

Iran from Crown to Turbans

Gail Rose Thompson

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Iran from Crowns to Turbans is a dynamite book about one foreigner's privileged look at earthshaking events that still impact the world today.

Gail Rose Thompson's *Iran from Crown to Turbans* is an incisive look at Iran during the late 1970s. Although technically a memoir about the author's time in the country, this book is also a history tome and a sociological study of a nation transitioning from a liberalizing monarchy to an autocratic theocracy.

In 1972, Thompson's American family moved to Iran and soon found themselves members of the country's relatively small expatriate community. Don Thompson, the author's husband, worked for an aluminum company. The author herself quickly fell into working with horses—a position that ultimately led her to becoming a member of the Royal Horse Society and Iran's Imperial Court.

Thanks to this position, Thompson saw the inner workings of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's court. The shah, the author notes, sincerely believed in reforming his country along Western lines. However, the shah pushed too hard and dreamed too big, while the common people of Iran blanched at their leader's ostentatious lifestyle.

This book accomplishes many things at once: On the one hand, Thompson provides a firsthand account of what Iran was like before the coming of the mullahs in 1979. Women were liberated (somewhat) and could walk outside without wearing a hijab. Drugs flowed freely in the upper echelon of society, and everyone in the shah's orbit talked about freedom. On the other hand, Thompson is an academic observer and political theorist who boldly states that President Jimmy Carter and his government were helpless to stop the 1979 revolution.

Regarding more contemporary matters, Thompson, who visited Iran in October 2017, records facts about daily life in the country that contradict the well-worn shibboleths of the Western media.

Thompson's work is exciting, informative, and entertaining. Each chapter, divided by theme and time period, is a compact work in and of itself. They go from the glitz and glamour of the shah's court to the bloodbath that was the Iran-Iraq War. These powerful chapters are helped along by the author's polished writing, which balances description and action well.

By the conclusion, this book goes far in eradicating a lot of the uninformed noise about Iran—its revolution, its system of governance, and most importantly, its people. More insight about Iran can be gained from this memoir than a hundred position papers. This is the type of book that should be assigned reading for those interested in the Middle East and the politics of Southwest Asia.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (January 24, 2019)

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