



BAZAR V. TEMPORARY BAZARS IN IRAN AND AFGHANISTAN

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v. Temporary Bāzārs in Iran and Afghanistan

Periodic bāzārs. Periodic markets, and especially weekly markets, are generally presented as an intermediate stage between a subsistence economy and networks of permanent trading centers, and are an almost universal feature of “peasant societies” in less-developed countries (Berry, p. 93). But the Iranian world, like the whole Middle East (Wirth), is characterized by the lack of such markets in extensive areas and by their peripheral position. Weekly markets are rather to be found in relatively thickly populated rural areas such as the Caspian lowlands of Iran, some parts of Azarbaijan, or the northern piedmont of the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan (Figure 7). While they are rare or totally lacking on the arid central plateau of Iran, where a sparse rural population is scattered over discontinuous oases, and where the “primacy model of settlement” as defined by M. Bonine (pp. 182-85) after the case of Yazd prevails: The major central place or primary city dominates minor towns and concentrates the bulk of commercial and artisan activities in its *bāzār* (on urban *bāzārs* see above). The more limited regional influence of Afghan towns may account for the greater importance of weekly *bāzārs* in that country. The



various regional networks of weekly markets in Iran and Afghanistan differ from one another in extent, antiquity, and spatiotemporal organization.

The most firmly established form of periodic *bāzār* is certainly the one observed in the Caspian lowlands of Iran (Figure 8) and especially in the central plain of Gīlān (Thorpe, 1978 and 1979; Bazin, 1980, II, pp. 152-56), where weekly *bāzārs* (*bāzār-e haftagī*) are part of a particularly long tradition. As early as 1698 Père de la Maze (1838, p. 363) mentions the “famous Tuesday market of Kaskar” (i.e., Gaskar, the afterward ruined center of the khanate of Gaskar), which “attracted a stupendous crowd” in a hundred shops clustered around a caravansary, apart from the residence of the khan standing on the opposite bank of the river. Fraser (pp. 225-26) went through the markets of “Tooloo Bazar” (Tūlam, now Jom‘a Bāzār), “Kishmah” (Kasmā) and “Teregoram” (Ṭāher Gūrāb), which still exist today, and noticed that “Tooloo Bazar is one of these numerous places in Gheelān where markets are held on some days of the week, and gather then the peasants of the neighbouring villages. On the other days, only empty sheds can be seen there.” The inventories of markets given by Melgunof and half a century later by Rabino (pp. 64-65) show a network of *bāzārs* that is a little denser than today’s (Thorpe, 1979, p. 96). Between 1915 and 1973, the number of marketplaces decreased from 47 to 36. This looser locational spacing probably reflects the better transport facilities and the growing influence of the permanent trading centers of the main cities. In fact, weekly *bāzārs* are no longer held in the two major towns of Gīlān, Rašt and Lāhījān, but they are still present in all the other towns, and if several markets have disappeared in the southern part of the Safīdrūd delta, in Fūmanāt and along the coast of Ṭāleš, new markets have been created as well, such as Hendekāla, Nowkāla, and Zīda in the late 1960s, which proves the vitality of this economic and social institution.

Gīlānī markets are held once a week, twice a week in the most densely populated part of the central delta. The dispersal of market days throughout the week allowed the development of market cycles with close temporal synchronization (though not so perfect as the cycles observed by B. Oettinger, pp. 19-24, in western Anatolia). Everywhere, the market square is surrounded with rows of permanent shops, but these reach their full degree of activity on market days, beside the stands of itinerant traders; these are mostly Gilak, also Ṭāleš and Turks from Kalkāl in western Gīlān (see a detailed description of the Saturday *bāzār* in Māsāl in ‘Abdolī, pp. 74-87 and photos 23 to 67). Beside its economic function, the Gīlānī market has very important social functions



(Kosravī, 1976 and 1977), which play a great role in its vitality: the peasants attend those *bāzārs* not only to buy and sell goods but also to exchange information, to meet relatives or friends, to look for spouses, to watch mountebanks, or simply to enjoy the vivid atmosphere of the market.

Weekly markets exist in Māzandarān too (Thomson, 1976), but are more discontinuous (Figure 9). A wide gap, owing probably to the strong influence of Tehran, separates a small but coherent group of markets around Tonokābon (Šahsavār under the Pahlavis) from the dense and well-organized network of central Māzandarān, between Bābol and Sārī (Thomson, 1981, pp. 264-65). There are many fewer data available on the history of these *bāzārs* than in Gilān; Rabino (1928) mentions only three weekly *bāzārs*, in Mīr Bāzār (south of Mašhadsar/Bābolsar), Bārforūš (now Bābol), and ‘Alīābād (i.e., Qā’emšahr/Šāhī). More to the east, the two markets of Bandar-e Torkaman (formerly Bandar-e Šāh, Monday) and Āq Qaḷ‘a (Pahlavī Dež under the Pahlavis, Thursday) are very important meeting points expressing the unity of the Ja‘farbāy Turkmen. In both places, itinerant sellers gather their horse-drawn carriages (*gārī*) around the wooden permanent shops. The market in Bandar-e Torkaman is of peculiar importance, with specialized “streets” (rows of stalls) for the wool trade and carpet trade and a very impressive livestock market (C. Bromberger, personal communication).

In spite of the proximity of Tabrīz, two cycles of weekly *bāzārs* are still active in the subcenters surrounding the plain of lower Ājīčāy, in the western part of Azarbaijan (Figure 10), while other markets more to the east toward Bostānābad have declined since the improvement of the Tabrīz-Tehran road strengthened the commercial attraction of the capital of Azarbaijan (A. Nazarian, personal communication).

Elsewhere in Iran, weekly *bāzārs* are very rare, and rather specialized. In towns having a permanent *bāzār*, a livestock market may be held on appointed days of the week, for instance on Sunday in Salmās (formerly Šāhpūr) and on Saturday in Kermān (Thorpe, 1979, p. 83). Likewise, some big villages east of Ardabīl have a biweekly livestock market (Bazin, 1980, II, p. 159). Fishing in the straits of Hormoz and fruit and vegetable gardening in the coastal oases support an active Thursday market in the small town of Mīnāb (B. Raḥmānī, personal communication).

In Afghanistan (Grötzbach, 1976 and 1979), there is a sharp contrast between the northern and southern halves of the country (Figure 11). The higher



density of weekly *bāzārs* in northern Afghanistan is connected with their greater antiquity. A. Burnes (III, p. 8) noticed that holding weekly markets was a rule in Afghan Turkestan and in the adjacent emirates of Khiva and Bukhara, whereas the market day was an unknown thing in Kabul as well as in India. Toward 1900, more than twenty weekly markets were held, mostly twice a week, in northern Afghanistan, and only one more to the south, the Friday market of Sabzavār (now Šendand; Grötzbach, 1979, pp. 20-21 and map 32).

Nowadays weekly *bāzārs* in northern Afghanistan can be divided into three groups. From the center to the east nearly all the markets are held on the same two days, Monday and Thursday, following the rhythm of Tašqorġān, the former major trading center (Centlivres), and other big towns such as Qondūz and Mazār-e Šarīf. This synchronism forbids the rotation of traders between several markets and expresses the fragmentation of this rather densely populated region in small units focusing on relatively autonomous urban centers. The main exception to this rule results from the adaptation of Friday markets to the rest day of the factories in the two industrial towns of Pol-e Kōmrī and Baġlān(-e) Šaṅʿatī. A similar pattern can be observed in north-western Afghanistan: All markets, held on Sunday and Wednesday, follow the rhythm of the cereals and livestock markets in Herat, the regional metropolis. Between these two areas, the region around Maymana has developed a system of *bāzārs* with various market days, bound to one another in organized rotations.

Another cyclic system of weekly markets has recently formed in the Kabul-Panjšēr basin north of Kabul, but the network of weekly *bāzārs* remains quite elementary in all other parts of eastern and southern Afghanistan. The few markets existing there are all Friday markets, either isolated or clustered in small groups around Jalālābād and to the west of Qandahār.

Bāzārs with an annual periodicity exist too in Iran and Afghanistan, but available data are too scarce to allow an overview. These annual markets, e.g., the Ḥasan Rezā Bāzār at the end of summer in Jūybār near Qā'emšahr/Šāhī, the “moon feast *bāzār*” of Šīrgāh in Māzandarān toward the end of July (ʿAbdolī, p. 64), or the Nowrūz *bāzārs* in Mazār-e Šarīf and Ḥazrat-e Emām Šāḥeb, which could last up to two months in the 13th/19th century (Grötzbach, 1976, p. 15), are generally bound to religious or popular feasts, and their social significance exceeds their economic importance.



Seasonal bāzārs. The great importance of pastoral life (nomadism and semi-nomadism, as well as pastoral migrations of villagers) in the Iranian world should have favored the development of temporary markets on winter and summer grazing lands of the herders. But, contrary to neighboring Anatolia where such seasonal *bāzārs* remain quite active in the whole Pontic range, they can be seen only in a few regions such as western Alborz, Baḳtīārī land, or central Afghan mountains. Their scarcity reflects once again the heavy weight of cities in the commercial network: In most pastoral areas, there are no intermediate forms of trade between the urban *bāzārs* and itinerant peddlers (*dowragard*) and livestock buyers (*čūbdār*), who often come from towns themselves. For instance, the Šāhsevan nomads attend the *bāzārs* of Sarāb, Meškīnšahr, and Ardabīl when they are summering on Mount Sabalān, whereas urban cheese makers come and stay on their winter pastures in Moḡān to process milk on the spot (Schweizer, pp. 98-100, 129). Likewise, the *bāzār* of Hamadān serves the Turkoševand and Yārīmtoglū when they are in their summer camps on the Alvandkūh (Ehlers), and that of Shiraz the Qašqāī and other nomads of the Fārs.

The most spectacular of these seasonal *bāzārs* are the “nomadic *bāzārs*” of central Afghanistan studied by K. Ferdinand (1962 and 1978; see also Jentsch, pp. 169). In the province of Ġōr, the three *bāzārs* of Gomāb (locally pronounced Gomaο), Abul (visited by Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, 1954), and Čarās respectively gathered more than 300, nearly 150, and about 60 tents in June-July, 1960; all had livestock markets where thousands of sheep changed hands and numerous retail “tent-shops” selling all kinds of goods. They serve the local population, i.e., Fīrōzkōhī and Tājīk in Gomāb and Čarās and Taymanī in Abul, and western Dorrānī or “Durrvanized” Afghan nomads who have set up their summer camps in this Āymāq area. But nearly all the traders are East Afghan trading nomads, chiefly Aḡmadzay from the Gardēz-Ḳōst area. They come thence in caravans through Hazarajāt where they hold short-term *bāzārs*. These nomadic *bāzārs* result from the conjunction of pastoral expansion of Pashtun into the central mountains of Afghanistan and commercial expansion of eastern Pashtun from east to west. These trading nomads had at first created a single tent *bāzār* in Kermān in Hazarajāt, under the authority of a leader called *mīr*. Kermān fell into decay about 1929-30 while the present-day *bāzārs* began to grow more in the west, in the remotest mountains whence they will probably disappear in their turn with the gradual extinction of caravan traffic.



In another isolated mountain district, the northwestern end of Alborz, the summer *bāzārs* of Ṭāleš (Bazin, 1977) are more ancient, being bound to a deep-rooted indigenous pastoral life. They differ from one another in their location and structure (Figure 12). In central Ṭāleš the *bāzārīs* are integrated in villages or summer camps, whereas those in the south are small detached trading centers, together with the little town of Māsūla (Bazin, 1980, II, pp. 162-67), which serves in summer part of the adjacent districts of Ṭārom-e ‘Olyā and Kalkāl. In all these summer *bāzārs*, a great proportion of the traders are Turks from the villages of Ardabīl and Kalkāl.

In other regions, trading centers with marked seasonal variation in activity (just like Māsūla) can be found instead of actual seasonal *bāzārs*. For instance the small *bāzārs* of Āsīābar, Deylamān, Kelīšom, or ‘Omām in southeastern Gīlān reach their full activity only in summer when the surrounding grazing lands are crowded (Bazin and Bromberger, p. 94 and map 42). In central Zagros, several *bāzārs*, have been created in the 1340s Š./1960s in order to serve the Baḳtīārī nomads, in Lālī and Īḍa when they are wintering in *garmsīr* or in Ardal and Čelgerd when they are encamped in their summer quarters (*yeylāq*). The population of this last village thus increases from 40 families in winter to 520 in summer, including many *dokāndār* (shopkeepers) coming from Čahār Maḥāl(l), Isfahan, or Kūzestān (Ehmann, pp. 116-18; Digard, pp. 20-21). Further information about seasonal commercial activities is still missing for a great part of Iranian tribal areas.

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