

From the so-called Islamic City to the Contemporary Urban Morphology: The Historic Core of Kermanshah City in Iran as a Case Study

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Abstract. *Pre-1920 cities in Iran were characterized by a number of features shared by other traditional cities of Islamic world. Although often criticized for their Eurocentric nature, the features of “Islamic city” can be useful as starting point to analyze the modernization process of these traditional cities and their crucial impact in their structural transformation. As the traditional cities of the Islamic world have been much more studied than the twentieth century changes that have transformed them, we need more holistic and integrated understanding about the changes derived from the modernization process. To explore the broad and wide-spread of their metamorphosis, it is more enlightening if we study second order cities, rather than studying the transformations of major capitals such as Cairo, Istanbul or Teheran, where interventions are more exceptional and more rhetorical. Therefore, this paper aims to study the historic core of Kermanshah city, to understand the link between urban and social transformations due to modernization process by tracing it historically. We will focus, particularly, on studying the stages of urban transformation and changes of urban morphology as well as conflicts and differences between traditional urban features with the modern ones. In other words, we are interested in understanding how traditional morphology and structure of residential and commercial zone are affected by the opening of new and wide boulevards in course of modernisation process, and how these changes influence everyday people life.*

Keywords: Iranian city, Kermanshah, urban morphology, Islamic city, urban transformation, Modernization schools of thought, Montreal

Introduction: The modernization of a second order city

The Iranian cities like all cities in Muslim world were influenced by western modernization and had major changes. Before 1920 the traditional Iranian cities, including Kermanshah, shared the components and spatial relations of the so-called Islamic cities: city wall and gate, madrasah (religious school), hammam (public bath), bazaar (commercial district), citadel (governmental palace), Friday mosque, Mahallas (residential neighborhoods) that were divided often based on different ethnics or religions criteria and hierarchical networks

of winding alleys and the numerous cul-de-sacs that link the houses to the city center (Borumand, 2009; Kheirabadi, 2000).

In 1920 this traditional pattern experienced the beginning of new phase in urban and structure change (Ehlers and Floor, 1993; Marefat, 1988). The first steps for modernizing of Iran, especially Tehran as the capital, were taken during the regimen of Naser-ed-Din Shah in Qajar dynasty by the 1870s after his visit of Paris (Katouzian, 1996). But it was not fundamental until the early 1920s with monarchy of Reza Shah during Pahlavi dynasty (Habibi, 2006). The importance of urban modernization study in Iranian-Islamic

cities is that the modernization process in Iran was a choice and was not imposed by the Western (colonial) countries like the most of so-call Islamic city (Isenstadt and Rizvi, 2008). Moreover, Iran's case study has become an interesting benchmark, being the only country that has established an Islamic regime since 1979. The period for over 30 years, less studied, in which the religion has acquired a great collective presence.

In the current paper, we analyze what were the features of urban modernization and the tension between them and traditional ones over the time. The paper studies the city morphology and its administrators' and planners' attempts to respond to the real and perceived problems related to process of modernization. The modernization was driven, not only, by power of municipal law such as opening of boulevards, new infrastructures and equipments, but also it was accelerated by historic city transformations dynamics such as new ways of inhabiting, demographic and urban expansion.

Kermanshah city, as our case, is one of important second order cities in Iran and the capital of Kermanshah province. This city has not experienced exceptional and fast modernization process like Tehran. Also it has not been rapid-growing industrial city but has faced with radical urban transformation.

As an historical city Kermanshah, in terms of its historical evolution, is not exceptional as Isfahan, Iranian historic city par excellence. But it has a long and constant history, in which the traditional structure of city as a pattern of so-called Islamic city has been maintained long enough before modern transformations (Karimi, 1998). As a result, not only the city has significant features of urban modernization now but also contains considerable character of its traditional features as a traditional Iranian-Islamic city yet (figure.1).

Methodology: A long term and spatial approach

To understand Kermanshah transformation, we need a long-term approach, since the beginning of the twentieth century until today, and also mapping tools for a spatial approach. We used secondary data including documentary research in various libraries archive such as books, literature reviews, newspapers, cartographies, and aerial photos; B) Comparative approach to study this process across the Iranian, Islamic, and non-western urban world.

In order to use cartographies those historical aerial photos of city have been scanned and digitalized by QGIS software; and were drawn based on the main features include streets, rivers and built environments, agricultural



Figure 1. Historical commercial routest (Silk Road) and situation of Kermanshah

area. Then these maps from different dates have been overlaid to show more clear change of city over time.

Analysis: The stages of a non-colonial modernisation process

Today Kermanshah is a large market city as well as an important military base for the western part of Iran. This strategic situation of city forces it to face many changes over the time such as modernisation of city. Thus to analyze the process of modernisation in Kermanshah, we consider to chronology and pivotal stages of the city transformation summarized as schematic analysis in figure 5. and figure 6. In the first stage the city is observed in its characterized pattern with features of “Islamic city”, before 1920, during Qajar dynasty (Figure.2). Actually, the second stage for study is the beginning point in course of modernisation process when centralized government under Reza Shah Monarchy, from 1925 to 1941, provided context of law to autonomous modernisation for Iranian cities, include Kermanshah (Katouzian, 1996). In this regard, following legislation of Municipalities law as street widening act of 1933, the first new Haussmann’s boulevard with new roundabouts divided old fabric of city in 1935 (Clarke and Clark, 1969); include bazaar and residential quarters, into two parts through extended

from north to the south of city (see figure.3). Although these years were not the period of rapid expansion for the city but some growth occurred to response to construction of Anglo-Iranian oil company refinery and its residential, recreational, and sport complex in the north of city, near to Qarasu River, in 1936 (Clarke and Clark, 1969) (Figure 4.). This new complex brought a modern stream for the city at that time because of its modern design, especially modern layout of houses, modern methods, and materials of construction.

The end of first Pahlavi and the transfer of reign from Reza shah to his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, coincided with Second World War. During Second World War, Kermanshah grew little and there was lack of series experiments and variations in terms of city’s modernization even in the network of new streets (Figure.4 and Figure.5). Because the city was located in an area affected by tribal upheavals, after the fall of Reza Shah, it was occupied by Allies, especially by British and Americans, and became a military base, with an airport, as a stopping point in the long route of convoys supplying Russia (Clarke and Clark, 1969).

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, between 1941 and 1979, like his father not only favoured the construction of new boulevards and highways but also he introduced land regulation and socioeconomic planning as

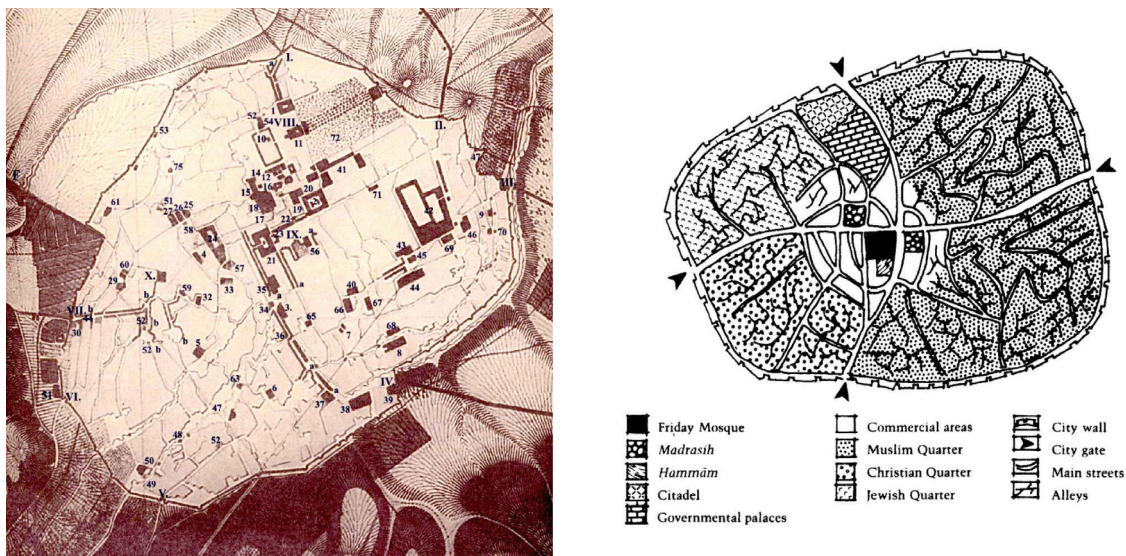


Figure 2. Concordance of Kermanshah city in 1850s with Model of Islamic city (Borumand, 2009; Kheirabadi, 2000)

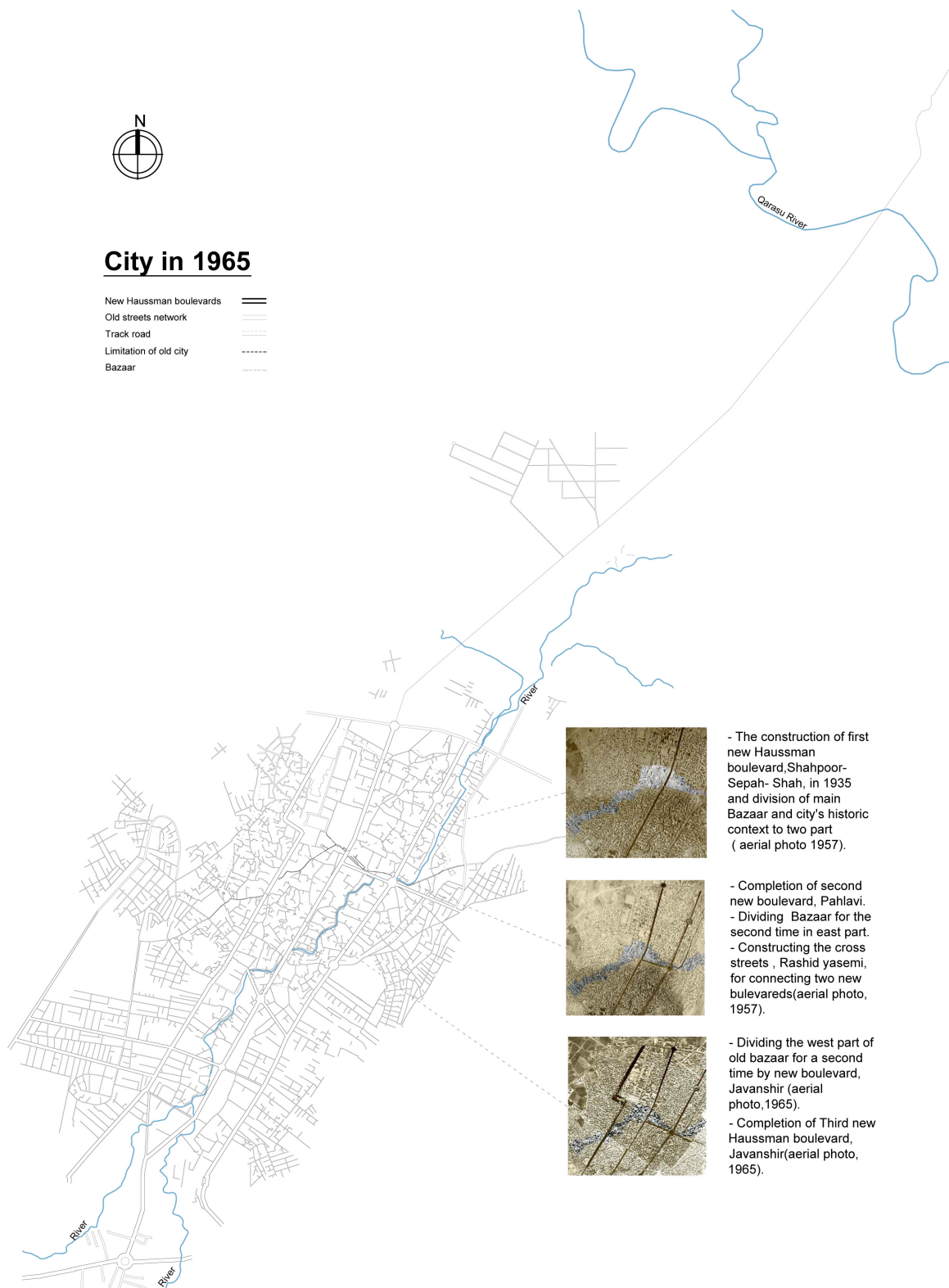
urban management devices (Zad, 2013). So during his reign a second and third Haussmann's boulevards in parallel with the first one divided the historic core of city and bazaar and traditional residential districts more (see figure 3. and figure 4). This new modern street segmented active, continues and organic morphology of historic core and attracted retails and construction of new multi-storeys, usually two or three storeys, building in front street. This new situation made them as main competitor with bazaar as a focal point for daily social life of people in the city. During second Pahlavi and monarchy Mohammad Reza Shah, The plan organisation's industrialisation strategy for country, among them was the 'land reform' policy, in order to enhancing the industrialisation process, led to the massive rural-urban migration and consequently massive urban growth for city. Hence the population in Kermanshah was increased from 125.439 to 290.600 people between 1956 and 1976 that led to expansion and progressive housing in almost every direction of city's peripheral (Clarke and Clark, 1969) (Figure.5).

This urban sprawl expansion was continued for Kermanshah after Islamic revolution in Iran and also during eight years war between Iran and Iraq, that events accelerated the emigrations and growth of city due to geographical location of city with border with Iraq (see figure.5 and figure.6). The process of modernisation was stopped, replaced with slow reconstructions, during these years and until 1986 there was not any comprehensive master plan to control of city expansion. The city only was witness of uncontrolled, unplanned and enormous expansions but with low density (Borumand, 2010). This outward urban expansion led to inner historic core of the city has been considered as decayed context and goes through demolition and have been replaced with people, most immigrants who don't have any common identical, social and cultural like the past; hence, distinguished traditional neighbourhoods based on ethnic or religious, replace by polarized neighbourhood, based on poor and rich people. Also this uneven development process and widespread city growth led to old villages in the area have been swallowed in the sprawl of modern estates. The

most of the remaining people of Kermanshah live in areas, which were previously villages but are now part of the metropolitan area and are regarded as city land (Adibi, 1989).

Conclusion: From the 'Islamic city' to the Islamic Republic

Iranian cities undergo similar processes to many non-Western cities. If we have comparative view to trace modernisation process, between non-colonised cities, among non-western cities, even Islamic and non-Islamic cities, it would be considerable that there are multiple cities that although, they might have experienced diverse particularities and non-uniformity but they have many similarities in regard to plural modernity (Sintusingha and Mirgholami, 2013). Modernisation is above all a reaction to the Western modernization that is imposed globally. The long phase of the Islamic Republic has inevitably followed this process of modernization with strong tendency and the religious question is less decisive than the political situation, the War with Iraq, the emigration of the rural population to the city, or the lack of investment derived from the disconnection of the Western world. So in cities like Kermanshah, as second order cities, even though modernisation process has not been symbolized, equal as major cities like Tehran, but shares many similarities in terms of urban modernisation processes and morphology changes with most of the cities in the world.



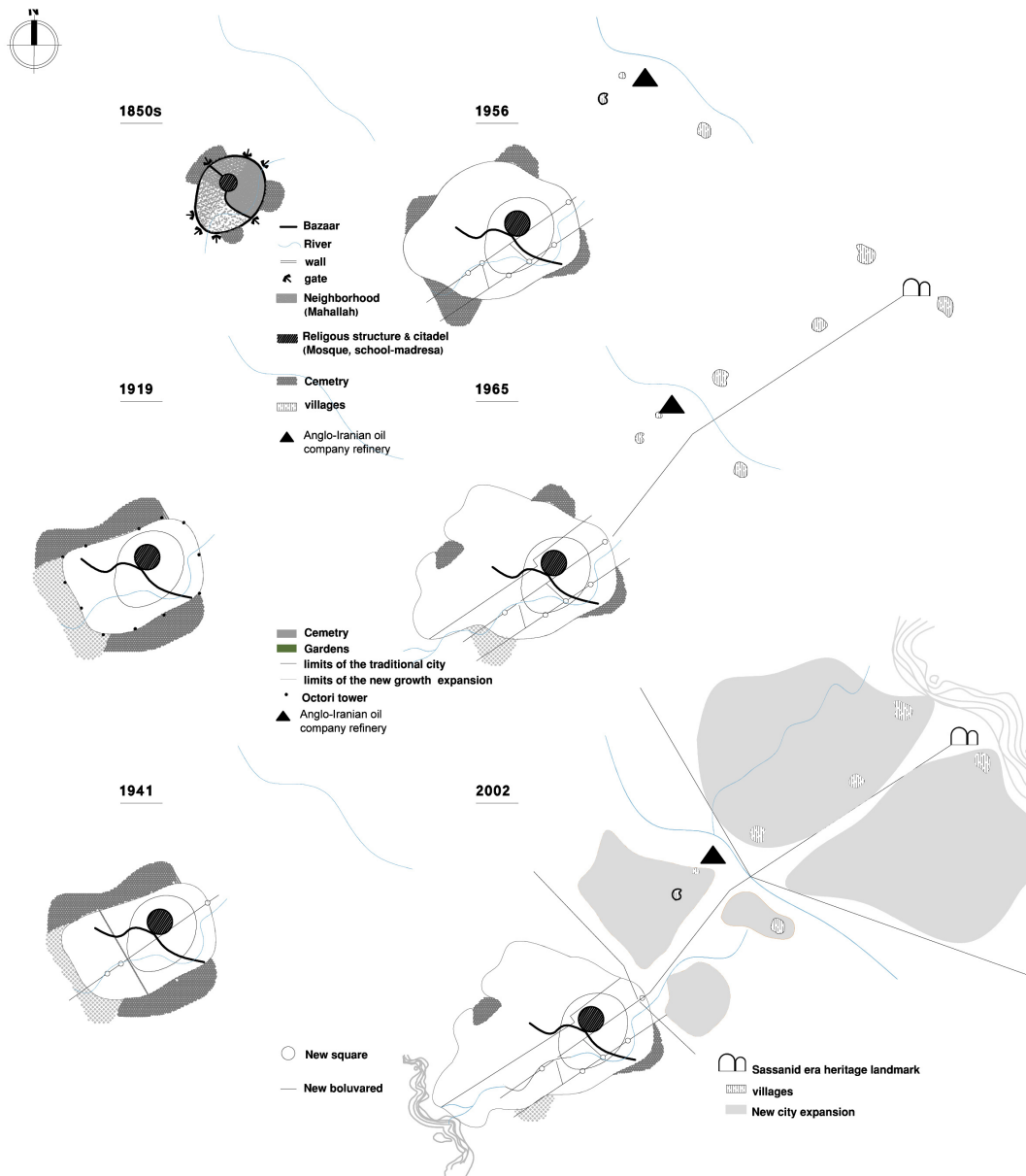


Figure 4. Schematic stages of Kermansah transformation

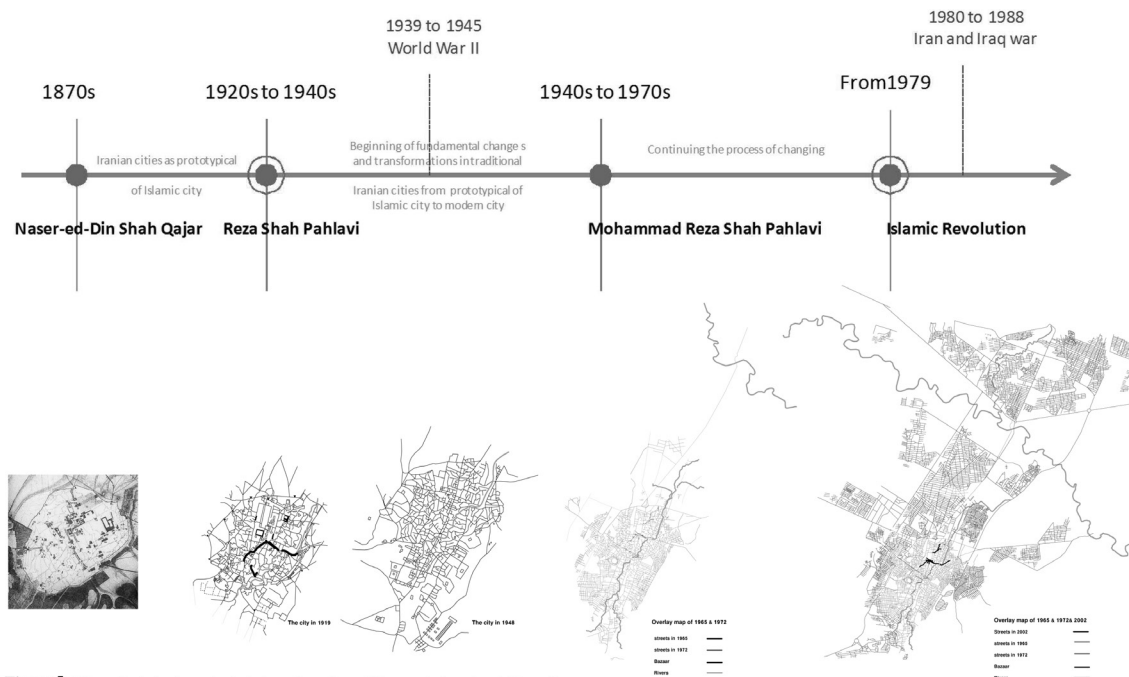


Figure 5. Chronological scheme to study transformation of Kermanshah: extracted by author

Notes

Reverse peasantry into smallholders by redistributing agricultural land from feudal landowners to sharecropping (Zad, 2013).

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