Dardasht is the old quarter north of the bazaar area and west of the Friday Mosque. It has been brutally cut in half by the new Abdorrazzaq Avenue. This fact, together with a standard of services which is low when compared to new development in the suburbs, has caused a gradual exodus of the population and the abandonment of the traditional courtyard house. As a first step in preventing further deterioration, the author of this article, who is an architect and consultant to Organic (the Master Planners of Isfahan), intends to establish a field unit by opening an office in a disused caravanserai. Her project is based on participation by local inhabitants and on the assumption that financial aid will be forthcoming not only from private philanthropic organisations, but also from the Ministry of Housing in Tehran, which will allocate the funds formerly earmarked for new peripheral development, now no longer permitted, to a major rehabilitation programme within the old city.

When Sheikh Bahai and his enlightened colleagues at the court of Abbas I planned the Maidan-i-Shah and the royal city, they deliberately avoided interfering with the older medieval fabric. Because of this preference for an additive process of attaching the new to the old, *regularisation,* such as Haussmann conceived for Paris, never suggested itself to the Safavid town-planners. It was only in the twentieth century that this drastic process was adopted in the development plans of Iranian towns. Sheikh Bahai's approach, so different to that of a Haussmann, remains the key to the problems which Isfahan and all medieval Iranian cities will have to solve.

Although the medieval quarters continued to grow and change during the whole of the Safavid period, they assumed an increasingly residential character by comparison with the official centre of government which developed in the new city. Whereas a quarter in the Middle Ages incorporated all public buildings, including religious monuments, the Safavid city created a division between official space (both secular and religious) and residential space. Thus seventeenth-century development in the old quarters consisted mainly of houses which fitted the existing forms and patterns of growth. With the exception of a residential area which was built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries according to Sheikh Bahai's plans, the old quarters survived as areas of private houses until the '40s of this century. Over a long period of time, therefore, the typology of the house remained essentially the same throughout the old city. Wherever there was contiguity in the urban structure, not only the house but every kind of building was characterised by a centralised ordered geometry from within and attached continuous shapes from without. One must add that although the walls which encircled the old city contained fields and gardens, the available urban space always remained closed and limited, like that of a European medieval town.

**Demolition: a break with tradition**

The demolition in the area around the Friday Mosque, which began immediately after the Second World War and which was intended to provide car access to the old quarters, has been provoking lively controversy ever since Isfahan became subject to a master plan and its consequences. Whereas the administrative authorities at both national and local level recognise that this type of action causes more problems than it solves, they nevertheless support systematically any project which is going to open up the traditional urban structure to the motor car. So important are the problems posed by the intensive and uncontrollable development of a city whose population is increasing at the rate of 7-15 per cent per annum and whose industrial activities have tripled in less than 10 years, that it seems desirable to examine in more detail some of the operations which

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*We mean by *regularisation*—a word borrowed from Haussmann—that form of critical planning whose explicit purpose is to regularise the dilapidated city, to disclose its new order by means of a pure, schematic layout which will diminish and prevent failures.* The Modern City: Planning in the 19th Century by Francois Choay, New York and London.
have been gutting the old quarters and the planning strategies to which these have given rise. Facing a process of westernisation in their use of space, both in a practical and in a formal sense, Iranians began gutting their historic city centres back in the '30s. No doubt among the reasons which encouraged this destructive process must be included the pressures resulting from the social and economic development which had been under way since the beginning of the twentieth century. The way in which these gutting operations are carried out has remained the same in all Iranian cities for more than 30 years. First, a straight road is imposed on the city in an arbitrary direction, cutting the main bazaar axis in two and passing usually near the Friday Mosque. Second, another straight road is cut at right-angles to the first, also passing through the old centre and forming a square at the point of intersection. Finally, a series of similar parallel roads are plotted and impose a gridiron layout over the whole city.

The need for access is always the argument used to justify these operations, whether by the municipality or by the people. For quite different reasons, the latter have for a long time suffered from inadequate services and amenities, and see in the gutting process a solution to their problems. The question of access, however, is only one aspect of a strategy which puts up the value of urban sites and encourages land speculation. The devastation which results from the cutting of modern roads through the traditional fabric most obviously affects the typical urban 'island' and almost automatically produces a radical change of typology in the house. The courtyard house, which answered the needs of the large family, including the production of food for home consumption, is also the form which is best suited to the arid and highly variable climate of Iran's desert regions. This type of urban cell has produced a morphology of the urban 'grain' which cannot be understood or protected unless the form of the basic cell and its gradual revival are first fully considered. The secondary circulation network of lanes, moreover, shows clearly the fundamental nature of the part played by the typology of the house in forming a system of connections. A cluster of houses, which is normally grouped around a long, narrow cul-de-sac, forms part of an urban 'island'. Though of an amorphous nature, such 'islands' are repeated all over the old quarters and show that the distances and relationships to the primary circulation routes are roughly the same everywhere. Each 'island' includes up to 20 houses and is defined by a 'ring' of little lanes. Nor is there anything fortuitous in the fact that each 'ring' forms part of the secondary network of lanes, and that these spread from the primary circulation routes into the urban fabric, providing access to the compact house clusters at more or less regular intervals.

The changing concept of a quarter

If the Islamic city, contrary to what is often assumed, is much more than the sum total of a number of autonomous urban units, it is nevertheless true that its social and morphological structure is essentially based on quarters (mahalleh), which are all alike but isolated from one another. Each quarter is based on a society of guilds which not only

3. Key plan: the tinted part represents the area shown in the plan below.

4. Plan showing part of Dardasht west of the Friday Mosque, with the main bazaar route running along its southern edge. The new Abdorrazzaq Avenue has severed both major and minor connections, and has contributed to the decline of the quarter. The area to be rehabilitated first borders the minor bazaar route north of Abdorrazzaq Avenue. (Scale 1:5000).
lives and works there, but is also responsible for running the local community's religious and secular institutions and for providing other public amenities. Each quarter consists not only of residential clusters, but also of one or more centres, where a mosque, a takieh (a place of reunion for religious purposes) and often a tomb will be found next to a water reservoir, shops and caravanserais. Here the religious and the secular constitute a single social reality and each urban element may be seen as an integral part of the total system.

The changes which have taken place within the political institutions of Iranian society in the twentieth century have resulted in weakening the religious organisation of the quarter and in increasingly replacing this organisation with the administrative organs of the state. The latter inevitably tend to operate at a national and political level. They are ineffective when it comes to the administration of cities either because they are by their nature centralised or because they lack any tradition of urban management. Thus, on the one hand, the quarter nowadays is deprived of its traditional form of organisation while, on the other, it has not yet acquired a new organisation nurtured and inspired by its inhabitants.

Much stress is laid in Iran on the obsolescence of a traditional culture and of attitudes to the formal use of space—arguments which have been used to explain the decline of life in the old quarters and, more generally, the forsaking of rich urban traditions. A closer look at the habits and forms of life in the modern, European-type house shows clearly that the formal use of space has changed very little. Families living in modern houses tend to go on using the hall, with its surrounding rooms and services, as a substitute for the central court. It is used for living, sleeping, eating and sometimes even for cooking, while the living room proper is reserved for special occasions and the bedrooms remain unused.

The function of public places, on the other hand, has changed completely. The structure of the quarter was always closely linked to public activities and to the cohesion resulting from the close relationship between religious and private life. Thus the process of obsolescence in the built heritage is due on the one hand to institutional changes in society and, on the other, to the commercial exploitation of urban land and property. The loss of identity in modern architecture—the absence of any feeling of neighbourhood in new housing, for example—is by now too familiar to need elaboration.

Deprived of its essential dynamism, and cut up furthermore by the new roads which introduce a violent change of scale, the quarter is left as an urban entity in the process or rapid deterioration. The theoretical starting point of any attempt at redefining the quarter and at planning the rehabilitation of the historic city centres must, therefore, consider the replacement of the old Moslem institutions by the institutions of modern Iran, which include municipal authorities, cultural centres, universities and other educational institutions.

5, a disused caravanserai situated on the minor bazaar route, which will become the cultural centre for the neighbourhood.

6, the minor bazaar route on either side of which the first rehabilitation work is proposed.
establishments. Because these are centralised, however, and do not operate at the level of the quarter, what is now urgently needed is the small-scale local operation with as much public participation as possible.

To consider the problem at a purely architectural level, moreover, will only result in the depopulation of the historic centres and in their transformation into dead, museum-like and so-called touristic areas. Thus the question of re-use, or of finding a new use, should always be regarded as a necessary complement to any restoration programme.

**Rehabilitation in Dardasht**

At Isfahan the durable quality of the two principal axes—the main bazaar route and the Chahar Bagh—which continue to form the dominant elements of the city's structure despite the cutting of new roads, has had the remarkable effect of preserving the old quarters more or less in their integrity. Their survival has been helped by a dense circulation network, which provides frequent connections to the main bazaar and by their sheer size, which has enabled each quarter to retain a degree of autonomy.

Dardasht is linked to the route of the main bazaar by the three axes of its local bazaars. Its eastern parts embrace the Friday Mosque and mark the border where Dardasht originally touched its neighbouring quarter of Jubareh. Today these two quarters are separated by Hatef Avenue, which was the first of the modern roads to be cut in Isfahan. Dardasht consists of four zones divided by ‘rings’, which are long, narrow street formations and all of which rejoin the main bazaar.

The public buildings of the quarter are located along the ‘rings’, while residential clusters fill the remaining space. One of these clusters, for example, consists of four houses giving on to a covered cul-de-sac, which is in effect the private road to this group of buildings. This disposition of houses behind a ‘ring’ is described in Iranian historiography as ‘the fortified roads’ which were barred with gates at night and guarded by watchmen. Nasser Khesrow, the thirteenth-century Iranian geographer, refers to an extensive residential zone behind the Friday Mosque which was underground and fortified street by street.

The rehabilitation proposals for Dardasht have been considered at two levels. First, there is the problem of the architectural heritage and the conservation of whole areas; and second, there is the need for the architects and planners carrying out the proposals to establish a relationship with the local population and to promote effective public participation. To avoid a stereotyped approach to the problem of rehabilitation, it was found essential to define the two main courses of action: to provide access and services; and to re-use existing buildings or find new uses for them by restoring, converting or even adding to them where required.

Access and services will both be provided by making the new roads into an infrastructure incorporating all the pipes, wires and parking facilities required by the local population. In this way full advantage will be gained from the new roads, the use of which will be rationalised. In this way, too, it might be possible to reconcile the open and rectilinear character of the new roads with the very different pattern of the traditional fabric which lies concealed behind. As for the mode of access to these interior regions, that will be a matter for treating each case on its own merit.

It will be important to insist on the administrative nature of the proposals, for they imply nothing less than the re-education of the local population regarding their urban heritage, as well as a search for new organisations, profoundly democratic, rooted in Islamic traditions and forms of participation, yet suited to the public life of an emancipated urban community.

To achieve the rehabilitation proposals it will be essential to turn away from theoretical planning or sociological models, and tackle the physical structure in situ, always ready to find different solutions for different problems. It will above all be essential to avoid any action whose chief aim, like the rehabilitation of the Marais, is to conserve or freeze
an image of the past. That is a sure way of losing the indigenous population to the suburbs and of condemning a quarter to representational uses. The intention in Dardaasht is to persuade the existing population to stay, to maintain residential buildings in residential use and to involve the local inhabitants in the restoration and rehabilitation work through an educational programme and with the help of an office which will be opened inside a disused caravanserai and which will operate as a kind of local architectural, sociological and environmental clinic.

9, domestic courtyard belonging to an adjoining house cluster.
10, the covered out-de-sae access.
11, courtyard of one of the two larger houses.
12, axonometric of a cluster of four houses (also shown in 7), with the courtyards and covered out-de-sae access tinted grey.