

Muḥammad Ramazānī: A Bridge for the Transmission and Continuity of Written Heritage in the Transition from the Qajar to the Pahlavi Era

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Abstract

Muḥammad Ramazānī (1904–1967) should be recognized as one of the most influential figures in the modern history of publishing, librarianship, and collection-building in Iran. Having learned the trade of printing and bookselling from his father, he officially entered the world of books in 1920, at the age of seventeen, by founding the Etifāq Reading Room in Tehran. From that point forward, he engaged continuously and diversely in fields such as librarianship, magazine publishing, printing, editing, and publishing. By establishing institutions like Kitābkhānah-yi Sharq (Eastern Library), Majallah-yi Sharq (Eastern Magazine), Chāpkhānah-yi Sharq (Eastern Printing House), and especially the Kulālah-yi Khāvar publishing house, he played a major role in promoting reading culture and reprinting classical and folkloric Persian literature.

Ramazānī was also the founder of Kitāb (The Book), the first specialized periodical on books in Iran. By listing and reviewing publications from various Iranian publishers, this journal played a

vital role in documentation and shaping the publishing landscape of the time. It can be considered the starting point of professional bibliographic reporting in the Iranian publishing industry.

In addition to his wide-ranging activities in the realm of publishing and print, Ramaẓānī dreamed of establishing a large and comprehensive library. Over the years, he gathered a unique and valuable collection of manuscripts, printed books, newspapers, and other non-book print materials. Although financial difficulties and illness prevented him from realizing this dream, parts of his collection, particularly newspapers and magazines, were donated to the University of Tehran Library, while the main portion of his manuscripts and printed books was gifted to the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Masjid-i A'ẓam) in Qom. This collection was assembled at a time when public libraries in Iran were scarce and information infrastructure was underdeveloped.

Ramaẓānī's importance lies not only in his role as a publisher and bookseller but also in his pioneering efforts as a collector. He acted as a bridge connecting the printed heritage of the Qajar era with the Pahlavi period and later generations. This article seeks to revisit his life and contributions, focusing on his role in preserving Iran's textual heritage, the methods he employed in collection-building, and the historical significance of his efforts within the cultural and institutional context of the time. It also examines the current state of preservation, organization, and accessibility of the collections he donated to the University of Tehran and the Grand Mosque Library.

Keywords: Muḥammad Ramaẓānī, Persian written heritage, Qajar–Pahlavi transition, Iranian publishing history, Collection-building in Iran

Introduction

The number of private or public libraries in Iran that have devoted themselves to collecting printed materials after the emergence of the printing industry is no more than a handful.¹ The only library that holds a valuable collection of printed sources from the Qajar era is the Royal Library of Iran.² This library was established under the auspices of Fath-‘Alī Shāh Qajar, and subsequent monarchs continued to collect and preserve resources there, especially during the reign of Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shāh Qajar. During his rule, the library housed a wide array of printed materials in various European and other languages, Latin scripts such as French, English, German, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, and Persian.

However, the Royal Library of Iran was exclusively reserved for the Qajar kings, and virtually no one else had permission to access its holdings at that time. Although a few governmental, public, and national libraries were formed during the Qajar period, a significant weakness across all these institutions was the lack of administrative structure, insufficient budgets, and inadequate facilities for proper collection development and resource acquisition.³ While the law

¹ The printing and publishing of Persian books in Iran began with the publication of *Risālah-yi Jihādīyah* written by Mirzā ‘Isā Qā‘im Maqām Farahānī in 1233 AH (1817/1818 CE).

² For an introduction to this library and the printed materials available there, see: *Catalogue of Printed Books (Movable and Lithographed) of the Royal Library of Iran*, by Ismā‘il Shaykh al-Mashayikh Amir Mu‘īzi, edited and researched by Majid Jaliseh, Qom: Varāqqān, 1402 AH.

³ On the establishment of governmental and public libraries in Qajar Iran, see: Majid Jaliseh, "Chāp Nivisht (12): The Library of the Dar al-Funūn School during the Qajar Period," *Aynab-yi Pazūbūsh*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Issue 205), Farvardin & Ordibehesht 1403, pp. 39–60; Majid Jaliseh, "Chāp Nivisht (13): The First Efforts to Establish Public and National Libraries in the Qajar Period," *Aynab-yi Pazūbūsh*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Issue 206), Khordad & Tir 1403, pp. 7–49; Majid Jaliseh, "Chāp Nivisht (14): The National Library

for entrusting books to the National Library of Iran was passed in the Majles (National Assembly) in 1326 AH (circa 1908 CE), Iran did not have an officially established national library.⁴ This absence resulted in many printed books from that period lacking a proper repository, often ending up scattered in corners of the country at best.

Alongside this situation, neither the Ministry of Education nor the Printing Administration pursued the official and accurate registration of printed book titles, nor was there a structure to compile a comprehensive bibliography of printed works published in Iran. Therefore, neither the original books, magazines, announcements, and other printed materials were properly preserved nor their information systematically recorded.

During the Qajar period and afterwards, for a long time, private libraries, though informal, scattered, and unstructured, took on the responsibility of collecting, preserving printed works, and transmitting them to future generations. The idea of establishing a National Library of Iran had emerged before the Constitutional Revolution, and there were desperate efforts to create such an institution. However, it was not until the late period of the Pahlavi

of Tehran during the Constitutional Era and Its Catalogue," *Aynab-yi Pazhūbish*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Issue 207), Mordad & Shahrivar 1403, pp. 25–86.

⁴ Article Five: From every edition that is printed, the printer must send two copies for deposit in the National Library and to complete the press collection. In the capital, these two copies are officially submitted to the Ministry of Science, and in other regions to the Ministry of Science's branches and the Department of Education. A receipt is issued indicating the title and number of copies printed. By this law, the printer is religiously obligated that if violated, a fine of three to sixty tomans must be paid at the discretion of the authorities." See: *Press Law*, Tehran: Royal Printing House, 1326 AH.

dynasty that a national library was officially and legally founded in Iran.⁵

Manuscripts, due to their value and cost, were always highly regarded by scholars as well as merchants and wealthy individuals, who collected and preserved them not only to safeguard knowledge but also as an investment and a status symbol among the upper classes. Printed books, regardless of their content, held no value for this class and their collection and preservation were not prioritized.

Therefore, the absence of a national library, which has among its most important duties the collection of printed works published in or related to Iran, alongside the lack of interest from the upper classes in these works, led to considerable neglect and loss of many printed resources.

Despite this, during the Qajar period and early Pahlavi era, there were a few individuals who valued books as books per se, regardless of their age or origin, and who purchased, preserved, and cared for every book printed in or related to this land. Although their numbers did not exceed a handful, if we were to list these bibliophiles, undoubtedly Muḥammad Ramaẓānī would rank highest among them.

⁵ For more on the early efforts to establish public and national libraries in the Qajar period, see: Majid Jaliseh, "Nokhostūn Talāsh-hā barā-ye Rāhandāzi-ye Ketābkhānehā-ye 'Ummūmī va Mellī dar Dowreh-ye Qājār," *Ayneh-ye Paszūbesh*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Issue 206), Khordad & Tir 1403, pp. 7–49.

Muḥammad Ramaẓānī

Muḥammad Ramaẓānī was born in 1904 (1283 SH) into a family of established publishers and book traders. His father, Mirzā ‘Alī-Asghar, was a well-known publisher and bookseller, and his grandfather, Ramaẓān-‘Alī, a merchant from Kashan, was also counted among the famous publishers and booksellers of his time. According to Ramaẓānī himself,

“Books played a fundamental role in our family. I became familiar with books from childhood because everyone called my father the bookseller, and his telegraphic title was also ‘bookseller.’ I remember from my childhood having a strong and unusual love and interest in books. I was constantly engaged with them, and all my passion was devoted to books. When I completed primary school at the Sultānī School, the principal arranged middle school classes for us and also gave me access to the school library. This was the ultimate wish of mine” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 7).

After Sultānī School, Ramaẓānī continued his education at the Madrisah-yi Siyāsī (Political School), where he benefited from the instruction of prominent teachers such as Muḥammad-‘Alī Zukā al-Mulk Furūghī, Eghbāl, Mirzā Tāhir, Furūzānfar, Pūrdāvūd, and Fāzil Tūnī (Azarang & Dihbāshī 2014 [1393], 90).

The Ettifāq Reading Room: The Beginning of a Great Dream

Muḥammad Ramaẓānī’s earliest attempts to establish a library coincide with the foundation of the Ettifāq Reading Room. He

founded this reading room in Esfand 1300 SH / March 1922 with the aim of creating a place for the public to study. The original location was on Farmānfarmā Street, next to the Eghtisād Guesthouse (Kūhistānī-Nijād 2003 [1382], 77). After seven months, he moved the reading room to the upper floor of the post office on the same street, opposite the Armenian street (Kūhistānī-Nijād 2003 [1382], 78).

One advertisement published in newspapers of that time described the reading room as follows:

“Notice and Announcement

To the attention of all knowledge seekers: A reading room called Ettifāq has recently opened on Farmānfarmā Street, next to the Eghtisād Guesthouse, offering all kinds of scientific, literary, ethical, historical books, novels, and bound journals as well as domestic newspapers for free reading. The following books are also available for sale at the reading room: Rocambole (5 volumes), The Coronation of Shah Suleiman, Tavernier, Course, Sir Anthony Shirley.

At the end, we thank the respected editors of central newspapers who have sent their newspapers for reading in our reading room so far.

On behalf of the partners, Manager Muḥammad” (Kūhistānī-Nijād 2003 [1382], 77)

The reading room was open every day from 10 a.m. to noon and from 3 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. Those interested in reading magazines, newspapers, and books could attend free of charge (Kūhistānī-Nijād 2003 [1382], 77).

Unfortunately, this initiative did not have a favorable outcome. After about one year, due to lack of public interest, the closure of the reading room was announced on 8 Esfand 1301 SH (late February 1923) through a notice:

“Notice

The Ettifāq Reading Room, due to lack of public use, becoming vulgarized and subject to improper use, is hereby dissolved, and in its place, the Sharq Library has been established.

Muḥammad Ramaẓānī” (Kūhistānī-Nijād 2003 [1382], 79)

Muḥammad Ramaẓānī and the Establishment of Sharq and Khāvar Publishing

While managing the Ettifāq Reading Room, Ramaẓānī became a publisher and printed his first book, *Risālah-yi Eqtisād* (Treatise on Economy) by Sadeq Rizāzadah Shafaq (1891–1971), in Tir 1300 SH (July 1921) (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 10). However, following the dissolution of the Ettifāq Reading Room, as announced in the previous notice, Ramaẓānī officially launched the Sharq Library, or Sharq Publishing. The Sharq Library was established on Nāsiriyah Street (now Nāsir Khusraw Street). This bookstore was founded at a time when the number of literate and book-reading people was limited, but Ramaẓānī was determined to revolutionize printing and publishing, break the stagnation in book sales, and create a thriving market:

“I was a student at the Political School. My father had gone to Europe... I borrowed money from a friend and started a bookstore.

Alongside the bookstore, I worked nights correcting the newspapers *Shafaq-i Surkh* and *Kūshish* to raise money to support the bookstore... My work gradually picked up..." (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 10).

In 1306 SH (1927–28), Ramazānī transferred ownership of Sharq Bookstore to his brother, Mahmoud Ramazānī, and himself founded the Khāvar Institute, which later became known as Kulālah-yi Khāvar (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 12).

Parviz Nātil-i Khānlarī recalls: "The first book I translated and published was *The Captain's Daughter* by Pushkin. This was when I was a fourth-year high school student. Muḥammad Ramazānī, director of Kulālah Khāvar Institute, printed it" (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 18).

Majid Muvaqqar, editor-in-chief of *Mehr* newspaper, wrote in a preface to the new edition of the *Shahnamah* published by Kulālah Khāvar:

"Ten years ago, a small library was established in one of the shops on the western side of Nāsiriya Street. The shelves of this library were worn and shabby. Its few books were not impressive. Visitors might have considered this library just one among the many similar libraries on that street. But inside this library was a daring and ambitious heart... The small library on Nāsiriya Street began publishing legends and stories popular with the public, and soon its name spread widely. Gradually, the library grew. Every month, or even every week, it published a new book. If its founder had

initially opened a small bookstore, after a few years he became a major publisher...” (Muvaqqar 1933 [1312], 264).⁶

The First Monthly Book Information Publication in Iran, or the First Iranian Bibliographic Journal

After the publication of the first printed book in Persian in Iran, namely *Risālah-yi Jahādīyah* by Mirza Isa Qa'im-Maqām Farahānī in 1817 CE (1233 AH), for many years there was little concern or effort to systematically access information about printed books published in Iran. Although over the course of nearly a century the number of printed titles grew from one or two per year to hundreds, and during the Qajar period alone approximately 20,000 titles were published in Iran, no regularly issued list or bibliography existed, whether monthly, bimonthly, annually, or every eight years, that provided systematic information about books published in Iran. Such bibliographies, for example, had existed in France since November 1811 under the title *Bibliographie de la France, ou Journal général de l'imprimerie et de la librairie*.

The first attempt to compile a systematic bibliography of printed books in Iran was undertaken by Muḥammad Ramaẓānī in 1932 (1311 SH). By founding a journal named *Kitāb* (Book), he sought to provide a comprehensive list of books published in recent years. Issued twice monthly, *Kitāb* served as a comprehensive

⁶ The author's focus in this article is on documenting the formation of the Mohammad Ramazani Library, its development, and its collection-building practices. References to the publishing houses *Sharq* and *Khavar* are made solely to establish Ramazani's professional identity as a publisher; they are not intended to extend the scope of the study beyond that context.

bibliography including various details about each book (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 15).

In the introductory pages of the first issue, it was written:

“One of the things that is of utmost necessity for book lovers is to have a comprehensive bibliography of books printed and published in Persian. In civilized countries, the number of periodicals in every library exceeds the number of books printed in the last ten years in Iran, and a useful and comprehensive bibliography exists so that no difficulty remains for book seekers.⁷ However, as periodicals in Iranian libraries are very few and hard to obtain, a useful bibliography cannot be expected soon that will resolve the difficulties of book seekers.

The Khāvar Institute, the largest publishing house in Iran, is determined to fill this gap and, despite the losses it has incurred in this effort, compiles a comprehensive list of books printed in the last two or three years in Iran or abroad (as far as it is known) and makes it accessible to the public. This list includes the title, author, place of printing, and brief information about the book’s subject. Later issues of this collection will take the form of a magazine and, in addition to books published after this time and the completion of the ten-year bibliography and information about books published before this decade in Persian, it will include critical articles, various important miscellaneous information, and all topics related to books. Since many books may have been printed in Iranian cities, Tehran, or outside Iran in Persian but not

⁷ For examples of Persian works printed outside Iran, see:

Silsilah al-Nasab al-Şafaviyah, Ḥusayn b. ‘Abdāl, Berlin: Iran Shahr Printing House, 1303 SH [*Ketab*, Farvardīn 1311, p. 26]; *Tadhkirah-ye Shah Tahmasb Şafavi*, Berlin: Kāvīyānī Press, 1303 SH [*Ketab*, Farvardīn 1311, p. 30].

mentioned in the *Kitāb* collection, we kindly ask authors, publishers, and book lovers to send a copy of their published books as soon as possible to the Khāvar Library. In return, they will receive a copy of four issues of the *Kitāb* collection or a publication of the Khāvar Institute of equal value, which will be the best means to introduce their books and publications. Those who do not wish to send books can also send a brief description of the title, author, publisher, place and date of publication to be included in the *Kitāb* collection" (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 19).

Kitāb can be considered one of the most important foundations of Muḥammad Ramaẓānī's library collection. Understanding the significance of writing a comprehensive bibliography of works printed in Iran and abroad gave Ramaẓānī a rare mastery over these works. With this bibliographic knowledge and perspective, he was able to collect a relatively comprehensive and complete collection of contemporary Iranian and foreign books in his library.

Muḥammad Ramaẓānī and the Dream of a Great Library

In the years when Muḥammad Ramaẓānī decided to establish a public library, the largest library in Iran, the Public Library of Ma'arif, held approximately 16,000 volumes (Pūrahmad Jaktāji 1978 [1357], 16). Later, the printed collections of the Royal Library and the Dar al-Funūn Library were merged into this institution, which in 1937 (1316 SH) was introduced as the National Library of Iran. Although exact statistics for the National Library around 1967 (1346 SH) are unavailable, estimates place its collection of printed books between 40,000 and 90,000 volumes (Pūrahmad Jaktāji 1978 [1357], 42).

Considering the approximately 40,000 unique volumes Muḥammad Ramaẓānī personally collected over some thirty-three years of relentless effort, one gains a clear appreciation of the magnitude of his work and the precious place of his library (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 37 and Ustādī 1986, 11).

Ramaẓānī had intended to transfer his library to the city of Qom. In this regard, Maḥdī Āzarizādah quotes him as saying:

“...Haji said he wanted to bring his children to fruition and close his bookstore here and buy a large, spacious house in Qom to transfer the library, which has no equal among private libraries in Tehran, to Qom. In Tehran, there are few like-minded collaborators, but in Qom there are many seminary students who love books and have modest expectations. There I want to establish a publishing institute like the Hyderabad Deccan Encyclopedia Institute and reproduce hundreds and thousands of rare books. I am close to achieving the dream for which I have labored all my life” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 37).

Ramaẓānī himself spoke of the importance of his library in a 1965 (1344 SH) interview:

“In terms of the number of books, no other library has as many books. Another advantage is that the books are not duplicates; that is, there is only one copy of each book unless there are different editions. For binding the books, preparing catalog cards, publishing a catalog, and building a respectable space for it, we need at least 200,000 tomans. To raise this money, I am willing to sell three Kulālah-yi Khāvar bookstores with their inventory worth seventy thousand tomans to anyone interested. Also, my house can be rented out. These means can help establish the library. There is

land in Rey that is ready for sale. My only request from benevolent people is to take a step forward so that by selling these assets we can raise the funds needed” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 36).

In another announcement, Ramaẓānī officially named the library and provided general statistics about its collection and location:

"Great news: The Public Library of Šāhib al-Amr (may God hasten his reappearance), with more than 40,000 unique books, will soon be established in the city of Qom. This library includes: 3,200 religious books; 4,200 Arabic books; 3,200 Arabic and Persian manuscripts; 4,500 historical books; 2,200 poetry volumes; 2,000 literary and ethical works; 3,000 schoolbooks; 3,500 novels; 2,000 scientific, medical, and legal books; 3,000 newspapers; 4,500 magazines; 2,500 miscellaneous books; 3,500 foreign language books.

Ramaẓānī's bookstore, affiliated with the Public Library of Šāhib al-Amr in Qom (Aram Street, opposite Haram Alley), is open and able to provide various religious, Arabic, historical, poetic, literary, ethical, miscellaneous books, novels, and magazines to customers (if unavailable, they will be requested from central Tehran). To complete the library, it is ready to exchange your desired books or purchase your books at fair prices” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 36).

To realize this important endeavor, Ramaẓānī publicly put all his assets and properties up for sale to fund cataloging, bookbinding, and purchase of a suitable library building, but this plan was never fulfilled due to various obstacles (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 37). Despite numerous efforts and even moving Ramaẓānī and his books to Qom, the library project was never implemented. Ultimately, with

Ramaẓānī's sudden death in July 1967 (Tir 1346 SH), all the dreams and aspirations of this great figure in the world of books were lost.

Book Collection and Library-Building by Muḥammad Ramaẓānī

Muḥammad Ramaẓānī's library collection was generally formed through two main methods: a smaller portion was inherited, while the majority was acquired through purchase. Given that Ramaẓānī came from a family of booksellers, his father and even his grandfather were active in the book trade, it is natural that a passion for books and collecting was hereditary. Some of the books in Ramaẓānī's library were inherited from his father or grandfather or other family members. For example, among the manuscripts he donated to the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Masjid-i A'ẓam) is a manuscript of *Khulāṣat al-Minhāj al-Ṣādiqīn* by Mullā Fath-allāh Kāshānī (d. 988 AH), copied in 1139 AH in India by Sayyid Valī at the command of Muḥammad Bakhsh Khān, bearing the ownership note of his father Hajj 'Alī-Asghar Ramaẓānī dated 1347 AH:

“This blessed book, volume one of the commentaries *Khulāṣat al-Minhāj* by the late Muwla Fathollāh Kāshānī (may God sanctify his soul), from the blessed Sura al-Fatiha to the end of Sura al-Kahf, was completed in the year 1139 AH in India. Now it has been 208 years since it was written. At the end of Sha'ban 1347 AH it belonged to the reader, especially those who pray for mercy and forgiveness, 'Alī-Asghar son of Ramazān-'Alī (may God forgive him and his parents)” (Ustādī, Hasan-zādah, and Tāyyār Marāghī 2009, 314).

Alongside this note is Ramaẓānī's own note indicating that he acquired the manuscript after his father's death:

“On the night of 21 Shawwal 1361 AH, it became part of my library. May God bless the late Haj ‘Alī-Asghar Ramaẓānī, my father. I humbly ask for special prayers for the late bookseller and myself, Muḥammad Ramaẓānī.”

However, the majority of the books in Ramaẓānī's collection were gathered through persistent searching and purchasing from bookstores and private libraries. His deep knowledge and bibliographic expertise as a specialist in the field of books enabled this meticulous collection. In a 1965 interview, Ramaẓānī explained his motivation and process:

“Thirty-three years ago, I decided to compile a bibliography of all the books printed in Iran and publish it in several volumes for readers. When I began, I encountered confusion and difficulty because the list I was preparing was incomplete. I did not have all the books, and guesses or hearsay were insufficient. So I resolved to collect books, magazines, and newspapers myself” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 19).

This coincided with the founding of the journal *Kitāb* in 1932 (1311 SH). After publishing four issues of this magazine, Ramaẓānī's determination to collect newspapers, magazines, books, and other printed materials became firm.

Mahdī Azarizadah, who was both a student and collaborator of Ramaẓānī, recounts the collecting efforts:

“Haji had a large, very diverse private library on the third floor of his building, which he cherished and kept closed to others. Every day, in summer and winter, he would take a large sack and walk across the city, visiting all places that bought and sold used newspapers, magazines, and household books to find missing and necessary items. All the peddlers knew Haji and considered him their best customer, as he bought the items he selected at prices better than others, which were still cheaper than elsewhere. At night, Haji would return tired and sweating, with a sack full of books, magazines, and newspapers, happier than at any other time. He would then send me home and spend late nights organizing and cataloging them in the library upstairs” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 32).

Ramaẓānī also described his dedication and sacrifices:

“For 32 years, day and night, I have been collecting books. I have suffered and worked hard in this path! I remember never wearing good clothes or eating a full meal. I walked to my tasks to save money so I could buy at least one book. Many days I went to the market with pockets full to buy clothes or other things for my children, but when I returned home, guess what was in my hands? Books, sir! Always thinking about them, awake or asleep. Sometimes I think it was not a trivial friendship one can easily abandon; it was love, madness, madness!” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393], 35).

A reporter from the *Rushanfikr* newspaper wrote of Ramaẓānī's library:

“In his library, which includes three large rooms of his house, he has compiled the largest collection of Persian books. Not just a

hundred or a thousand, but 40,000 volumes of books, magazines, and newspapers since the inception of printing in Iran, including thousands of unique manuscripts and historical documents not found in any museum or library. This is no small number. It is a sea hidden beneath fog and clouds, unknown and invisible. It requires great effort and enormous energy to organize and make this priceless treasure available to all.

Before I met him and saw his valuable collection with my own eyes, doubt and disbelief haunted me. I re-examined an announcement he had published and sent a copy to the magazine office, focusing on the figure ‘40,000 volumes. Astonishment mixed with admiration overwhelmed me. It was a large number, very large! As far as I knew, nowhere else in the world could such a valuable collection of Persian language resources be found in one place” (Qāsimī 2018 [1397], 49).

Collection Building from University of Tehran to University of Utah’s Middle East Library

Undoubtedly, Muḥammad Ramaẓānī was one of the most skilled and knowledgeable collectors in Iranian library history, an untrained academic but a bibliophile who grew up in publishing and possessed deep awareness of the history and present of books in Iran and abroad.

When the University of Tehran Library was established, Iraj Afshār benefited from Ramaẓānī’s expertise in collection building (Afshār 2022 [1401], 109). A surviving document shows Ramaẓānī’s significant role in collection building for other libraries, specifically

the Middle East Section of the University of Utah Library (Image 1):

After Dr. Khusraw Mustufi (1921–1992)⁸ founded this section, Ramaẓānī played a crucial role in expanding its holdings. Mustufi stated in an interview with Everett Cooley about strengthening the Persian collection:

“I did not spend much time collecting these works because I had to identify the sources. But I was fortunate to know a good publisher, a longtime family friend named Muḥammad Ramaẓānī, owner and manager of Khāvar Publishing. He was very honest and personally interested in this project. He helped me acquire over 4,000 volumes of books and periodicals for the library at low prices. When Professor Mujtabā Mīnuvī, one of Iran’s greatest scholars, came here and reviewed one of the invoices, he said, ‘Ramaẓānī sold you the books at half price and on top of that gave you a twenty percent discount.’ This was because Ramaẓānī had personally become interested in our Middle East Library. One day he told me: ‘You are the first person who has come to me to buy books for a university or school without asking for a personal discount.’ That was why he gave me such a discount. He said, ‘I do not deal with crooks’” (Mustufi 1985, 30).

One of the few surviving letters from Ramaẓānī is addressed to Dr. Mustufi and dated April 15, 1967 (26 Farvardin 1346), in which

⁸ Khusraw Mustufi was born in Tehran in 1300 SH (1921/22) and after completing primary and secondary education entered the University of Tehran, where he earned a Bachelor’s degree in English in 1323 SH (1944/45). In 1328 SH (1949/50), he enrolled at the University of Utah, where after nine years he earned a PhD in Political Science. From 1339 SH (1960/61), he began his academic career there and served as head of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies from 1345 to 1361 SH (1966–1982). Thanks to his efforts, the University of Utah’s library became one of the richest American libraries on Iran (Nasr 1992).

Ramaẓānī announces the establishment of his personal library in Qom:

“Dear Dr. Mustuḥfī,

After presenting my respects, I regret that I have not yet fully mastered my work as I am busy constructing a large building for my personal library in Qom, which is beyond my financial means.

However, I hope, with God’s help, to succeed and one day inform you that my library in Qom, with over forty thousand volumes, is available to seekers and readers.

I have sent the invoice for printing and will send it soon along with some magazines you requested.”⁹

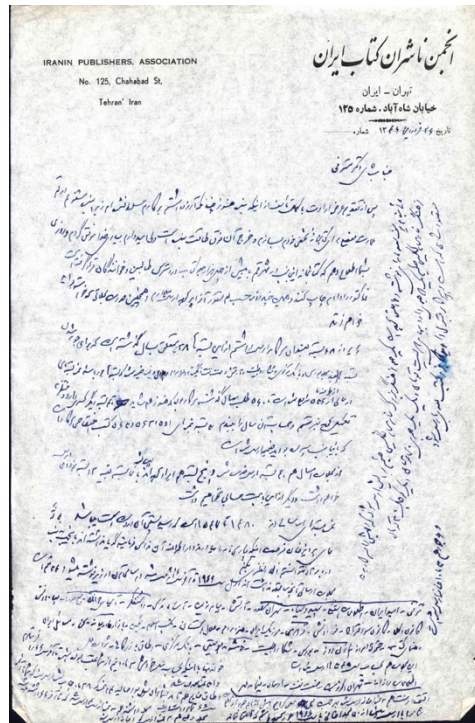


Image 1: Letter from Muḥammad Ramaẓānī to Dr. Mustuḥfī (Islamic and Iranian History Library – Qom)

⁹ This document, recently acquired by Dr. Rasūl Jafarīān and generously made available to me by him, is currently preserved in the Library of Islamic and Iranian History in Qom.

Cataloging the Muḥammad Ramaẓānī Collection

Quantity	DESCRIPTION	Price
25.	Tihren-i-Musavvar	
26.	Illila'at-i-Haftizi	
27.	Umīd-i-Iran	
28.	Taraghi	
29.	Rawshanfikr	
30.	Firdawst	
31.	Ittila'at-i-Banuvan	
32.	Sepid-o-Siyah	
33.	Zan-i-Imrus	
34.	Asiya-yi-Javan	
35.	Sobh-i-Imrus	
36.	Shikar-o-Tabi'at	
37.	Amuzish va Parvarish	
38.	Artish	
39.	Amar	
40.	San'at'i'Haft	
41.	Ilmi-va-Fanni	
42.	Misigi	
43.	Mafd'i-Mardum	
44.	Bank-i-Markazi	
45.	Majmu'ih-ye-Hoquqi	
46.	Kamun-i-Yakala	
47.	Kamun-i-Sardafaran	
48.	Astan-i-Quds	
49.	Sepah-i-Danish	
50.	Ittil'at	
51.	Mishmas-ye Ketab	

Image 2: List of Newspaper and Magazine Requests from the University of Utah to Muḥammad Ramaẓānī (Islamic and Iranian History Library – Qom)

In the midst of his extensive book collecting efforts, Muḥammad Ramaẓānī recognized the crucial need to catalog and organize his vast library. In a note published in 1952 (1331 SH) in the *Sharq* magazine, he outlined his plans as follows: “If no difficulties arise in 1952, I hope to accomplish the following services: First, to publish monthly a booklet containing a

comprehensive bibliography of Persian

printed books; Second, to present the literary magazine *Sharq* monthly to scholars and literati; Third, to complete a series of elementary textbooks and, if possible, print a series of accurate books aimed at reforming teaching methods; Fourth, with the help of a society of scholars and literati, to prepare and print some essential books on the last page; Fifth, to present at least one

volume of a valuable book to book lovers every month; Sixth, to bind, index, and systematically arrange the fifteen thousand books collected for the public library and make them accessible.” (Ramaẓānī, 1 Farvardin 1331 SH [March 1952])

Although Ramaẓānī prepared cataloging slips for his library (see Image 3), he was ultimately unable to fully implement these plans. The enormous volume of books, periodicals, and other printed materials, coupled with the high costs associated with maintenance, binding, and cataloging, presented serious obstacles.

Ramaẓānī himself acknowledged these challenges in various interviews, stating:

“For binding the books, preparing catalog cards, and publishing the intended bibliography, as well as constructing a respectable location for the library, at least 200,000 tomans are needed. To raise this sum, I am willing to sell three shops of *Kalale Khāvar* along with seventy thousand tomans worth of books to anyone interested. My house can also be rented out, and I have land in the city of Rey ready for sale. My only appeal to benevolent people is to step forward, so that by selling these assets, the necessary funds can be raised.” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393 SH], 36)

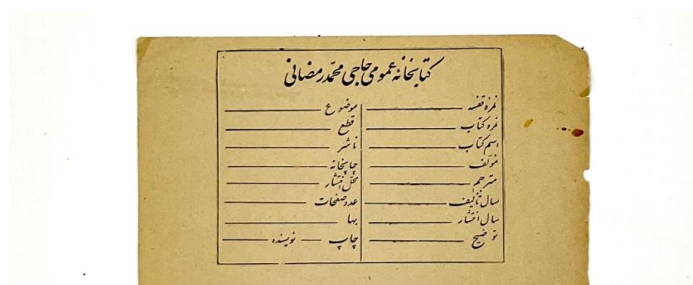


Image 3: Sample Cataloging Slip from the Haji Muḥammad Ramaẓānī Public Library

Therefore, despite his strong determination and persistent efforts, financial and practical limitations prevented the full realization of Ramaẓānī's cataloging and organizational ambitions for his invaluable collection.

A Dream That Was Not Lost

Muḥammad Ramaẓānī was fully aware of the importance and loneliness of the difficult path he had chosen. He once said:

“All my wish was to quietly establish a library and open it for the public's use. Now that I am an old man and the sun of my life is setting, I have begun to hasten to realize this intention. Because if I die tomorrow, I know that none of my heirs will care to preserve the fruit of a lifetime of my efforts.” (Qāsimī 2018, p. 55)

Toward the end of his life, Ramaẓānī had transferred his books to the city of Qom, where they were kept temporarily in a rented house. But fate did not grant him more time. As his brother Ibrahim Ramaẓānī recalls:

“The library was ultimately blessed with a good fate, and we fulfilled my brother's wish as best as possible. We carefully packed all the books in the library, which were kept separate from other accounts, and with Muhsin [Muḥammad Ramaẓānī's son], we transported them to Qom.” (Qāsimī 2014 [1393 SH], 38)

After his death, Muḥammad Ramaẓānī's library and its collection were divided into two parts. The first included printed books, manuscripts, and the majority of non-book printed materials—around 40,000 volumes—which, through the efforts and guidance

of Hujjat al-Islam Maḥdī Gulpāyigānī and other heirs, were transferred to the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Ustādī 1986, 11). The second part, consisting of periodicals and newspapers, was purchased by the University of Tehran Library.

His donated manuscripts form an important segment of the manuscript collection at the Grand Mosque Library, enriched over time by further donations before and after Ramaḏānī's contribution. The oldest manuscript in this donation is a composite volume comprising three works: *Fi Hilat Raf' al-Athqal* by Eren ibn Qustinius; *Burban 'Alī Jama' al-Murabba'at al-Mutawaliyah* by Abu Hatim Muzaffar ibn Ismail Esfizari; and *Burban Misabat al-Muthallath* by an unknown author. This collection was likely copied during the 6th or 7th century AH (Ustādī, Hasanzadah, and Tayyār Marāghī 2010, 454).

In 1970 (1349 SH), one of the librarians of the Grand Mosque Library, Hujjat al-Islam 'Abd al-Ghanī Maḥdavī-Siffat (1899–2011), undertook the preparation of a manuscript catalog (see Image 4). He compiled two volumes: one listing individual manuscripts, the other describing collections of manuscripts totaling around 700 items.

شماره ثبت	عنوان	مؤلف	تاریخ کتبی	تاریخ تصحیح	تاریخ کتبی	تاریخ تصحیح	تاریخ کتبی	تاریخ تصحیح
۱۳۱۱۱	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۴۰۱۴	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۴۳۴۲	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۳۹۸۲	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۴۴۳۰	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۴۴۵۰	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۱۰۷۸۹	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۱۱۴۳۰	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۱۳۱۰۷	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
۱۴۷۵	آب تله کلمه در تفسیر...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

Image 4: Opening Pages of the Manuscript Catalog by Alphabet, 'Abd al-Ghani Mahdavi-Siffat, 1349 SH (1970)

The first volume, titled *Alphabetically Organized Manuscript Catalog*, includes information such as accession number, title, number of volumes, subject, language, shelf location, and author. This handwritten catalog was completed on January 20, 1971 (30 Dey 1349 SH), as indicated on its cover (shelf mark: 4368).

The second volume, titled *Manuscript Collections of the Grand Mosque Library*, contains descriptions of approximately 700 manuscripts, including details on accession number, format, title, author, and date of copying (shelf mark: 4395).

Unfortunately, this second catalog, compiled shortly after Ramaẓānī's donation, makes no mention of the donors or benefactors responsible for the manuscripts. The information of the handwritten catalogues is as follows: Mahdavī-Siffat, 'Abd al-Ghanī (1298–1390 SH / 1919–2011), *Register of Manuscripts by Alphabetical Order*, [288 pp.], 1349 SH / 1970 CE; *Manuscript Collections of the Masjid-i A'ẓam Library*, 130 pp., undated.

Following the initial manuscript cataloging efforts, it was Muḥammad-Taqī Dānish-Pajūh (1290–1375 SH / 1911–1996 CE) who, for the first time, provided a brief report on the manuscripts donated by the late Muḥammad Ramaẓānī to this library. He stated:

“There were already some manuscripts in the Grand Mosque Library of Qom, and the late Ramaẓānī endowed two thousand manuscripts there. May God have mercy on him, for by this good deed he prevented these national and religious treasures from reaching foreign lands and saved them from the clutches of a handful of cultural brokers who sell heritage.” (Dānish-Pajūh 1974 [1353 SH], 254)

Later, for the first time, the total collection of 3,955 manuscripts of this library was cataloged by Rizā Ustādī, which included the manuscripts donated by Muḥammad Ramaẓānī. Unfortunately, this catalog made only minimal reference to the names of donors or benefactors. The bibliography is as follows: Ustādī, Rizā, *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom*, Qom, Grand Mosque Library, 16 + 728 pages, 1986 (1365 SH).

Years later, the manuscript catalog of this library was revised and expanded under the supervision of Rizā Ustādī and in

collaboration with two other manuscript catalogers. However, even in this updated catalog, no mention is made of the manuscripts donated by Muḥammad Ramaẓānī. The omission of provenance details such as ownership, endowment, donation, or purchase is considered a significant shortcoming in such catalogs.

The bibliography of the catalogues is as follows (Image 5):

Ustādī, Rizā; Hasanzādah, Sadiq; and Tayyār Marāghī, Mahmūd. *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Arabic Books)*. Qom: Daftar-i Nashr-i Bargizidah, vol. 1, 624 pp., 2009 (1388 SH).

———. *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Persian Books)*. Qom: Daftar-i Nashr-i Bargizidah, vol. 2, 816 pp., 2009 (1388 SH).

———. *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Collections)*. Qom: Daftar-i Nashr-i Bargizidah, vol. 3, 647 pp., 2010 (1389 SH).

———. *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Collections)*. Qom: Daftar-i Nashr-i Bargizidah, vol. 4, 768 pp., 2010 (1389 SH).

Hasanzādah Marāghī, Hossein. *Index of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom*. Qom: Najafī, vol. 5, 572 pp., 2013 (1392 SH).

A major part of the donation by Muḥammad Ramaẓānī to the Grand Mosque Library consists of printed materials, encompassing over 40,000 volumes. These include a valuable collection of old and new printed books in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Urdu, and Latin. The oldest printed book in this

collection is *Al-Shifa* by Avicenna, published at the Medici Press in Rome in 1597 CE.

For the first time, after twelve years, in 1979 (1358 SH), the librarian of the Grand Mosque Library, ‘Abd al-Ghanī Mahdavi-Saffat (1298–1390 SH / 1919–2011 CE), compiled a list of Muḥammad Ramaẓānī’s books in the library (see Image 6). These books were apparently shelved in specified locations within the library, namely shelves 76 through 109, with varying numbers of volumes on each shelf (e.g., shelf 76 with 183 volumes, shelf 77 with 91 volumes, and so forth).

ردیف	شماره	عنوان کتاب	مؤلف	شماره	ردیف	عنوان کتاب	مؤلف
۱۳۲	۱۶۰-۲۳-۲۵	فهرست کتب آموخته شده	۲۷۳۸۴	۴۸	۱۳۲	فهرست کتب آموخته شده	۲۷۳۸۴
۴	۱۵۲۴۹	توضیح در باب احوال	۵۱۴	۴۹	۴	توضیح در باب احوال	۵۱۴
۵	۱۵۲۹۹	توضیح در باب احوال	۵۱۴-۱۹	۵۰-۵۲	۵	توضیح در باب احوال	۵۱۴-۱۹
۶	۱۵۹۸۲	فهرست کتب	۴۹۴۲	۵۲	۶	فهرست کتب	۴۹۴۲
۷-۸	۱۸۹۸۵-۸۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۵۴	۷-۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۹	۱۷۷۴۰	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۵۵	۹	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۱۰	۱۵۴۵۵	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۵۶	۱۰	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۱۱	۱۵۵۵۲-۵۵	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۵۷	۱۱	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۱۲-۱۴	۱۹۷۹۲	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۵۸	۱۲-۱۴	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۱۵	۱۹۷۹۲	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۵۹	۱۵	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۱۶	۱۹۷۹۲	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۰	۱۶	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۱۷	۱۹۷۹۲	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۱	۱۷	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۱۸-۲۱	۱۹۷۹۲	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۲	۱۸-۲۱	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۲۲	۱۷۷۴۰	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۳	۲۲	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۲۳	۱۷۷۴۰	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۴	۲۳	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۲۴	۲۲۹۰۸-۲۱	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۵	۲۴	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۲۵	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۶	۲۵	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۲۶	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۷	۲۶	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۲۷	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۸	۲۷	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۲۸	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۶۹	۲۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۲۹	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۰	۲۹	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۰	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۱-۷۲	۳۰	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۱	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۳	۳۱	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۲	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۴	۳۲	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۳	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۵	۳۳	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۴	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۶	۳۴	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۵	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۷	۳۵	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۶	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۸	۳۶	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۷	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۷۹	۳۷	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲
۳۸	۲۲۹۰۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲	۸۰	۳۸	فهرست کتب	۲۴۴۲

Image 6: Books from the shelves of Muḥammad Ramaẓānī, ‘Abd al-Ghanī Mahdavi-Saffat, 1358 SH (1979).

This list is simply formatted in three columns including: serial number, total accession number, book title, and volume number. Each page is divided into two columns, presenting the data in abbreviated form. In total, 6,383 book titles are recorded in this list, which represents only a fraction of the books donated by Muḥammad Ramaẓānī to this library. The information is as follows: Mahdāvī-Saffat, ‘Abd al-Ghanī Mahdāvī-Siffat, ‘Abd al-Ghanī (1298–1390 SH), *Books of the Shelves of Haj Muḥammad Ramaẓānī, Kalālah Khāvar*, [1979 / 1358 SH].

Cataloging and Digitization of the Printed Rare Books Collection

In 2010 (1389 SH), the author of these lines proposed the cataloging and digitization of the rare printed materials of this library to its management. Subsequently, using an experienced team, the project of cataloging the rare printed materials, including Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Urdu books published from [start year missing in original text] until 1978 (1357 SH), was initiated. The cataloging was conducted in categorized groups, including lithographed books, early movable type printed books, later movable type printed books, and textbooks.

The majority of this project was completed by 2014 (1393 SH), and the cataloged data was digitized and made publicly accessible online through the library’s official website. Less than a decade later, with the support of Varāqqān Publishing, these cataloged materials were also published in print to broaden access for researchers to the rare printed collections of the library.

To date, the following catalogs, which contain a substantial portion of the printed materials donated by Muḥammad Ramaẓānī to the library, have been organized and published (Image 5):

Bāqiryān Muwḥadd, Sayyid Rizā (b. 1974), *Catalog of the Yearbooks of Iranian Schools* (Endowment Collection of Haj Muḥammad Ramaẓānī in the Library of Ayatollah Burūjirdī, Qom), Qom: Varāqqān, 324 pages with illustrations, 2021 (1400 SH) (360 vols.).

Jaliseh, Majid, and Hiydar Eyvazī, *Catalog of Lithographed Books in the Library of Ayatollah Burūjirdī (Grand Mosque)*, Qom: Varāqqān, 4 vols., 21,610 pages, 2023 (1402 SH). (7,967 vols.).

Jaliseh, Majid, and Masūmah Omid, *Catalog of Textbooks in the Library of Ayatollah Burūjirdī (Grand Mosque)*, Qom: Varāqqān, 2 vols., 2023 (1402 SH).

Hāj-Bāqiryān, Tayyibe, *Catalog of Regulations, Statutes, and Bylaws in the Library of Ayatollah Burūjirdī (Grand Mosque)*, Qom: Varāqqān, 533 pages, 2024 (1403 SH) (1,295 vols.).

So far, these printed catalogs collectively cover over 15,000 volumes of books donated by Muḥammad Ramaẓānī's collection to the Grand Mosque Library of Qom. Given the ongoing efforts in cataloging and documentation, it is hoped that the remaining volumes will soon be fully cataloged and published.

After the death of Muḥammad Ramaẓānī, in 1967 (1346 SH), the collection of magazines and newspapers from his library was acquired by the University of Tehran Library. In praise of this collection, Afshār writes:

"Also, mention must be made of the rare collection of Persian newspapers and magazines belonging to the late Muḥammad Ramaẓānī, owner of the Kulālah Khāvar publishing house, which he had gathered with unparalleled diligence and passion over a period of forty years. Undoubtedly, this is one of the rarest collections of its kind in the world." (Afshār 1401 [2022], 132)

Afshār counts approximately 2,000 titles of periodicals in this collection (Afshār 1401, 142). The intermediary who facilitated this transfer was a man named Bārīftānī, a manager at Shams Bookstore on Nāṣir Khusraw Street in Tehran and Ramaẓānī's son-in-law. With his help, Ramaẓānī's newspapers and magazines were transferred to the University of Tehran Library (Afshār 1401, 333).

Following the acquisition, the cataloging of these newspapers and magazines was undertaken by Murtizā Sultānī. After eight years, the first volume of the catalog was published with the following details: *Catalog of Persian Newspapers in the Central Library and Archives of the University of Tehran: Covering the years 1850 (1267 AH) to 1941 (1320 SH)*, compiled by Murtizā Sultānī, Tehran: Chap-i Bahman, November 1975 (Aban 1354 SH).

This catalog is organized alphabetically by publication title and provides information about the founders, license holders, editors, year of establishment, and the issues held by the University Library. The catalog includes a total of 365 newspaper and magazine titles published over a century. The final section of the catalog contains selected illustrations from these periodicals.

Conclusion

In the absence of a legal and systematic framework for identifying, preserving, and maintaining printed materials during the Qajar period, and due to the lack of official state libraries dedicated to this task, it was primarily through private libraries and the dedicated efforts of passionate individuals that such printed resources were preserved and transferred from the Qajar era into the Pahlavi period and beyond. Among these individuals, Muḥammad Ramaẓānī—an expert bibliographer with the vision of establishing a large public library—was able with great care and diligence to identify and collect a substantial volume of rare printed works published during the Qajar and early Pahlavi periods. Although he never realized his dream of founding a major public library, by safeguarding these books and ultimately transferring them to two prominent institutions—the Grand Mosque Library of Qom and the Central Library—he played an unparalleled role in preserving and ensuring the continuity of Iran’s written heritage across the transition from the Qajar to the Pahlavi era.

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Jaliseh, Majid, and Masūmah Omid. *Catalog of Textbooks in the Library of Ayatollah Burūjirdī (Grand Mosque)*. Qom: Varāqqān, 2 vols., 2023 CE.

Jaliseh, Majid. “Nokhostīn Talāsh-hā barā-ye Rāhandāzī-ye Ketābkhānehā-ye ‘Ummūmī va Mellī dar Dowreh-ye Qājār.” *Āyneb-ye Pazhūbesh* 35, no. 2 (Issue 206), Khordad & Tir 1403 SH [May–July 2024]: 7–49.

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———. *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Persian Books)*. Vol. 2. Qom: Daftar-i Nashr-i Guzidah, 1388 SH [2009 CE].

———. *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Collections)*. Vol. 3. Qom: Daftar-i Nashr-i Guzidah, 1389 SH [2010 CE].

———. *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Grand Mosque Library of Qom (Collections)*. Vol. 4. Qom: Daftar-i Nashr-i Guzidah, 1389 SH [2010 CE].