

BRIEF COMMUNICATION

A Brief Survey of the Iranica Periodicals at the International Bahā'ī Library, Haifa, Israel

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The International Bahā'ī Library has as its primary role the comprehensive collecting and preserving of Bahā'ī literature in all formats. However, besides collecting on the Bahā'ī Faith, the Library also collects selectively in the field of Middle Eastern studies, Islam and comparative religion. In Iranica, the Library is developing a composite collection of periodicals, currently numbering approximately 200 titles. The collection is composed of both complete runs and sample issues. The value in keeping only a few issues or even a single issue of a title lies in the bibliographic information gleaned from such a “representational” collection.

The collection was acquired over a period of twenty years mainly by donations and augmented by purchases where possible. Very often the Library will be sent a single issue by a well-wisher because it contains a “very interesting article” on one subject or another. On several occasions the Library has been the recipient of entire personal libraries. The contents range from general newspapers to specialized serial bibliographies and include aspects of Iranica as diverse as law, medicine, sports, Islam and Zoroastrianism as well as the Bahā'ī Faith.

The oldest item is a bound volume dated 1851 of the *Rūz-nāmih-yi Vaqāyih-i Ittifāqīyih*, Iran's oldest newspaper. Even though this has been reprinted in 1994–95 in its entirety by the National Library of Iran, there is always something special about the original leather-bound edition, with its stains and blotches. There are also original copies of several provincial newspapers issued between 1914 and 1920, for example *Rāh-i Nijāt* from Isfahān dated 1918.

The vast majority of the collection is associated with the period of the Islamic Revolution, the events leading up to it and its aftermath. It is evident that these political and scholarly journals and newspapers which deal with contemporary issues and feature eye-witness accounts are highly valuable in studying the political and historical development of Iran, especially such titles as *Inqilāb-i Islāmī*, published by

Banī-Sadr, the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran and close advisor to Khomeini. However, the value of popular magazines such as *Javānān-i Imruz* or *Zan-i Rūz* should not be underestimated for they can be invaluable in charting the social repercussions of the Revolution. The pictorial advertisements in these magazines also tell an interesting story as they evolve and change from the years before, during and after the Islamic Revolution. The political satirical weeklies such as *Buhlūl* or *Fānūs* are in a league of their own because of their open defiance of the status quo in a most graphic way.

The collection also includes academic periodicals published in the United States, Germany, Lebanon, the Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom. Represented in this collection are scholarly journals, such as the well-cited *Studia Iranica* and *Iranian Studies* as well as those, which are not as well known such as *Jahrbuch des Verbandes Iranischer Akademiker* (Hildesheim), *Āthār-i Īrān* (Haarlem) and *al-Dīrāsāt al-Adabīyah* (Beirut).

The Iranian Diaspora has a long history of publishing and the oldest example in the Library is *Īrān-shahr* (Berlin, 1922–1927). Other titles in the collection are sample issues of exiled political journals such as *Iran im Kampf* (Frankfurt am Main), *Āvāy-i Īrān* (Orleans, Ont.) or *Gama* (Los Angeles, Calif.). Politics are not the only concern of the Iranian Diaspora as can be seen by the popular “Persian neighborhood” press such as *Sām* (Croydon, England), *Ikspiris* (North Vancouver, B.C.), *Payām-i Īrān* (Glendale, Calif.) or *Shahrvand* (Downsview, Ont.). There are also specialized titles such as *Tavoos*, dedicated to the arts and seems to be a joint United States and Iranian production, and *Āvāy-i Zan*, which concentrates on women’s issues and is published in Norway and Sweden. Other examples would be *Payām-i Pizishk*, which was published in 1979 in Fostoria, Ohio for a medical association.

Bahā’ī periodical literature, however, forms the very heart of the collection of the Library. There are 3,211 Bahā’ī titles from approximately 180 countries in over 100 languages in the collection. The oldest Bahā’ī newsletter from Iran is *Akhbār-i Amrī* from Tīhrān with the first issue dating from 1922. Since the Islamic Revolution all publishing activity by the Bahā’īs in Iran has ceased. However, the rich legacy of scholarly pursuit is continued by the Persian Bahā’īs in the Diaspora. Among the Bahā’ī periodicals in Persian currently received, the most important academic titles are *‘Andalīb* from Canada, *Payām-i Bahā’ī* from France and *Payām-i Badī* from the United States. Of interest is the children’s magazine *Varqā* first produced in Iran and later in India

under the direction of the well-known architect Farīburz Sahbā.

Electronic newspapers and newsletters should not be overlooked in this brief survey. Selected titles in this format have been electronically archived. The Library has added to its collection such titles as *Īrān gawhar* from California and Radio Free Europe's *RFE/RL Iran Report*.

The political turmoil in Iran has spurred the production of many titles dedicated to the issue of human rights: *Iran Human Rights Chronicle* (Portland, Oregon), *Iran Democracy Watch* from Sweden, *Iran-report* from Berlin and even *Defenders' Newsletter* from Tīhrān among others.

In cataloguing the Iranica collection it has been discovered how few of them are listed in on-line catalogues of other libraries, or even listed in specialized bibliographies. Even the works of Wolfgang Behn do not contain many of the *émigré* political journals that the Library has. This was also an argument for their retention and cataloguing.