Continuity and Change in the City of Yazd

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The industrial revolution and modernism not only played an important role in the transformation of eastern and western cities, but also caused changes in the spatial organisation and the formative elements of the city. In this report, Yazd has been studied as a historical-cultural desert city and as a city with highly complicated traditional elements as well as large areas of new development.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION OF THE CITY OF YAZD

Yazd is located in the centre of Iran, to the east of Isfahan and south of Kavir Lut, at an altitude of twelve hundred metres above sea level. The population of the city numbers about four hundred thousand and the climate is desert and semi-desert with hot, dry summers and hot, cold winters. Up until the seventeenth century it had, though, enjoyed a pleasant climate with green countryside and forests linking it to Kerman; however, due to atmospheric changes and the regular use of land, it slowly changed into a dry and infertile desert area. Lack of rain in the region means there is no suitable vegetation and farmers have no alternative but to use deep wells and subterranean canals to provide water for their lands. Yazd is mentioned in important books such as Masalek and Malek, Souratolarz and the Travels of Marco Polo (1272).

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE CITY OF YAZD

The enclosed part of the city of Yazd was developed in different stages up until the end of the fourteenth century. According to the records, before Islam and during the Achaemenid period (550 to 330 BC) the city was known as Issatis and was located where Yazd stands today, although no valid and reliable documents have survived. According to another historical record, the development of Yazd goes back to the time of Alexander, who founded a prison here and the city was called Kasah (both recorded in Afshar, 1966). According to another historical report in the History of Yazd by Iraj Afshar (1995), the city was developed by a Sassanid prince named Yirdjerd and might have been named after him. In the seventh century AD, during the time of the third caliph of Islam (Othman), the city fell to Muslim tribes. At that time, Yazd was equal in importance to Agda, Meybod, Hefed and Fahranj. It can be said that the development and first expansion of Yazd into a prestigious and integrated city dates back to the eighth century AD with the construction of massive castles and gates around the city, creating a new identity. Like many other cities in Iran, the
The irregular growth and development of the city was one of the main factors that caused a lack of efficiency in urban management. Gradually, greater focus was placed on inner development, aiming at achieving the goals of economic and social improvement in the traditional city. In this stage, through identifying suitable areas, some parts of the traditional city were repossessed by governmental and private groups, leading to a significant change in the city's development pattern. The stages in the transfer of the city centre required different development plans from other Iranian cities, such as Isfahan, Shiraz, Kerman, and Tabriz. Yazd did not develop much during the Safavid dynasty (AD 1501-1736) and few buildings were built. A more complex example was the Shah Tahmasb complex (pl. 17) in the north of the city, where changes were made to the structural elements of the city, but unlike the city, the city walls and fortifications were preserved. The Amir Chakhmagh complex (pl. 13) was built in the centre of the city, and its immediate surroundings were transformed into an active trading centre.

Despite the new street construction in the old part of the city during the Pahlavi period (1925-1979), the importance and core value of Yazd remained intact. Gradually, through the process of urbanization, the city development patterns changed, and new buildings were constructed in the city centre. The Islamic Revolution (1979) and the conditions that governed it intensified this process:

- changes in economic and social conditions so that the traditional city was preserved only within the scope of its valuable historical elements. Although attention to the old structure of the city was increasing in the theoretical discourse and among specialized groups, new construction continued.

A DETAILED PLAN FOR THE PRESERVATION OF OLD YAZD

A Detailed Plan for the city was drawn up in two stages with the first covering the central area (the Fahadan block and peripheral blocks) and the second, the remaining sections. The proposal aimed to coordinate and match changes to the cultural-historical value of given zones.

NAGHIBOL-ASHRAF ALLEY

The plan calls for improved car (and truck) access in order to facilitate the use of modern construction techniques in the area and also to directly improve the welfare of local residents. For several reasons, less than ten percent of the changes planned in the communication network were executed.

THE RESTORATION OF IMPORTANT BUILDINGS

The restoration of significant buildings was part of the process involving both changes and continuity in the traditional urban fabric. Although, at the outset, the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO) and the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Development played an effective role in the development of this objective, this undertaking has currently expanded to include both governmental and private participation. A number of historical residential areas have been transformed into administrative spaces. By restoring the Ali Khaneh Lari (pls. 14) and then expanding work to rebuild it located around it, the ICO has restored a vast area. Establishing the Faculty of Architecture has meant both an educational utilization of the cultural environment and a huge increase of interest through the students' movement.

Other examples of adaptive reuse include the transformation of a house into an educational establishment for teaching the Koran to children, changing a historic public bath into a restaurant and tea house, transforming the ruins of a historical caravanserai and front yard of the Ziaieh School into a public park, and changing a number of evacuated residential units into public passages by maintaining the structure and improving the Abolmaali block.

PROJECT STAGE

The regular growth and development of the city was one of the main factors that caused a lack of efficiency in urban management. Gradually, greater focus was placed on inner development, aiming at achieving the goal of economic and social improvement in the traditional city. In this stage, through identifying suitable areas, some parts of the traditional city were repossessed by governmental and private entities. The Islamic Revolution (1979) and the conditions that governed it intensified this process.
Environmental authorities (Housing and Urban Development Department and Maskansazan Company), providing residences for housing applicants. Despite identifying and defining many potential projects, only one has been fully executed and another is under construction. Obviously, evaluating these experiences will be of high importance in reevaluating the theoretical basis for this work.

TRADITIONAL CITY MANAGEMENT STAGE

The goals of this phase are:

• to set long- and short-term plans, strategies and policies and move towards provincial/national agreements;
• to determine and define the status of the development of the city and province;
• to coordinate executive systems and determine the responsibility of each one in achieving the predicted goals;
• to encourage resident participation in discussions, decision making and execution;
• to improve financial resources through national and local credits as well as popular participation and attracting investments in different economic sectors that would be compatible with traditional city management. A council for restoring historic buildings in the province and a guidance council have been created.

Although all the expectations arising from this discourse have not yet been fulfilled, it is fervently hoped that it can stimulate the necessary changes for continuing to improve life in the traditional city.

For illustrations of Yazd, the reader is referred to pls. 7, 10, 11 and 13-22.
6. Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation (ICHO) and the Urban Development and Revitalisation Corporation (UDRC), New Life for Old Structures programme, various locations, Iran, 1992-ongoing.
10. Amir Chakhmagh Complex (15th century), Yazd, Iran.
11. Masjid Jami’ (14th century) in the background, Yazd, Iran.
12. Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO) and the Urban Development and Revitalisation Corporation (UDRC), New Life for Old Structures programme; Modjtahedzadeh House (19th century), Isfahan, Iran, restored in 1992.
13. Badgirs (wind catchers), Yazd, Iran.
15. Masjid Jami' (14th century), Yazd, Iran.
16. Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation (ICHO) and the Urban Development and Revitalisation Corporation (UDRC), New Life for Old Structures programme, Hammam Khan (19th century), Yazd, Iran, restored in 1997.
17. A general view of Yazd, Iran.
18. The courtyard of Masjid Jami' (14th century), Yazd, Iran.
19. Amir Chakhmagh Complex (15th century), Yazd, Iran.
20, 21. Masjid Jami' (14th century), Yazd, Iran.
22. Mahmoodi House (19th century), Yazd, Iran.