parliament which made their way to the minutes; unfortunately, it would not be possible to do the subject justice in the scope of a single article unless one limited oneself to presenting a list of such topics. This, on the other hand, would be redundant, as the general ‘oeuvre’ of the first term of *Majles* has already been discussed elsewhere.¹⁰ Similarly, the analysis of the legal language used in the parliament is a subject in need of study, but again, this would require a separate article to do the matter justice. The present paper, however, sets the stage for such a study by reassessing the sources which may be of use.

I have also decided to focus on the earliest stages of the workings of the parliament, focusing mostly on the period preceding the ratification of the Constitution (14 Zulqa‘edeh 1324 [30 December 1906]). I have made this choice for two reasons. Firstly, it is the period crucial for the development of the first part of the Iranian constitution of 1906 (i.e., the constitution itself, not the 1907 Supplementary Fundamental Law), which dealt with the place the parliament shall occupy in the new political system of Iran. Secondly, as part of that period was covered in *Majles* and another part was not, scholars looking for the contents of the debates from the period must look further than one main source, such as *Majles* (see below). Furthermore, part of this period is not covered in the basic historiographical work from the period, Nazem al-Eslam Kermani’s *Tarikh-e Bidari-ye Iraniyan*, which omits the entire month of Shawwal (November–December 1906).

In doing the above, this paper tries to shed the misconceptions surrounding the earliest parliamentary history of Iran, and thus is but a first

¹⁰ Adamiyat (1985; n.d.); Mangol Bayat (1991); Afary (1996); Haqqdar (2016), among others.

step on the path to analyze the workings of the Majles, its debates and the language used in them. It may also serve as a guide to academics who wish to study the history of Iranian parliamentarism and who are trying to understand the relationship between some of the sources available. Moreover, the paper has to delve into the analysis of the Internal Bylaws (with regards to the preparation of the minutes) of the first Iranian parliament, which have been neglected by the existing scholarship.

2 The minutes and their sources

First Iranian Majles convened on 17 Sha‘ban 1324 (6 October 1906). In due time, a newspaper *Majles* was established to publish—apart from news etc.—the debates of the parliament; this was, in fact, stated as its chief objective. The newspaper, however, was first published on 8 Shawwal (25 November) of the same year and covered the debates only from 5 Shawwal (22 November) onward. This means that over a month of the proceedings was lost—and this included the period when a number of important laws were passed, such as the Majles’ Internal Bylaws, and—as it would seem—a number of crucial debates took place. Interestingly, this period, and even the events preceding it, are partially covered in the supplement to the Official Gazette (Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 5–13), in which the minutes of the first Majles were republished. The editor of the supplement wrote about his publication:

[...] parliament, by allocating sufficient credit, obliged the office of the Official Gazette to prepare the printing and publication of the transcripts (*surat-e mashruh-e mozakerat*) of the parliament from the first term to the beginning of the sixth, which has not been published. The office of the Gazette also from that very moment focused on collecting documents and evidence, so that the preliminary work might be completed and the objective reached. Yet, up until now, Khordad 1, 1325 [22 May 1946], with utmost sadness [I have to confess that] this important issue has been neglected and delayed, and there has been no success in this regard. And the reason for this was that the debates of the first term were destroyed in the bombardment of the Majles, and unlike the later terms, the official transcript was not present in the Majles archives. And had we wished to omit this term and begin printing with the second term, this series of publications would have been incomplete and unsuccessful because the debates of the first term had a great value from the point of view of shedding light on the important aspects of the history of constitutionalism (*mashrutiyat*). Fortunately, the abridged, but complete [sic!] proceedings of the debates of this term, from Shawwal 5 onward, were published in the newspaper *Majles*, which

was at the time published under the management of His Excellency Seyyed Mohammad Sadeq Tabataba'i, the erstwhile Speaker of the Majles. Yet, as from Sha'ban 17, which was the day of the inauguration of the Majles, to Shawwal 5, no trace of the proceedings of the debates was available in this newspaper, the office of the Gazette decided—so that in any case this collection [of the debates] would not be incomplete—to add to this collection, where possible, the proceedings of the debates and official speeches from the day of the issue of the edict (*farman*) of *Mashrutiyyat*.¹¹ In any case these preliminary [activities] became the reason why the printing of the series of the debates of the parliament were delayed by two months ... (Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 1)

As we can see, the editor made a number of claims: 1) that the original and full debates had been lost following the fall of Majles; 2) that *Majles* published only abridged reports (this is clearly linked with the first point); 3) the office of the Gazette prepared an account for the period for which there was no account in the newspaper. The sources used for this account were not listed, but one could infer from the text that they were the result of the office's *collecting documents and evidence*, mentioned earlier in the quote. This statement, however, is far from precise, and seems to suggest that the sources used were mostly official notes and records. Yet, as it will become clear soon, the claims made by the editor were not entirely founded.

As for the original and full transcripts of the debates being lost, there is actually little evidence that they had ever existed. This is not to say that no official notes had been taken. However, there is no reason to believe that the official and final text of the minutes was anything other than what we can find in *Majles*. There are quite a few arguments to support this position, with the crucial document being the Internal Bylaws,¹² a detailed analysis of which is necessary to fully understand the issue.

The term *tondnevisan* (lit. quick writers, meaning shorthand-writers or stenographers) appears in them quite a few times, which suggests that some note-taking took place on the official level; as the term is not, however, explained, there is little to go by here. The minutes themselves are, however, given more space. According to Article 12 'taking care of the

¹¹ There is no place here to discuss the exact legal terminology; term *farman* generally means 'order' (especially royal or imperial order or edict), and *Mashrutiyyat* was the term used for the constitutional or parliamentary type of government. The use of term *farman-e Mashrutiyyat* for the document in question has for some time, however, been an object of scrutiny (Soltani 1390 [2011]: 349).

¹² Discussion of the various editions of the Bylaws can be found below.

minutes of the parliament which are written by the Secretaries in each sitting¹³ is the duty of the Speaker, the same applies to the appointing and limiting the letters/writings of the stenographers that are to be distributed and published in the newspapers'. This suggests that the minutes were prepared by the secretaries under the supervision of the Speaker. Also, the speaker could tell the stenographers to prepare separate notes or letters for the newspapers—the plural for here being of note, as it did not single out *Majles*, which had not been published at the time. At the same time, we know from the newspaper itself that there were no people capable of stenography available (*Majles* 11 Moharram 1325: 1), which suggests that no 'scientific' or methodological stenography took place.

Then, when describing the duties of the parliamentary Secretaries, the bylaws state that 'writing the minutes of a meeting for each sitting, printing the discussions of sittings to be distributed among the MPs and taking care of the writings of the stenographers and comparing them with the minutes written by the journalists are the duties of the Secretaries of the parliament' (Article 18) and that 'the Secretaries read the general points of the previous sitting so that the MPs would know what was said before [on the subject they are going to discuss]' (Article 19). There is also a separate mention of the minutes being distributed as part of the process of amending the laws in their subsequent readings: 'After amendments to a bill [have been], the minutes are read. They are distributed to the MPs after the second reading minutes' (Article 69). Importantly, their office is also separate from the keeper of the chancellery (*daftardar*), who keeps the writings and the documents of the parliament (Article 26).

This shows us a number of things, provided that the bylaws were executed. Firstly, there would be a large number of printed minutes of every sitting—which would make it virtually impossible for them to be all lost after the *Majles*' bombardment, as someone would have taken at least one copy home at some point. Also, we can see that the secretary was reviewing and comparing the writings of the journalists-reporters and the stenographers; this would mean that the record published in the newspaper was validated by the parliament's officials. Also, the above articles show us that what was prepared by the stenographers was not a finished official document, but a 'raw material' from which a proper document was prepared.

¹³ In general, the term *ejlasiyeh* would be used for a session and *jalaseh* for a sitting. When the Bylaws were written and passed such a distinction was not yet that clear, and while the term *jalaseh* was used as would later become customary, the terms *majles* (sic!) and *ejlas* was also seemingly used in this meaning.

As for the minutes of the parliamentary commissions—which are not the subject of this particular paper but deserve mention as a comparative material—these commissions each had their own secretaries, and it was they who prepared their minutes (Article 26). Still, they were not published, nor were they to be distributed among the MPs, unlike the general minutes; thus, naturally, they existed in a much smaller number of copies. Yet we are still aware of some their proceedings from other sources (Adamiyat n.d.: 16), which seems to suggest that the general minutes would still at least partially survive.

All this points to the minutes published in *Majles* as being the official, final version of the minutes, based of course on the earlier drafts. This is further validated by two passages from the memoirs of the MPs, Hasan Taqizadeh. In one instance, he stated that ‘[Sa’d al-Dowleh]¹⁴ was speaking in a calculated manner, so that the stenographers may write his whole speeches’ (Taqizadeh 1390 [2011–2012]: 59) and in the second, that

[Sani‘ al-Dowleh, the Speaker of the parliament] said [to me] ‘Mister,¹⁵ these MPs as they are, talk and the stenographers are unable to write precisely. They also complain. Sa’d al-Dowleh is the worst as he shows his [ulterior] motive’. He told me to listen and remember: ‘These stenographers should bring their notes and you should say where the mistakes are. Then they should bring them to be printed’. Stenographers brought [the notes] and read [them]. It lasted one week. Then I said that that I am kept away from work and on the other hand, because I am not from Tehran, they have their affections and feuds, they are not impartial, they object. I proposed Vakil al-Ro‘aya Hamadani. He was accepted. (Taqizadeh 1390 [2011–2012]: 64)

While we can see here that the regulations of the Bylaws were taken a bit lightly (as we find no mention of the Secretaries being involved in reviewing the minutes), it may also stem from Taqizadeh’s writing his account after many years and hence misremembering or omitting less important passages. What is, however, clear is that Sa’d al-Dowleh was angered by the way in which his speeches were misrepresented, and hence demanded the clear review of the notes made by the stenographers instead of their being simply printed as they were. This would mean that what was published in the newspaper was exactly what would constitute the official version of the minutes as prepared by the parliament. This is further corroborated by Sa’d al-Dowleh’s protests against the supposed misrepresentation of his words, which can be found in the minutes published

¹⁴ One of the most active MPs in the early parliament.

¹⁵ *Aqa*, see below.

in newspaper, and in the apologies and corrigendum sections of the said newspaper (*Majles* 25 Shawwal 1324: 1–2; *Majles* 11 Moharram 1325: 1–2; *Majles* 8 Zulqā‘edeh 1324: 3; *Majles* 23 Shawwal 1324: 1). Then this is corroborated even further by *Majles* mentioning that one MP was delegated to review the contents of the minutes prepared for publication;¹⁶ apparently, this person quickly resigned and was replaced by another MP, who also resigned after a brief period. It may seem, however, that there was a difference between the reporters of *Majles* and the parliamentary stenographers, as it also reported that the reports prepared for publication both in *Majles* and in other newspapers were being compared with each other and with the notes taken by the parliamentary stenographers (*tond-nevisan-e makhsus-e Majles*) with the help of one of the MPs; the *Majles*’ reporters supposedly being most professional (our understanding here is obviously lopsided, as the information here comes from *Majles*). While these arrangements did not last long, as they were very time-consuming and required a lot of effort on from all the parties involved, in some cases they were still followed (*Majles* 8 Moharram 1325: 4; *Majles* 11 Moharram 1325: 1–2).

The idea that there existing a separate, full and official account of the debates seems to be an extrapolation of later parliamentary practice. In the *Majles*’ second term, according to its bylaws, (*Majmu‘eh-ye Mosavvat-e Advar-e Avval va Dovvom-e Qanun Gozari-ye Majles-e Showra-ye Melli* 1318 [1939]: 346–386) two accounts of its proceedings would be prepared: a complete transcript (*surat-e mashruh-e mozakerat*), and shorter, ‘standard’ minutes (*surat-e mozakerat*) (Article 135 §2 and Article 149), with the latter being public (as evidenced by, e.g., their being a medium of announcing some the penalties of the MPs, as per Articles 120, 122 §2, 124, 125) and read at the beginning of a following sitting (Article 103). The phrase *mashruh-e mozakerat* is, however, missing from the Bylaws of the first term. Where it can be seen, is in the introduction to the supplement of the Official Gazette, that has been already cited above, where it is described as being following the fall of the parliament. Yet it seems that it might not have been lost, as it possibly never existed as an official and complete document, as evidenced by its not being referred to in the contemporary laws and regulations.

There is, however, one document that could be considered as evidence against the reasoning laid above: a seemingly verbatim account of a meeting held on 27 Ramadan 1324 (14 November 1906).¹⁷ There is, however, a number of issues through which the said document, instead of disproving

¹⁶ Originally this was supposed to be one of the stenographers.

¹⁷ Published in Kuhestaninezhad (1388 [2009–2010]: 205–220).

the thesis that what was published in the newspaper was the official account, actually supports it.

Firstly, according to the already-discussed bylaws, the official minutes of the sittings were to be printed. The document in question, however, is supposedly kept in the manuscripts section of the Library, Museum and the Document Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly,¹⁸ suggesting that it is a manuscript. This, in turn, would mean that it is at best a draft, which would serve for a full report, more probably, however, some kind of a report, but not made in the official capacity of the parliament. This is further corroborated by the lack of mention of any seals, signatures or other methods of authentication in the text.

Secondly, the document itself contains the discussion of what would become *Majles*. When discussing the subject of a foreign loan, one of the MPs, Mirza Mahmud (probably Mirza Mahmud Tajer Esfahani) said that the parliament needs a newspaper. The Speaker, Saniʿ al-Dowleh, rejected this idea; the parliament should not edit its own newspaper, as it is up to the journalists to write it. Mirza Mahmud argued that a license for such a newspaper was still necessary. Saʿd al-Dowleh added that the government should also give the newspaper permission to freely write about the issues. Saniʿ al-Dowleh was still unconvinced. In his opinion the journalists should simply come to the parliament and write down the speeches; also, the MPs should speak in turn, so that their speeches are intelligible (Kuhestaninezhad 1388 [2009–2010]: 209).

This particular exchange—in general, of little value to the proceedings of that day—contains two important pieces of information. Firstly, although the royal decree (*dastkhatt*)¹⁹ establishing *Majles* was issued in Shaʿban 1324 (*Majles* 8 Shawwal 1324: 1), in late Ramadan (which was the next lunar month) it was still unclear what the relationship would be between the parliament and the newspaper—after all, the *dastkhatt* itself not only did not specify this subject, not even making a single reference to the publication of the *Majles*' minutes. Also, by raising the point about freedom, Saʿd al-Dowleh asked for something that had already been given in the *dastkhatt*, just as the license itself had already been given. In addition, while from the discussions held in the late Ramadan it is clear that the parliamentary reporting should occur in the newspaper, it is evident that the Speaker did not want to give the newspaper any official authority.

¹⁸ This is all the information provided by its editor, which makes the proper identification and even search for the text virtually impossible.

¹⁹ Originally meaning *autograph*, the term would be also generally applied to the royal documents that contained even a single phrase written by the royal hand.

However, his objection to the preparation of the minutes or reports by the officials of the parliament or the MPs (although such things were already required by the Bylaws) seems to suggest that he considered press reporting sufficient for the job. This seems to suggest that when *Majles* was in any way publishing the minutes with a stamp of officiality, he would be opposed to the preparation of another set of minutes; after all, for him at least, reporting was a job for journalists, not for the parliament.

Hence, we can more or less confidently say that what was published in *Majles* was the official and final (although often brief) version of the minutes of the first term of the Iranian parliament. In this case, however, what are the reports published at the beginning of the supplement to the Official Gazette, which have for years been a standard reference for the study of the debates?

3 Some of the Official Gazette's shortcomings

As already hinted at above, in stark contrast to collecting rare and inaccessible documents—as one could imagine after reading the introduction to the Gazette's supplement—the editors of the collection of parliamentary debates did a far less meticulous job. It would be expected of them, obviously, to make some changes in the material they published—leave out sections that did not contribute to the debates and include only what was relevant for the historical and legal discussions of the day, all the while giving proper references to the documents they used. Unfortunately, this had not been the case. Their work was often sloppy, to the point where their publication, while still giving a more or less clear picture of the debates, loses a great deal of credibility with regards to specific subjects—especially the study of the language of politics.

We get the first hint at this sloppiness, when we compare the Internal Bylaws as published in the Official Gazette's supplement with the text found in other sources. Supplement published Articles 1–32, when in fact the Bylaws had 90 Articles (*Majmu'eh-ye Mosavvat-e Advar-e Avval va Dovvom-e Qanun Gozari-ye Majles-e Showra-ye Melli* 1318 [1939]: 53–63; Kermani 1377 [1998–1999]: 46–56; *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 20 Zulhejjeh 1324: 6–12).²⁰ The reason for the omission of most of the Bylaws in the Gazette's supplement is obvious after even the most cursory research. The Bylaws were published in the *Majles* newspaper, in three separate numbers: in No. 20, Articles 1–32 were published, in No. 22 Articles 33–59,

²⁰ There are some discrepancies in numbering the Articles, as *Tarikh-e Bidari-ye Iraniyan* omits Article 88 and both *Tarikh-e Bidari-ye Iraniyan* and *Habl al-Matin* do not assign the number to Article 90.

and in No. 35 Articles 60–64 (*Majles* 14 Zulqa‘edeh 1324: 3–4; *Majles* 17 Zulqa‘edeh 1324: 3–4; *Majles* 15 Zulhejjeh 1324: 4); it would seem that the rest of the Bylaws was not published in *Majles*. The editors of the Gazette’s supplement republished the Articles found in No. 20 (where there was no mention at the end that the subject would be continued in later issues) and thought that it was the complete text of the regulation in question. This alone would be enough to warrant great caution when referring to the Official Gazette’s reedition.

When we turn to the debates themselves the situation seems more complex. In case of the debates from the newspaper *Majles*, the editors of the Gazette made mostly minor changes (mostly omitting titles they found redundant, honorific plural etc.). A good example here may be the removal of the honorific *Aqa*²¹ or *Jenab* in the supplement, or the change of a preposition to a more standard one (cf. *Majles* 12 Shawwal 1324: 2; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 13), or dropping the title *Hojjat al-Eslam* that had been used before the name of Seyyed Mohammad Tabataba’i (cf. *Majles* 8 Shawwal 1324: 6; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 13). Honorific plural would also often be changed to singular forms in the supplement’s reedition (cf. *Majles* 8 Shawwal 1324; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 13). Sometimes, however, the differences went much further and included even changing of the name of the MP who was speaking, such as changing Hajji Sheikh ‘Ali to Hajji Sheikh Mohammad ‘Ali, who was obviously a different representative; likewise, changing Hajji Seyyed Baqer to Hajji Seyyed Mohammad Baqer—again, a different person. The latter is the most confusing, as there was no MP known as Seyyed Mohammad Baqer in the first term of *Majles* (*Majles* 8 Shawwal 1324: 6; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 13).²² Apart from these few obvious mistakes, the minor nature of most of the changes

²¹ The honorific *Aqa* was often treated almost as a part of one’s name, which sometimes led to its repetition, when it was first used as an honorific, and secondly as a part of one’s name or titles (an example of this may be found below).

²² For the lists of the MPs—slightly varying between the sources—see: *Mokhtasar-e Tarikh-e Majles-e Melli-ye Iran* (1337 [1919]: 22–50); Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi (1325 [1946]: 4–5); Even the supplement’s list does not include the supposed Hajji Seyyed Mohammad Baqer. *Habl al-Matin* and *Tarikh-e Bidari-ye Iraniyan* also offer the names of the first ‘batch’ of the elected MPs, namely the MPs of Tehran (Kermani 1384 [2005–2006]: 541–544; *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 24 Ramadan 1324: 5–7). According to the yet-unsigned Constitution (Article 6) and the already implemented electoral law (Article 19), the MPs of the capital were enough for the parliament to begin its work (*Majmu‘eh-ye Mosavvat-e Advar-e Avval va Dovvom-e Qanun Gozari-ye Majles-e Showra-ye Melli* 1318 [1939]: 4, 37; Kermani 1384 [2005–2006]: 517; *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 3 Ramadan 1324: 18); English translation of the relevant legislation is to be found in Browne (1910: 359–363).

means that in the absence of the original newspaper could be acceptable source, unless one ventures to research the political and official language.

Apart from occasional mistakes, the biggest issue with the reedition may be that the telegrams and letters, which had been read in the parliament, were sometimes removed from the account found in the supplement (*Majles* 8 Shawwal 1324: 6; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 13). Also, the fact that the Gazette did not publish most of the other sections of the *Majles*, it can also make some issues harder to understand.

The real problem with the reedition, however, lies in the earliest debates—unrecorded in the newspaper *Majles*. There we can see that the editors of the Gazette did not look too far for the records. In fact, almost the entirety of these proceedings and other events related to the parliamentary history of Iran from 14 Jumada II through 3 Shawwal 1324 (7 June–20 November 1906) is taken from the reports published by one of the most popular newspapers of the period, *Habl al-Matin* of Calcutta²³ which had been prepared by *Habl al-Matin*'s editor—Mo'ayyed al-Eslam's—brother, with some stylistic changes and omissions. The issues of the newspaper that were used are as follows:

1. No. 13 (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 10 Ramadan 1324: 17–20), covering (apart from some earlier telegrams) the period of 14 Jumada II–28 Jumada II 1324; Gazette did copy only the sittings up to 27 Jumada II.
2. No. 15 (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 24 Ramadan 1324: 1–8) covering the period of 25 Rajab–18 Sha'ban 1324 (14 September–7 October 1906); the Gazette more or less copied the contents starting with page 2.
3. No. 21 (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 21 Zulqa'edeh 1324: 17–21), covering the period of 24 Sha'ban–20 Ramadan 1324 (13 October–7 November 1906).
4. No. 22, (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 28 Zulqa'edeh 1324–29 Zulqa'edeh 1324: 14–18)²⁴ covering the period of 22–27 Ramadan 1324 (9–14 November 1906).
5. No. 23, (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 6 Zulhejjeh 1324: 9–14) covering the period of 29 Ramadan–15 Shawwal 1324 (11 November–2 December 1906), although the supplement of the Gazette

²³ The reason for the popularity of the said newspaper was that by being published abroad it was free from the government censorship, while at the same time it enjoyed a broad readership in Iran, largely thanks to its involvement with the Iranian politics (Sadr-e Hashemi 1363 [1984–1985]: 2, 200–208).

²⁴ There are different dates given on various pages of the newspaper.

used only reports of the sittings not included in the newspaper *Majles*; thus the report of the sitting held on 3 Shawwal (20 November) is the last one the Gazette lifted from *Habl al-Matin*.

The moment the reports of minutes from the newspaper *Majles* become available, *Habl al-Matin* is entirely dropped as a source, as its reports were generally far less detailed, although sometimes included MPs meetings taking place outside of the parliament, such as the meeting on the National Bank that was held on 6 Shawwal 1324 (22 November 1906) in the house of Mo‘in al-Tojjar Bushehri (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 6 Zulhejjeh 1324: 10–11).

Some of the changes made in the supplement were clearly supposed to simplify the text, hence, on some occasions, dates were added where in *Habl al-Matin* only the day of the week had been given (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 21 Zulqa‘edeh 1324: 18; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 9). There are, however, also some omissions in the text, especially of speeches and exchanges, probably deemed unimportant by the supplement’s editors. For example, the discussion of the reform of the new schools was removed from the report of 29 Ramadan, especially as it did not take place in the parliament (cf. *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 6 Zulhejjeh 1324: 9; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 12). Nonetheless, it contained worthwhile historical observations (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 21 Zulqa‘edeh 1324: 17). Similarly, whenever a speech had been published only partially in *Habl al-Matin*, as suggested by phrases such as, for example, *va va va...* (‘and and and...’, meaning ‘and so on’), these phrases were skipped in the Gazette, falsely suggesting that it published the entirety of the speech (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 21 Zulqa‘edeh 1324: 19; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 10). This may lead a reader to have a distorted image of the length and character of the parliamentary speeches, and—again—distorts the image of the period and the parliamentary procedures.

More visibly, any passages pointing to the authorship of the original reports and containing the contemporary political analysis were also cut (cf. *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 21 Zulqa‘edeh 1324: 19–20 with Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 10; *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 6 Zulhejjeh 1324: 9 with Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 12). Less strikingly, information available elsewhere in the supplement was cut from the republished reports, as in the case of the names of the MPs of Tehran (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 24 Ramadan 1324; Seyyed Mohammad

Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 4–5).²⁵ Another example may be the Shah's speech on the occasion of the inauguration of the parliament: it was let out of the Gazette's account (cf. *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 24 Ramadan 1324: 7–8 with Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 9) as the facsimile of the speech's manuscript can be found at the beginning of the volume (Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 3).

Another matter removed in the Gazette's supplement was the description of the social activities surrounding the parliamentary work, such as smoking and drinking *sharbat* or tea, which can be found throughout *Habl al-Matin's* reports.²⁶ This lack of context, while understandable given the goals the editors set for themselves, greatly diminishes our understanding of the circumstances in which the MPs worked, and as such of the exact functioning of the parliament; it also means that the reedition is lacking as a source for social history and anthropology of Iran in the early 20th century.

Given what was cut, it is sometimes quite curious what has been left. For example, in the already mentioned discussion cited by Mangol Bayat, the editor kept the Turkic term *kornesh* (meaning 'bow, curtsy')—a term rarely (as to my knowledge) used in Iranian Persian, quite common, however, in Indian Persian. Had the editor's goal been to make the text easier to understand for the Iranian reader of the time when the supplement was published, and to leave only the parts relevant for the political and historical discussions of the time, that term would surely have to be cut. It seems, however, that even this part of the editor's activity fell victim to his sloppiness.

All these prove that while the unscholarly lack of reference to the original source was the original sin of the Official Gazette's reedition, by itself it did not cancel out its relevance as the work containing the text of the debates. The treatment the debates received, however, while still allowing for the reedition to be used as a source of the general knowledge on the contents of the debates, makes it entirely useless for the study of political language and parliamentary procedure, as well as the social life surrounding the political activities. Far worse, in some instances, such as concealing the non-official provenance of the sources used and presenting only parts of a speech as its entirety, the editors' approach could be considered doctoring or even falsifying the historical sources. Even worse, it

²⁵ Obviously, the information given in the Gazette slightly differs from what is to be found in *Habl al-Matin*, as it also includes the MPs elected at a later date, provincial MPs etc.

²⁶ For example, cf. *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* (6 Zulhejjeh 1324: 10) and Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi (1325 [1946]: 13).

has been decades since the original sources have been not much harder to reach than the supplement, making the overreliance on it much harder to explain.

Yet, while the Gazette's supplement sometimes lacked some of the details to be found in the original *Habl al-Matin's* reports (as it has been just pointed out), there are, however, two instances in which the accounts found in it contain information not to be found in the newspaper from Calcutta. One is on 29 Sha'ban, where the original contains only the mention that the bylaws were long and detailed, while the Gazette spliced in the report the already-mentioned incomplete text of the Bylaws (cf. *Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 21 Zulqa'edah 1324: 18; Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 9). More importantly, however, in case of the report of the debates held on 27 Ramadan 1324 both accounts are almost identical (apart from the already mentioned stylistic changes etc.), until they reach a quarrel between a few MPs. Then, it would seem, the editors of the supplement switched to using a different source, which they unfortunately failed to name. As the details are much different than in the seemingly verbatim account we do possess (mentioned above), we can safely assume that it was not the source used. The relevant (different) section of the text in *Habl al-Matin* reads as follows:

His excellency Hajj Mohammad Esma'il Tajer Tabrizi known as Maghazeh turned to Sadr al-'*Olama*, who was the founder of the Company, i.e. was speaking for the domestic merchants, and said:

'Aqa Sadr al-'*Olama*, if the opinion of Aqa²⁷ is to tell us to accept this job then we will not accept [it]. When it is decided that we want to perform a service to a nation and give up [our personal] profit, the result will be that they will present us as without any credit.²⁸ We will never accept it'.

Suddenly one of the [Majles] members became angry: 'Yes, you want to swindle the Nation and the Government!'

Hajj 'Ali Aqa Tajer Shalforush said:

'If you have an argument to support these words then prove it'. He suddenly raised his voice, saying 'I have pretenses of honor,²⁹ [if] you wish to degrade³⁰ me, what right do you have to talk so coarsely to me?'

²⁷ Honorific of Turkic origin. Nowadays, it is mostly used in the meaning 'Mister'; at the time, it was used both in this meaning, and—more specifically—to refer to the religious scholars; in the context of the first term of Majles this would most often mean Seyyed Mohammad Tabataba'i and 'Abdollah Behbahani.

²⁸ *Bi-e'tebar*.

²⁹ *Man da'tyeh-ye sharaf daram*.

³⁰ *Zaye'*.

One of the Aqas³¹ who had graced us with his presence turned to His Excellency ‘Ali Aqa Tajer Shalforush with utmost anger [and said,] ‘Get out of the Majles, get up, guys³², make him leave the Majles’. A seyed³³ came forward to make Hajji [Shalforush] leave, [but] Hajji himself stood up and went outside. Right after Hajj ‘Ali left, all the merchants stood up and left the Majles. Again, by the order of the Aqas, a group of honorable MPs and sons of religious scholars³⁴ went and escorted back Hajj ‘Ali and the rest of the merchants back in. They sat down for two minutes. Hajj Mo‘in al-Tojjar wanted to deliver a speech. His Excellency Sani‘ al-Dowleh the Speaker of the Majles stood up and the [parliamentary] sitting turned to chaos. Then Aqa and Hajj ‘Ali Tajer Shalforush [who had been] angry [at each other] were reconciled by Aqa Seyyed ‘Abdollah [Behbahani] and the sitting ended. (*Habl Al-Matin (Calcutta)* 28 Zulqa‘edeh 1324–29 Zulqa‘edeh 1324: 17–18)

While in the Gazette’s supplement it is as follows:

Hajj Mohammad Esma‘il Tajer Tabrizi, known as Maghazeh, turned to Sadr al-‘Olama, who was the founder of the Company, i.e. was speaking for the [members] of the Company who were from among the domestic merchants, and said, ‘Aqa Sadr al-‘Olama, if the opinion of Aqa is to tell us to accept this job then we will not accept [it]. When it is decided that we want to do a service to the nation and give up [our personal] profit, the result will be that they will present us as without any credit. We will never accept it’. At this moment Sheikh Hoseyn Saqatforush got angry and stated ‘Yes, you want to swindle the nation and the government’.

Hajj ‘Ali Aqa Shalforush insulted him. At this moment Sheykh Hoseyn Saqatforush got angry and stated in a loud voice ‘I have pretenses of honor, you want to degrade me, what right do you have to talk coarsely to me’. Aqa Seyyed Mohammad Sadeq Tabataba‘i³⁵ said ‘Here [it] is Majles, everyone has equal rights. It is not the bazaar for you to insult and act high-handedly³⁶ towards a *saqatforush*³⁷ [just] because you are a merchant’. Hajj ‘Ali however became even more aggressive. Tabataba‘i became angry and stated ‘Here [it] is the Majles and there is no place [here] for insults and high-handedness’ and then turned to Aqa Seyyed Mahmud, known as

³¹ Here probably Tabataba‘i and Behbahani.

³² *Bacheh-ha*.

³³ Person tracing their paternal lineage back to the prophet Muhammad.

³⁴ Aqazadegan, i.e. sons of Aqas; here: probably sons of Behbahani and/or Tabataba‘i.

³⁵ Editor of the *Majles* newspaper and a son of Seyyed Mohammad Tabataba‘i.

³⁶ *Tahakkom*.

³⁷ Small-time shopkeeper, dealing mostly in items such as tea, sugar etc.

Nazem³⁸, and said ‘The persons who are obstructing the freedom to speak must be removed from the Majles’. Seyyed [Mahmud] came forward to remove Hajji [Shalforush]. Hajji stood up himself and went out, and right after Hajji ‘Ali [Shalforush] left, all the representatives of the merchants left. The representatives [who had stayed] immediately delegated a group of MPs to escort Hajji ‘Ali [Shalforush] and the rest of the representatives³⁹ [who had left] back to the Majles. This [delegated] group went and escorted the [representatives of the] merchants and sat down for two minutes. Hajji Mo‘in al-Tojjar [Bushehri] wanted to deliver a speech, Sani‘ al-Dowleh the Speaker left Majles and Majles became disorderly. At this moment Aqa Seyyed ‘Abdollah reconciled both sides of the argument. (Seyyed Mohammad Hashemi 1325 [1946]: 12)

As we can see, the beginning and conclusion of both accounts are almost identical. Then, in the middle of it—when there is a reaction to Maghazeh’s words—we begin to see new information inserted by the Gazette’s editors into the report from *Habl al-Matin*. This new information is mostly: 1) names of the people taking part in the quarrel; 2) specific words uttered, which differ between the two accounts. Hence, it is clear that the editor of the Gazette also used another source which I cannot yet identify. As one can see below, it could not have been, however, the supposedly verbatim report, years later published by Kuhestaninezhad. The date of publication is not an issue; after all, the editor could have access to the manuscript. The reason why he did not utilize this source is becomes clear after looking at the more-or-less relevant section of the supposedly verbatim report:⁴⁰

Hajji Mohammad Esma‘il: This request that you are making; nobody will agree to form a company based on these arrangements [this is followed by an exchange about the price of bread etc., which does not have a parallel in the sources mentioned earlier]

Sani‘ al-Dowleh, Hajji Seyyed Nasrollah, Aqa Seyyed Mohammad Taqi: There is the Company. The Aqas⁴¹ say that it is.

Hajji Mohammad Esma‘il [Maghazeh]: We are no [more than] a few people. Hajji Mo‘in [al-Tojjar], Hajji ‘Ali Aqa, Amin al-Tojjar, are you [the members]? They said no.

³⁸ I.e. orderly; term often used for people keeping order in places or institutions.

³⁹ *Namayandegan*.

⁴⁰ As this text differs from the other two sources, and is not as easily available, it had to be quoted *in extenso*.

⁴¹ Here probably meaning ‘gentlemen’.

Aqa Sheikh Hoseyn [Saqatforush]: Now that you are not, we will pull the wheat from the warehouses and break [the locks of the warehouses].⁴² One should enforce the verdict of speculation.

Mashhadi Baqer: This is not enough for bread!

Aqa Sheikh Hoseyn [Saqatforush]: This condition laid down by Aqa Mirza Mahmud will destroy the company.

Mashhadi Baqer: Gentlemen, we are crying for bread.

Aqa Mirza Mahmud:⁴³ They asked for 250.000 tuman and wanted to swindle the government. They will not accept it.

Hajji Mohammad Esma'il: What are these inappropriate [words]? There are still busybodies in the Majles!

Aqa Mirza Mahmud: to Hajji Mohammad Esma'il: What right do you have to say these words. I represent 250 people by speaking here.

Hajji 'Ali Tajer [Shalforush]: What is this bullshit?⁴⁴ Whatever he wants to say [he may say], there is no difference between anyone [in the parliament].

Aqa-ye Aqa Mir Seyyed Mohammad [Tabataba'i]: What are these words that you say? Stand up [and leave] the Majles you old man!

What is the meaning of these discussions in the Majles?

Hajji 'Ali Tajer stood up and left the Majles. Hajji Mohammad Esma'il and other merchants all stood up, said goodbye and left.

Aqa Molla Hassan Vares came to Aqa-ye Aqa Seyyed 'Abdollah [Behbahani] and said: This is not good, I implore [you] to send Aqa-ye Hajji Seyyed Nasrollah and [your] son to go and escort them [back]. Aqa [Behbahani] ordered, 'Go'.

Hajji Seyyed Nasrollah [and] Aqa Mirza Seyyed Ahmad son of Aqa [Seyyed Behbahani] went and through a thousand efforts and pains brought back the merchants. The people of Majles offered the [necessary] courtesies.

Aqa-ye Aqa Seyyed 'Abdollah called Hajji 'Ali: Hajji, excuse me, come here. Hajji 'Ali said: I am not ok.

[Mo'in al-Tojjar] Bushehri came and sat down next to the gentlemen of the clergy. He said: [as for] this subject of bread, at first did the Prime Minister not tell us, 'We want this matter from you' because there was a public good in this matter; they wanted [it] and came. Then some of the statesmen did not consider this appropriate. Then the subject of the Majles came up, and they were invited for the night.⁴⁵ They said what to do, I said 'if someone

⁴² Conjecture added in the Persian edition of the text.

⁴³ There were a few MPs by that name; here it was probably Aqa Mirza Mahmud Tajer Esfahani.

⁴⁴ *In gohha chist keh mikhori.*

⁴⁵ This section of the text is unclear. It is followed by the mention in the footnote: 'the approval (spelled *ta'id* instead of the correct *ta'id*) of the words of Bushehri to the Aqas'.

wants the government to incur less of a loss this is preferable, if does not happen so, then we were present because of the obedience towards the Islamic Scholars'. Now why do you insult us without any [reason]?⁴⁶ The merchants had no motive or goal other than frugality.

Aqa Mir Seyyed Mohammad [Tabataba'i]: He made a [serious] mistake. Aqa Mirza Mahmud was a busybody.

[Mo'in al-Tojjar Bushehri]: This is not permanent, they will organize the Company much later,⁴⁷ why do they insult? You, a few Islamic Scholars and the Prime Minister insisted. The people who opposed it obstructed it. The people have been made to wait idly for three months. Tomorrow, the snow will come. Bread will be two riyals⁴⁸ per *man*.⁴⁹ Why do they say insulting phrases in the Majles?

Hajji Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri: What does [this] raising one's voice in the Majles mean?

Hajji Seyyed Mohammad: Aqa-ye Sadr al-'*Olama*, did you not invite [them]? Sadr al-'*Olama*: Why [not]; I invited the gentlemen. Aqa Mirza Mahmud does not know, moreover, we insisted a lot.

Aqa Seyyed Mohammad Taqi: To a degree one should observe the limits [of their position?]

[The sitting concluded]. (Kuhestaninezhad 1388 [2009–2010]: 218–220)

As we can see, in the part that followed Maghazeh's remark, there are quite a few differences, which show that this report offers a different account of the events than what is found in the Gazette's supplement. Firstly, there is quite a lengthy discussion between Maghazeh's suggestion that nobody would accept the arrangements suggested and the suggestion that the merchants want to swindle the nation. There is also a lack of the mention of the reason why the traders cannot accept unfavorable conditions, which appears in *Habl al-Matin* and in the Gazette's supplement (casting doubt on whether the account is truly a verbatim one). Thirdly, apart from the obviously lengthier and more detailed account of the supposedly verbatim report, it also ascribes certain comments to different people. Thus, according to Gazette's supplement, it was Saqatforush who suggested that the Merchants want to swindle the nation and the state; yet according to the supposedly verbatim account, it was Aqa Mirza Mahmud who said that. Then, while

If one decides that there was no spelling mistake in the note, it would be read as *ta'ayyod* and mean 'hexing' instead of 'approval'.

⁴⁶ Conjecture added by the editor of the Persian text.

⁴⁷ *Sar-e kharman*, 'after the harvest has been collected'.

⁴⁸ Riyal as an unofficial unit was used under the Qajars, although rather sporadically.

⁴⁹ Ca. 3 kg.

in *Habl al-Matin* and the Gazette it was Hajji ‘Ali Shalforush who reacted to this comment, here the earlier part of the quarrel is between Maghazeh and Mirza Mahmud, and it is in reaction to the comments of Maghazeh—not Shalforush—that Mirza Mahmud—not Saqatforush—mentions that he represents 250 people—not that he has claims of honor. There is also no explicit mention of degrading. It is only after these comments that Shalforush insults the opponent—again, Mirza Mahmud, not Saqatforush. Then, it is Seyyed Mohammad Tabataba’i who reacts—which seems much more plausible than the involvement of his son and editor of *Majles*, Mohammad Sadeq Tabataba’i. Also, the exact words are quite different, and there is no mention of insulting someone for being a small-time salesman from the position of being a wealthy merchant. There is also no sign of someone being sent to throw the merchants out. Also, we can see that it is Vares—a guild MP—who comes up with the idea of escorting the merchants back in. Then again there are some differences with the account of how the merchants came back, there is no mention of the Speaker leaving during Bushehri’s speech etc.—the similarities are limited to the role played by Behbahani in reconciling the quarreling parties. It would seem, however, that he was not entirely successful. We can also see Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri speaking, who was missing from the other accounts. Hence, as we can see, this document could not have been the source for the Gazette, as it contradicts it even more than it contradicts the shorter text from *Habl al-Matin*. Sadly, all three accounts suggest a slightly different social dynamic surrounding the parliamentary debates, especially when it came to the relationship between the clergy and the merchants and the guilds. Still, they all agree on there being some tensions between the upper- and lower-class MPs—making it sufficient for having a general outlook of the debates. Yet these differences mean that using only one of these sources would not suffice for a detailed analysis of, for example, political language or even the exact details of the conflict between the MPs. Moreover, the differences of the discussion may seem minor only if one does not look carefully: most strikingly, the supposed detailed account suggests the involvement of different people, which would certainly matter for—among other things—a biographer of the MPs, or even someone trying to assess the political savviness and gravitas of various MPs in the first Majles.

4 Conclusion

As it has been established above, the Minutes of the first term of Iranian parliament as published by *Majles* most probably were—with all their shortcomings—the official record of the debates of that legislative body. While it is clear that apart from the newspaper reporters, the parliament

employed—or tried to employ—some stenographers of its own, it would seem that what they prepared was not the final, official record of the meeting. Instead, it was but a stage of the preparation of such a record, which was then prepared with the cooperation of one of the MPs—secretary according to the Bylaws, but probably not in the actual parliamentary practice—and the reporters. The idea of the existence of the official, full transcript of the debates seems to be an extrapolation of the later parliamentary practice to the earliest days of Iranian parliamentarism.

Moreover, we can see that the supplement to the Gazette, often treated as the official and correct record of the debates, as far as one was available, is anything but. Far from being a reliable and diligent publication, it is an often haphazardly prepared and disorderly collection of excerpts from various sources, unnamed in the publication. Then, even a brief look at the debates it republished from the newspaper *Majles* and from *Habl al-Matin* shows that even there are some minor changes—again, mostly stylistic and in the honorifics used, although there are also some obvious mistakes, even in the names of the MPs speaking. These issues underline the importance of considering original sources whenever possible, not only their later summaries, and make the Gazette an unreliable source for the study of the legal and political language of the first Iranian parliament. These issues become even more apparent when one takes into account the fact that while there exists a rather detailed analysis of Iranian constitutionalism in the Islamic Republic (Schirazi 1997), when it comes to the details of the earlier constitutional and political debates, even a century of scholarship has not managed to bring us out of the dark.⁵⁰ As the present study shows, some views that were taken for granted, be it the erstwhile existence of the complete, verbatim and official record of the debates, or the faithfulness of the reedition of the debates in the Official Gazette, have to be reevaluated. Only then will we be able to try and recreate as complete a picture of the beginnings of Iranian parliamentarism as possible, which is a prerequisite for any satisfying analysis of its development. Thus, it is a must to go back to even the most fundamental sources for the study of Iranian Constitutional Revolution and to reevaluate them. This should not, however, be misunderstood as a typical call to go back to the archives and look for new sources. On the contrary, it is the call to carefully analyze sources which are already easily available, but which were used without any critical look.

This should not be seen as a return to the over-focus on the central power and authority, after the field of study has in recent decades began

⁵⁰ The current state of research on the constitutional debates can be summarized by a few paragraphs found in Amanat et al.

to focus more on the provinces, and the issues such as the nationalism and secularism in that period (Martin 2013).⁵¹ In fact, the new look on the sources in question will benefit these subjects as well, as all of them were in some way addressed in the parliament. As the issue of leadership of certain members of the Shiite clergy has in recent years enjoyed renewed interest,⁵² the precise language and titles used with regards to them also plays a large role. Moreover, the proper grasp of the way in which language was used in parliamentary discourse, of the social activities surrounding the parliament, the involvement of the public in the workings of the parliament—all of which can be found in the accounts of *Majles* and *Habl al-Matin*—are among the key elements necessary to study the early-twentieth-century history of Iran. This is especially relevant as the changes in these very spheres—in the official language, honorifics, social behavior etc.—are among the elements which defined much of the late Qajar and Pahlavi modernity. Thus, reevaluating sources on the parliamentary debates has been one of the key problems in the said field—problems made more serious by the general unawareness of their existence.

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⁵¹ Naturally, these works also do not completely abandon the subject of the central authority, as evidenced in Martin (2013: 109–121). Interestingly, Martin also uses the reedition of the debates, more specifically its disk edition (Martin 2013: 254).

⁵² As evidenced by Farzaneh (2015).

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