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On the evening of September 17, 1992, eight leading members of the Iranian and Kurdish opposition had gathered at a little-known restaurant in Berlin when two darkly-clad men burst through the entrance. Within moments, the roar of a machine gun filled the air. Two rounds of fire and four single shots later, four of the men were dead. One of the survivors of that shooting, along with the widow of one of the victims and a handful of reporters, attorneys, and fellow exiles, began a crusade that would not only pit them against Tehran but against some of the greatest powers in Germany. When an undeterred federal prosecutor, and an endlessly patient chief judge, took over the case, a historic verdict followed which shook both Europe and Iran, and achieved something few could have predicted—justice. Royak Hakakian's *The Assassins of the Turquoise Palace* is an incredible book of history and reportage, and an unforgettable narrative of heroism and justice.

Assassins of the Turquoise Palace Details

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From Reader Review Assassins of the Turquoise Palace for online ebook

Ava Homa says

Author Roya Hakakian has achieved a remarkable feat: She has written a book about the 1992 assassination of Kurdish leader Sadegh Sharafkandi at a Berlin restaurant, and the four-year trial that followed, without ever really acknowledging the Kurds as a people.

Except the inevitable assassination scene, Kurds are nearly wholly absent from *Assassins of the Turquoise Palace*, which otherwise offers a compelling read, with vivid imageries and masterful maneuvering among the different characters and perspectives.

In the 301-page hardback version, what is written about the Kurds barely constitutes three pages, skipping over the identity, painful history and struggle of a scattered people who number an estimated 30 million, and are the world's largest state-less ethnicity.

The brazen murder of Sharafkandi and his two deputies at Berlin's Mykonos restaurant on September 17, 1992, shocked Kurds around the world and made international headlines.

Sharafkandi was the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, fighting for greater rights for Iran's oppressed Kurds.

In an April 1997 ruling, after naming the principal perpetrators and accessories, the German court issued an international arrest warrant for Iranian intelligence minister Ali Fallahian, declaring that the assassinations had been ordered by him, with knowledge of Iran's top leadership, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Hakakian, an Iranian-born poet, journalist and author who is based in the United States, writes in such detail that the reader even knows the dreams of Sara Dehkordi, the daughter of a non-Kurd victim. The detail permeates even to the Iranian dish cooked by Parviz Dastmalchi, a survivor.

And yet, no Kurd is heard in court, even as a witness during the four years of trial that presented more than 300 testimonies.

What little information about the Kurds is contained in the book, which was named a *New York Times* notable book for 2011, is inaccurate and insolently trivializes the Kurdish cause.

Hakakian calls the Kurds, "only a minority of four millions," threatening Iranian rule over a total population of more than 60 million. "Compared to the Kurds elsewhere, Iranian Kurds had always led far better lives," Hakakian writes. She informs of "an ancient history of camaraderie among the Iranians and the Kurds!"

Is this the extent of this eminent writer and journalist's knowledge of the Kurds? Years of systematic oppression against the Kurds is denied, and it is claimed that a brotherhood has existed among Kurds and Persians.

German officer Bruno Jost rightfully wonders why on earth Tehran wages war on such an insignificant minority that Iranians have been friendly to. Hakakian's brilliant answer: "Since the Gulf War, the Kurds were no longer alone. They were a minority backed by America whose influence threatened to deepen and

spread among the neighboring Kurds.”

That is how Hakakian reductively recounts the painful history of the Kurds.

Based on the book, Sharafkandi and his deputies have no one to file a complaint on their behalf against the assassins. Sharafkandi is referred to as this “unpopular, uncharismatic Kurd” who – in the few sentences he utters throughout the book – says that Kurds are more Iranian than the rest of Iran.

Jalal Talabani, one of the first witnesses and a prominent Kurdish leader, is the one who revealed Tehran’s hand in the assassinations at the primary stages of the case. Yet, he only takes up a paragraph of the book, and is ignored until the end, when he is quoted as a major contributor to the case. The reader never learns who Talabani is, that for decades he has been a towering figure of the Kurdish struggle.

When, after four years, the trial judge finally admits “the plight of the Kurds,” nothing but that brief phrase is reported or explained. The reader, who earlier in the book is informed about the existing amity between Kurd and Iranian, is left wondering which “plight” the judge is referring to.

The Kurds, thankfully, appear at Sharafkandi’s funeral. But there, they behave in a way that no Kurd would recognize. They freak out everyone, especially the guards, by suddenly and spontaneously breaking out into a “Halparke” folk dance, while singing "Ay Raqib."

How many Kurds dance when singing their national anthem?

Ms.pegasus says

There is a spectrum of political assassination from the fanatic inspired by incendiary rhetoric to the targeting of an individual by a governmental agency. ASSASSINS OF THE TURQUOISE PALACE reaches far beyond that spectrum. Most are aware of and were appalled by the fatwa declared against novelist Salman Rushdie in 1988. That highly publicized event was only a small part of a litany of terrorism orchestrated by the highest Iranian political authorities – a reign of terror waged in Paris, London, Washington DC, Vienna, and Berlin. Regular meetings that included the Grand Ayatollah, the president, the foreign minister, the minister of intelligence, and the chief of the Revolutionary Guards targeted names from an official list, and supplied cash, weapons and operatives. This went far beyond “government-sponsored” terror.

Hakkakian's book chronicles the aftermath of the assassination of Sadegh Sharafkandi the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, and Noori Dehkordi an activist Kurdish Iranian exile, and two other Kurdish political figures on September 17, 1992 in the Mykonos, a Berlin restaurant owned by another Iranian expatriot. Several stories unfold. First, there is the traumatizing effect on Noori Dehkordi's wife and daughter. A close friend of Noori's, Parviz Dastmalchi, survives the shooting and deals with his conflicted feelings of duty to his dead friend's memory and the trauma of his own near assassination. The German investigation is led by Bruno Jost of the German Federal prosecutor's office. He at first believes the assassination is the result of a violent schism between Kurdish separatist groups. The sizeable ex-patriot community in Berlin reacts with outrage at the government's low profile investigation, and their own growing mistrust of each other as they realize that an insider must have been involved in the assassinations. Officially, the German government is eager to fill the vacuum left by the American embargo of Iran. To that end it desires a role in affecting the outcome of the investigation – an outcome that excludes investigation of the Iranian government. The role of the media in shaping public opinion is yet another part of the story. Hakakain skillfully modulates these competing viewpoints – the emotionalism of the personally grief-stricken, the procedural details of the German investigation, and the political landscape of Iran and Europe.

I must admit that I was most engaged by the human elements of ASSASSINS. Noori Dehkordi's widow Shohreh receives death threats. Parviz goes into social seclusion, partly because friends are afraid of becoming collateral damage if seen with him. On the occasion of a rare acceptance of a dinner invitation from a friend, Parviz receives a threatening phone call at his friend's home. The German Federal prosecutors also receive death threats. The author, however, wisely refocuses our attention on broader issues. The exodus from Iran did not begin with Khomeini; it began in 1955 with the American sponsored coup which put the Shah in power. By 1992 there were nearly a million expatriates. In the political landscape, however, those numbers were easily dismissed. When the investigation begins to name the government of Iran as a suspect, Jost's superior, Alexander von Stahl, is first reprimanded by the Justice Department, and ultimately fired. Jost receives calls from colleagues admonishing him that his persistence is a bad career move. The German government, like the rest of Europe, wanted hostages released, the safety of their nationals in Iran guaranteed, and lucrative business contracts. "Europe accepted Tehran's math: dozens of dead Iranian exiles equaled one free European citizen."

This is a significant book. It gives us a glimpse of a lifetime spent in the shadow of terror, and the face of true courage.

Maria says

Everyone else in the book club loved this, and thought the writing was fabulous, so maybe I missed something. I thought the writing was clunky -- sometimes awkward, sometimes overly flowery -- I checked to see if it was a translation. I learned something about the Iranian diaspora but that's about it. Even the trial itself -- all the specifics that were quoted as testimony sounded like political haranguing, no real evidence. Based on the outcome, presumably there was evidence, but the story wasn't really compelling as shining a spotlight on the Iranian government's complicity (as compared to Red Notice for example)

Paul says

This is an amazing, tautly written account of an assassination in Germany of Iranian activists. The story follows the crime then the long trial that follows through the eyes of the various participants. The author is spellbinding - several places I marveled at her prose, but always marveled at her moving the story along. This is a true story but reads like a novel.

Sassan says

Absolutely amazing book! It really is no surprise that the late and great Christopher Hitchens was a big fan of Roya Hakakian and her new groundbreaking book "Assassins of the Turquoise Palace". This masterpiece by Ms. Hakakian is not just a book, it is lyrical poetry mixed together with a historical account in one of the most important trials of state terror of the latter half of the 20th century. Roya takes us on a journey of the assassinations and lives affected in the state sponsored terror assassination against the Kurdish-Iranian dissidents which took place at the Mykonos restaurant in 1992. Roya takes us on a journey in which one truly feels that they are engulfed in the scene; whether of those Iranians that were assassinated and injured, or the journey of the brave German prosecutor and judge who took on the case despite political pressure to turn a blind eye. This book is vital and important as one better understands the true nature of the state apparatus

terror machine constituting the Islamic Republic. And to close, it is important and vital to remember that this is just one story of many assassinations that took place throughout Europe and even continue to this day. I for one hope that Roya in the future embarks on writing about the assassination and beheading of the Iranian satirist and great singer Fereydoun Farokhzad. Roya is truly a remarkable writer as her words and prose are truly poetry in writing! I highly recommend this for EVERYONE and for everyone to share this historical account to all their friends and family.

Gail says

A tremendous story about the assassination of four men who were all members of an Iranian and Kurdish opposition. They had met for dinner at this restaurant in Berlin back in 1992. For days, they had looked forward to this event. All together, it was eight men. In the middle of the meal, two guys walked in and shot them.

The guessing game began the next day concerning the perpetrators. It didn't take long for the federal prosecutor to suspect the regime of Iran. Since 1980, one year after Khomeini rose to power, he drew up a list of names that he considered to be "enemies of Islam." Five hundred writers, artists, intellectuals, political opponents were being hunted down no matter where in the world.

The eventual trial would be huge and last four years.

The writing is riveting and beautiful at the same time. Author Roya Hakakian is a Persian poet (her previous book, a memoir, was "Journey from the Land of No" which had the most gorgeous, lyrical writing) and from the first page, I was captivated.

Tony says

What an epic story! Nonfiction, incredibly researched, retelling of an assassination of members of opposing Iranian & Kurdish members. So beautifully written (think IN COLD BLOOD). Filled with heroes and villains, a court trial--a mini series designed for Law and Order.

Mark Landmann says

So, I don't know... I feel a bit bad giving the book only 2 stars. I didn't mind reading it. I'm sure it's thoroughly researched and the writing is ok (though possibly not super), and it's a good story it had to tell about the assassination of Iranian dissidents in Berlin in 1992 and subsequent 4-year trial. I think the main problem I had with the book was the way it tried to explore the inner mindset and humanize everyone on one side (the victims, their families and their supporters), while mostly ignoring the motives of the perpetrators or even of any non-supporters. Probably it wouldn't have been possible to get access to the murderers or Iranian government ministers, but one line near the end mentions "the sinister men that snuffed out the lives of the best and brightest of their nation," which seems to sum up the author's agenda to me. Far be it from me to demand moral equivalence, or to defend extra-judicial terrorist killings or the awful Iranian government, but I do note that the US has fully adopted this technique now - just with drones rather than masked men with machine guns. Is it more justified because it's a democratic government carrying out the killings? I'm sure the Iranian government also considered their victims to be a threat to the state. Although I feel very hostile to the Iranian government myself, I still feel myself reacting to the book and not fully trusting it.

Robin says

Very well-written, important and frightening book that honors the courage of those who will hopefully inspire bravery in others who are faced with the difficult task of making decisions about right and wrong, justice and injustice in the face of great threats and fears.

Sepi says

One of the best books I've ever read in regards to politics and Iran. The book reads like fiction. Roya is a very talented story teller.

Cathy Murahashi says

A facinating story beautifully written.

Chelsea says

More reviews available at my blog, [Beauty and the Bookworm](#).

The biggest problem with Assassins of the Turquoise Palace is that I had no idea what it was about. Having been raised in the good ol' US of A, I have been pretty much perpetually inundated with messages of "Iran is bad. Bad bad bad." While I doubt that's true in its entirety--few things ever are--there are a myriad of areas in which it does seem to have merit. For example, the Iranian government's ordering of the killings in this book. That wasn't exactly cool. But what I was left wondering, for the entire book, was why it was ordered in the first place. I think it had something to do with Kurds. I don't know much about Kurds, pretty much just that they're a group of people in the Middle East who don't have a country of their own, much like the Roma, or the Jews before Israel was created, or the Palestinians today. I don't know why the Iranian government wanted these particular Kurds dead. Or were they Kurds? Was that ever said? I think it was mentioned that they supported an independent country for Kurdistan, but just because they supported it doesn't mean they were Kurds themselves.

You might see why this book left me a little confused. Parts of the book also rambled or jumped around a bit too much; I have never seen more pagebreaks in my life, I swear! It made following the multiple characters a little more difficult than I would have liked.

Also, despite the book being entitled Assassins of the Turquoise Palace, very little time is spent talking about the Turquoise Palace, the assassins, or even the assassination. The focus is on the 90's-era trial of the men accused of killing several Iranian activists in Berlin. Now, don't get me wrong, I love me a good trial. I am an avid watcher of Law & Order (but only the episodes with McCoy, because he is a badass in the courtroom) and I take law classes for fun at my university. And I do think that the trial and everything surrounding it was written very well, and was very easy to read; no slogging through legal mumbo-jumbo required. But, if I'm picking up a book called Assassins of the Turquoise Palace, I really do expect the focus to be somewhat on the assassins. I would have liked that story. How did these people get to be killers, anyway? It's entirely possible that book can't be written, because of a dearth of sources or something like

that, but I think it would have been a more compelling read. Not that a quest for justice is un-compelling, but... I don't know. It just wasn't what I thought it was going to be, and what it was wasn't enough to make up for that.

One more thing. While the writing is very detailed, which is what makes it so readable, I'm skeptical of how accurate it is. Including dreams and feelings can be done in a nonfiction book through detailed interviews, but that would be very detailed indeed. I'm skeptical if, at times, Hakakian isn't speculating and putting her own words or feelings into the mouths and hearts of the people of the book.

And can we talk about that cover for a second? It doesn't influence my opinion of the book, but man, that is some of the worst photo-editing I've ever seen.

So, lacking some information that made it a bit hard to understand, with a bit of a jumpy structure, it was a hard book to really get into. While its actual topic was well-written, for the most part, it isn't a book I would pick up again.

James Asante says

Intriguing, insightful and mystifying.

Chip says

3.5 stars. Adequately written and interesting. Not questioning the big picture or overall substance of the work, but do wonder about how the author was able to ensure (if she did) the accuracy of quoted conversations and the like.

Meredith says

This book was definitely interesting since I didn't know anything at all about Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, and the persecution of the Kurds. However, I can't say I looked forward to picking it back up each day. It probably would have been a really amazing feature magazine piece, but a lot of the book dragged. The most exciting parts came towards the end when the key trial witnesses were discovered and their back story was revealed. I felt that was much more interesting than the trial itself and all the events leading up to it.
