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Original Paper

The Tale of Two 1001-Night Cities

An Actor-Network View on the Role of Social Structures and the Motives and Intentions of Agents in Spatial Development of the Medieval Bagdad and Isfahan

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Abstract

This contribution analyses the urban identity and historical patterns of spatial development in ancient Baghdad and Isfahan, according to Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Actor-Relational Approach (ARA). In the case of two different historical urban hubs (Baghdad and Isfahan).

This article demonstrates how in the course of history, those interactions between various path-dependent networks have produced various, but specific types of urbanity in this region. It aims to show how ANT could clarify the embeddedness of dynamic actor-networks within the Middle Eastern urban spaces. This contribution argues that the institutional settings, customs, and use might even be more crucial for the issue of local identity, precisely because in effect they influence and shape urban living, institutions, form and infrastructures through time.

Keywords

post-structuralist characterization of Middle Eastern cities, Actor Network Theory, Baghdad and Isfahan

1. Introduction

Many of the studies on morphology of the Middle Eastern cities deal with the materialized urban forms, (e.g., the hardware of the issue), while the software and orgware (the socio-economic use and the specific urban organization) remain largely outside the field of argument (i.e., Jayyusi et al., 2008; Elsheshtawy, 2004; Bosworth et al., 2007). This is a major omission, while all those actors and factors of importance, those specific uses, institutional settings, and evolving customs over here, might even be

more crucial for the issue of urban typology, precisely because through history and time they influence and shape materialistic urban forms and infrastructures in a more profound and resilient way (Boelens, 2009).

Next to that, the Middle Eastern urban politic like many other regions in the world, stay largely trapped within the impasse between the “globalist” and the “localist” supporters for planning and architectural building. On the one side, one stipulates the need to compete within a dynamic, borderless, networked economy, by provoking exclusive and unique places in those worldwide networks, with the associated notions of “Global Cities” (Sassen, 1991), “The Death of Distance” (Ohmae, 1995), “Network Cities” (Taylor, 2004) or “The World is Flat” (Friedman, 2005). On the other hand, one stresses the phenomenological need for identity (Heidegger, 1927), local cultures (Levy Strauss, 1949) or important meanings of history (Braudel, 1984) in order to develop more socio-spatial robust and resilient urban assemblages. Politicians would need to choose between the one and the other, depending on the ideological mainstream, or neo-liberal flows of finance and economy. Usually, however, politicians make neither choice and experts bring results to a stalemate far too often in a mismatch of elements of both positions (mostly in external structure and internal content respectively).

In this contribution I want to by-pass this “bi-structured debate”, by proposing an actor-relational approach for understanding two different patterns of urban development inside the Middle East. Because neither the exclusive focus on global dynamics, nor the exclusive focus on critical regionalism or the pure focus on the materialistic incentives of typology and archetype sheds a new light on embedded, identifiable urban hubs in global networks. Therefore, and instead, the relational approach of (global) cities does in fact start from both positions at the same time. It does not only focus on the cross-border inter-relational networks of which each city is currently a member, but it also focuses on the inter- and trans relational associations of leading actors and factors of importance by which the city and all its institutions and urban landscape are eventually made (Thrift, 1996; Graham/Healey, 1999). It therefore also refers to changing views about the meaning and determinants of space and the new scientific socio-political and evolutionary economical ideas about the proper role of actors and networks (Massey, 2005; Latour, 2005).

Therefore, I attempt to trace the development-paths of medieval Baghdad and Isfahan through recognizing their actor-networks and discovering the creative agents which have mobilized and pushed these flourishing urban hubs inside their regions. Here, I try to demonstrate how during the Golden Age of Baghdad, the religious and political powers as the decisive actors have mobilized the development of this city as the hub of the Muslim Caliphate and the metropolis of Islamic civilization. Further I analyze a different institutional settings and actor-network structure of the city of Isfahan where the bazaars and merchandise organizations in harmony and cooperation with the political and religious powers have mobilized the consolidation, renewal and refinement of this flourishing medieval city. To analyses those institutional settings and actor network structures in these cities, I will start by explaining some headlines of the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) of urban design and planning.

2. A Conceptual Framework: The Actor Network Theory

The Actor-Network-Theories (ANT) of Latour, Callon and Law relates to urbanity via its institutional background and networks, which are established because of the interaction between leading actors and factors in the past and present. Through ANT, cities -their hardware, software and orgware- may be described as social-ontological phenomena (Latour, 1993, 2005). Recently, such "Latourian notions" on urbanity have even been applied to post-structural notions about geography and urban space (Murdoch, 1998). ANT departs from the conviction that actors in our networked society are equal in principle and that actions occur in networks independent from each other. Moreover, according to ANT actors are not only humans but also non-humans; like flora, fauna, geography or existing urban systems and infrastructures, etc. In that case, one speaks about actants. According to Latour (2005), these actants have the ability to change their environment, as they have the capacity for agency. An existing river, road or light rail allows specific spatial development opportunities, as would the availability of computers, wifi, money, etc… However, change comes only when these "actants" interact; or in other words enter a network or association. Then translation may result not only into new knowledge, economic value, social progress, but also into new spatial developments. Governments, planners or urban developers could initiate those translations, but they are also and increasingly generated elsewhere; on a global as well as on local scale. That is what Farias and Bender (2010) recently called "urban assemblages". Instead of visions, structures or participatory processes, the emphasis is here on analysing systems of becoming part of temporary or permanent associations. Rather than the players themselves, the decisive factor here is heterogeneous networking as the impetus for certain (spatial) developments. The focus is on assembling itself with actants-networks that matter, and could operate both on a local, provincial, national or global level, and in between (in fact scaleless). Like governments, in networked societies everyone must confront him or herself with those assemblages, in order to realize its own objectives.

2.1 Four Steps in Translation Processes (according to Callon 1986)

- Problematization

Problematization relates to the process of a principal or focal actor striving to become indispensable to the other actors, by defining the problem/opportunity and motivating the others into that problem definition. Therefore, problematization describes the process of alliances, or associations between actants by identifying what they want.

- Interessement

Next, the question arises how the different actants can be interested in the solution to the issue. How can actants be convinced that dealing with the problem would ultimately serve (f)actors' own interest? In fact, here the question arises how actants are or could be locked into problem solving, by reinforcing his/her/its identity through his/her/its system of references, ideas and concepts of mind.

- Enrollment

Furthermore, enrolment refers to the question how these common interests could be translated and concerted into potential associations or assemblages. Do the different actants also accept their specific role in those potential associations and/or can they be geared to available resources? Therefore, the enrolment phase refers to the designation of the roles and the position of the (f)actors into the network, mostly in a strategic sense.

- Mobilization of allies

Finally, mobilization contains the position of the representatives of the people and things, by which the actants form a resilient relationship. Here the question arises if the spokesmen actually represent their respective constituencies effectively, or how the actor-network association can become embedded in a wider setting, towards more resilient formal or informal institutional settings, serving all involved.

In this contribution, I use this term “decisive (f)actors of importance” in order to draw attention to the dominant elements and resources, which influence spatial development and planning of urban spaces over a longer period of time. Moreover, when decisive (f)actors of importance associate, they form decisive networks of importance—or in other words “institutional settings”—which in turn influence other actors in their (path-dependent) behaviour and actions. In fact, they become constituted based on the engagement of, what Latour (1988) calls, the “immutable mobiles”, such as laws, rules, organizations, etc., (formalistic) or norms, values, specific ways of doing, etc. (informal). Therefore, these institutional settings do not only include sets of social powers and agencies, but also relate to socio/geographical customs and the like, wherein urbanity emerges in a specific embedded way (Coleman, 1990, Boelens, 2009). In this perspective, every urban/spatial development is essentially relational and can only be defined as an outcome of interactions between involved people, units, and resources on as well a global as local level. Therefore, ANT does not only go beyond the hierarchy of scales, but also beyond the plan. The plan is the result, nor the beginning. Instead, it visualizes the city as a sometimes predetermined, but mostly unexpected assemblage of heterogeneous “actor-networks” that can be economical, technological or social; global and/or local, and everything in between, but always “becoming” (Murdoch, 2006; Jacobs, 2007).

3. Baghdad, the Power Hub of the Caliphates

Baghdad together with Damascus and Cairo was founded during the early Islamic eras to demonstrate the power and glory of the new faith (Le Strange, 2004; Grabar, 2005). In 762 Caliph Mansur founded this city to replace the caliphdom from the Ctesiphon, the capital of the Persian Sassanids kingdom, which had been under Muslim control since 637. Ctesiphon was situated about 30 km southeast of Baghdad. Ctesiphon became rapidly deserted after the development of Baghdad. Also, the Babylon, which had been deserted since the 2nd century, lied some 90 km to the south of Baghdad.

During its golden age, Baghdad even became the heart of the Islam and the legend of theocratic/Islamic urbanity in the whole Muslim World (Bosworth, 2007; Jayyusi, Raymond et al., 2008). The citadel

(round city) of Baghdad had been the political and administration hub of entire caliphdom and the official residence of the Abbasid court for more than 4 centuries.

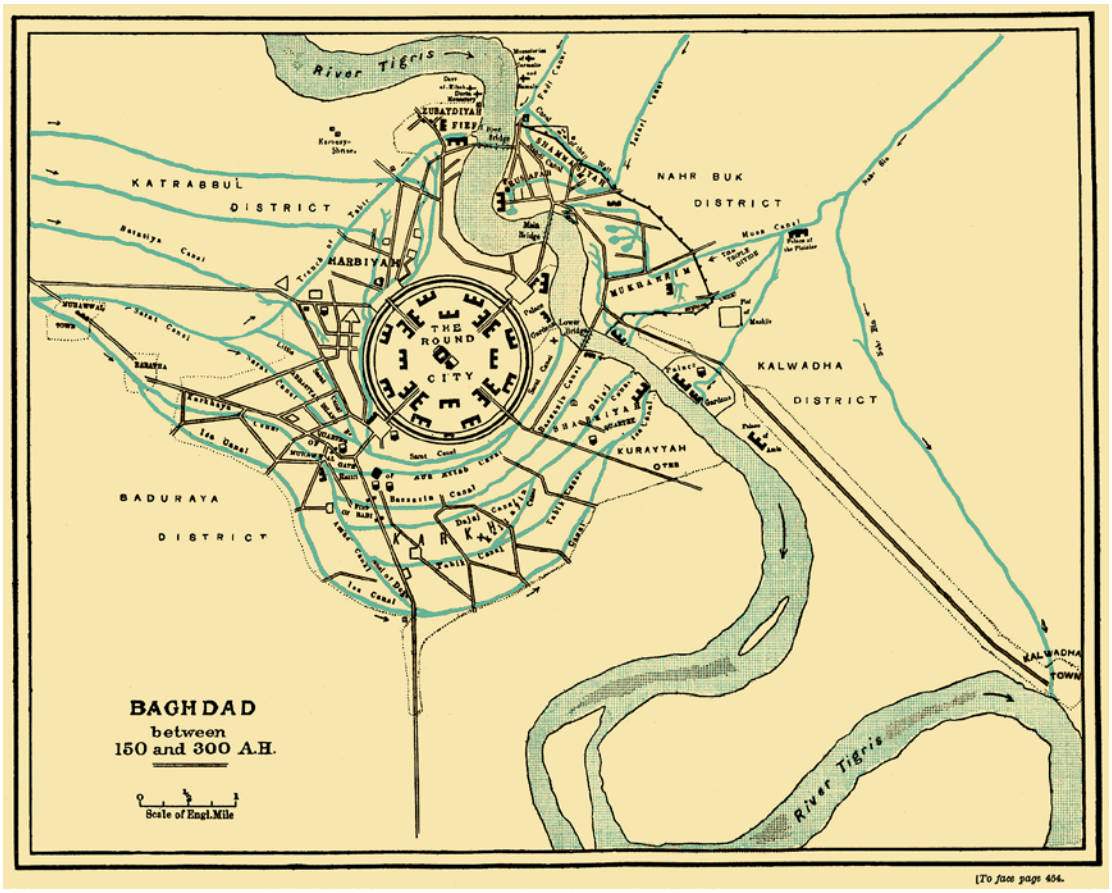

Figure 1. Baghdad between 767 AND 912 AD) Drawn by W. Muir 1888-Public Domain WWW.MUHAMMADANISM.ORG/MAPS/DEFAULT.HTM

There is hardly any trace of what Baghdad was during its heyday but Baghdad was the city where the stories of 1001 nights were told, and it is here where the "House of Wisdom" was established as the unrivalled centre for Muslim science, philosophy, medicine and education of the time. Therefore Tabari, a historian from the 9th century, could note that: "amongst the cities of the whole world, Baghdad stands as the professor of community of Islam" (cited in Hitty, 1973, p. 85). Within half a century, Harun ar-Rashid's capital had grown into the largest city in the world, with perhaps a million inhabitants. Isfahan, Damascus or Cairo would be comparable to Baghdad, for they would soon have a population of 300,000 to 500,000. Nevertheless, from the 13th century onwards, Baghdad lost its exclusive hold on political power and could not retain its notable urban importance. This was due to the fact that during the 13th-16th century, Baghdad was confronted with several series of bloody religious and sectarian convulsions, as well as by severe attacks of the Mongol Huallaga Kahn in 1258, and later on by Taimoor's soldiers in 1401 and by the Safavids in 1501 again. They deported several intellectuals

and wiped out many of the soft- and orgware of the city. Moreover, during the next centuries, Baghdad became Ottoman's colonial urban hub, named the "Principality of Baghdad". However, and although several Ottoman governors, e.g., Midhat Pasha. (1822-1884), applied urban reforms ("tanzimat") to the city, these reforms still followed the autocratic Islamic traditions of the previous urban planning institutions.

In many ways, these institutions were motivated to return to Baghdad's traditional role as a capital metropolis in the Islamic World, brimming with tradition and legacy. Until the modern era, despite the changes in ideological systems and national policies, that kind of autocratic and centralist spirit in the field of Baghdad's urban development remained unchanged. Problematization Referring to this short overview of Baghdad's history, one could conclude that the Quran and Muhammad's Hadith were in fact the first and principal focal actors of this urban assemblage. The Islam was at its core an urban faith (Fischel, 1956).

Muhammad did not want his people to return to the desert, but virtually demanded cities to serve as "the place where men pray together" (Wheately, 2001, p. 41). Therefore, the Islam should take shape in a largely urban environment (Porter Berkey, 2009). Thus, after Muhammad's death, the first "political successors to the messenger of God" (the Khalīfah or the caliphs) were determined to break with the previous nomadic social structure in the Arabian Peninsula. During the Rashinud period (632-661), as well as those under the Umayyads dynasty (7th-8th centuries), the caliphs -also out of pure self-interest- built new urban strongholds, which functioned as the agents of the Muslim community as a whole: "the Ummah" (Wheately, 2001). Muslim cities became in fact the "nodal points" of the Islamic association, representing the laws of the Islam (Bulliet, 1994). However while the caliphs as the political representatives of the divine power were in fact only responsible for the worldly unity of the Muslim nation, they needed to work in close cooperation with the Muslim clerics and imams, while theology was according to Muhammad a personal matter. The caliphs realized profoundly that they needed.

Technical, socio-cultural and foremost religious support from those theological representatives of the Ummah, to achieve their goals. In turn, the clerics realized that the production of new urban power holds could result into the stabilization of Islam and the growth of the Muslim world (Porter Berkey 2009). Thus, the core of this "problematization stage" (in ANT terms) was the mutual understanding that the Islam needed capital urban condensations.

3.1 Interessement

However, the ruling Umayyad caliphs were not universally supported within the Muslim community. Some (the sunni's) contested them, because they were not selected by Shura -elected by Muslims or their representatives- while others (the shia's) believed that the caliph should descend in a direct line from the original family or household of Muhammad (Ahl al-Bayt). Therefore, around the mid of the 8th century there were numerous rebellions against the Umayyads, as well as splits within their ranks. In this turmoil Abu'l Abbas As-Saffah from the Abbasid dynasty took power, claiming that he

descended from Muhammad's youngest uncle (Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib). Furthermore, and different from the claim of Muhammad's son-in-law Ali, this revolt was largely supported by the Arabs, while Abu'l attacked Umayyads moral character and administration in general (Kennedy, 2006; Lapidus, 2002). Moreover, the Abbasids appealed to non-Arabic Muslims (the mawali, especially the Persians), who were regarded as a lower class under Umayyads reign.

In order to be closer to that important Persian backing and the broad mawali demand for less Arab dominance in the empire, the Abbasids moved their capital in 762 to the banks of the Tigris River, the place were Baghdad is now. An additional motive was that this Capital of the Islamic World moved again into the centre and urban-heart of the in the meantime massive geographical Muslim territory, stretching westwards across North Africa, into Hispania and eastwards through Asia Minor, into the ancient lands of the Indus Valley. The caliphs themselves supervised major urban plans and realized several important infrastructures and social buildings, including mosques, bazaars, and military fortifications during this period (Hitty, 1973; Le Strange, 2004; Lapidus, 2002). In order to build this urban hearth of the Ummah, the imams and the spiritual leaders were regularly consulted by the caliphs to approve their urban plans and policies (Le Strange, 2004; Arjomand, 1999). Therefore, most of the social rules and, amongst them, the land-property and urban development regimes came directly or indirectly from the Quran and Hadith. Some clerics were even specialized in these interpretations of the Islamic laws. The "Qazi ol Ghozat" or the head of the judiciary, for instance, was a cleric who also served in specialised jobs with regard to the real estate registration and the supervision of the merchandise deals. Therefore, in the case of the fabrication and transformation of this capital, ultimately the most decisive actors were situated in religious lines and beyond the caliphate. The caliphs used the Islamic texts and motivations to assign interests to whom they wanted to become an actor in their plans. But all these decisive actors had eventually to share a common set of (religious/social) rules to build and organize the capital.

3.2 Enrollment

However, and although Islamic scholars repeatedly pronounced that it was forbidden to have more than one leader in the Muslim world, a new position was established during the building of this new capital at Baghdad; that of the vizier. These viziers were the well-educated Iranian bureaucrats from the "Great Khorsan" and the Persians, who came from families of the Sassanid's civil servants, like the Barmakids. These Barmakids assisted the caliphs in their decisions to drive the Islamic empire and establish a functional government and administration (Tabari, 1987). Therefore, for couple of decades, they became the most influential men in the caliphate; formally after the caliph, but in fact the driving force. Furthermore, other realms of the central authority were delegated to local emirs of lower Islamic city-states. In Baghdad, but also in Damascus and in many other Islamic cities, these viziers and their governors had complete access to the "Beyt ol Mal", which was the central treasury of the Muslim Community, the Ummah. It that had two effects.

On the one hand the Muslim World and Baghdad got a powerful social and political administration. Baghdad became a stable urban capital with more than a million people and many commercial activities and efficient urban infrastructures.

The caliphs and their viziers for instance constructed the city's canals, dikes, and reservoirs, drained the swamps around Baghdad, freeing the city of malaria, and built glorious mosques, public houses, schools and a world known university "Nezamieh"; in so doing, creating fabulous fortunes in the city.

However, as a result an ever-greater variety of religious motivations and interests, new strategies were used by the administration to activate different actors and to find alliances in the urban fabric (Hitty, 1973). It eventually meant that to many Abbassid caliphs a more ceremonial role was assigned, as the viziers began to exert greater influence, and a Persian bureaucracy slowly replaced the role of the old Arab aristocracy. Next to that, because of the nomadic character of the rural areas, the caliphs and Islamic clerics had little control over their countryside. Their influence was more restricted to the urban districts than the non-urban areas. This was very different from European feudalism, where regional powers had direct control over the land (Lapidus, 2002).

3.3 Mobilization of Allies

Whatever it may be, the Muslim clerics inside Baghdad (and also in many other Islamic urban societies) stayed the morally superior class. During the Abbasid's era, three of the four major orthodox schools of Islamic law lived and worked in Baghdad: Abou Yousif, the founder of Hanafid School, Al Shefei the founder of Maleki Sunnism and Al Ghazali one of the most famous figures in the history of Sufism (Hitty, 1973).

Their primary function was to preach and interpret the Quran, but they also played a significant socio-political role, among which within the judicial administration. The mosques were not only the place where the Muslims could come together for praying, but also served as an information centre, planning-institution and educational base (Wheateley, 2001). Next to that, the Shariaa's impacts on the urban development and planning becomes visible in the regimes of land tenure, taxation, and the monetary (Coulson, 1994). Furthermore, the "waqf" was the most effective Islamic urban law, which was used to legitimize the urban development projects and land-use policies inside the urban areas. The "waqf" was a legal instrument for using the private land properties for social use under the supervision of the government. It had huge impact on the transformation of the urban spaces. Even still in Baghdad and many Islamic cities, most of the public urban spaces like mosques, public baths, water storages, and public orphanages are "awqāf", which refer to a social beneficial, charitable endowment of people (Jayyusi, Holod, Raymond et al., 2008). In this way the Abbasid urban regimes, institutions and path dependencies shape the urban fabric of Muslim "capital cities", like Baghdad, throughout their 1500-year history. Several factors were key to the legitimacy of this mobilization:

Involvement of concerned and influential religious institutions with a commitment to shared goals and a clear focus on the Islamic community's (the Ummah's) demands;

Formation of appropriate multi-functional judicial and social organizations, with interdependence to the political institutions;

Development of decision-making mechanisms through the setting up of Islamic regulations to facilitate decisions of the government;

Support and legitimization from the local and intra-regional agencies, and organizations with enough resources devoted to build the alliances.

Figure 2. Mongols Besieging Baghdad in 1258, PAINTED, Painted ca 1430-Public Domain

4. Isfahan, the Trade-Hub of Islamic Merchandise

Isfahan has a long history which goes back to the Elamite civilization (2700-1600) BCE.

From the early Persian empire of the Achaemenids Isfahan was known as Aspadana. Once Cyrus the Great had established this Achaemenid Empire (648-330 BCE), Aspadana became the legend of the Achaemenids religious tolerance. After taking Babylon in 538 BCE, Cyrus freed the Jews in Babylon and many of them in place settled in Isfahan rather than returning to Jerusalem (Gharipour 2014-179)

During the pre-Islamic period, the city was the capital of the Upper Persia province of Sassanid empires. The Arabs conquered the city in 643. The city retained an important function. Its location on the Silk Road made the city famous all around the ancient world. During the Seljuk dynasty in the 11th century, Isfahan became the capital of Persia. In the thirteenth century the Mongols conquered and largely destroyed the city and later in 1387, Timur Lenk destroyed the city.

Under the Safavids (1501-1722), Isfahan became again the capital of Persia in 1598. The city flourished under Shah Abbas the Great. During this period, the most important buildings were built, such as the square of the Imam. The population of the city was then about 1 million inhabitants. At this period, many groups of merchants immigrated to Isfahan, (including many Armenians and Jews) who were allowed to practice their religion freely. The Persians then city called it “Nesf-e-Jahan”, (“half the world”), meaning that if you had seen it, you would have seen half the world. Despite the move of the urban centre of Islam from landlocked Capitals, as Makah and Damascus, to riverine Baghdad was also argued for the sake of trade between East and West (Bernstein, 2008, p. 81), the history of Isfahan remains a completely different matter. It is more connected to the Silk Road, which had been the major trade and international businesses route from 300 BC for about 2,000 years. The Silk Road connected China, Asia Minor and the Middle East, with the cities in the Nile Delta and the West (Wood, 2002). In all the Bazaars of the mercantile cities alongside the Silk Road, many private business corporations, storages, retails, and exchanges came up, especially after the conquests and massive reign of the Islamic Ummah.

However, they were functioning independently from the state and doing transnational businesses on their own (Amir Arjoumand, 1999). Their initial purpose was to provide a space for exchange and stopovers for merchants, moving across the great trading routes of North Africa and the Middle East (Wood, 2002; Whitfield, 2004; Lapidus, 2002). Inside those mercantile cities like Isfahan, Tabriz and Kashgar, the flows of trade were the essential operational mode of the urban economy. Due to their central geographical situation and socio-political hegemony, the Islamic trade cities got exceptional opportunities to develop intra-regional markets. They were able to challenge the established hierarchical system of the Islamic Capitals. Even more, the merchants managed to arouse the caliphate’s interest in their direction and got help from these “commanders of the belief” to protect and sustain their trade. That kind of co-operative power was not based on the political control over a territory, but more on mutual socio-economical interdependency (Abdullahzadeh, 2003). The mercantile urban interconnections and trade played a major role in the urban institutions alongside the Silk Road. Inside the bazaars, the merchants and craftsmen cultivated socio-economic interests and through the construction of guilds, bathhouses and caravanserais, they played a considerable role in the development of these cities (Hill, 2006).

Figure 3. Cityscape of Isfahan in 17th Century Painted by German Traveler Adam Olerius, Source: Vermehrte niewe beschreibung der Muscowitchen und Persischen Reyse (SCHLESWIG, 1656) Public Domain DE

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- **Problematization**

Although Isfahan's origin can even be traced back to the Palaeolithic period, the main and focal actors of the city are therefore the Silk Road and its transportation means. Isfahan was situated in the heart of the Silk Road and other North-South and East-West trade routes crossing Iran and the Middle East. Moreover, Isfahan was also situated in a fertile and well-watered area with the river Zayandeh-Roud flowing through it. While cross-ocean maritime technology was still in its infant's phase and very much dependent on the winter/summer monsoon winds, trade went mainly by land. Although a draft horse could carry about two hundred pounds on its back and pull four thousand pounds with the help of a wagon and a good road, due to the rough, sandy and hilly conditions, the donkey and later camel and dromedary were the pack animals of choice. Arabian nomads even refined saddles to such a point that it allowed an average pack camel to carry more than five hundred pounds. A single camel driver, conducting three to six animals, could therefore transport around two tons of cargo between twenty and sixty miles in one day (Bernstein, 2008, p. 56).

Given the "safe" three-day water capacity of the camel, oases and caravanserais needed therefore to be spaced about sixty to hundred-and-eighty miles apart. Therefore, as an instance of the trade-based technology at the time, Isfahan's strategic position in various North-South and East-West camel driven networks, became prominent. Because of its crossroads, water supply and halfway position between China and the European hinterland, Isfahan became even an excellent interchange point (Boulnois, 2004). Hence, according to the various routes, several caravanserais were located in and around the city, in such a way that Al Baladhuri a 9th-century Muslim historian described Isfahan at the time as an agglomeration of about 16 medium-sized urban centres (Al Baladhuri, 1924).

- **Interessement**

From these backgrounds also various trade-dependent actors came up, which had the ability to build various alliances, which eventually affected the spatial structure of Isfahan profoundly. In fact, the urbanity in this region evolved around various path-dependent mercantile interactions. One of the main actors here was the Grand Bazaar. This Bazaar, however, was an amalgamated institution, wherein different merchants and artisans did businesses and brought wealth to the region. From the 12th century onwards the Grand Bazaar of Isfahan expanded up to one of the greatest and longest marketplaces in the world. The Bazaar consisted of trade institutions (like the merchant's guilds), services (like exchange, storage, and transportation services) and small industries. Generally, Isfahani merchant's guilds often chose a head of merchants, which was called "Malek ol Tojar" or "Amin ol Tojar". He should represent bazaars' point of view in the political arena and protect their social position in society.

Those “bazaaris”, as a trade-based institution, were the most decisive (f)actors of importance for the construction of Isfahan, by defining the infra-structural and urban demands in the city. In order to be successful, the bazaaris used various socio-economical mechanisms, contributing to the Interessement of other allies into their network. Consequently, their urban connections in and outside the caliphate was not hierarchically, but horizontally established (Hill, 2006; Wood, 2002). As a result, from those open institutionalized networks, foreign investors came into Isfahan, including Jews, Christians and other people. Although from the 16th century, the Shiaa Islam became the ruling state religion in the area, also Christian, Jewish religions, as well as Sufism flourished in the city. They even developed an interactive relation with wide-ranging political and social institutions. Therefore, Isfahan was increasingly exposed to different cultures and religions, while in return the Islam spread from Isfahan to South-East Asia, and Indonesia (Elverskog, 2010).

- **Enrollment**

During this enrolment process, the trade institutions inside the mercantile urban spaces became as such the “spokesmen” of many social institutions, from different cultural backgrounds. The bazaars and trade institutions, integrated individuals, tribes, neighborhoods, and various-sized economical clusters into an expanded mercantile community. As such it regulated even many public affairs, such as building orphanages, public bathes and charity houses. In this sense the bazaar itself was not just an urban marketplace, but the major public space for sharing political news, gossips and religious issues to various social classes (Tapper & Mc Lachlan, 2003). The Bazaar eventually became the intersection of the urban and non-urban societies and the major meeting place of peasants, pastoralists and townsmen. The Bazaar was the main source of income for religious institutions like schools, charitable institutions and orphanages. But also, the pre-modern bazaars were the places, wherein the poets and genealogists could demonstrate their literary, oratorical and other skills and calligraphers, scribers and copiers flourished (Abdullahzadeh, 2003). These trade institutions were developed concordant to the overall evolution of the inter- and intra-urban networks. In fact, the bazaaris justified their legitimacy by the financial-economic links with a wide range of activities within the Islamic world on the one hand, and by the interaction between the merchants, and the social-political institutions on the other hand. Because although -in contrast to the Muslim “capital cities”- the religious organizations had no autonomy in Isfahan and functioned under the shadow of the bazaar (Rawandi, 1961), the bazaaris and the religious clerics nevertheless supported each other in various socio-economic circumstances. Therefore, through the history of Isfahan’s urbanity, these bazaaris had a strong relation with the other powerful local actors as the clerics and later on the royals and military officers (Weiss & Westermann, 1998). This ensured a remarkable degree of cooperation as far as their organizational arrangements and social networks were concerned. The proximity of the Grand Bazaar and Grand Mosque of Isfahan shows the close ties and cooperation between the economic and social/religious institutions of the city (Bakhtiar, 1974). During the Safavids era, even the political power was added to this part of the city.

From that time, up to the modern period, Isfahan's urban development became very much dependent on the triangle of the Grand Bazaar, the Grand Mosque, and the Royal Palace (Grabar, 1990).

- Mobilization of Allies

That kind of preliminary assemblage became at hand, especially when -from the seventeenth century onwards, and due to new maritime innovations (compass sextant, etc.), maritime route discoveries and growing dominance of some Western-European countries with respect to cross-ocean transport (Matthee, 1999)- trade routes between the East and West threatened to shift away towards the sea. It caused a loss of commerce and trade in Isfahan. While their western European counterparts sought revenue in cooperative models of their own (like the Hanse in North Europe, the Muscovy, Eastland and Levant Company in England or the Dutch United East-India Company), merchants and bazaaris in Isfahan succeeded to activate the political rulers and imams. They managed to convince these political Safavid rulers, including the religious Shiaa clergy, that the Islamic empire could enjoy a trading monopoly and collect taxes, due to the strategic position of Isfahan in the heart of the Silk Road (Matthee, 1999). Therefore from the first half of the 17th century, the Safavids rulers started to build roads, bridges, caravanserais and strategically placed bazaars, partly financed by the merchants and by road tolls, in order to promote massive and faster trade, in clean and safe conditions (Blow, 2009).

The Safavids even drove the Portuguese out of Bahrain and occupied key strongholds at the Gulf of Aden and the Persian Gulf, in order to cut these sea routes off and/or control them with high taxation (Savory, 1980, pp. 193-195). Moreover, Safavids effectively re-routed the Silk Road through Isfahan, across the Caspian Sea, via Moscow and Poland to Europe with assistance of the Muscovy Company, in order to circumvent the Ottomans, who controlled two vital routes in former Turkey at the time (Savory, 1980, p. 196). In so doing, they managed to survive Isfahan's international trade networks for another two hundred years. But although Shiite clerics and the Safavid's caliphs have tried in these periods to represent Isfahan as Shiite metropolis versus the Sunni's well-known capital cities like Baghdad or Istanbul. Therefore, through the Safavid's urban transformations, the city remained especially attentive to the economic concerns of the bazaaris interests and popularity in general (Newman, 2006). As such Isfahan has never functioned as a religious urban power hold. It has remained better known for its bazaars and caravanserais, than for its madrasas or Islamic organizations until the present day. Therefore, analysing the evolution of Isfahan's Grand Bazaar during the last millennium, we can stress its essential position in the "skeleton" of the urban structure. The residential and multi-layered districts established around the bazaar, were directly related to it through many passages and streets.

Figure 4. Great Bazaar of Isfahan drawing by G. Hofsted van Essen, Leiden University library, Public domain NL

5. Conclusion

In this manuscript, I have briefly reviewed two different patterns of urban actant-networks in Baghdad and Isfahan. Baghdad is defined by its hierarchical actor-networks and planning institutions, based on the political-religious domination of the caliphs (as the political commanders of faith) and the imams or sheiks (as the socio-spiritual leaders of faith). Based on the translation of actants-networks during their problematization, Interessement, enrolment and mobilization phases, one can conclude that in Baghdad and probably in some other Islamic "capital cities", like Cairo and Damascus, the city's strength (r)evolves around:

The sovereign authority, which rests on divine, charismatic and traditional motives; the law/judicial structure, which is mostly enforced by an Islamic/divine core, and specific interpretations by esoteric officials;

Religious groups within a social hierarchy, which have been formed on religious/political specifications, rather than economical classes.

Consequently, the role of the governmental and religious institutions within Baghdad was far greater than other actors and factors of importance; even the geographical ones. In the field of urban infrastructure and planning, the caliphs in concordance with the religious leaders were responsible for all the plans and could get money as much as they needed for their execution from the “Beit ol mal” (House of money) as public treasury. However, when viziers and local emirs extended their influence, not only the original institutional regime, but also the idea of a prime capital of the Ummah eventually declined in importance.

In contrast, in Isfahan the property rights at some levels were respected more than in any other Persian and Islamic city. While in Baghdad and other Muslim “capital cities”, the social contribution of bazaars and the economic organizations was very much limited, in Isfahan the bazaaris and the merchants could contribute massively to the city’s glorious urban plans and financing huge urban plans. In these types of the Middle Eastern cities an amalgamation of economic-political arguments and geographical deliberations define the pattern and dynamism of the city. In the end these strategic networks were flanked by opportunistic alliances between bazaaris and political rulers. In fact, the state institutions cooperated with these bazaaris, such for the sake of international trade and, consequently, the economic prosperity and resilience of themselves. In turn the trade-institutions in the city were remarkably responsive to the spatial development and urban fabrication of the city; and most helpful to invite and facilitate the Safavids ruler’s to and rebuilt the city into one of the largest and most beautiful cities of the early modern world.

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