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bazaar -7- modern times

2022

The bazaar started as a busy meeting point for traders in the open air and evolved into an introvert 'city within the city', see 'Bazaar 1'. During the modernisation of Iran under the rule of Reza Shah (1925-1941), cities expanded along straight streets.



But it was not long before the railways made their mark. Between 1927 and 1938, Reza Shah had railway lines built to spur industrialisation. Mechanised carpet-weaving factories in easily accessible industrial parks formed stiff competition for wholesalers dealing in handwoven carpets in the bazaar, to give an example. Urban populations grew rapidly as workers migrated to the city from far and wide. In the same period, a new national law made it easier to widen streets and plan roads that cut through built-up areas. To cap it all, in 1951 the oil industry was nationalised, allowing a rise in prosperity and bringing car ownership (with cheap local petrol) within reach of all. The cities were bursting at the seams. Municipalities drew up modern expansion plans with grids of straight roads as in Western countries. Plans were made for roads cutting through the labyrinthine historical centres and leading outwards to the new expansion districts. Some bazaars were cut in two.



The new Qiam Street in Yazd

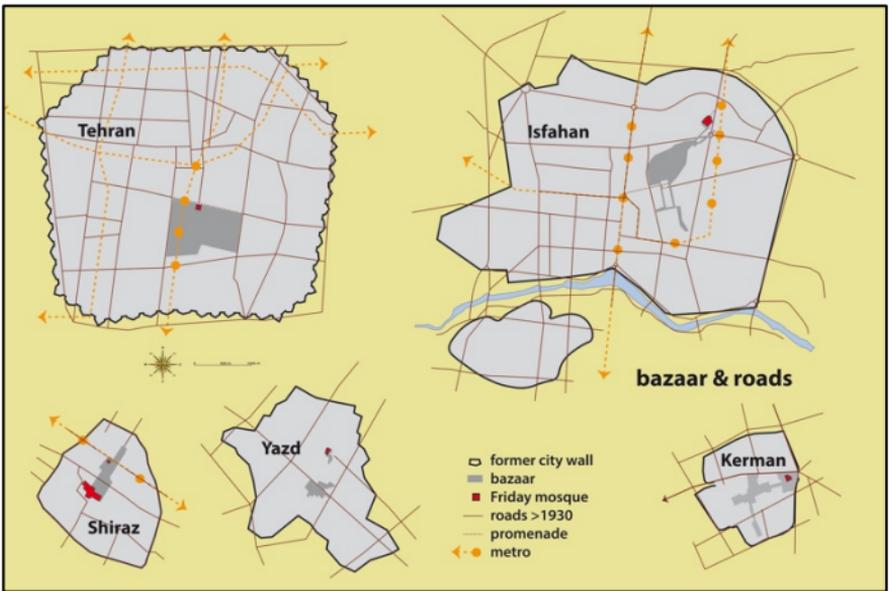
This modernisation of Iran's cities inevitably had an effect on the bazaars. In 'Bazaar 5' we reported that a straight street running right through the great bazaar of Yazd (see the photo above) had little effect on the functioning of the mosques and Koran schools. But the situation was different for the shops. The barrier effect meant the shops to the south of this street suffered. Traditional crafts (see the photo below) lagged behind while the shops on the opposite side flourished.



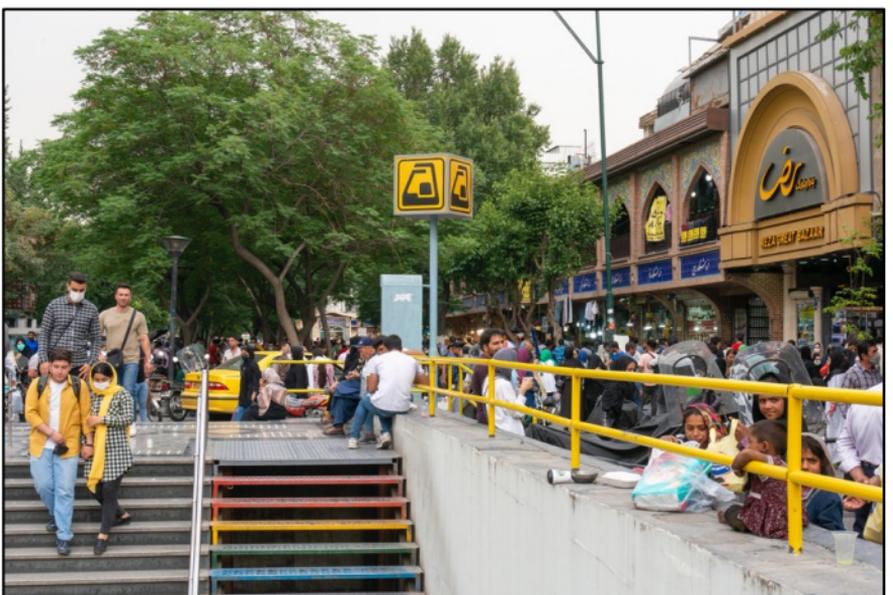
A similar plan for a through road in Tehran did not stand a chance. As we saw in 'Bazaar 4', the bazaar community refused to allow it to go ahead. In Kerman, these road plans took a distinctive form. The expansion in this city was mainly to the west, which meant the historic centre was no longer located in the geographical mid-point. As a result, the radial roads leading to it became filled with shops, businesses, institutions and offices. The radial roads merge close to the centre, where they turn into one long shopping street with lots of luxury shops (see the drawing below). It will not come as a surprise that the bazaar in the historic centre found this a problem.



Over time, metros were built in addition to the road network. That was an inevitable development. The roads in the centre of Tehran became so gridlocked that the government felt it had no option but to build a metro network. After the first line opened in 1999, it was soon followed by more. Other million-plus Iranian cities followed soon. Of the cities we visited, the two former capitals Isfahan and Shiraz both had metros — see the drawing below.



It is difficult to say what influence the metro has had on bazaar visitor numbers. It was only in Tehran that we saw a lot of bazaar visitors using the metro, for the simple reason that there was a metro stop next to the bazaar entrance. See the photo below.



What we can say is that the various cities that built a metro took the opportunity to create pedestrian-friendly public spaces in the vicinity of the bazaar.

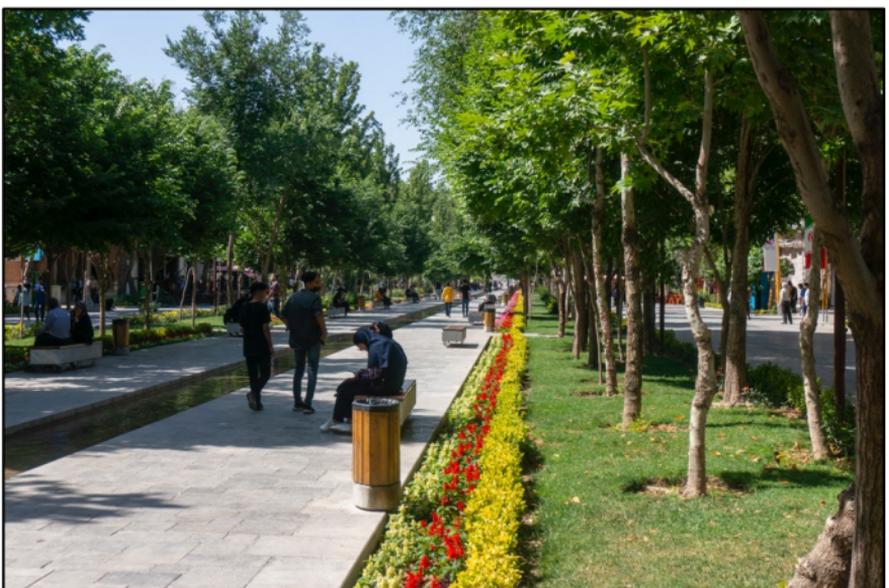
For example in Shiraz (see below), a promenade was built on the roof of a combined road underpass and metro tunnel.



New promenade in Shiraz

In Isfahan, where the metro is somewhat further removed from the bazaar, the planners opted for a green environment with a water channel running down the middle towards the river, a place where locals like to spend time in the evenings; see the photos below. The exuberant greenery of both this promenade and the various parks and avenues also serves as a link with the bazaar, which starts with the lovely green square of Shah Abbas I (see 'Bazaar 6').

It looks as if the disastrous modern road networks are making way in some places for pedestrian-friendly public spaces that tie in with the bazaars. Whether that is sufficient to halt the decline in the bazaar remains to be seen.



New promenade in Isfahan



River and bridge as meeting area in Isfahan

Next... Bazaar 8 – decline