



# KĀNUN-E PARVAREŠ-E FEKRI-E KUDAKĀN VA NOWJAVĀNĀN I. ESTABLISHMENT OF KANUN

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## KĀNUN-E PARVAREŠ-E FEKRI-E KUDAKĀN VA NOWJAVĀNĀN

### i. Establishment of Kanun

*The Conception of Kanun.* The founders of Kanun—Shahbanou Farah, Lily Amirarjomand (Jahānārā), Homā Zāhedi, and [Firuz Shirvanlu](#) (Šīrvānlu; 1938-88; joined in early 1967)—were aware of the paucity of specialized library and non-textbook literature of quality for Iran’s children. They harbored progressive ideas on civic and cultural education through the arts and were conscious of the lack of cultural and artistic productions and activities geared towards children as well as the lack of specialized centers for the younger generations.

Kanun’s goal was to produce and offer support and services for children in better settings than the grim and austere school classrooms, namely, in newly built and colorful centers where children would be welcomed by their own specialized librarians and artistic guides. These were to be venues where they could study or borrow books, view movies, and participate in artistic training courses and activities in specialized environments built and organized solely for children and adolescents, where they could gather in their out-of-school



leisure times. It was clear to the founders of the Kanun that to achieve these goals they needed to lay out an infrastructural foundation to attract and mobilize the best talents and creative forces to join the enterprise. When the idea of the Kanun was still in its infancy, the founders, as well as almost all the pioneering collaborators who joined them, were in their twenties or early thirties (see below, viii).

*The beginning.* Unofficially, Kanun began operations in 1964 with Lily Amirarjomand supervising the establishment of libraries and Homā Zāhedi overseeing publications; Zāhedi then brought in Firuz Shirvanlu as her deputy in publication affairs. Shirvanlu played a pivotal role in attracting to Kanun a large number of leading, young modernist intellectual figures in literature and visual arts, who had critical views of the regime’s autocratic mode of governance.

The initial meetings of Kanun were convened at the Anjoman-e Ketāb (Book Society), and Ehsan Yarshater, who enthusiastically supported the idea from the outset, suggested the name for Kanun and prepared its by-laws.

A three-room apartment was the initial headquarters for the official enterprise, where the project’s first employees were hired from 15 December 1965. A dramatic arts student, Ḥosayn Samākār, was charged with the accounting and oversight of the budget and financial management—a position that he managed until the first year of the 1979 Revolution (for his artistic contributions, see below, v and viii).

Kanun’s publication activities started with the publication in early 1967 of two children’s books: First, “Uninvited guests” (*Mehmānhā-ye nāk’vāndeh*), illustrated by Judy Farmānfarmā’iān. It was written by a young dramatist Farideh Farjām, who is also considered a pioneer female playwright of Iran (Fulādvand, p. 1322). Second, “*The Little Mermaid*” by Hans Christian Andersen, translated and illustrated by Shahbanou Farah as *Doḡtarak-e daryā* (Figure 1).

Shirvanlu founded a publishing and publicity firm, Negāreh (Daftar-e našr o tabliḡāt-e negāreh), in 1966. There he helped the Publication Department of Kanun, which was under his own supervision, in choosing, conceiving, editing, illustrating, and publishing Kanun’s books, posters, and catalogues. Conscious of the fact that there were not many specialized designers and painters for children, he invited a number of young painters and art designers, some still



at university, to collaborate in the project; they were assigned to focus on books for children, a task which was for many their first experience in the field. They included Abbas Kiarostami, Nikzād Nojumi, and Faršid Meṭqāli. A good number of these early Negāreh collaborators subsequently became permanent employees of Kanun (see below, viii). Among them, Nur-al-Din Zarrinkelk and Parviz Kalāntari were already familiar with Kanun's main content and quality objectives, as they were painters, designers, and writers who were already engaged in the layout process and illustration of school textbooks, a children's weekly *Kayhān-e baččehā*, and children's pages of general publications; they were working for Franklin Publishers before being hired by Shirvanlu (interviews with Zarrinkelk and Kalāntari).

*A delicate balance.* Lily Amirarjomand, supported by Shahbanou Farah, was able to bypass many bureaucratic obstacles and also to resist SAVAK, the security police, whose directors considered Kanun a beehive of leftists, since Kanun had among its employees a number of arrested or blacklisted dissidents, including Shirvanlu himself.

A delicate balance had to be maintained, and the managing director, for the sake of the stability of Kanun, attempted to engage the SAVAK hierarchy in dialogue. In pursuit of its own objectives, Kanun did not have a hostile attitude towards the regime's autocratic order, nor was it a disseminator of leftist pamphlets; however, it was also far from becoming another propaganda instrument for the regime. Kanun, in its 15-year pre-Revolution activities of releasing hundreds of books, films, audio tapes, plays, songs, and poems for children, hardly ever published a propaganda book (Mirzā'i, pp. 228-33).

In the 1970s, the book selection committee (Komita-ye entekāb-e ketāb) had an unwritten agreement to avoid the purchase of books with indoctrinating political content for libraries (Mirzā'i, pp. 228-33; confirmed also by Niv Nābet).

*The formation of Kanun.* On 15 December 1966, the first by-laws and the organization of Kanun were approved. Under the Shahbanou's patronage, a board of trustees was established with Lily Amirarjomand as its managing director (Modir-e 'āmel), and Kanun became an official entity as a non-profit, non-commercial, socio-cultural institution, accountable to Shahbanou Farah.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See at end of part IX.