



BAZAR I. GENERAL

BAZAR

i. General

The Iranian *bāzār* is a unified, self-contained building complex of shops, passageways, and caravanserais, interspersed with squares (*mejdān*), religious buildings, bathhouses (*ḥammām*), and other public institutions. This traditional commercial center is usually roofed with vaulted ceilings made from fired brick, although the outer branches may be open or have only makeshift coverings of wood or reeds. Light and air circulation come from small openings in the brick vaults, and the height of the ceilings keeps the halls cool and comfortable during the long hot season, even though the *bāzār* can be rather chilly in the winter. The shops (*dok[k]ān*), small single-storied stalls three or four meters in width, line each side of the lanes and contain retailers and craftsmen, who often are grouped in separate branches (*rāsta*) by occupational types. Typically no residences occur within the *bāzār*, and so the main complex can be closed at night or on holidays (or during political protests by the *bāzārīs*). A *bāzār* may also have a *qayṣariya*, a passageway which usually has large doors on each end which can be locked, with shops containing goods of higher value. *Bāzārs* of small towns may contain only a few hundred shops (or fewer), while the market centers in the major cities have several thousand shops.

Large interior courtyard caravanserais (*kān, sarā[y]*, *sarai*) are an integral part of most *bāzārs*, particularly in the larger cities where international long-



distance trade was significant in the past. Around the courtyard are single- or, more usually, two-storied complexes of offices occupied by wholesalers, although the bottom level is more often for storage and in some instances even contains shopkeepers or craftsmen. The caravanserais open onto the main branches of the *bāzār*, and small covered caravanserais (*tīmča*), which often feature shops, may be adjacent to the larger ones. Goods have to be carried by human porters or pack animals through the crowded, narrow passageways. (But most large caravanserais which housed caravans and travelers in the past were on the outskirts of cities, and not spatially associated with the *bāzār*.)

Interspersed throughout the *bāzār* are mosques, religious schools (*madrasa*), mausolea, and other religious buildings. The *bāzār* itself often contains considerable endowment (*waqf*) property, and the religious endowments that are within the marketplace support structures which are principally in the *bāzār* complex itself. The Friday mosque is sometimes next to or part of the *bāzār*, although there are exceptions to this pattern, as in Yazd or Kermānšāh (now Bāktarān).

The location of the *bāzār* within the traditional city followed several patterns. Central Asian cities were typically divided into an inner city (*šahrestān*) and an outer city (*rebāṭ*). The main *bāzār* and caravanserais were often at one of the gates of the inner city, where the main *bāzār* hall, as in Kīva, was called a *tīm*. In other instances, as in Bukhara, the *šahrestān* was penetrated by two intersecting orthogonal avenues, and at this crossroads (called the *čahār-sū* [“four-ways,” intersection] or shortened to *čār-sū*) was the main *bāzār*, with shops along all four streets. The closer to the *čahār-sū*, the more prestigious the location (and the higher the rent). *Bāzārs* in Afghanistan, as in Herat (Figure 1), Qandahār, and Tāšqorġān (Figure 2), also followed the *čahār-sū* model. The central intersection sometimes was covered with a huge dome, as in Bukhara or Tāšqorġān. These unroofed *bāzār* streets, which are the traditional main avenues of Afghan cities, resemble the *bāzār* structure of nearby Indian cities as well.

The location of the *bāzār* in Iran also followed the Central Asian model in some cases. In Yazd a new *bāzār* complex began to evolve outside one of the gates of a new city wall built in the mid-8th/14th century, a wall which was around the inner city. On the other hand, it appears that most Iranian *bāzārs* have evolved within their major city walls (although the exact historical morphological development of most Iranian cities is still to be determined). Such internal development took place in Tehran, Tabrīz, Isfahan, Shiraz,



Kermānšāh, and Mašhad, as well as in numerous smaller towns such as Malāyer or Ardakān-e Yazd. Many *bāzārs* in Iran are linear, with the main passageways in a single, linked series, with minor branches and caravanserais dispersed along the major axis. The *bāzārs* of Kermānšāh, Kāšān (Figure 3), Shiraz (Figure 4), and large parts of the market centers in Isfahan and Tehran follow this pattern. *Bāzārs* of small towns are usually linear as well, often without any side branches. Other Iranian markets are more rectangular, comprised of several principal parallel lanes, with smaller intersecting corridors. Tabrīz (Figure 5) provides one of the best examples, where two major passageways constitute the main axes.

Long tunnel vaults constitute the major covered *bāzār* passageways, although elaborate domical vaults and ribbed vaults, sometimes with squinches, window grills, and other decorations, impart to some *bāzārs* a most majestic appearance. Geometric ornamentation formed by interlocking brick designs adorn many domes and hallways, while most smaller passages have their vaults plastered and the walls painted white. Mosaic or tile decorations are not commonly found in the *bāzār*, except as part of a mosque or other religious structure. The Isfahan *qayṣariya*, Bāzār-e Now in Shiraz, and Bāzār-e Kān Walī in Yazd are examples of fine *bāzār* architecture, although a number of outstanding domed passageways, *čahār-sūs*, caravanserais, and *tīmčas* can be found throughout this cultural region.

A *bāzār* grows by accretion, for the spatial arrangement develops over centuries as new branches and caravanserais are added to existing structures. As a city expanded, the *bāzār* grew too, as perhaps best exemplified by the *bāzārs* of the capital cities—Isfahan during the Safavid period and Qajar Tehran in the 13th/19th and early 14th/20th centuries. Benevolent merchants, governors, and other government officials provided the funds for building new *bāzārs*, often as part of a *waqf* to support a newly established (or existing) mosque or *madrassa*. The development of the Yazd *bāzār* illustrates the pattern (Figure 6). This provincial city's *bāzār* began in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries under the Mozaffarids and Timurids. There were two foci at the outset, the Mehrījerd (Mehriž) gate of the 8th/14th-century wall and the Masjed-e Rīg, built outside and to the west of the wall. A *bāzār* with two rows of shops flanking a lane was established at the gate outside the wall, and shops (undoubtedly *waqf*) were around the Masjed-e Rīg, which was about two hundred yards from the Mehrījerd gate. Over the next several centuries more branches, caravanserais, mosques, and *madrassas* were constructed. For



instance, in the last half of the 12th/18th century the governor of Yazd, Moḥammad Taqī Khan, constructed the large Madrasa-ye Kān within the *bāzār* complex. Several new *bāzār* branches were built as *waqf* for the support of the new religious school, including the *qayṣarīya*. Another governor built the Bāzār-e Kān Walī in the latter half of the 13th/19th century, and this branch is still the best section of the *bāzār* of Yazd, with beautiful vaulted ceilings and containing shops with expensive goods (mostly textile shops and goldsmiths). The last major additions came in the early 14th/20th century when two new branches and several caravanserais were constructed by the head of the Yazd finance office. Hence, the Yazd *bāzār* grew to its present size of about 950 shops and 20 caravanserais owing to the actions of specific individuals, by a process of addition over considerable time. Soon after World War II, a major avenue was constructed through the *bāzār*, which is its latest major morphological change.

Isfahan, with one of the more spectacular Iranian *bāzārs*, provides a second illustration of the growth process. This *bāzār* developed in conjunction with the new capital complex of the Safavids established by Shah ‘Abbās I at the beginning of the 11th/17th century. A huge new square (Meydān-e Šāh; aerial view in Ehlers, Bild 5) was the focal point of the shah’s ambitious developments, and a new royal *bāzār* complex was established on its northern side. Shops also were around the *meydān*, which was the location of several new mosques as well as the palace complex west of Meydān-e Šāh. The new *bāzār* was built partly to attract business from the older pre-Safavid *bāzār* which was located to the northeast around an older *meydān* and the Friday mosque. This strategy was not entirely successful, however, and over the succeeding centuries more branches and caravanserais were built, eventually linking the two *meydāns* via a long, linear *bāzār*. The section immediately north of Meydān-e Šāh remained the most prestigious—it contained the *qayṣarīya* and was the site of the royal mint of the Safavids. And it is this same part of the *bāzār*, which today has the shops for higher quality retail goods and traditional crafts, that made the Isfahan *bāzār* one of Iran’s principal tourist attractions in the later Pahlavi period.

Small neighborhood *bāzārs* (*bāzārča*) occur in the residential *maḥallas* of Iranian towns and cities. Comprised of four or five shops providing daily necessities and services, the *bāzārča* usually is located at the crossroads of the principal alleyways of the *maḥalla*. Often roofed and associated with *ḥammāms*, mosques, or shrines, these nodes can be *waqf*-endowed for one or



more of the adjacent structures. Although a *bāzārča* may contain several dozen shops, most of these small markets have declined in importance in the last several decades.

Within the 14th/20th century major avenues have been constructed through Iranian cities, which affect the *bāzārs* considerably. In most cases, as in Isfahan, Tabrīz, or Shiraz, merely small parts of the *bāzār* have been destroyed. In other cities, such as Yazd or Ardakān-e Yazd, the new streets coincided with the main axes of the *bāzārs*. In all cities, *bāzār*-type stalls have been established on the new avenues, and on only a few streets are Western-type walk-in stores situated (and particularly in Tehran). There are now more shops on the avenues in all major Iranian cities, which has affected the economy of the central marketplace substantially. Yet the fact that most shops on the avenues are still small stalls represents a morphological extension of the *bāzār* onto these modern thoroughfares. And, even though no longer the economic core, the traditional *bāzār* is still a viable, dynamic commercial center in Iranian cities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

General discussions of the Middle Eastern *bāzār* (including Iran) can be found in: M. Scharabi, *Der Bazar*, Tübingen, 1985.

E. Wirth, "Strukturwandlungen und Entwicklungstendenzen der Stadt," *Erdkunde* 22, 1968, pp. 101-28.

Idem, "Zum Problem des Bazars (sūq, çarşı)," *Der Islam* 51, 1974, pp. 203-60; 52, 1975, pp. 6-46.

Central Asian *bāzārs* are examined in: E. Giese, "Aufbau, Entwicklung und Genese der islamisch-orientalischen Stadt in Sowjet-Mittelasien," *Erdkunde* 34, 1980, pp. 46-60.

W. Müller-Wille, *Stadt und Umland im südlichen Sowjet-Mittelasien*, Erdkundliches Wissen 49, Wiesbaden, 1978.



Studies of Afghan *bāzārs* include: P. Centlivres, *Un bazar d'Asie centrale. Forme et organisation du bazar de Tashqurghan (Afghanistan)*, Wiesbaden, 1972.

C.-J. Charpentier, *Bazaar-e-Tashqurghan. Ethnographical Studies in an Afghan Traditional Bazaar*, Uppsala, 1972.

P. English, "The Traditional City of Herat, Afghanistan," in L. C. Brown, ed., *From Madina to Metropolis*, Princeton, 1973, pp. 73-90.

E. Grötzbach, *Städte und Basare in Afghanistan. Eine stadtgeographische Untersuchung*, Wiesbaden, 1979.

D. Wiebe, *Stadtstruktur and kulturgeographischer Wandel in Kandahar und Südafghanistan*, Kiel, 1978.

Iranian *bāzārs* have been analyzed in: N. Ardalān and L. Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity. The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, Chicago, 1973.

A. Bakhtiar, "The Royal Bazaar of Isfahan," in R. Holed, ed., *Studies on Isfahan*, Iranian Studies 7, 1974, pp. 320-47.

M. F. Bonine, "Shops and Shopkeepers: Dynamics of an Iranian Provincial Bazaar," in M. E. Bonine and N. R. Keddie, eds., *Modern Iran*, Albany, 1981.

M. E. Bonine, "Islam and Commerce: Waqf and the Bazaar of Yazd, Iran," *Erdkunde* 41, 1987, pp. 182-96.

H. Gaube, *Iranian Cities*, New York, 1978.

Idem and E. Wirth, *Der Bazar von Isfahan*, Wiesbaden, 1978.

H. Kopp, *Städte im östlichen iranischen Kaspitiefeld*, Erlangen, 1973.

M. Seger, *Tehran. Eine stadtgeographische Studie*, Vienna, 1978.

G. Schweizer, "Tabriz (Nordwest-Iran) und der Tabrizer Bazar," *Erdkunde* 26, 1972, pp. 32-46.

See also E. Ehlers, *Iran. Grundzüge einer geographischen Landeskunde*, Darmstadt, 1980.

Search terms:



□□□□ bazar baazaar