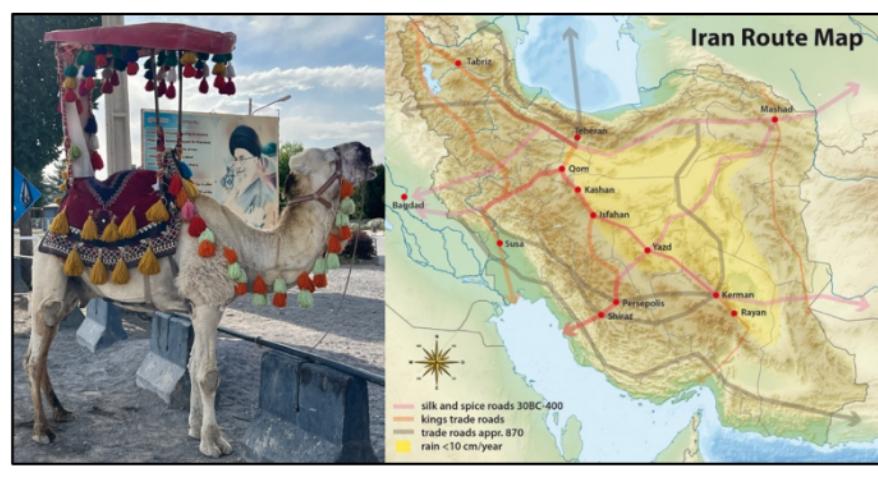


bazaar -1- Iran

2022

We set off to explore Iran with a city guide we had compiled ourselves. Iran is a huge country, covering an area nearly forty times bigger than the Netherlands with a population five times bigger, and with an impressive history that goes back to the Persian Empire. We went in search of the point when urban development changed from introvert to extrovert, when modernisation took off. We wandered around numerous bazaars and took rests in countless mosques. We visited citadels and gardens, and even the archaeological remains of cities. Cars raced past us and we became entangled in a web of authentic desires and hard reality. But what did we actually see?

That was the question that prompted this account of the Iranian bazaar and its chequered history. Based on the literature and our own observations, we give a concise account of the bazaar as a spatial entity and the factors that have influenced this, illustrated with numerous drawings and photographs. This article is Part 1 of a series we are publishing on LinkedIn, and which can also be found on the website www.kurbin.nl/bazaar.



The bazaar is a Persian invention that was closely connected with the silk roads that arose before the Common Era. The 'Iran Route Map' shows both the first silk and spice roads and the royal and trade routes that developed later. These were the routes used for trade between China and India on the one hand and Europe and Africa on the other. The Persian Empire, which was much larger than modern-day Iran, occupied a highly strategic

position mid-way along these routes. The cities we will be discussing in this series are also shown in the ‘Iran Route Map’.

The usual means of transport back then was the camel: not fast, but well able to cope with the intense desert heat. Nowadays, camels are only found in Iran as tourist attractions.



The derivation of the word ‘bazaar’

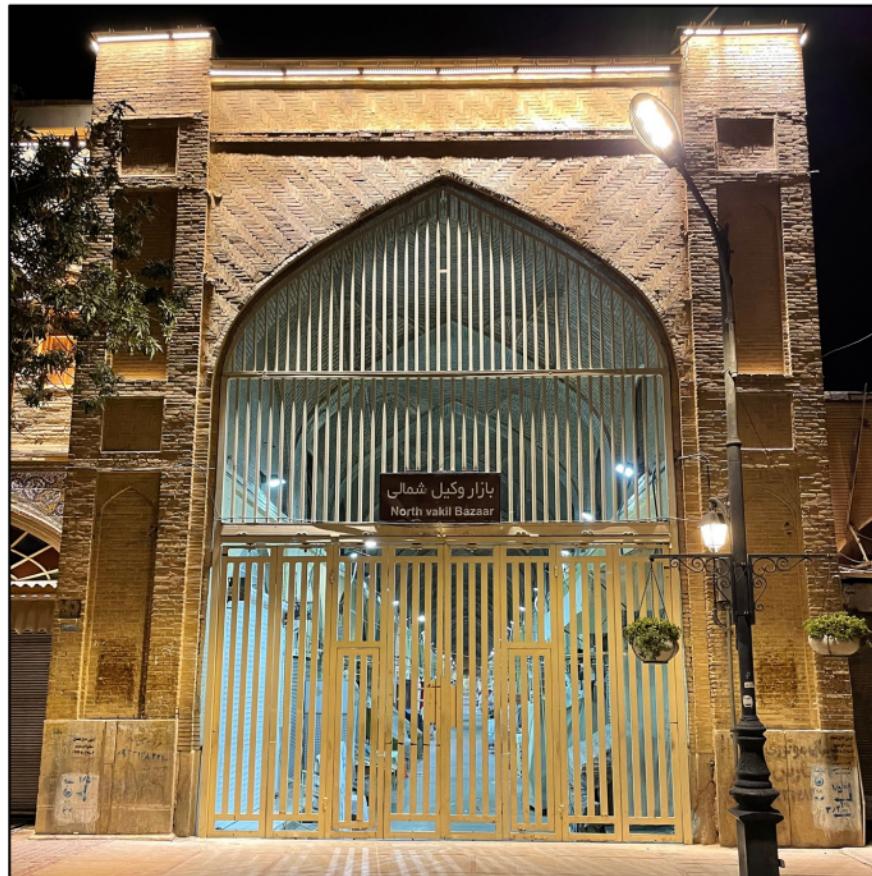
The word ‘bazaar’ is derived from ‘vakar’, which means a busy and important site, or a site where traders gather. In the open air, it should be noted, as bazaars did not have a permanent roof at this early stage. At most, a cloth canopy might be put up to protect traders from the bright sun.

These days, bazaars look like a covered shopping street, a bright pageant of colour, people and a wide variety of goods. It is hard to remember the bazaar started out as a meeting place for traders and the city’s residents. It developed into the city’s commercial, cultural, political and religious centre.



The bazaar has always been a kind of hub for the city’s inhabitants, a place where trade and economic activity was concentrated, but also the site of religious activities, cultural exchanges between traders from different countries, political debates and communication and media. It was a ‘city within a city’, you could say, where the various guilds and occupations rubbed shoulders with one another. This led to a hierarchical segmentation:

the rich and powerful merchants at the top, followed by the religiously oriented wholesalers who had contacts with other cities, then the conservative retailers and the dealers with their expertise in contracts, moneymen, secretaries who could read and write, warehousemen and finally the porters. The bazaar has a reputation for being a conservative and religiously inclined community because of its close links with mosques and Koran schools. See Parts 4 and 5 on the spatial position occupied by mosques.



Various individuals were responsible for security and keeping the peace in the bazaar. The most important such person was the law enforcement agent appointed by the governor. He worked on the basis of the Shariah. Then there was the guard, the bazaar policeman, the tax inspector, the keeper of the keys who locked and unlocked the entrance to the bazaar, and the official who made sure everyone behaved properly and who gave assistance to the poor.

In the book *The House of the Mosque* by Kader Abdolah, the main character is the head of the bazaar, a kind of cross between a merchant, wholesaler and keeper of the keys as described above. In spatial terms, the bazaar housed not just shops but also storage spaces, businesses, caravanserais (or khans) where traders and their camels could rest, one or more mosques, Koran schools (madrasas) and bathhouses (hammams). It was a kind of 'city within a city'.

Next... Bazaar 2 – City