



REHABILITATION OF TABRIZ BAZAAR

Tabriz, Iran

In many Eastern countries, ancient bazaars still play a vital role in the community, as they have down the centuries, acting as major economic, social and cultural reference points and influencing the urban fabric and political life. As well as being one of the largest brick complexes in the world, Tabriz Bazaar is one of the oldest in the region. Covering 27 hectares with 5.5 kilometres of inner lanes and counting 5500 shopkeepers and 40 professional guilds, it is the largest covered bazaar in the world in terms of both size and trader numbers. Along with its shops, it includes a variety of functional spaces, such as caravanserais, *timcheh* (domed crossroad nodes), mosques, schools, bathhouses, public squares, gateways and outside green spaces bordering the river.

Settled since 2000 BC, Tabriz is the largest and most important city in the north-east of Iran, located on a vast plain at a high altitude, – surrounded by mountains on three sides, and a lake on the fourth – with a semi-arid climate of short summers and long cold winters. Its monumental Bazaar has signalled the city's greatness over the centuries as a crossroad of ancient civilisations, connecting east to west and north to south, from China to Europe and from Egypt to Russia. It was one of the great destinations along the Silk Road already in Ilkhanid times and many travellers, including Marco Polo, have written about the Bazaar's architectural glories, which enjoyed its heyday in the 16th century when the city was capital of the Safavid dynasty.

The present Bazaar is 230 or so years old, having been almost completely demolished by the disastrous earthquake of 1780 (indeed, ongoing archaeological excavations as part of this project reveal that the Bazaar met this fate a number of times in its long history). By the late 20th century, however, its brick buildings were crumbling due to decades of neglect, businesses were vacating and a local governor had scheduled it for demolition to make way for a new modern market. This situation began to be redressed in the mid-1990s under the auspices of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation (ICHTO) with the direct involvement of the traders in all decision-making. This resulted in a successful pilot restoration project that was decisive in winning over all 5500 shopkeepers to the advantages ensuing from an overall rehabilitation project that would conserve and revitalise the valuable heritage of the Bazaar.

After traditional self-management of the Bazaar had been firmly reinstated, a conservation master plan for the entire complex was drafted through

a bottom-up grassroots participatory process. ICHTO provided planning and technical assistance and ensured that restoration standards were met. A multi-disciplinary team was set up including engineers to advise on consolidating the stone foundations and reinforcing load-bearing walls and domes in light of Iran's seismic activity, and this remarkable effort of stakeholder coordination and collaboration to restore and bring back to life an essential part of the city could begin.

The sophisticated brickwork throughout – hallmark of the Bazaar – combines both structure and ornament and proved to be a challenging training ground for current experts in restoration who learned in the field from local masons as it was repaired, using traditional techniques. The unique vaulting and domes present intricate geometries and the domed nodal crossroads combine spatial importance with other space-covering geometries. Brick is used for walls, columns and arches too, as well as for the flooring of areas trading in the more expensive goods. As a material, it offers excellent thermal protection in both winter and summer while openings in vaults and domes (some acting as wind-catchers) provide dynamic airflow and sufficient natural light to interior spaces. In comparison with the amount of brick, wood is used more sparingly, mainly as a structural support – apart from majestic doors in the main gates.

Although such a complex will necessarily change over time in line with new requirements, these changes must be well integrated into the whole. For example, today, goods arrive in huge containers rather than in camel-size packs. Consequently areas were created to respond to this new need by placing delivery zones outside the Bazaar and away from its tiny streets, leaving the original inner open spaces for public planted gardens and courtyards. Conversely the random creation of additional mezzanines, hiding traditional ceilings, and the haphazard insertion in the past of concrete structures or utilities, such as air conditioning, into areas where shops or sections had collapsed had to be addressed. It was vital to maintain the Bazaar's highly efficient layout and circulation patterns, evolved over time to meet the needs of shopkeepers and customers through specialised linear streets and major nodal crossings, although gateways and entrances were more clearly identified to facilitate access and emergency routes were created to ease evacuation; new gates were also made, improving connections with the vehicular and pedestrian networks outside and permitting security points and fire service points to be included.

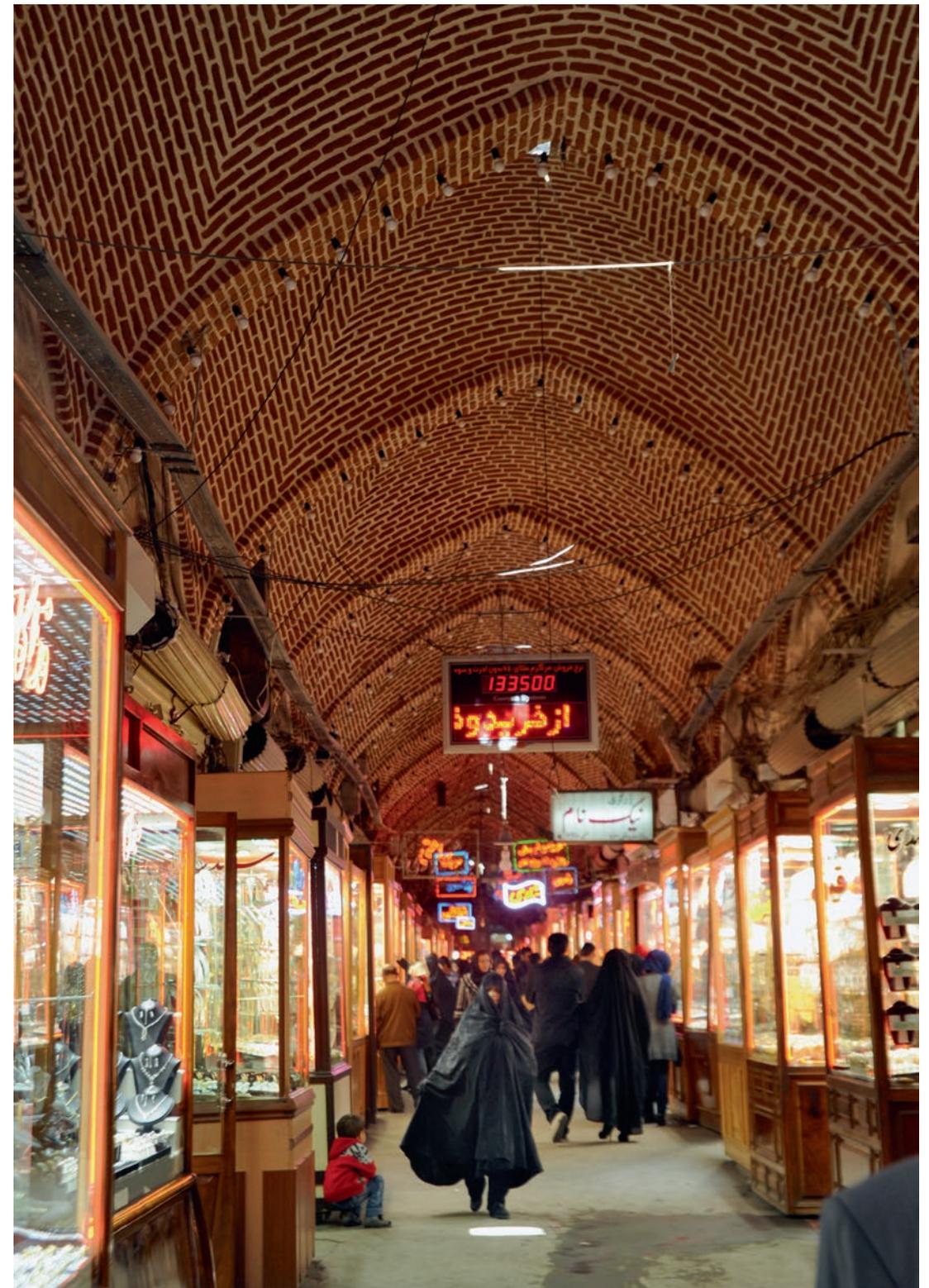
Today, the Bazaar is no longer a place of decaying disorder and insecurity but has once again claimed its position as the dynamic urban centre of the city of Tabriz; shopkeepers have returned; trades on the brink of disappearing have been revived; and the community gathers here in the evenings to socialise. And since being recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2010, it has earned additional international value that will attract foreign tourists.

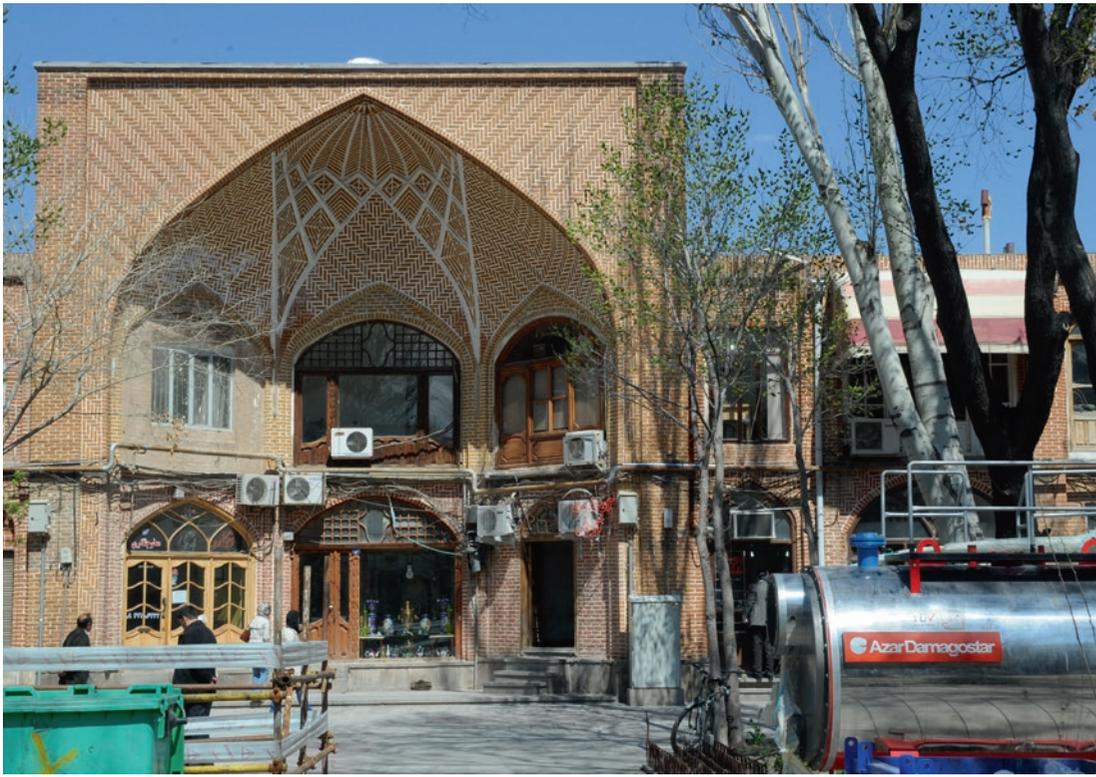


JURY CITATION

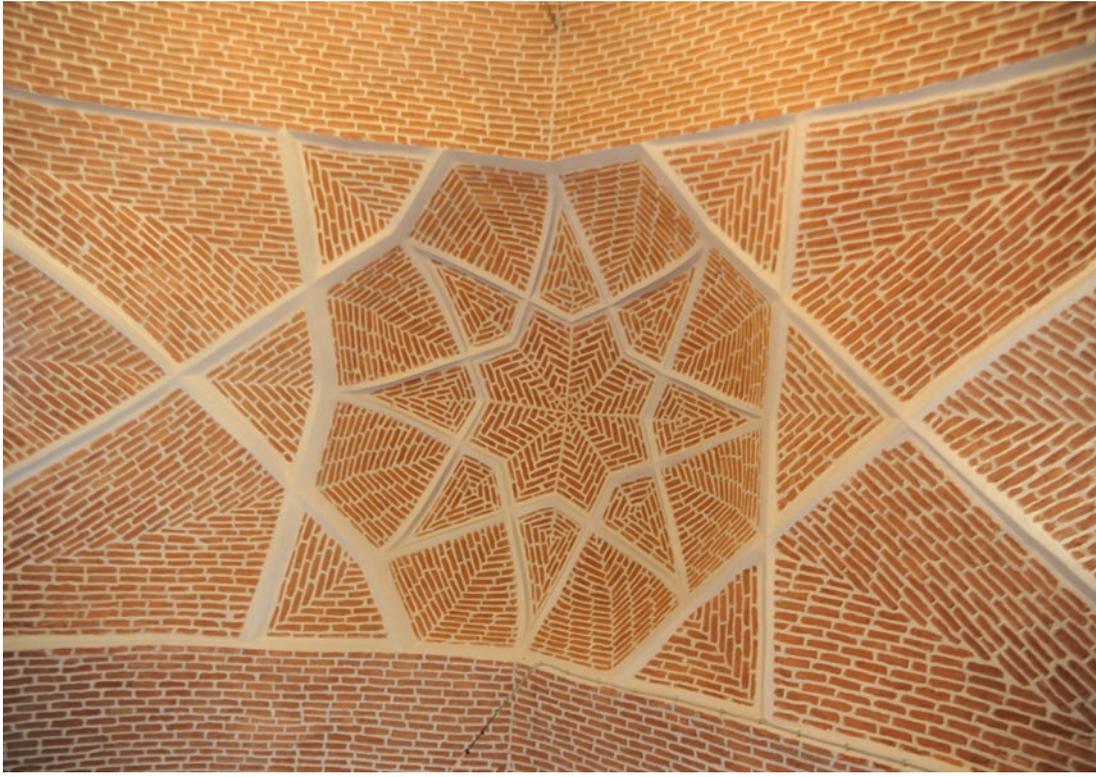
The Rehabilitation of Tabriz Bazaar, with its 5500 shops, is a remarkable example of stakeholder coordination and cooperation to restore and revitalise a unique structure. The architecture of the Bazaar is essentially brick: a singular monolithic material turned into structural and ornamental poetry. The principal expression is the unique vaulting, coordinating light, climate, structure and ornament. The structure that we see dates back 240 years but the site as a place of trade has its origins as far back as the 10th century. It is considered one of the largest brick complexes in the world. What the collaboration, under the direction of the design team, managed to achieve is to return to prominence a historic and living city artefact to the centre of the community's lives.

The project has contributed to the revival and transfer of lost building techniques and skills and has shed light on an important model of this essential everyday typology that challenges us about the quality of commercial space. It is a great reference and example of high-quality architecture and living urban fabric that is still in use as originally intended.

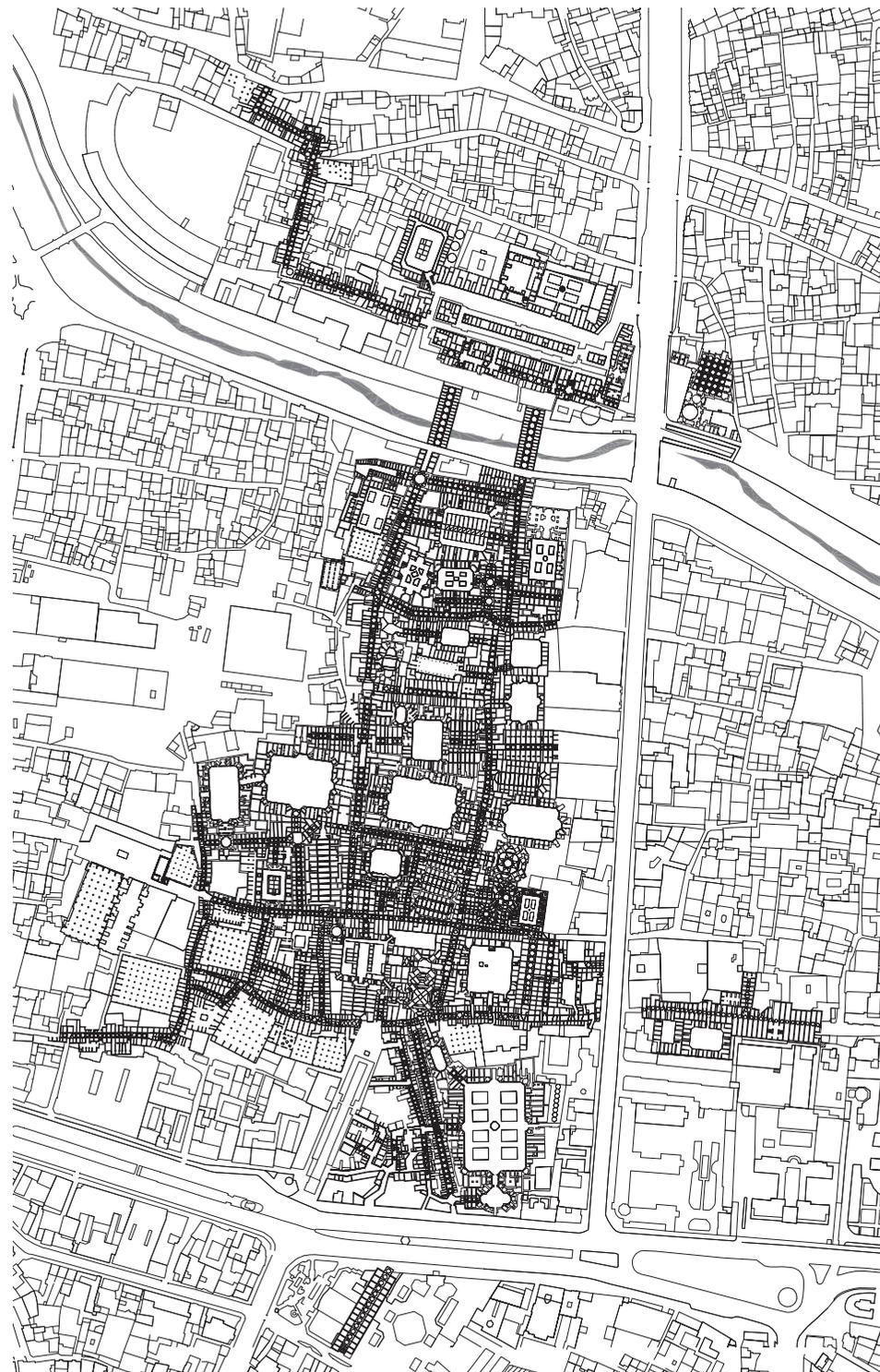












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Tabriz, Iran

CLIENTS

Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism
Organisation of East Azerbaijan Province,
Tabriz, Iran

Bazaar Community, Tabriz, Iran

COMMUNITY ORGANISERS

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Hosseini, Tabriz, Iran

ARCHITECT

Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism
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Tabriz, Iran:
Farhad Tehrani, director (1980s)
Abdoulrahman Vahabzadeh, director (1980–93)
Akbar Taghizadeh Asl, director (1993–2004)
Behrouz Omrani, Saed Hodayi, deputies
Hassan Ghorayshi, architect

CONSULTING ENGINEER

Sakhtab Consulting Engineers, Tehran, Iran

SITE ENGINEERS

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ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

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MASTER MASONS

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Jalil Abbasi, Allahverdi Ahmadpour, Tabriz, Iran

ADVISOR

Reza Memaran (1993–96), Tabriz, Iran

PROJECT DATA

Site area: 27 ha
Lane length: 5.5 km
Cost: n/a
Commission: 1994–ongoing
Occupancy: 2005–ongoing

IRAN CULTURAL HERITAGE, HANDICRAFTS AND TOURISM ORGANISATION

The establishment of the Iran Cultural Heritage Organisation in 1986 brought together a majority of the public sector institutions involved in cultural activities under one umbrella by merging 11 research and cultural organisations. Two decades later it evolved into the Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation (ICHTO), with a brief to assure that tourism acts in the service of culture and not vice-versa. It covers various fields such as museums, antiquities, archaeology, conservation and restoration of historical monuments and anthropology, and has numerous research centres and bases around the country. ICHTO has a major role in promoting the built heritage through listing buildings, nominating them for inscription on the World Heritage List where appropriate, creating laws and by-laws, and educating experts. The ICHTO of East Azerbaijan is responsible for the conservation and restoration of architectural heritage in the province and its capital, Tabriz, amongst its activities.

AKBAR TAGHIZADEH

Akbar Taghizadeh, a native of Tabriz, after graduating from Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, began his career with the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation, whose approach to cultural heritage was one of revitalising historic monuments rather than of just restoring them, at a time when post-war development plans were already threatening them. During his time at ICHTO in East Azerbaijan from 1993 to 2004, a number of such buildings were successfully brought back to life in the province, such as the restoration and adaptive reuse of various Qajar-era buildings into faculties of architecture and art, a museum on nomads, and a museum on the literature and mysticism of the Qajar era. As the director of the Pardisan Project, Akbar Taghizadeh was responsible for the restoration of a number of historic monuments along the Silk Routes in Iran for reuse as restaurants or guest houses. He is currently engaged in the private sector, active in the rehabilitation of historic monuments in Tehran, Kashan and Kerman.