

The Iran Museum in Hamburg: Organization and Plans

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For many years it was a desire of mine, while teaching art, history, religion and languages of Iran at the University of Hamburg, to create a museum of Iranian culture. After visiting nearly all the great museums of the world I was quite unsatisfied with the representation of Iran in the exhibitions. In the Louvre of Paris, the British Museum of London, the Berlin Museums and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York we can find beautiful collections of Iranian art, but they are distributed in different quarters of these huge ensembles, the ancient periods being mixed with Babylon and Assyria, and the mediaeval and modern periods being annexed to Islamic art, as it extended from Morocco to India. There are national Museums in Tehran, Kabul, Karachi, Delhi, St. Petersburg and Baghdad containing rich treasuries of Iranian culture, but every one is limited to the modern political borders. Not one museum tries to represent a nearly comprehensive, and a coherent picture of the culture of Iranian people, which is politically split into different nations and which once was an imperium extending into three continents, has not been adequately disclosed. And up to now especially the Zoroastrian religion has had no European, American or Iranian museum offering exhibitions. Zoroastrianism is the heart of Iranian culture, from which it developed its own, specific forms and ideas, putting it into one row with Egypt, Babylon, India and China. There is an urgent need of an information-centre about Iranian culture in Germany, where not even scholars have fundamental knowledge about modern Iranian tribes like Pashtuns, Kurds, Baluchi, Ossetians or Gilakis, or historic peoples like Scythians in Eastern Europe up to river Danube and Saka in Chinese Turkestan, or about the achievements of the Achaemenid and Sasanian empires. Even Iranian scholars seldom read about the development of agriculture and stockbreeding in prehistoric Iran 10,000 years ago and the extraordinary excavations of Ganj Darre.

It was in 1991 that, together with Keykhosrow Zareh (who sadly died in 1993) I founded the Iran Museum in Hamburg. Several years before, from 1967, I undertook research on the ritual of the Zoroastrian firetemple in cooperation with scholars in Bombay, and with the help of my Bombay friends the Iran Museum received a complete set of implements of a firetemple, and over time also obtained a lot of garments of Bombay and Yazd Zoroastrians. In 1993 we could make our first exhibition in a small museum near Hamburg. We got some exhibits for loan from German museums, the library of Munich provided us with Avestan and Pahlavi Manuscripts, the Pergamon Museum in Berlin sent some items from the excavations at Babylon etc. 90 000 DM were donated by such Iranians as Dr. -Ing. Abbas Saleh Rastin, Dr. Manuchihr Farhangi, Mrs. Farengis K. Shahrokh, Parviz Yeganegi, Mehraban Farhangi, Rostam Yeganegi, Esfandiar Moobed, Mohandes Kaikhosrou Giw, Fariborz Mawandad, and others, Mrs. Turan composed a wonderful poem and an anonymous person gave beautiful antiquities to us.

The Iran Museum is focused on the Zoroastrian religion and tries to demonstrate the enormous influence of this creed all over the world. A second part of the Iran Museum is the historical section with objects of Iranian art from the prehistoric roots through Elamite, Median, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian periods to mediaeval times, when the Zoroastrian background transformed Iranian Islamic culture through the *Shahnameh* of Ferdousi, the *Khamse* of Nezami and the mystical poems of the Sufis. A third section will demonstrate the culture of Central Asian Iranian tribes. We will get an archaeological collection from the Saka tribe of Khotan on the Silkroad and

ethnographical collections from Iranians living at the Hindukush. We are also constructing an epigraphic section with documents in cuneiform, Aramaic and different Iranian scripts and languages. Very important will be a library focussed on Iranian literature. The Iran Museum will be open to learned Germans but also it will become a cultural centre of Iranians living in Hamburg and northern Germany, and will support the many cultural activities in our town.

The University of Hamburg, with which the Iran Museum is associated as an independent scientific institute, will provide us with a building, and step-by-step I hope to get financial aid from the German government, which is a very difficult job at the moment because of the financial crisis in Germany. We hope for further support from Iranian and German sponsors, by which we will develop our collections and activities. In 1995 we planned to open three exhibitions, one being the much developed collection of the 1993 inauguration, another being a collection "1500 years of Iranian painting" and the third one "Excavations of the Iranian kingdom of Khotan at the Silkroad in China". We have gone about collecting money to print catalogues of these exhibitions. And we will try to extend the museum every year with another saloon.