



# Commerce, empire and faith in Safavid Iran: the *caravanserai* of Isfahan

Derek Bryce

*Strathclyde Business School, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK*

Kevin D. O’Gorman

*Strathclyde Business School, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK and  
School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University,  
Edinburgh, UK, and*

Ian W.F. Baxter

*Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK*

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Received 30 January 2011  
Revised 19 May 2011  
2 November 2012  
Accepted 5 November 2012

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is twofold: to explore how commercial hospitality has contributed to the development of urban areas in relation to commerce, hospitality, religious and imperial patronage in early modern, Safavid Iran (c. seventeenth century). Second, to combine material culture research methods in an analytical framework for future use.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected during 27 site visits over three years to 14 *caravanserai* six bazaar complexes. A material culture methodology is proposed, designed and implemented, supplemented by analysis of textual sources.

**Findings** – The form and function of *caravanserai* at Zein-i Edin broadly reflect the form and function of desert *caravanserai* common in much of the Islamic world. However, the complex within the Qaysariyya Bazaar in Isfahan reflects the convergence of specific dynastic, geopolitical and economic issues facing seventeenth century Safavid Iran shaping both urban form and commercial focus. These are consolidation of the Safavid dynasty, rivalry with the Ottoman Empire and the vital importance of trade with Mughal India.

**Research limitations/implications** – The research is limited by its specific contextual scope but invites further investigation in analogous contexts across this milieu as well as further implementation of the material culture methods it adopts to both historical and contemporary commercial contexts.

**Originality/value** – The paper explores, for the first time the development of commercial hospitality in early modern Iran and invites further consideration of the development of capitalism outside of Eurocentric teleologies. Furthermore, it presents a new and explicit methodological framework for using material culture as a means of enquiry.

**Keywords** Iran, *Caravanserai*, Bazaar, Islam, Material culture, Hospitality services

**Paper type** Research paper



## Introduction

The theoretical aims of this paper are two-fold: to explore the development of an infrastructure of hospitality provision intended to facilitate commerce within the Islamic world, and to combine material culture research methods in an analytical framework. Material culture research analyzes the physical world to infer meaning on human function. By exploring three key aspects of material culture, a fresh research

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perspective is offered. The importance of this paper is therefore three-fold; it demonstrates engagement with new qualitative methods from different disciplines. Second, it enhances our understanding of the development of commercial hospitality and trade through the adoption of alternative methodologies and perspectives. Third, it offers a methodological framework for future research. In offering a new and explicit methodological framework for using material culture as a means of enquiry, this paper answers the question: How can data from material culture be used to strengthen hospitality and tourism research methods? Exploring and discussing archaeological, architectural and artifactual data collection methods, from a material culture perspective, creates a three-level framework.

Contextually, this paper explores the place of hospitality in Safavid Iran during a period when a “capitalist” economy informed by Islamic propriety had existed for almost 1,000 years in the region (Rodinson, 2007). The value in better understanding the nature in which religion, commerce and pioneering ambition interacted is apparent since Iran was situated between the Ottoman and Mughal empires and commercial hospitality facilitated trade and pilgrimage throughout the surrounding regions (Linderman, 2013). There is a strong tradition of hospitality in the Islamic world, drawing on the ethics of the Prophet Ibrahim as articulated in the Qur’an (O’Gorman, 2010). *Caravanserais* were hostels for travellers, where accommodation was often provided free for a night (O’Gorman, 2009). A comprehensive system of *caravanserais* existed across Iran, and wider Islamic world. In contrast to the monasteries of Western Christendom (O’Gorman, 2010), *caravanserais* could also be used as commercial centers for merchants. As well as being located on trade and pilgrimage routes, *caravanserais* were also commonly found associated with the grand bazaars of Iranian cities (Hāgī-Qāsimī, 2005a, b).

The term “Islamic world” is an imprecise one. First, it does not correlate in spatial and functional terms with the idea of the *Ummah*, the term originally meaning, in the earliest years after the emergence of the faith in the seventh century CE (Armstrong, 2001) the community of Medina including Muslims and Jews, but later meaning the collective community of Muslims (Adamec, 2007). In this paper we use the term to mean those parts of the world where Islam became the dominant faith of either or both a ruling elite and the majority of a population and where the precepts of the Qur’an, Sunnah, Hadith and Shari’a law determined or informed political, social and economic organization.

Understanding of the position of commercial hospitality in the region is limited and engagement with it in relation to religious and economic tropes precludes articulation of the fundamental role it played. This paper engages with examples of commercial hospitality provision using multiple perspectives on their physical and social function to illustrate that integral role. The use of material culture methods allows for more comprehensive meanings of the built environment and the social structures that functioned therein to be gleaned.

This paper now divides into five sections. The literature on commercial and economic life in early Islam and in particular the role of the *caravanserais* and bazaar is reviewed in section one. Section two exploring the literature on Safavid Iran and the City of Isfahan sets the context for the empirical work. There follows a detailed section on data sources and collection methods. The next section is empirical and we explore the role played by different *caravanserais* in the development of commercial hospitality and in its contribution to the growth of structures analogous to early capitalism. In the final section of the paper, we draw together the threads of our argument, highlight the importance of commercial hospitality in shaping both urban form and focus of Isfahan

### **Commercial and economic life in early Islam**

Islam emerged in the seventh century in the Arabian Peninsula, where populations were largely nomadic. Economically and politically, it was less organized than neighbors in the Late Roman (Byzantine) and Iranian (Sassanian) empires. Yet, urban, commercial activity was provided for, notably in Mecca sitting astride caravan routes linking Yemen with Syria. The Prophet Muhammad, was born to the prominent Meccan *Koreish* family which had important commercial links with Byzantine Syria (Hourani, 1991). Urban commerce in Mecca permitted the emergence of a commercial class from older kinship networks. Islam provided a form of worship and legal-ethical framework governing non-kin relationships, notably in commercial life (Wolf, 1951). As Morony (2004) shows, the rapid territorial expansion of Islam was into the economically developed, urbanized Byzantine territories of Syria, Palestine, Egypt and North Africa as well as in Sassanian Iran. Islam emerges from a commercially aware context and expands into sophisticated existing (Byzantine) and expanding (Sassanian) economic spheres.

By the ninth century, the Islamic world, much of it under the centralized rule of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, stretched from Iberia to Central Asia (Kennedy, 2005). Even after the end of Abbasid dominance and the regional fragmentation of political power, this was a milieu connected by faith, high culture and trade. Despite the prohibition of usury in Islamic law (Labib, 1969), means were found to finance commerce in a “world market” encompassing the vast Islamic milieu as well as non-Muslim markets in China, India and Europe (Burke, 1979). Compromises were therefore reached including the expedient (as in Christendom) of relying on Jewish financiers but more commonly to measures such as the indexing of loans to the sale value of goods rather than currency, and the issuance of recognized letters of credit (Bowden, 1977). This system of credit, already well developed by the eighth century, was vital to ensure the viability of commerce both in terms of the transit of goods and their reception and resale in the bazaars of a network of urban centers (Udovitch, 1975; Ray, 1997; Lapidus, 2002). Such was the established nature of this network that the fourteenth century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battutah was able to describe the cities of Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Samarkand and Delhi as wondrous in their local specificities yet recognizable to him, based upon the institutional commonality that united them (Mcintosh-Smith, 2002; Gordon, 2008). Additionally, during the period of Mongol rule in the eastern Islamic lands, Muscovy and China an even wider shared system of economic and diplomatic relations was established. This was carried over to relations between three early-modern empires of Islam (Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal) in their relations with Ming China. These sets of diplomatic and commercial relations precede the global trade networks often associated more specifically with later Western European commercial powers (Kauz, 2011). Secular commercial and economic life was, as Rodinson (2007, p. 107) comments, sufficiently embedded that, as an ethical limitation, “Islam’s capacity is of the same order of magnitude as that of its rival ideologies, in other words, a very weak one”. Certainly, by the fourteenth century, Muslim thinkers like Ibn Khaldun were able to survey economic life as an object of study in a structured fashion (Spengler, 1964). In any event, the structural conditions in terms of finance were in place to enable long distance commerce linking a network of urban centers across the Islamic milieu well before the period that this paper is concerned with.

Caravanserai *and bazaar*

The field of Islamic architecture and urban space in both sacred and secular forms, reflects diverse cultural and stylistic vernaculars stretching from the Maghreb to Indonesia, from the Balkans to sub-Saharan Africa. Abu-Lughod (1987) cautions against orientalist attempts to present it as an undifferentiated, dehistoricized way. Certainly, actual modes of consumption of public, commercial hospitality in urban contexts varied considerably, depending on local cultural conditions (Lewicka, 2005; Karababa and Ger, 2011). Yet Inalcık (1990) maintains that the foundation of the bazaar and associated bedestan, for the storage of bulk goods, was indeed a feature of much Islamic urban planning. Hillenbrand (2003) acknowledges that certain functional, institutional forms, related to commerce and hospitality, such as the *caravanserai* and bazaar, may be posited as broadly typical of this. *Caravanserai* were initially conceived of, particularly in the Medieval Central Asian context, as rest houses for groups of people, their goods and animals, travelling land routes between cities, and were often provided by the state. Typically, they were fortified, square, round or hexagonal complexes containing an arcaded courtyard with quarters for travelers, stabling for animals, and storage for trade goods (Ahmad and Chase, 2004). The design of these complexes may have drawn inspiration from pre-Islamic structures such as Roman forts and domestic courtyard architecture, Chinese military posts and Buddhist monasteries (Wirth, 2000), reflecting the diversity of architectural and institutional vernacular that Islam drew upon throughout its history and the existing long-distance trade routes that it developed around (Fussman, 1996; Ousterhout, 2004). Certainly, in the case of Iran, evidence suggests that *caravanserai* were founded during the Sassanian period, with their original function simply continuing under Islamic rule (Hāgī-Qāsimī, 2005c; Shokoohy, 1983; Wirth, 2000).

Establishing *caravanserai* to provide hospitality for travellers is often reflected among the traditions and writings of the region, for example in 719:

[...] establish inns in your lands so that whenever a Muslim passes by, you will put him up for a day, and a night and take care of his animals; if he is sick, provide him with hospitality for two days and two nights; and if he has used up all of his provisions and is unable to continue, supply him with whatever he needs to reach his hometown (al-Tabarī, [838]/1989).

Ibn Abd al-Hakam ([1014]/1922), (d.860) makes mention of *caravanserai* built by the governor of Egypt; and there is evidence from 710 when the ruler of Damascus was criticized for funding the construction of a Mosque rather than maintaining the roads and building *caravanserai* (al-Muqaddasī, [946]/1877). As O’Gorman (2009) notes, by the ninth and tenth centuries there were facilities for travellers in Bukhara, Uzbekistan (al-Narshakhī, [959]/1954) and in the eleventh century a governor in Western Iran had “built in his territories 3,000 mosques and *caravanserai* for strangers” (ibn Abd al-Hakam, [1014]/1922, p. 113).

The overriding rationale for *caravanserai* maintenance was commercial, with evidence showing that only during the wealthiest years of the Abbasid Caliphate were they constructed for the specific use of pilgrims on the *Hajj* routes (Petersen, 1994). Yavuz (1997) suggests that attentiveness to the specific form of individual *caravanserai* may yield insights into ancillary functions such as military facilities, postal stations and royal guesthouses. Yet *caravanserai* did not solely occupy the role of desert or rural way-station for long-distance trade and travel. *Caravanserai* can be seen in the heart of urban contexts, including inland and port cities, across the breadth of the Islamic world in various periods, including Abbasid Iraq, Moorish Iberia,

Medieval Morocco; Ottoman Anatolia and Thrace, Mughal India and Islamic South East Asia (Naji and Ali, 1981; Burns, 1971; Jennings, 1976; Kuran, 1996; Boone *et al.*, 1990; Begley, 1983; Kathirithamby-Wells, 1986). These are contexts where states vied for control over major *caravanserai* and trading *entrepot*, founded urban *caravanserai* in association with the marketplace or bazaar and associated both with prominent religious and secular imperial architecture. Islamic charitable endowments, Waqf, usually associated with royal or elite patronage, were often linked with their foundation. Revenues accruing from these commercial areas and sites of hospitality can be seen in, for example, the Mamluk and Ottoman Levant (Fernandes, 1987; Shatzmiller, 2001; Kana'an, 2001). In other areas, such as Central Asia, the value of land was determined by the revenue accrued from the *caravanserai*, bazaars, baths and other institutions (Fedorov-Davydov, 1983).

This conjunction of the terminus of long-distance trade, the need for proximity of hospitality provision with the bazaar and the associated presence of state-sponsored religious architecture can be seen markedly in Cairo's Khan al-Khalili, dating from the Medieval Fatamid and Mamluk periods. Williams (2002) notes the link between commercial, religious and local community function in the association amongst *caravanserai*, mosque, medrese and hamam in both Mamluk and Ottoman Cairo. The seventeenth century Ottoman traveler, Evliya *Çelebi* notes this proximity and relatedness of institution and function in his account of his stay in Jerusalem en-route to fulfilling the *Hajj* pilgrimage, underlining the importance of this commercial infrastructure for religious as well as commercial travelers (Dankoff and Sooyong, 2011). The role of the *caravanserai* as local meeting place, official public space and as venue for commercially focused hospitality for long-distance traders is illustrated by Faroqhi (2005), relating the command by a Mongol governor of central Anatolia that both townspeople and his own troops gather in a local *caravanserai* to witness his inauguration of a new *medrese*, or religious school. This complex of *caravanserai*, bazaars and nearby mosques was traditionally frequented by foreign merchants (Williams, 2002). Istanbul's *Divanyolu*, or "road of the Divan", along which Ottoman Sultans paraded ceremonially on their way to Friday prayers also intersected with the commercial heart of the capital, including the *Kapalıçarşı* or "Grand Bazaar" (Cerasi, 2005).

### **Safavid Iran: imperial consolidation and the rise of Isfahan**

Safavid Iran was one of the three great early modern Islamic states, along with the Ottoman and Mughal empires, whose territories stretched collectively from North Africa to southern India. With the decline of the political unity of Islam under the Abbasid Caliphate from the ninth century, Iran was ruled by a series of Iranian, Turkic and Mongol dynasties. During this time, a fusion of Arabic religious and legal norms and Iranian high culture came to form a vernacular recognizable to many in the Islamic world (Frye, 2000). Drawn from the Sunni, Sufi religious movement of Shaykh Safi al-Din (1252-1334), which sought to purify and restore Islam at a popular level at a time of political uncertainty, the Safavids had become a potent military force by the fifteenth century. Shifting towards the Shi'ism, this religious movement also became a dynastic one under its leader, Isma'il, who conquered all of Iran and declared himself Shah in 1501 (Lapidus, 2002).

The state was essentially an at times uneasy alliance between Turkish speaking military and Persian speaking administrative classes, a situation the Safavid Shahs ameliorated with the formation of a slave army of Georgian, Armenian and Circassian

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Christians, loyal only to the imperial house. The empire's initial capitals were in the northwestern cities of Tabriz and Qazvin, but partly because of their proximity to the military front along the border with the Ottoman Empire, it was moved in to the central Iranian city of Isfahan in 1590 (Newman, 2005). The empire fell to Afghan invaders in 1722, after a half-century of decline brought about by a series of internal and externally derived economic, ideological and political crises (Foran, 1992).

The Safavid Empire entered its "golden age" under Shah "Abbas I (r. 1587-1629), who is credited with transforming the city of Isfahan into one of the most dramatically beautiful cities of the period, known poetically as *Nesf-e Jahan* or "half of the world". Isfahan boasted fine religious and secular architecture from previous Seljuq, Il-Khanid and Timurid periods (Hutt and Harrow, 1977), but it was under "Abbas I that the city gained the built environment of a true imperial capital, with the palaces and mosques endowed by the dynasty and the associated commercial infrastructure catering to it.

### **Methodology for the application of material culture research to organizational research**

As O'Gorman (2009) observes, a comprehensive system of *caravanserai* existed across Iran and throughout the Islamic world. These provided hospitality and care for travellers both pilgrims (Petersen, 1994) and merchants (Yavuz, 1997). In Iran today 120 of these *caravanserai* still exist, some have been redeveloped and are used as city-center hotels, markets, or other commercial facilities, whereas others still operate like the *caravanserai* of old (Hāġī-Qāsimī, 2005c). The remainder is left under the care of Iran's cultural heritage agency. Individual and complex examples of *caravanserai* are investigated as part of this research.

One of the main issues impeding any study of the evolution of these facilities is the lack of historical data, as most early eighteenth century invaders destroyed city and state archives. In Isfahan, for example, Asaf (1348/1929) notes, after the invasion of 1722 the Afghan governor ordered the burning of contents of the imperial record office. McChesney (1988) presents limited sources on Shah Abbas's building of Isfahan and Bacque-Grammont (1993) lists the documents available in various archives. However, the lack of documentary evidence requires a more imaginative methodology; exploring the material remains of these buildings.

Current trends in management research consider the dynamics of organizations as impacted on by their use of physical space (Linderman, 2013; Maclaren *et al.*, 2013; O'Mahony and Clark, 2013). Thus the layouts and the utilization of material culture artifacts create the missing link between people and place (Cousins *et al.*, 2010; O'Gorman and Gillespie, 2010). The contemporary methodological approach of material culture is defined by Prown (1982) as being determined by the utter absence of any other method through which to gather information when it comes to historical subjects. Prown (1982, p. 5) notes in some cases, "artifacts constitute the only surviving evidence, so there is little choice but to use them".

Material culture has the ability, particularly in a contemporary context, to capitalize on the profound absence of other environmental elements that often empathize with our own biases and beliefs (see, for example, Maclaren *et al.*, 2013). The fundamental approach of material culture as outlined by Prown (1982) is description, deduction and speculation. The objective description and categorization of objects leads to deductions regarding their use, impact, and associations to a context and environment. From this process, a variety of definitive conclusions can be made that, according to Prown

(1980), are only interpretable through material objects. These conclusions include, veracity, cultural perspective, inherent value, representation beyond text, tangible and physical impact on the course of history.

Material culture research, according to Woodward (2007) seeks to infer meaning on human function through analyzing the physical world. Miller (1987) cites the ability of artifacts to bridge a gap of meaning between the physical and the metaphysical. Barber and Peniston-Bird (2009) note that historical research has been improved through the use of a range of methods, acting as alternatives to traditional means such as textual analysis. For this research the built environment is used as a text by reflecting and analyzing the cityscape. Geertz (1977, p. 448) describes the cityscape as “a story people tell themselves about themselves.” Two different architectural approaches exist for this: historical architecture and social architecture. Hillenbrand (1994), as an architectural historian, tries to identify the architect, analyze the work, and put the architect’s work into the larger context of his time and region. Whereas Blake (1999), as a social architect, argues the built environment reflects the social system of the time and the ways in which that system is expressed, reproduced, and experienced and therefore reflects the structure of urban life.

Material culture prevents other environmental elements from “contaminating” and as such is able to articulate a cultural narrative in stark relief from an absent human context. In his discussions surrounding the freedom of historians to be in a position to bestow meaning upon historical documents through a priori conceptions, Marwick (2001) cites two key factors pertaining to any form of research relating to historical disciplines. First, that the mere existence of documents (or indeed artifacts, physical spaces or buildings) ascribe an acknowledgement that, “some event took place” (Marwick, 2001, p. 26). From this acknowledgment, conceptions can begin to be formed and thus from these conceptions historians can secondly engage in what Barber and Peniston-Bird (2009) describe as a “tripartite relationship” of intersubjectivity where the historian forms an interpretive bond with the author of the historical document through the document itself. As material culture falls within a category of historical research disciplines that infer meaning from the physical world, a naturally similar symbiosis is formed between the material culture researcher and those who used the material objects in the first place. The parallel to Marwick’s (2001) descriptions is apparent here, whereby, the researcher’s interpretation of the material object expedites meaning to be bestowed on the organization that once, or perhaps still, functioned around it. The subjectivity that the researcher is privileged with is essential in drawing out any meaning from the subject matter and precludes one from over subscribing to reductionism in a futile effort to achieve true objectivity (Barber and Peniston-Bird, 2009). It is indeed the subjectivity of the researcher’s interpretation that allows new methodological possibilities to be established in previously unaddressed disciplines. Therefore, the meaning inferred from the interpretation of the users of material objects through the objects themselves illustrates how useful material culture methods could be to the analysis of organizations.

The basis of approaching material objects as a means for wider organizational enquiry lies in the formulation of a collection of key questions relating to the object according to Harvey (2009). Forming a protocol of enquiry for the object allows comparisons to be drawn between objects and categorization to be carried-out. Categorizing groups of objects enables organizational processes to be identified and establish the relationship that existed between different categories of objects. This protocol of enquiry seeks to establish the production, function and reception of the

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object as well as how those aspects fitted in with the organization and wider social context. Morrall (2002) notes the potential for objects to indicate that they were used with resistance or even misused, further highlighting the value of analyzing material culture's place in an organization. Any organizational analogies that can be drawn from the enquiry focussed on particular objects or categories of objects serve to further illuminate the potential contribution of material culture to organizational research.

It is also noted by Harvey (2009) that the need to consider the space and built environment around an artifact is integral to the overall interpretation of its place in the environment and its use therein. Hood (1996) underlines this need to engage with all aspects of the material object in order to unlock the possibilities of meaning that can be harvested from it. Formulating a protocol for enquiry with these aspects in mind will allow meaning to be extracted from the artifact, the researcher, the original user of the object and the physical and metaphysical environment within which the artifact existed and operated.

Table I gives a methodological overview of four studies that employ material culture. The aim of each paper is stated and from this aim the methodological proposition is described, this shows the way in which each respective study expects the use of material culture to precipitate illuminating findings. The four studies depicted below are methodologically concise and typical in terms of material culture, using three stage engagement with the material to offer insight into its place in the environment, its use therein and potentially any constructed meaning that may be drawn from the previous. Despite their more typical employment of the methods, the studies depicted below are also discussed due to the more unusual foci. Saunders (2000) explores the physicality of factories and the organizational meaning that can be drawn from it; Shove and Southerton (2000) use material culture to offer insight into the relationship societal progress has had with the development of the freezer. By using these studies, a justification for the contribution material culture methods can make in other fields of enquiry is feasible, furthermore the apparently consistent methodological process used offers a framework on which a methodological protocol can be developed.

The studies discussed in Table I demonstrate a consistent pattern of engagement with their data. Three categories of enquiry are evident, namely: archaeological (e.g. Saunders (2000)), architectural (e.g. Alexander (2000)) and artifactual (e.g. Shove and Southerton (2000)). Within these respective areas of interest, methods usually center around a framework, for example Saunders (2000) identifies categories in which to analyze the trench art metal work. Organizational research that engages with the data in all three areas of material culture, namely archaeology, architecture and artifact analyses, creates a rich and textured impression of the research subject. Therefore the emergent framework presents a multi-level method that utilizes all three of these data sources. Moreover, the use of this framework provides a comprehensive and detailed expression of an organization through a material culture gaze, further illustrating the impact such methods might have.

*The Maydan- i Shah, the Qaysariyya bazaar and its caravanserai: an illustrative example of a material culture interpretation of organizational research*

A three-level methodological framework using archaeological, architectural and artifactual methods of data collection are used as a framework around which to construct material culture-based research. When applying material culture methods in a contemporary context to a populated and functioning business, the subjectivity of any study of this nature can be influenced by the human element of the organization.



**Table I.**  
Methodological overview  
studies that employ  
material culture

Title and reference	Overview and aim	Methodological proposition			Method		
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Bodies of metal, shells of memory Saunders (2000)	Looking at material culture in First World War metalwork trench art. Trench art pieces are objectifications of the self, reflecting soldiers' experience of war	Identify categories with spatial, temporal, and physical features, and symbolic associations	Category 1 1914-19 Trench art made by soldiers in the front-line or rear areas	Category 2 1914-39 Sub-category 2a: 1914-18: In-civilian manufacture of metal trench art. Sub-category 2b: 1919-39: New market of pilgrims and tourists visiting the battlefields	Category 3: C. 1918-C.39 Unworked materials brought back after the war		
The factory: fabricating the state Alexander (2000)	Considers the Turkish State's use of the built environment to mould behavior. Looking at the physical and "metaphysical" space of a factory to determine influences of state	Three categories of buildings identified	The Factory: "form", "practice", "building" and "setting"	The Compound: "form", "practice", "building" and "setting"	The Social Buildings: "form", "practice", "building" and "setting"		
Defrosting the freezer: from novelty to convenience a narrative of normalization Shove and Southerton (2000)	Examines the "normalization" of the British freezer, re-framing the sociological analysis of material objects and of better understanding the social and technical organization of domestic energy use	Three periods of development of the freezer are reflective of three distinct periods in advancements of domestic household life in the west	Initial period 1960-1970: oriented around the utility of preserving home produce, using marketing and communications as data	Second stage 1970-1980: the development of a frozen food infrastructure and the establishment of the freezer as a part of the efficient domestic economy	Third stage 1980s onwards: subtle but significant redefinition		

(continued)

Title and reference	Overview and aim	Methodological proposition			Method		
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Syncretic objects: material culture of syncretism among the Paiwan Catholics, Taiwan Tan (2002)	“The Paiwan Cross”, characteristic of the mixture of traditional imagery and Christian imagery, represents a path towards syncretism. Through the making of religious objects combining Christian ideas and traditional symbols, do the Paiwan Catholics develop and construct themselves as syncretic subjects?	Engagement with specific iconic artifacts will illustrate the mixture of religion and tradition	Carving in two frames: carving regarded as a privileged and sacred act	The making of syncretic objects and syncretic subjects: identifying similarities in carvings through the ages	The house of syncretic objects: the Tjaubar Catholic Church is a space where Catholicism and traditional religion are not treated as mutually exclusive and a dialogue between them is encouraged.		

Table I.

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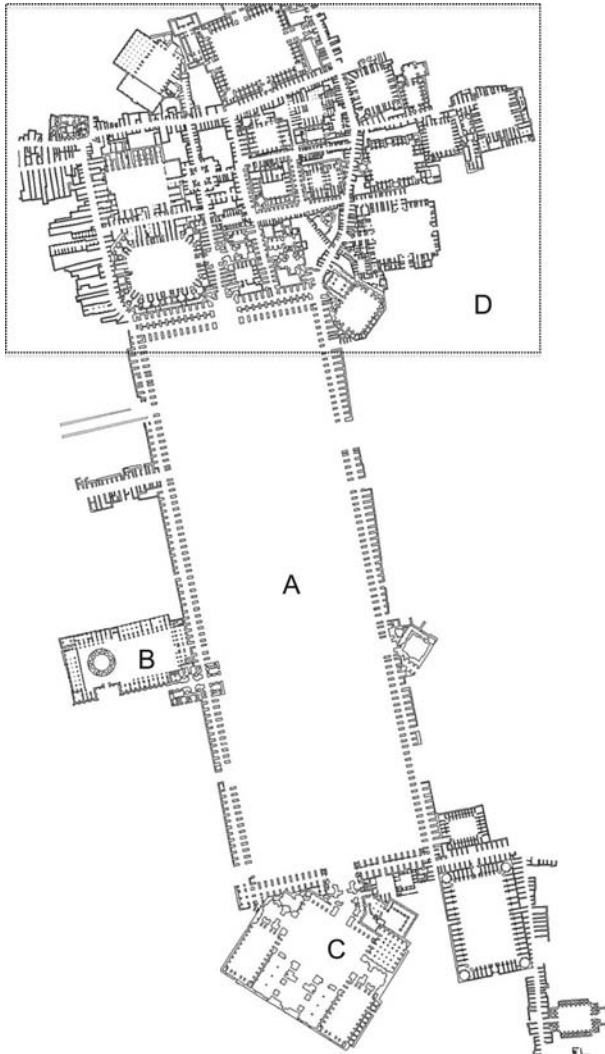
After gaining site access and requisite permission, when appropriate, from the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organizations a three-stage research process took place. Data were collected over a three-year period, during 27 site visits in Iran, with 14 individual *caravanserais* and six bazaar complexes visited. Collaborative visits were also undertaken with local experts, where intensive debate complimented and refined the individual professional approach. Follow-up discussions took place to challenge the research method, assumptions and interpretations. The data that are presented here emanate from a typical case of *caravanserai*, and one bazaar complex, which are both illustrative and representative.

*Level 1 Archaeological data: identification, context and interpretation of physical infrastructure.* The interpretation of archaeological data aims to contribute to the understanding of the history of the site, and the development of society at it over the course of time. The building as an archaeological artifact or site is thus a piece of the jigsaw within the wider enquiry into the cultural development of society at the given location.

At Zein-i-edin in the desert, about 100km outside Yazd in the direction of the Afghan border, there is a restored *caravanserai*, located on one of the major silk routes. It is owned by the Iran Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, and, until recently, was neglected and derelict. Four years ago it was secured on a 12-year lease by three brothers with an agreement to renovate the site as a hotel designed in a style sympathetic to its origins (Figure 1 and Plates 1 and 2). They employ a professional Iranian hotelier to manage and operate the project. It attracts international visitors, mainly from Spain but also elsewhere in Europe, domestic tourists and also provides meals for passing tour groups.

In comparison to the stand alone *caravanserai*, as McChesney (1988, p. 103) observes, “Shah “Abbas’s additions to the cityscape of Isfahan have elicited awe and admiration for centuries [including] the great Royal Square (Maydan-i Shah) (Figure 1: A), the Palace District (Bagh-i Naqsh-i Jahan) (Figure 1: B) [and] the Royal Mosque (Masjid-i Shah) (Figure 1: C)” as well as the Qaysariyya (“Grand”) Bazaar (Figure 1: D), built in 1603, and facing the latter. The land these structures were built upon was purchased specifically by “Abbas to form the secular, religious and commercial heart of his new capital, with rational planning introduced to ensure the city “served practical needs [as well as engineering] public and semi-public spaces to fit with the Shah’s new social vision” (Canby, 2009, p. 23). Over the century, the new bazaar spread northwards from the Maydan to link with the old city center. “The latter . . . became the socio-economic center for the common people and . . . religious festivals while the new square to the south was . . . the center of the economic and politico-cultural activities of the court” (Newman, 2005, p. 60). Imperial patronage drew craftsmen and artists to the city, enhancing its aesthetic and commercial profile, while Armenians, including an important merchant community, were resettled in the city, away from conflict on the Ottoman frontier, placing Isfahan at a pivotal position on important trade between India and Europe (Debashti, 2003; Gregorian, 1974).

It was Safavid imperial policy to divert trade with Europe away from the transit routes through the Ottoman Empire, by expanding the commercial profile of Isfahan, the port of Bandar Abbas and other direct points of contact with Western merchants. This helped to minimize the leakage of vital gold and silver specie to Ottoman customs levies. This was vital to Safavid commerce with its principal trading partner, Mughal India, which demanded payment in specie (Newman, 2005). The Ottomans, meanwhile, were concerned with leakage of specie taken as payment for raw Iranian silk and goods



**Notes:** A – Great Royal Square (Maydan-i Shah); B – Palace District (Bagh-i Naqsh-i Jahan); C – Royal Mosque (Masjid-i Shah); D – Qaysariyya (‘Grand’) Bazaar (See Figure 2 for more detail)

**Source:** Kevin O’Gorman

**Figure 1.**  
Central Cityscape of  
Isfahan

arriving overland from India in the markets at Bursa, underlining the interplay and tension amongst state actors and their policy responses (Faroqi, 2006).

Along with the large community of visiting Indian merchants, therefore, the city attracted European travelers, attracted by the commercial and diplomatic opportunities it afforded (Walker, 2005; Ferrier, 1996). Along with the expanding infrastructure, manifest in the construction of the hybrid wholesale venue/hospitality

**Plate 1.**  
External view of  
*caravanserai* at Zein-i  
Edin, Iran

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**Source:** Kevin O’Gorman

provision of the *caravanserai* and the retail markets in the bazaar, so necessary to such a thriving commercial center, a culture of consumption and sociability emerged. Partly influenced by court taste, this included the appearance of coffee shops in the Qaysariyya Bazaar: “a public place in which the upper segments of society had the opportunity to enjoy a stimulant in an atmosphere of leisure and conviviality”, thus underlining the centrality of commerce and hospitality in the Safavid capital (Matthee, 1994).

*Level 2 Architectural data: location, layout and function.* Architectural data helps to establish the context of a building, room or any establishment through identifying its primary functions, how these functions are influenced by the environment, and changing needs over time. This is achieved through gaining perspective on location and layout, which then allows for general observations on the use of space.

Originally, the *caravanserai* at Zen-I Edin provided for basic human needs in the desert. It is a rounded hexagonal shape with observation points at each corner and around the single threshold. As an exposed desert building, the design provides robust protection from the natural elements and attack. The angled walls allow effective wind-deflection, necessary for the heavy sandstorms that the region is prone to. Like all desert *caravanserai*, the main gate was closed at dusk and not opened until dawn the following day. Guests experience a relative oasis in the harsh environment, with the central circular social space on to which the inside rooms open up. This would be a haven for traveling tradesmen and a bustling, but small market, and there was a stabling facility and space to tend to repairs and health issues whilst staying. The sleeping quarters were basic; cut-out niches in the exterior wall had a step up to them.

This is a typical example of a freestanding *caravanserai* that facilitated trade. *Caravanserai* were faced with security and protection difficulties, threats from looters or bandits and exposure to storms meant that the exterior was built for strength and isolation rather than access and aesthetics. The walls were high, and flat with observation towers on the corners of the square building, and either side of the single entrance. The built environment alludes to the focus on security, in the



**Source:** Kevin O’Gorman

**Plate 2.**  
Internal view of  
*caravanserai* at Zein-i  
Edin, Iran

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same manner as mediaeval castles, they have a single, protected entrance to control a single threshold. This simple but effective method of security served a myriad of purposes: from human threats, protection from the elements in an exposed environment, and the control of traders. The belief in free hospitality meant that charges for accommodation and facilitation of trade had to be levied in an indirect fashion. When traders arrived, the goods they were carrying would be counted and stored. On their departure, the goods would be recounted and the difference would be taxed based on the items that had been sold. Thus, trade tax served to substitute for accommodation rents.

The building was entirely self-contained and all necessities would be catered for internally. The central passageway running the full circumference of the *caravanserai* had larger rooms on the inside, opening onto the central market space. On the other side of the passageway, the external wall of the building contained the basic accommodation space. These would be modest quarters, slightly raised off ground level, veiled by a simple curtain, with carpets and sheets for comfort. Traders would use these facilities as a means of working, socializing, passing news and tending to problems with camels, stock or personal health. The smells and sounds they experienced in such a *caravanserai* would be intense as business was conducted all around them with a vast range of products and produce on offer, camels stabled nearby and many people sleeping, working, toileting and eating in close proximity with one another.

The grand Bazaar of Isfahan is comprised of a *mélange* of variously sized *caravanserais*. In such a concentrated marketplace environment particular trades would cluster around associated *caravanserais*. Therefore, *caravanserais* delineated market segments and associative commercial and infrastructural clusters in a commercial and physical sense. From the plans, the built environment shows Mosques and *caravanserais* as connected by the Bazaar alleyways. The Mosques are of course oriented toward Mecca and are distinguishable from *caravanserais* for this reason. Visiting traders, would set-up alongside established local shops on the ground floor. Front shops would open onto the market space with back shops available for loading, unloading and stocking goods. Some stalls were permanent with production facilities in the back shop and vending space in the front. Given the significance of the local economy in Isfahan, traders could viably set-up permanent shop in the Grand Bazaar. However, many still travelled the trade routes and the *caravanserai* accommodated these guests on the upper floor.

*Level 3 Artifacts: provenance, function and meaning.* The individual *caravanserais*, treated as large artifacts in their own right, are listed below, detailed on Figure 2, data has been gathered from the site visits and the few written sources available: Bacque-Grammont (1993); Chardin (1988); Gaube and Wirth (1978); and McChesney (1988).

- *No 1. Caravanserai-i Shah.* As its name indicates, this was the principle *caravanserai* in the Grand Bazaar and was home to the so-called “King of the Merchants”. In commercial terms, within it were a variety of retailers and the cloth market. Its religious infrastructure included both mosque and madrasa and the principle hospitality function of the *caravanserai* itself. The goods sold were to a large extent luxury items destined for elite consumption.
- *No 2 & 6 Caravanserai-i Tavila I & II.* These *caravanserais* were home to Indian cloth and garment merchants.
- *No 3 Caravanserai-i Lala Beg.* Named after a senior official at the court of Shah “Abbas I, this *caravanserai* was home to Indian merchants who catered specifically to the luxury market for gold and silver brocaded cloth and garments. It also hosted purveyors of luxury goods including jewellery and rare flowers.
- *No 4 Caravanserai of Pomegranate Sellers.* Despite the specificity of its name, this *caravanserai* hosted purveyors of a range of fruits.
- *No 5 Caravanserai-i Mahmud Beg.* This *caravanserai* housed merchants from Iran and Central Asia specializing in a wide range of goods including tableware, ceramics, perfumes and rice.



**Notes:** M – Mosque; Md – Madrassa

**Source:** Kevin O’Gorman

**Figure 2.**  
Plan of the Qaysariyya  
("Grand") Bazaar of  
Isfahan

- *No 7 Khan of the Head Goldsmith.* Emphasizing the links between the Qaysariyya Bazaar and the court, this facility hosted the goldsmith who directly supplied the imperial household.
- *No 8 Caravanserai-i Mustaufi Sabiq.* This *caravanserai* was occupied by wealthy merchants from both Iran and India.
- *No 9 Caravanserai-i Saru Taqi.* Hosting sellers of dyed cloth, this *caravanserai* was named after a member of the court who was assassinated during its construction. For this reason, and despite its existing size and aesthetic virtue, its upper level was not completed.
- *No 10 Caravanserai-i Yazdian.* This facility composed of two associated inns, hosted merchants specializing in luxury, gold embroidered and brocaded garments as well as those selling more prosaic items such as rosewater, plain cloth and fruits. The latter group seemed to have hailed from the central Iranian city of Yazd, indicated in the *caravanserai*'s name.

The Bazaar *Caravanserai* differed from the other types in that their primary function was to facilitate the transition from wholesale to retail. On the ground, the space was devoted accommodation for support of trade: loading, unloading, storage and stabling. Access was more open to facilitate this; also the more protected environment did not necessitate the closed structure of exposed *caravanserai*. Traders would come into contact with a wealth of different people in the Bazaar, the concentration of traders in particular goods drove competition but similarly it also created opportunity. All



sections of society would descend upon the Bazaar and it was used by the wealthy as a location for socializing, as well as for networking and passing of news among local and visiting traders.

### **Role and development of *caravanserai***

The development of *caravanserai* in terms of form, function and their linkage in a network of hospitality provision can be broadly associated with the expansion of Islam, as a confluence of religion, commerce and politics. Certain essential common features have been identified, acknowledging that variations based on specificities of culture, economy and architectural form in spatial and temporal terms existed. The place of Iran as an initial zone of expansion of early Islam into an already commercially and politically developed zone has been highlighted. The existence of a network of long-distance trade within the Islamic world and its centrifugal role in relation to neighboring regions has been noted, along with the pivotal role of the *caravanserai* as an institution of hospitality. This invites longitudinal consideration of the Islamic context as being central to the development of international trade and early “capitalism” up to and including the early modern period (Rodinson, 2007). The position of Safavid Iran as a central component of a commercial context encompassing the three great early modern Islamic empires is not simply as a throughway for trade linking “east” with “west”, but as a principal market in its own right. This imperial state’s policy emphasized its close relationship with Mughal India and the economic as well as military threat posed by the Ottoman Empire. Following Wang’s (2011) critique of the Weberian thesis associating the rise of a rationalistic, capitalist modernity as a result of certain features “unique” to Protestant Euro-America, this invites consideration of the history of commercial life and its associated infrastructure in early modern Iran and its neighbors in intrinsic terms and not as mere adjuncts to Western-centric teleologies of development.

Safavid *caravanserai* developed in specific response to the convergence of dynastic, geopolitical and economic forces affecting Iran at that time. The first of these was the consolidation of Safavid imperial power and an enhanced culture of courtly display and consumption of luxury goods. The second is the movement of the imperial capital to Isfahan. Third, the need to conserve gold and silver specie through third party taxation contributed to the Safavid policy of forging direct commercial links with Europe. These three issues are reflected in the spatial form, function, goods traded and patterns of habitation of Safavid *caravanserai*. Here, the dynastic priorities of the Safavids in terms of aesthetic consumption, religious patronage and display are in direct proximity with an infrastructure of commerce and associated hospitality. This invites consideration of urban form in the city of Isfahan not simply in terms of cultural or historical specificity *in situ*, but of the broader inscription of geopolitics and economics inscribed thereon.

### **Concluding remarks**

#### *Historicizing insights*

*Caravanserai* formed a backbone for trade and religious pilgrimages. The influence of Islam is key to the context of this study in that the development of *caravanserai* has been driven by a need to indirectly secure rents for providing accommodation. In an environment where the underpinning religious injunction is to provide hospitality for

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free, making a living from running a *caravanserai* had to be facilitated by accruing rent in other ways; thus, rather crucially, we see the development of the internalization of markets within *caravanserai*. Indeed, despite the financial necessity of doing this in the period discussed, this is a true touchstone for contemporary commerce. Accommodation provision became part of an integrated package for facilitating trade and the movement of traders encouraged *caravanserai* owners to expand to other locations. There is also a sense of symbiosis in the relationship between trade and *caravanserai*; routes existed between particular destinations, yet the actual course of the routes could be influenced by the hospitality provision available. Innovative approaches to the financial structuring and nature of provision fortified the success of the trade routes in the region and this is evident in the pattern of city development too. Even in contemporary terms, the region demonstrates the potential of shrewdly integrating travel, accommodation and commerce with international hubs such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi drawing trade away from other locations for precisely the same reason.

#### *Applications for further research*

The second aim of this paper is to combine material culture research methods in an analytical framework for future use. The need for an ever-broader methodological contribution requires techniques that adopt a range of philosophical perspectives and that are informed by alternative fields of study. Techniques from other disciplines can be adopted in order to enrich the methodological capacity of hospitality and tourism research and fortify a landscape of respectively imperfect research methods. Material culture research augments investigation into the human element of business by illuminating the significance of the physical environment that people interact with thus strengthening the findings of both respective methods. For example, when considering layout of individual service environments, or perhaps more importantly the interrelationship between different environments, material culture data may usefully highlight the links between people and place in current research, notably drawing upon and augmenting “cluster theory’s” (e.g. Porter, 1998; Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000) insights on associative competitive relations amongst businesses and infrastructure. Moreover, by not making an absolute methodological distinction between research into the material cultures of past and present, we align with a broadly Foucauldian current within Cultural Studies that insists on “historicizing the present” and highlighting the contingent “genealogical and archeological” associations amongst material as well as discursive artifacts (Foucault, 2002; Roth, 1981).

The three-level framework using the complementary purposes of enquiry from archaeology, architecture and artifact studies allow a range of objective and subjective questions to be asked. Data is thus subject to a range of analysis allowing a layering of observations, assumptions and justifiable conclusions to provide an additional evidence base for interpretation of an organization and human relations with in it (Table II).

By its nature material culture studies traditionally suffers from not having the ability to substantiate its findings through further engagement with the human element of its research subjects. However, the lack of a living human element has catalyzed advances in interpreting the physical world to the point that significant

Purpose of enquiry	Questions to ask the data
<p>Archaeological To establish the history of development of society and culture through analysis of its excavated material record</p>	<p>Identification Can the building (itself treated as an artifact) be objectively identified and classified? What taphonomic processes have affected the survival and condition of the building remains? What is the location and spatial context for the building within the archaeological site and wider built environment?</p> <p>Context and function What is the relationship of the building to the surrounding physical infrastructure? What function or functions did the building have? How has the form or function of the building altered over time, and when did it fall out of use?</p> <p>Interpretation and meaning Why was the building used in the way that it was? Who used the building? What was the role of the building within society, and can a relationship between the building and its builders/users be established? Are there multiple interpretations of the use/function/meaning of the building?</p>
<p>Architectural To establish the context of the building, identify its primary functions and how these functions are influenced by the environment, materials and changing needs over time</p>	<p>Location Does the building belong to an architectural period/movement? What are the building's surroundings: is it near/attached to other buildings; is it near water; what direction does it face; is it on level ground or not? Is the building purpose built or converted?</p> <p>Layout and function Has the building changed or evolved in use and purpose? What does it do, what is its purpose? Room functions; what kind of room was it; dimensions etc.?</p> <p>Observation What evidence is there to say why the building is what it is, things such as individual artifacts might support this?</p>
<p>Artifactual To establish the form, function and meaning of artifacts individually and in relation to their discovered environment</p>	<p>Provenance Where was the object found? How was the object made?</p> <p>Purpose What was the function of the object? How was the object received by its user (reception of the object by its user)?</p> <p>Meaning How did the object contribute to the functioning of its environment and tasks associated with it? What was the outcome of the use of the object?</p>

**Table II.**  
Framework for material culture research

meaning can be inferred on the human element that populated the environment studied. The true value of applying material culture methods to a contemporary organization lies in the ability to compare the findings of studies of both the physical element and the human element of the environment.

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### Corresponding author

Derek Bryce can be contacted at: [Derek.bryce@strath.ac.uk](mailto:Derek.bryce@strath.ac.uk)

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