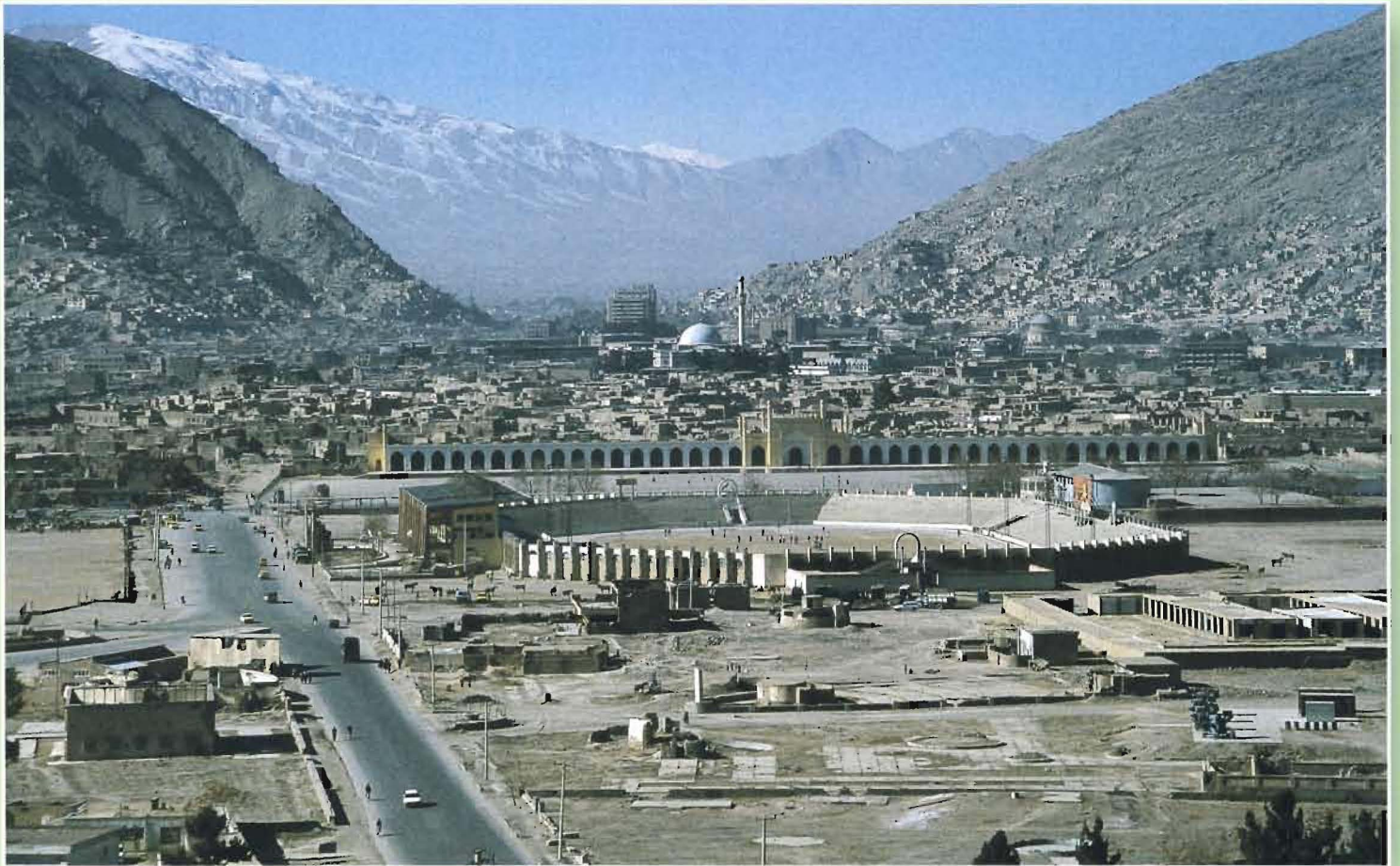


Geographische Rundschau

I N T E R N A T I O N A L E D I T I O N



Kabul – Chessboard for International Donors?
Afghanistan: How to Build a State
Nation-building in People's Minds
Geopolitics and the Afghan Territory
Rebuilding Kabul: Architecture and History
Revitalizing the Bazaar of Kabul
Geomorphological Mapping in Afghanistan
Towering above – Pakistan's Water Resources

Revitalizing the Bazaar of Kabul

The bazaar of Kabul today is marked by a rapidly growing number of traders, dealers, hawkers and shopkeepers. At the same time an unplanned expansion of commercial sites is visible. In this process the bazaar is not only revitalized to its pre-war function but shows an explosive growth of shops, stores, work-shops, mobile stalls and other trading facilities.



Figure 1: Central Kabul in 1959

The Kabul River can be seen in the north, the Pul-e-Khishti Mosque near the bridge. Jadda-e-Maiwand Boulevard heading from west to east meets Nadir Pashtu Street at the square of the Sephoi Gunman monument in the centre. Note the Shor-e-Bazaar quarter in the southeast and the two-storey and three-storey buildings along Jadda-e-Maiwand

Source: Afghan Cartographic Service 1959; Archives Dept. of Geography, University of Bonn



Figure 2: Central Kabul in 2004 (section as in Figure 1)

Note the destruction in the east and southeast, especially in the almost completely ruined Shor-e-Bazaar quarter

Source: ISAF Milit. Sat.-Image 2004

A major reason for the current rapid growth of Kabul's bazaar areas is the huge number of jobless people desperately looking for means of income. A number of these informal traders is recruited from refugees from eastern and southeastern Afghanistan and from returnees from Pakistan. All are faced with difficult living conditions when arriving in the capital. Many of them have never been involved in any trading activity before migrating to Kabul and are newcomers to the struggle for economic success in the bazaar.

The core area of the recent revitalization and restructuring in the bazaar of Kabul is a section between the Kabul River and Jadda-e-Maiwand Boulevard (Figures 1 and 2). The boulevard divides the old bazaar into a northern, more active, and a southern, more stagnating part. The stretch especially between the Pul-e-Khishti Mosque and the Sephoi Gunman Monument at the crossing of the Jadda-e-Maiwand and the Nadir Pashtu Street represents the busiest sections of the bazaar (Figure 3 and 4). The quarters west and north of this stretch did not suffer as much from destruction during the civil war as did other parts of the city and the bazaar. Many buildings, especially in the Bagh-e-Umumi quarter where two- and three-storey houses dominate, survived even the turbulent times since the second half of the 1990s.

The original core of the bazaar of Kabul most probably had been situated within the Shor-e-Bazaar quarter (Figure 4). Despite the fact that at the time of his fieldwork Shor-e-Bazaar had been a residential quarter with privately owned houses, *Helmut Hahn* (1964) assumes that the old bazaar once had been constructed here, north of the former fort. One obvious indicator for this assumption is the name Shor-e-Bazaar, meaning "noisy bazaar". This quarter, which had been one of the most densely populated areas of Kabul (Figure 1), is now quite a silent place. As the comparison of the 1959 aerial photograph and the satellite image from 2004 (Figure 2) indicates, the Shor-e-Bazaar area of today is more or less ruined. This part of the city where traditionally Pashtu speaking people from eastern and southeastern provinces settled fell victim to the fierce fighting between different Mujahidin militias. Destruction here, as in most parts of Kabul, did not result from the conquest of Taliban forces nor from their later withdrawal.

Today the name "noisy bazaar" would fit much better the section of Nadir Pashtu Street between the Kabul River and the Jadda-e-Maiwand. This line represents also a boundary between the area of well established traditional shops in the Bagh-e-Umumi quarter and the informal shops further east (Figure 4). It extends toward the new commercial areas beyond the Pul-e-Khishti and north of the Kabul River. It is in Nadir Pashtu Street where bazaar shops in two- or three-



Photo 1: Women had been banned from bazaar activities during the Taliban period

storey houses meet the area of simple stalls made of wooden boards, piles, plastic folios and tent material. Nevertheless this line seems to be one of the most densely sites visited by customers.

Today Nadir Pashtu Street is limited to pedestrians only, although it severely hampers traffic flow within central Kabul. The important role of the street dates back to the time of field work done by *Helmut Hahn* (1964, pp. 68–77), who was assisted in his data collection in the mid-1960s by *Ghulam Jailani Arez*, today one of the most experienced professors at the Department of Geography and one of the former vice-presidents of Kabul University.

The bazaar section of Kuhna Foroshi, east of Nadir Pashtu Street, represents the typical process of spontaneous creation of commercial areas in Kabul. As its name (Kuhna Foroshi = old goods) already indicates, this bazaar section traditionally acted as the selling place for old and used goods, especially old clothes, in general of European origin. The map published by *Hahn* (1964) indicates in this area shops with “Western” and European clothes (“europ. Kleider” in

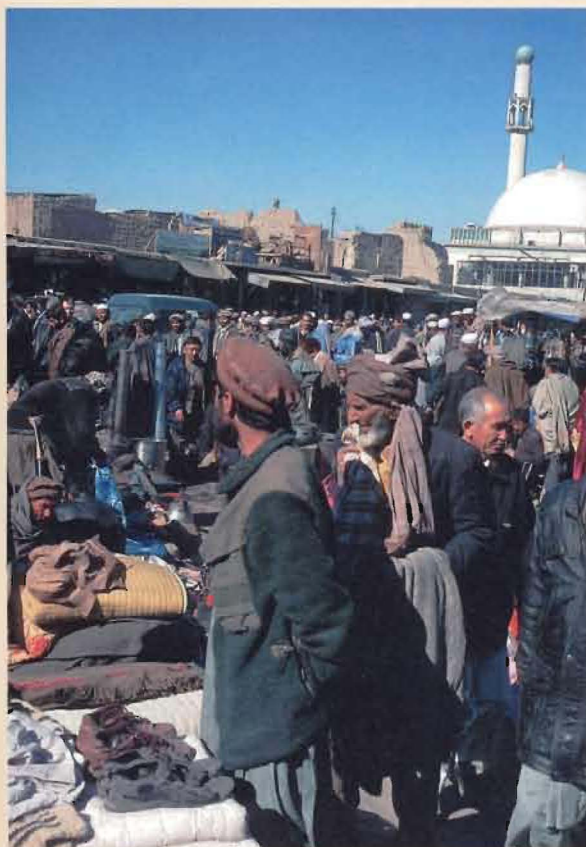


Photo 2: Entrance to the Kuhna Foroshi bazaar of old clothes and uniforms near Pul-e-Khishti Mosque



Photo 3: Blacksmith bazaar south of Jadda-e-Maiwand in 1962

Source: Hahn 1964, plate IV

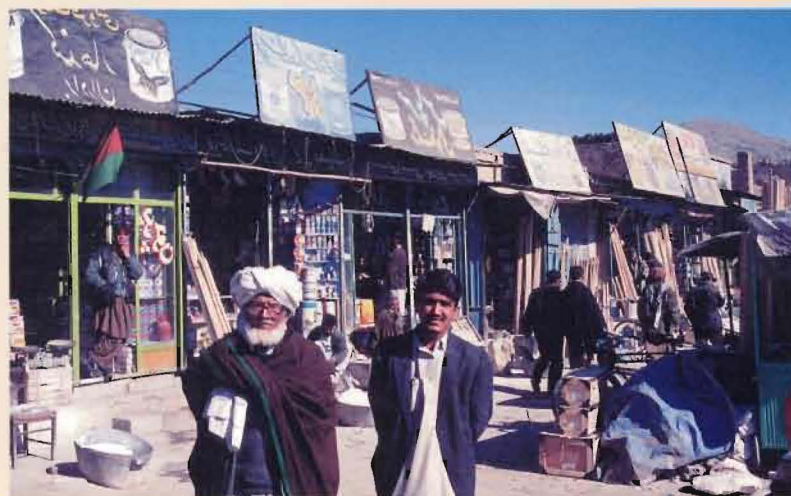


Photo 4: Construction materials in a Jadda-e-Maiwand bazaar section 2004

Photos 1, 2, 4–7: A. Dittmann

Figure 3), some glass and a few small workshops. After the Soviet invasion and especially during the following years of Mujahidin rule, mainly old uniforms and other military equipment of the Red Army and the Afghan People's Army were sold in the Kuhna Foroshi bazaar. In general this former specialization of the bazaar is still valid today while the type of goods offered shifted to equipment from US and ISAF troops.

Among the first commercial areas of Kabul which started business soon after the fall of the Taliban regime were the shops, stores and workshops along Jadda-e-Maiwand Boulevard. Here, the square with the Sephoi Gumnan monument at the junction with Nadir Pashtu Street seems to represent an important site of prestige and strategic importance. The revitalization of this

bazaar section has been characterized by both a rehabilitation of the well equipped carpet and imported textiles shops in two- or three-storey buildings around the monument and the rapid growth of wooden, instantly set-up small stalls in the eastern part of Jadd-e-Maiwand. While the installation of big textile stores around Sephoi Gumnan was a recast of former structures fitting to those of the Bagh-e-Ummumi area, the concentration of traders in small shops and mobile hawkers along the eastern part of the boulevard is a reaction to recent needs and opportunities of the present post-war situation. It was here where immediately after the fights in 2002 came to an end the first traders set up their small wooden huts of shops or just spread their goods along the pathways.

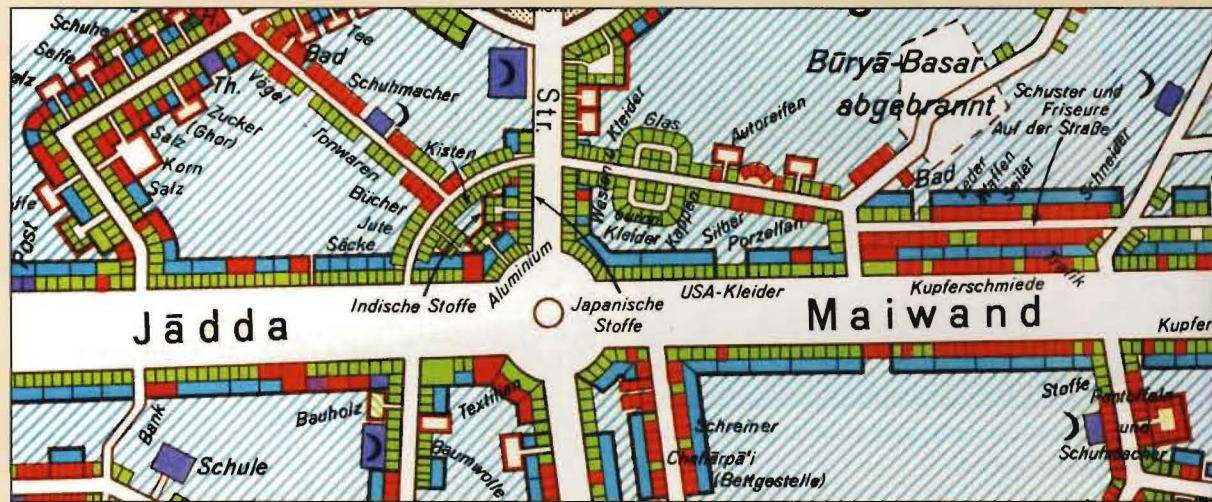


Figure 3: Section of the map of the central bazaar area of Kabul published by Hahn 1964

The data refer to 1962 showing the concentration of different categories of goods and services.

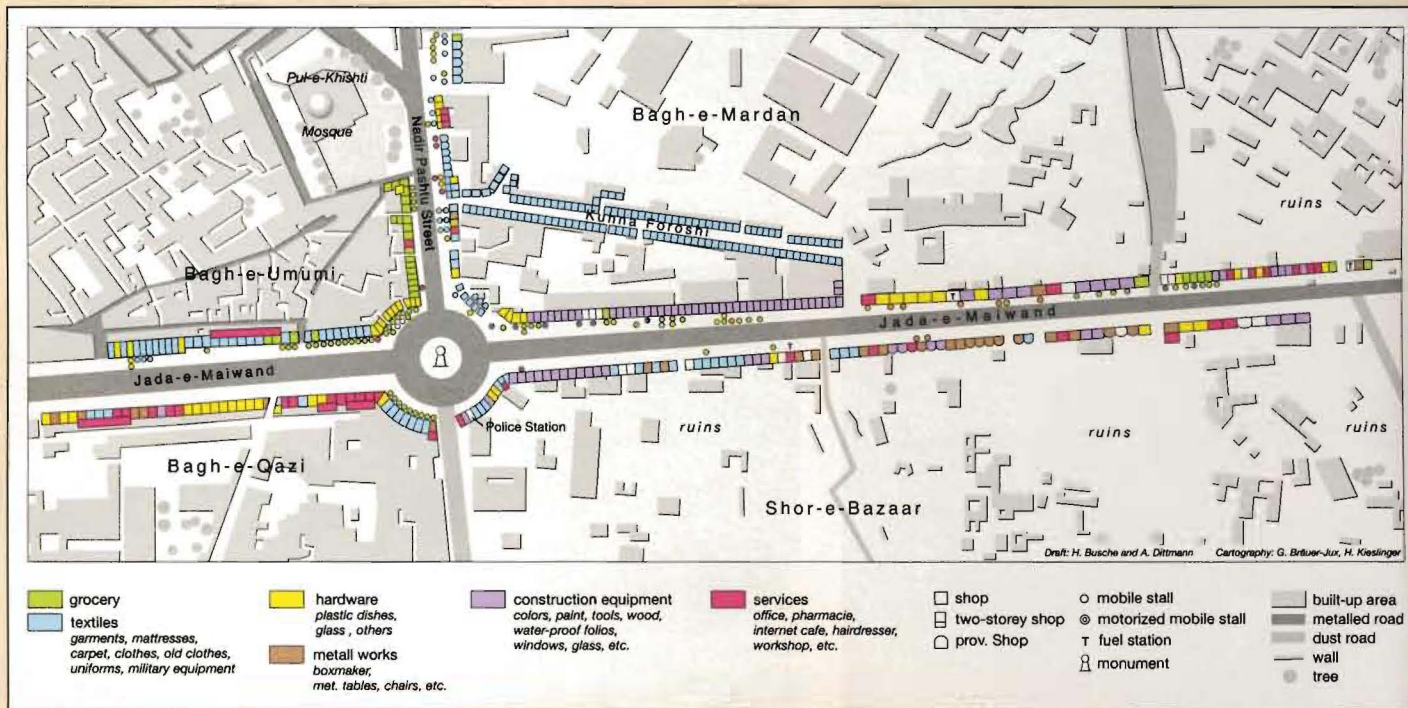


Figure 4: Sketch map of the central bazaar area of Kabul (2004) showing different stages of restructuring and re-formation

Source: Dittmann 2004

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Photo 5: The so-called “Titanic Bazaar” served as the marketplace for used clothes of European origin

They were sold on the banks of the Kabul River until heavy floods after snow melt in April 2003 filled the Wadi and washed away shops and stalls together with most of the goods on sale, thus giving this location its unusual modern name



Photo 7: Local medicine such as dried lizards and mushrooms in a pharmacy shop of Nadir Pashtu Street



Photo 6: Multitude of ethno-linguistic groups in Kabul’s bazaar (with bearded Tajik men, a Hazara boy in the centre, a Pashtu boy with cap and a Usbek man at the right)

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See page 9

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