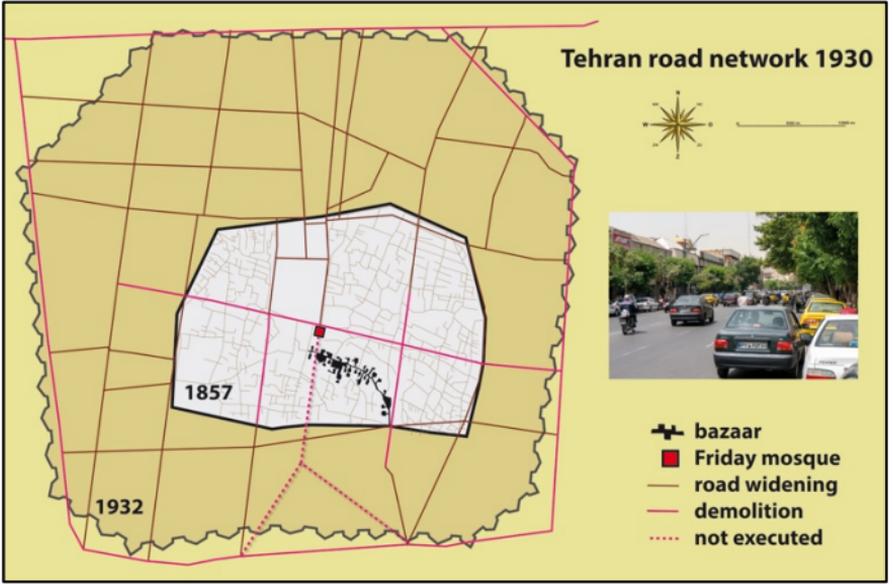


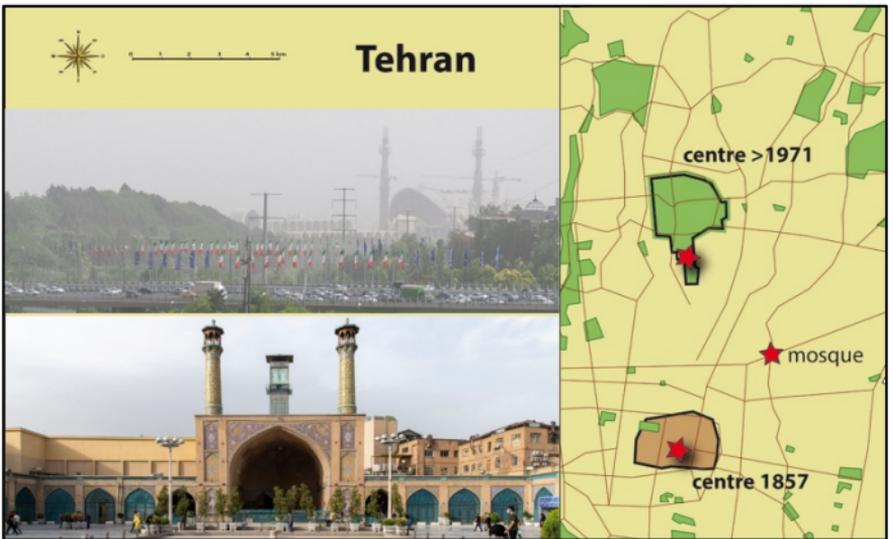


Dutch mosques often have ethnic shops located in the vicinity, sometimes with names like ‘bazaar Istanbul’ or ‘bazaar Marrakesh’, reflecting their preferred city. It would seem mosques and shops are connected in some way. In his book *The House of the Mosque*, the Iranian refugee and author Kader Abdolah describes the close bond between the bazaar and the mosque. The head of the bazaar, who lives next to the mosque with the imam, plays a key role. In the past, this close relationship between the bazaar and the mosque gave the bazaar a powerful cultural and political position, which could cause difficulties for the government. A good example of this comes from Tehran. When Reza Kahn, also known as Reza Shah, came to power in 1925, he wanted to modernise the capital. At the time, the population of Tehran was only 200,000 (it is now about 12 million). He had the city walls demolished and drew up plans for a road network that involved widening and opening up routes in the city centre. To achieve this, about 30 per cent of the buildings would have to be flattened. It looked as if the great bazaar — or at least part of it — would suffer the same fate. But that never happened. The north-south route in question would require demolition not only of part of the bazaar but also the old Imam Khomeini mosque, a Friday mosque.

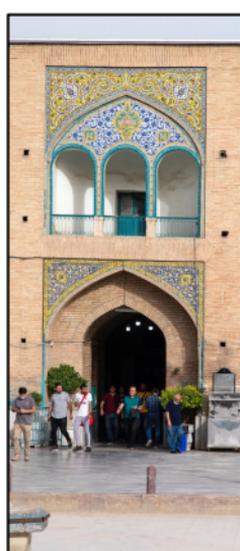
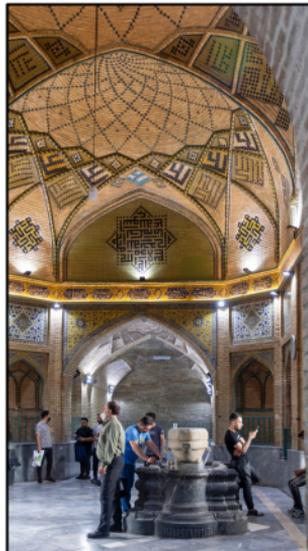
After considerable commotion, the bazaar and the mosque saw their joint protest rewarded with the government’s retreat. The demolition to make way for the new road never materialised. The drawing below shows the city walls that were knocked down completely in 1857 and 1932.



Tehran subsequently grew so much that in 1971 Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, decided to build a new city centre about five kilometres to the north of the old centre; see the drawing below. That was also never implemented because of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. What was built was a gigantic mosque, an additional Friday mosque, the Imam Khomeini Mosalla. This mosque stands alone as a separate monument in a large park, rather than being embedded in a bazaar as was the case with the old mosque.



The old Friday mosque, which is somewhat hidden from sight, can be accessed not only via the bazaar but also from the busy public shopping street. First you pass through a gate (see the photos from left to right), then you walk down stairs to a courtyard before entering an impressive hall where you can wash your hands. You pass through another gate to reach the mosque square, where you are surrounded by open space. Iranian mosques generally consist of four vaulted halls positioned crosswise around a square. The square is open to all. With their running water and toilets, mosques also contribute to the neighbourhood's social wellbeing.



The new Friday mosque, far from being secluded, towers above the city and is surrounded by busy roads. It can only really be accessed by car and there are no built-up areas surrounding it, certainly no bazaar or residential districts. This mosque is evidence of the power of religion — the mosque no longer needs to be embedded in a bazaar.

On our travels, we saw new mosques built as solitary monuments all over the country. We found that rather strange given that only 1.4 per cent of the people in Iran attend Friday prayers. At least, that is what it says in *A History of Iran*, the book by Michael Axworthy.

**Next... Bazaar 5 – Yazd mosque**