

Historic Development

Isfahan-Location and Geography

Located in Zagros Mountains the city of Isfahan today is bounded on the northeast and east by central desert, in southeast by the provinces of Yazd and Fars, in southwest by the Bakhtiari Mountains with peak rising to over eleven thousand feet, in northwest by Lorestan, Kazzaz, Kamara, Mahallat and in north by district of Natanz. The river Zayandeh rud passes through it on the south.

The city is geographically located at 32°38'N 51°29'E, in the lush Zayandeh-Rud plain, at the foothills of the Zagros mountain range. The city enjoys a temperate climate and regular seasons. No obstacle exists as far as 90 km north of Isfahan and cool northern winds blow from this direction. Isfahan is located on the main north-south and east-west routes crossing Iran. It is situated at 1590 meters above sea level. It receives an average of 355 mm of rain per year, making it similar to Denver, Colorado in terms of altitude and precipitation. The temperature ranges between 2 and 28 degrees Celsius. The record high temperature was 42 degrees Celsius and the record low was -19 degrees Celsius.

The southern and western approaches of Isfahan are mountainous and it is bordered northward and eastward by fertile plains. Thus, Isfahan's climate is varied and occasionally rainy, with a precipitation average varying between 100 and 150 mm.

Isfahan was once one of the largest cities in the world. It flourished from 1050 to 1722, particularly in the 16th century under the Safavid dynasty, when it was the capital of Persia. Even today, the city retains much of its past glory. It is famous for its Islamic architecture, with many beautiful boulevards, covered bridges, palaces, mosques, and minarets. This led to the proverb Isfahan nesf-e jahan: "Isfahan is half of the world".

Of all Iranian cities, Isfahan is perhaps the most popular for tourists. Today Isfahan, the third largest city in Iran, produces fine carpets, textiles, steel, and handicrafts. Isfahan also has nuclear experimental reactors as well as facilities for producing nuclear fuel (UCF). Isfahan has one of the largest steel producing facilities in the entire region, as well as facilities for producing special alloys.

Isfahan's aerial photo

Isfahan connections with other major cities in Iran

Isfahan in Iran

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Isfahan-A Brief History

642: Muslim Arabs conquer Isfahan, making it the capital of the Jibal province.

1055: Togrul Beg, the founder of the Seljuk dynasty makes Isfahan his capital.

1194: With the loss of Seljuk control over Persia, Isfahan loses its importance.

1256: Mongols attack Iran and the city loses its importance. The whole country is in war and terror.

1387: Timur Lenk was at first inclined to spare Isfahan, but following the murder of his garrison by the Isfahanis he returned and slaughtered 70,000 of them. The Tomb of Shahshahan dates from this period as does some of the work on the principal ivan of the Great Friday mosque.

1598: Shah Abbas I made Isfahan his capital created the city as we know it today. This period has left a tremendous heritage of architectural splendor in the city. The dynasty was terminated ingloriously following a protracted siege of Isfahan by Afghani tribesmen.

1722: The Ghilzay Afghans conquers Isfahan after a long siege. They would over the following years bring much destruction to the city. The Afghani interregnum was an unremarkable period historically. The only extant work from this time is a mihrab in the part of the Friday Mosque known as the "Porch of Omar".

1729: Isfahan is freed from the Afghan occupation and goes to the next period which is the Afsharid dynasty and Nader Shah. He is thought to have commissioned the murals in the palace of Chehel Sotoon. A period of political chaos followed his assassination in 1747, until Karim Khan took over the government of the country and made his capital in Shiraz in 1753.

1779: Qajar dynasty arises. The Masjed-e-Seyyed dates from this period as does some of the finest domestic architecture in Isfahan, but the movement of the capital first to Shiraz and then to Tehran brought an end to the period of building for which Isfahan is so famous

1930's: Isfahan and its many great buildings which had fallen into rubble, is started to be rebuilt under the initiative of Reza Shah Pahlavi. 1936: Isfahan University is opened.

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Pre-Islam Isfahan

Little is known of the early history of Isfahan. Its name, alternately spelled Esfahan, derives from old Persian sepahana meaning “the gathering place for armies”. The astronomer Ptolemy referred to the city as Aspadana. Originally, it was consisted of seven villages in pre-Islam period which four of them were ruined before Islam and two of them were destroyed after Arab raid and only the city of Jayy remained among them.

There is a legend telling the story of Jayy, indicating that Firuz, the Persian king chose the location of Jayy after consulting with geographers, to build his administrative capital. It was a typically Sassanid round city enclosing an area of two hundred jaribs. It had defensive outer walls and an inner fortification. The diameter of the outer circle was a little more than one and a quarter kilometer. There were hundred and four towers, making a tower at intervals of every forty to fifty meters. The outer walls had four gates located so that the sun rose and fell in the two northern ones in the summer solstice and in two southern ones in the winter solstice. Today, Jayy is identified as with the village of Shahr-istan, which lies east of the modern city of Isfahan on the north bank of the river.

The site of the present day Isfahan was known as Yahoudieh and was a settlement for exiled Jews from the kingdom of Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon. However, some credit this establishment of the ancient Jewish colony at Isfahan to Queen Shushandukht, the Jewish wife of Yazdgerd I, who ruled Persia from A.D. 399 to 420 as part of Sassanid dynasty. Yahoudieh has always been identified with the large quarter of Juybareh to the northeast of the Friday mosque. Sometime later the city of Jayy declined and the life of Isfahan was concentrated near Yahoudieh.

This would indeed be a curious phenomenon. Why should the settlement considered to be the madina (or city in Arabic language) and situated more advantageously near the river, why should this area decline while so-called Jewish colony became the heart of the Islamic city? if we investigate the early history of Isfahan, this conception of twin cities will appear to be a simplification and mainly representative of one moment in time which was described by geographers. The situation prior to this moment is far more complex and it is in the dark.

It is generally believed that during the first Islamic century Isfahan consisted of twin cities separated by a small distance, sometimes as two mile. The two cities were the town of Jayy and the second town of the pair was Yahoudieh, the Jewish quarter and has always been identified with the large quarter of Jubarah to the north-east of the Friday mosque.

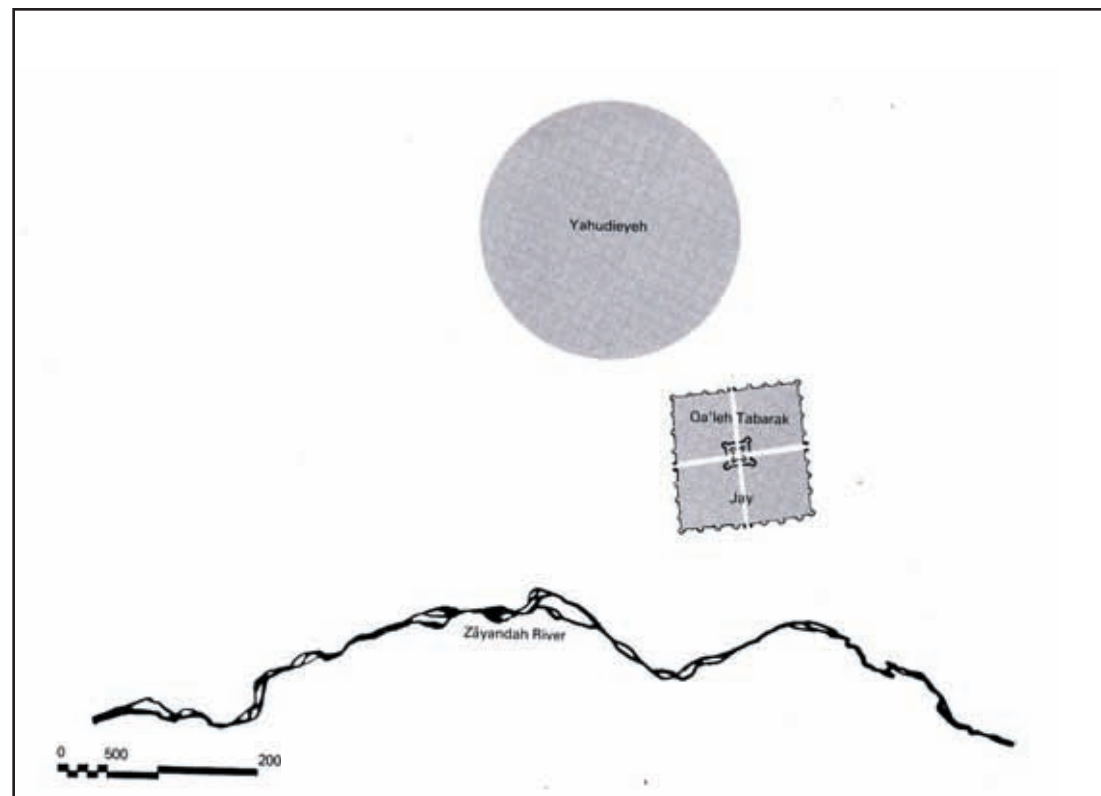
There are various stories regarding the origins of the Jewish colony. Whatever the truth may be, it is clear that they had come to Isfahan long before the foundation of Jayy. It is in the story that they called the area “Ashkahan” which in their language means “We stopped here”. It was then an uncultivated land.

About the architecture of Jayy, it is said that there was a fire temple around it. It is significant that the fire temple was not located within the walls of Jayy and it was outside. Jayy was never intended to be a religious city. When Muslim Arabs conquered Jayy, they built their first mosque within the walls of Jayy, in a noble’s house which was not a good idea because Jayy was used mostly as a refugee camp and it didn’t have a

true urban population. At the same time, the incipient urban body with its markets and crafts was to be found in the settlements of Yahoudieh. The population of this area had not opposed Arabs and according to an Arab historian, it had been the people of Yahoudieh who opened the gates of Jayy to the Arab armies.



Different views of the Shahrestan bridge, one of the rare constructions remained from pre-Islam period.



Isfahan: pre- Islamic period



Fire temple, a Zoroastrian construction from Sassanid era.

Historic Development-Early Islam

Early Islamic Isfahan

In 642, Muslim Arab tribes captured Isfahan and made it the chief city named Aljibal means Mountains. It is generally believed that during the first Islamic century Isfahan consisted of twin cities, Jayy and Yahoudieh, which were separated with a small distance. The coming of Islam to the region of Isfahan seems to have had little impact until the Abassid period. In 767-68 an Abassid governor set up residence between Jayy and Yahoudieh, in the village called Khushinan, and he built a mosque on the site of the present Shaya mosque. The Abassid governor also established markets toward Yahoudieh.

After the Abassid governor was removed, In 772-73 A.D. Some Arabs settled in the nearby town of Tiran and the laid the foundations of the present Friday mosque. The first Abassid governor had settled between Jayy and Yahoudieh, as if to straddle two camps. The new administration opted for Yahoudieh and extended its jurisdiction over fifteen other villages. Most of these villages became quarters of the city and retained their ancient names even until very recently. Jayy was omitted from this amalgamation although some farther flung districts such as Baraan were included.

After Abassid period, the Buyids took over and the next important developments took place under them. They encircled part of the city with a defensive wall including twelve gates and built a strong citadel in the southwest corner. The exact date of the wall is not known, but Moghaddasi (A historian) writing in 985 A.D. describes Isfahan as a walled city. The course of this wall is particularly visible in a series of streets encircling the eastern part of the modern city. Soon after the walling of the city the roughly oval area inside was divided into four different quarters:

- Juybareh which is still a well-known designation for the northeast quadrant of the city, corresponding to the ancient settlement of Yahoudieh.
- Karaan which occupied the southeast quadrant.
- Dardasht which covered the large area of the northwest quadrant and was also divided into several districts.
- Kushk which is the remaining southwest quadrant of the walled city, which eventually became the Safavid quarter of government.

The four, roughly pie shaped quarters constitute quadrants of a circle or oval. The center where these quadrants meet is an area right in the south of the Friday mosque which now is called "The old square". Although we do not know when this old square was built.

There are evidences that it goes back to Seljuk times, but the location of it and also the Friday mosque as a city center have been there from previous times.

The streets separating the four quadrants were the old bazaars which still remain and have been expanded. These arterial bazaars would have constituted major routes of access to different parts of the quarters. Also, there have been a series of major arteries within each quarter, radiating from the center point of the city outward toward the gates in the city walls. A traveler, Naser khosrow, that visited Isfahan in eleventh century was impressed by the multiplicity of walls and gates and makes the statement that every bazaar had a wall and a strong gate likewise all the alleys and districts.

The administrative center of the city remained within the Buyid walls even till recent times. The suburbs also had a role to play. The suburbs were in three different areas:

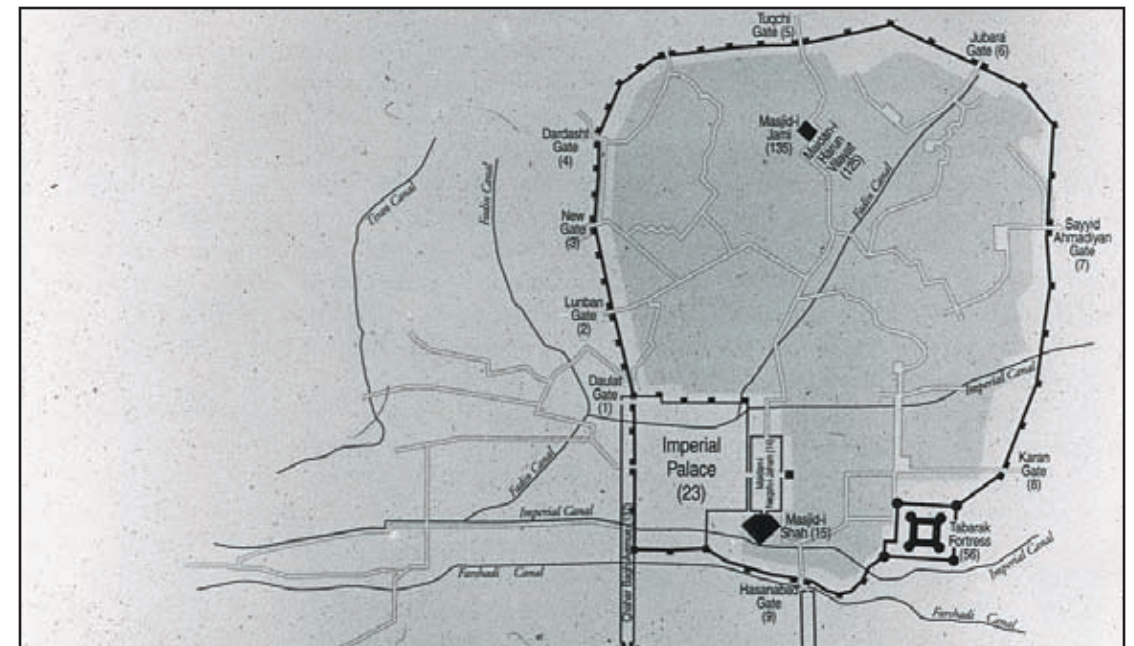
- The area south of the river (Julfa).
- The north bank of the city.
- The area to the northeast of the walled city.

Even through the period of twin cities, urban life was concentrated north of the river. Until seventeenth century, the area south of the river was never a concern. Perhaps all along it have been the province of non-Muslim minorities. However, the north shore of the river was always occupied by the royal palaces and aristocratic estates taking advantage of the waterfront location. Concerning the area north of the walled city, it is difficult to know whether there had been some development before sixteenth century or not. This area, known as Bidabad, was a place for squatters and two large cemeteries. In fourteenth century it was known to be place of paupers. All the agricultural land and gardens, located outside of the walled city to the south and west the Safavids, eventually incorporated into the grid of their metropolis.

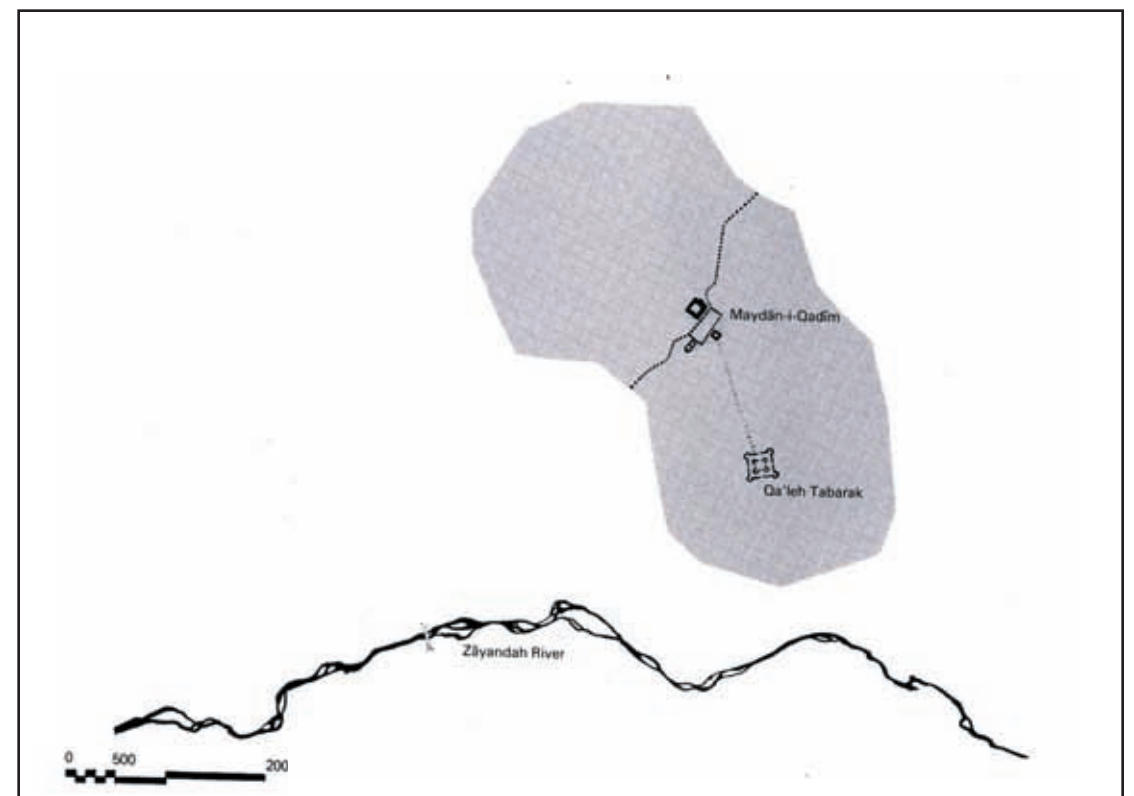
If we count only the monuments that lie within the actual city of Isfahan, the number remaining from the early period is small: one or two Buyid remains, some eight Seljuk structures, eight Mongol buildings, and five Timurid ones.

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The Coste plan of Isfahan ancient city wall and gates. Attention: surprisingly the direction of the Shah square is wrongly drawn on this map.



Isfahan- After Islam to Safavids

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Seljukid Isfahan- 10th and 11th centuries

Seljuk is the chieftain of a group of Turkish tribes, who migrate, in the late 10th century, from the steppes to the northern borders of the Persian Empire - in the region around the Syr-Darya River. They embrace Islam, and are expected to play their part in the frontier defenses of the Muslim world. But in the recurrent pattern of barbarians in the suburbs of civilization, they have their own ideas. They fancy a more central position. The Seljuks establish their base in this border region between modern Iran and Afghanistan, in Isfahan. So, Isfahan became the capital of Persia for the first time. During this period, the centre of power within the Islamic world shifted from the Arab territories to Anatolia and Iran, with the traditional centers now residing in the Seljuk capitals - Merv, Nishapur, Rayy and Isfahan.

A uniquely Iranian, eastern Islamic, architecture emerges only in the 11th and 12th centuries with the arrival in Iran of the Seljuk Turks. The Seljuks implanted creative and bold structural ideas in Iran, as well as new spatial concepts, which would later serve as a foundation for Safavid architectural developments. The Seljuks replaced the traditional western Islamic hypostyle mosque layout (brought to Iran in 749 by its first Islamic rulers, the Arab Abbasids) with the four-ivan plan. The Seljuk Turks excelled in the design of very large vaulted spaces and in the decorative articulation of buildings inside and out using complex brick patterns. They also promoted the custom of organizing important urban buildings around an open square (maidan), a large rectangular piazza or town square. Most of these design schema were unknown or eschewed in the Islamic west.

When the Seljuks took Isfahan as their capital, they transformed a pre-existing hypostyle mosque into the grand four-ivan Great Friday Mosque (Masjid-i Jami). An iwan is a vast vaulted space open at one end. It was a symbol of absolutist authority dating back to pre-Islamic Persia, when iwans functioned as audience halls in royal palaces. Iwans were also known in Islamic palaces, but it was the Seljuks who introduced the iwan into mosque architecture. The introduction of a symbol of royal prerogatives into mosque architecture encouraged the viewer to associate earthly rule with divine authority. The Great Friday Mosque has four iwans, one centered in each of the courtyard's four sides. Thereafter, this four-ivan plan became the dominant mosque type in eastern Islamic lands.



Buildings earlier than 1500 A.D. in Isfahan.

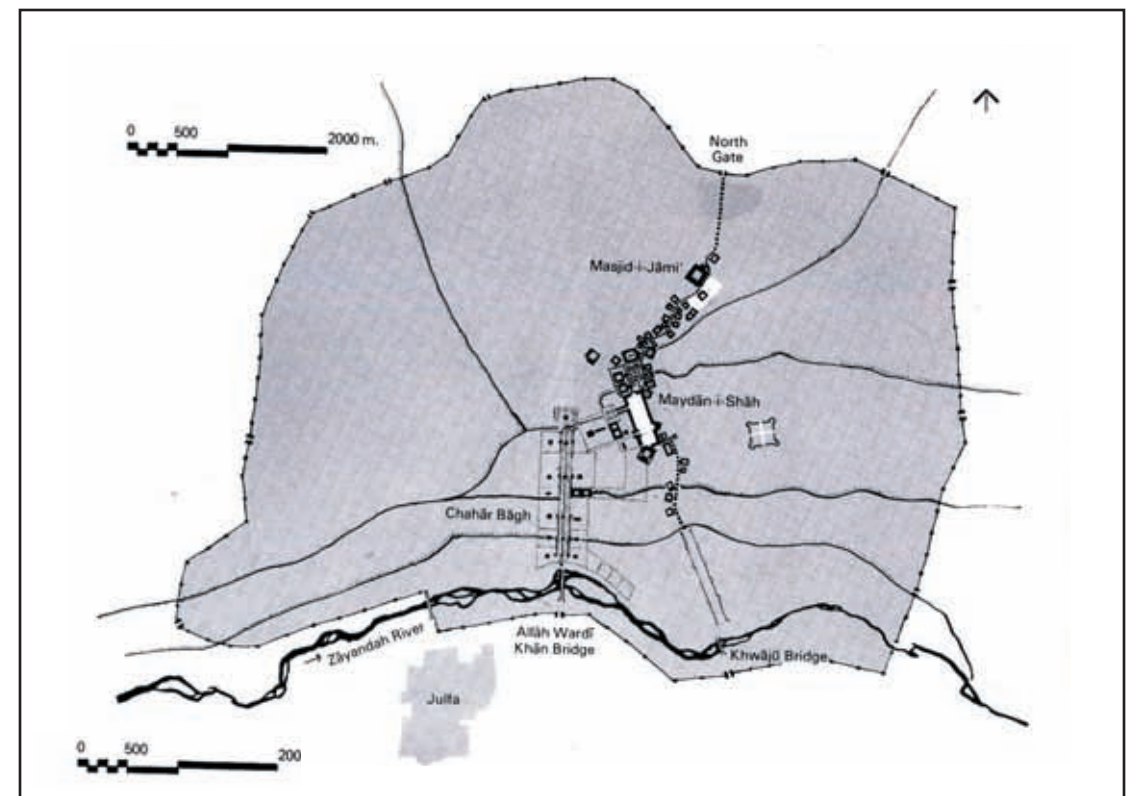
Historic Development-Seljukid Era



The Friday Mosque, Plan Today



The Friday Mosque



Isfahan: Safavid Era

Historic Development-Seljukid Era

The Seljuk period of Isfahan is also important because it was the first time in the history of Isfahan's urban development that the city found a civic structure. Seljuks needed a governmental structure for their capital so they added to the Friday mosque which remained from older times and shaped the city center around it. The old square of the city was structured at this time. It became the administrative and religious center of Isfahan and remained as the city center until the sixteenth century when a new square was built by The Safavid king, Abbas.

Today, it is still evident that the main axis of intra-urban communication of the pre-motorized age converges from the periphery of the city on the magnet of the Seljuk square.

The Old Square

The old square is a very important element in the layout of medieval Isfahan. Today, this square is built over simple workshops and warehouses. In the north it is used as a fruit and vegetable market. The bazaar in ruins condition.

the northwest, the bazaar-i Shah, is a part of the bazaar main axis between new square in the southwest and the Friday mosque in the northeast. It is roughly aligned with the Seljukid southeast wall of the Friday mosque. Thus, we may suppose that it follows the alignment of the bazaar which existed in the twelfth century.

Towards the southwest, the old square is bordered by a road, which was part of a nineteenth century extension of a shrine called Haroon-Velayat, dated 1513. The facade of this shrine formed the seventeenth century border of the old square.

On the southeast, finally, the old square was bordered by another alley which had to give way to a modern thought street. At the southeast side of the square there are three Safavid buildings and in the northwestern corner of this mosque, there is a Seljukid minaret built into the structure. This minaret marks the medieval southeast border of old square.

The old square is surrounded by mosques, madrasas, palaces, an elaborate bazaar, and a royal music pavilion. Most of these buildings could still be seen in the seventeenth century, although in ruins condition.

After Seljukids Isfahan

The change of the political conditions in Iran after the decline of the great Seljuk Empire, in the middle of twelfth century deprived Isfahan of its function as capital city and dealt a severe blow to its economy which was heavily dependent on long-distance trade. In 1244 the city was captured by Mongols. In Mongol times, Isfahan was a provincial capital and its economy was still prosperous although more modest than Seljukid era. After the decline of the Mongols in the second half of the fourteenth century, the Iranian Muzaffarids, ruled over Isfahan. The Muzaffarid period in Isfahan is chiefly remarkable for the Minarets of Dardasht and the tomb of Lady Soltan Bakht Agha.

The year 1387 marks the end of an almost 800 year long period of prosperity for Isfahan in Islamic times. In this year, Timur conquered the city and ordered his soldiers to sack it. A lot of its inhabitants were killed. In 1414, Isfahan was reported to have had only 50,000 inhabitants. The Tomb of Shahshahan dates from this period as does some of the work on the principal iwan of the Great Friday mosque.



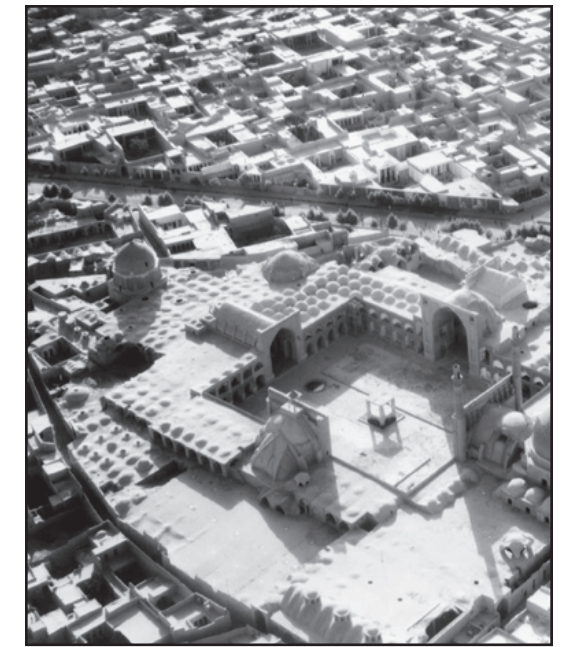
The Friday Mosque today, where there's no remains of the old square.



The area of old Friday mosque which has vanished during times

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The Friday mosque

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Historic Development-Seljukid & Timurid Era

The medieval City Structure

The main axes of intra-urban communication were those of the Middle Ages, for if they were more recent, they would not converge onto the old but onto the new square. In the tenth century wall the most important of the city gates were situated along these axes. Although locating the exact city gates is difficult since already in seventeenth century the medieval city gates had no longer had any function. The city had grown beyond medieval walls and Safavids did not defend their empire at the city gates of their capital but at its extreme borders, be they in central Asia or Iraq. The four main axes of the city are still lined for long stretches with shops and workshops, forming the bazaar of the city.

The paths or bazaar located on the north and northwest, are preserved and still exist. The road running from the west gate in a northeastern direction became after 1600, part of the main bazaar axis. It was joined by a street that came from the south gate which around the year 1000 lay close to the intersection of the two, but which in pre-Safavid times was located further to the south.

There is no recognizable road leading from the old square towards the southeast. There are two possible reasons: Either everything was destroyed in late medieval times, or the density of population between the old square and the city palace was low that no road was needed.

Through the determination of the main routes of intra-urban communication and their intersection point, the old square, all those parts of the medieval city which formed its skeleton are isolated. Here originated the central bazaar area around the old square to whose commercial importance and cosmopolitan flair literary sources bear witness. In addition to these, small bazaars formed near city gates and along the axes there were linear bazaars as well. In one of them a traveler in eleventh century saw no fewer than fifty carevansarais. Around the administrative, religious, intellectual and commercial center at the old square and the main axis of the intra-urban communications system, there were the residential quarters with their sub-centers and secondary religious buildings.

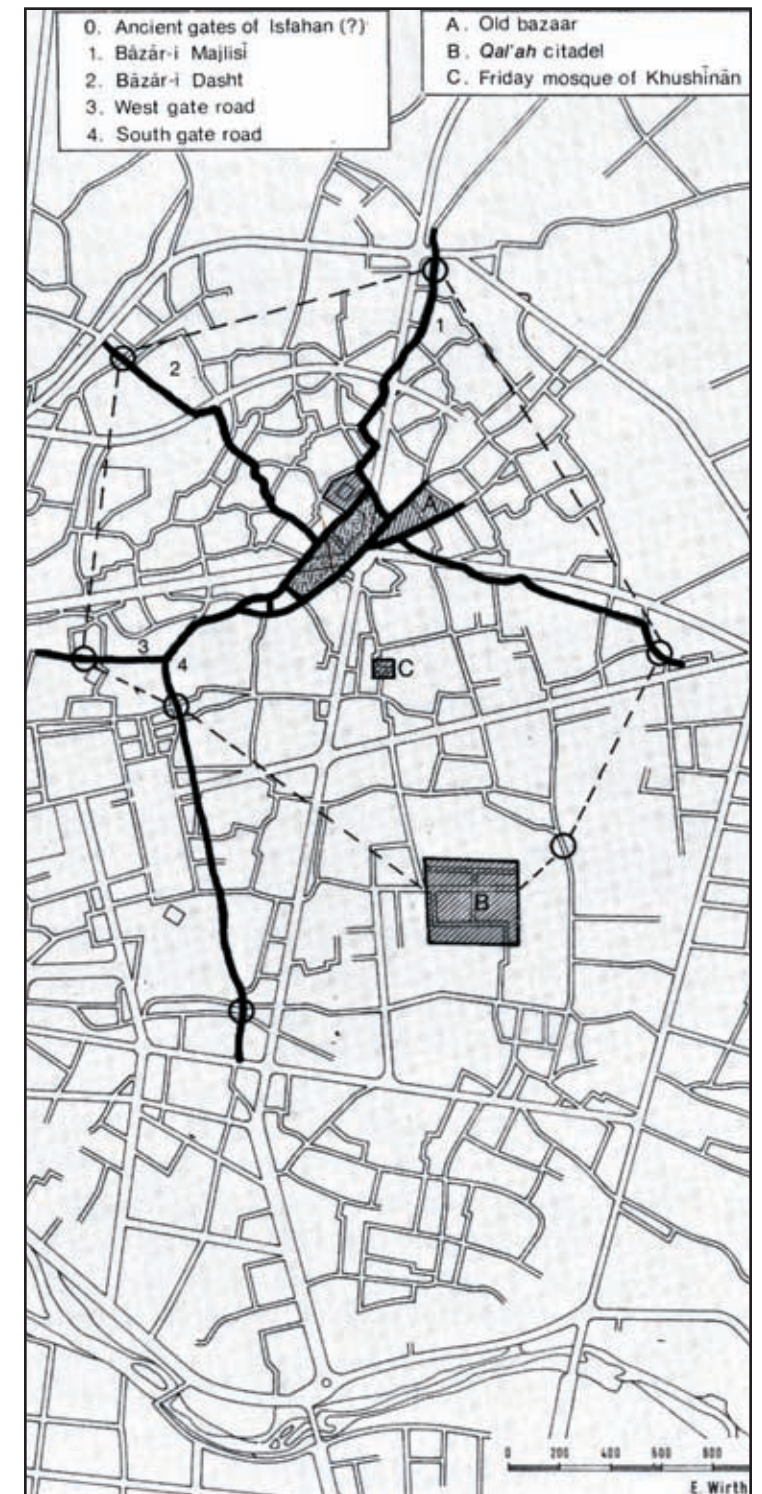
Buildings existing from this era are located in or near the original Yahudieh on the north of the old square, which shows that this area was the nucleus of the city. With its twisted lanes, its high density and small lots, it resisted even the most trying periods of crisis.



Seljuks were famous for building minarets. Ali minaret from Seljuk era.



A drawing of old walled Isfahan.



The main axis of intra-urban communication in Seljukid Isfahan

Safavid Isfahan

The Safavid period (1502-1736) was particularly decisive for shaping the city, whose beauty was so great that world travelers purportedly dubbed it “Half the World,” which, according to the proud 17th century historian Iskandar Munshi, was because “they only describe half of Isfahan.” Historians credit the Safavids with being the first rulers to lay a foundation for a national consciousness in Iran, a land populated by diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. They established Shiite Islam as the state religion, promoted Sufism, and instituted state capitalism to support wide-ranging political and social goals. Commerce was so important to the Safavid polity that its most powerful dynasty, Shah Abbas I, effectively re-routed the Silk Road through Isfahan so that his empire would enjoy a trading monopoly. By the seventeenth century, Isfahan attracted not only European merchants but also missionaries and mercenaries, as it became a religiously tolerant hub of mercantile and diplomatic activity. The city fabric is significant as an embodiment of this religious, commercial, and political unity, and was exceptional in the early modern Islamic world.

Safavid Dynasty

Ishmail I (1501-1524)

Tahmasb I (1524-1576)

Ishmail II (1576-1577)

Chodabende I (1578-1588)

Abbas I (1588-1629)

Safi I (1629-1642)

Abbas II (1642-1666)

Safi II (Suleiman) (1666-1694)

Soltan Husain (1694-1722)

Tahmasb II (1722-1732)

Abbas III (1732-1736)

Isfahan did not become the capital of Iran until the times of Shah Abbas I. It was partly because of the fights between Safavids and Ottoman Turks. And this was Safavids main problem that faces Ismail and his successors for about a century. That is why during Shah TahmasbI the capital was located in Qazvin which was farther to Ottoman borders than Isfahan. Some kind of peace was established in 1555 with Ottomans. After shah Tahmasb a short period of chaos appeared, the civil war broke out, the Turks invaded Tabriz again. In 1587 Khorasan proclaimed Shah Abbas I.

The first Safavid kings integrated their buildings into the medieval plan of Isfahan and their main concern was reconstruction of the old square.

Isfahan, the Safavid Capital

Nearly four centuries after the fall of the Seljuks, in winter of 1587, Shah Abbas I transferred his capital from Qazvin to Isfahan. This decision brought Isfahan in the course of only a few years to the highest point of its development and made it a capital of intercontinental importance, where envoys and merchants from Europe met those from the Far East.

Initially, Abbas did little to alter the physical appearance of Isfahan, preferring merely to associate his reign with pre-existing symbols of authority. He established his royal palace on the old maidan (city square) near the Great Friday Mosque, a legacy of Seljuk rule. Understandably concerned with preparing the foundations for the city’s infrastructure, Abbas rebuilt and refurbished old bazaars and laid some foundations for new shops. He did not neglect the emperor’s duty of providing public entertainments. He leveled the old square and spread sand on it so that it could be used for polo, horse racing, and wine drinking.

When restoring Seljuk buildings, Abbas left the Safavid mark in an unmistakable yet respectful manner. His renovation of the Great Friday Mosque, for instance, visually accentuated the features most associated with imperial authority using the brilliant colored tiles favored by Persian architects. He focused on the mosque’s iwans and courtyard which he had sheathed in polychromatic patterned tile veneer. The iwan vaults were elaborated with muqarnas (applied ornament which looks like stalactites or honeycombs) to which glazed mosaic tile was applied. Two minarets were added to the main iwan and clad with colored tiles, creating a new iconographic symbol of authority in which the new (twin minarets) was grafted onto the old. In general, Abbas demonstrated sensitive, if self-serving, reverence for Isfahan’s glorious past and concern for its fitting display.

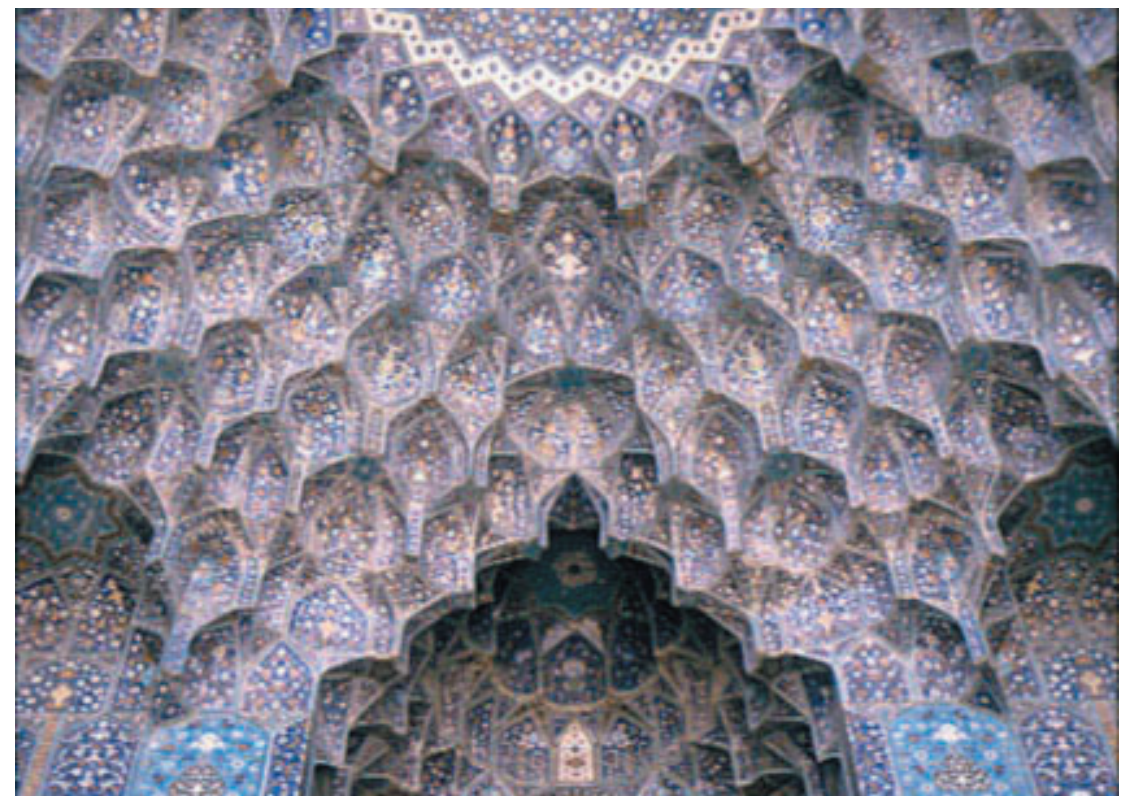
Unlike other kings that had ruled Isfahan and had sometimes lived in the old city, Shah Abbas decided not to live in the old city at all. He built his court on the southwestern edge of the city of those days. In this he followed trends already known in Seljuk architecture that is, to build royal components near the river. Abbas went further, however, and created a new religious and economic center at the fringe of the sixteenth century city. He thus, forced further development of Isfahan into new directions.



Shah Abbas the great, Safavid king.



Old city structure in Safavid era

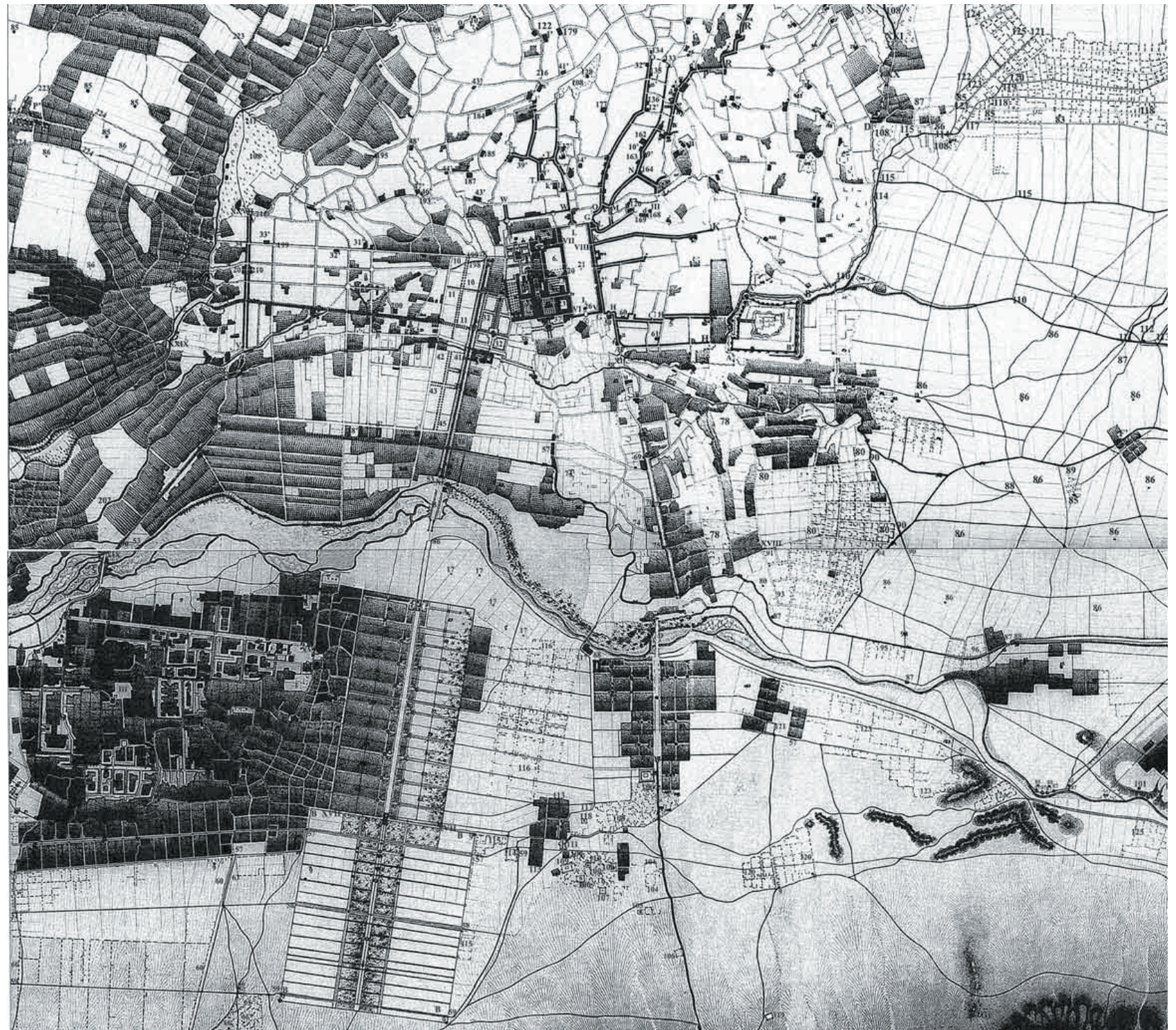


Detail of entrance portal Muqarnas work in Shah mosque

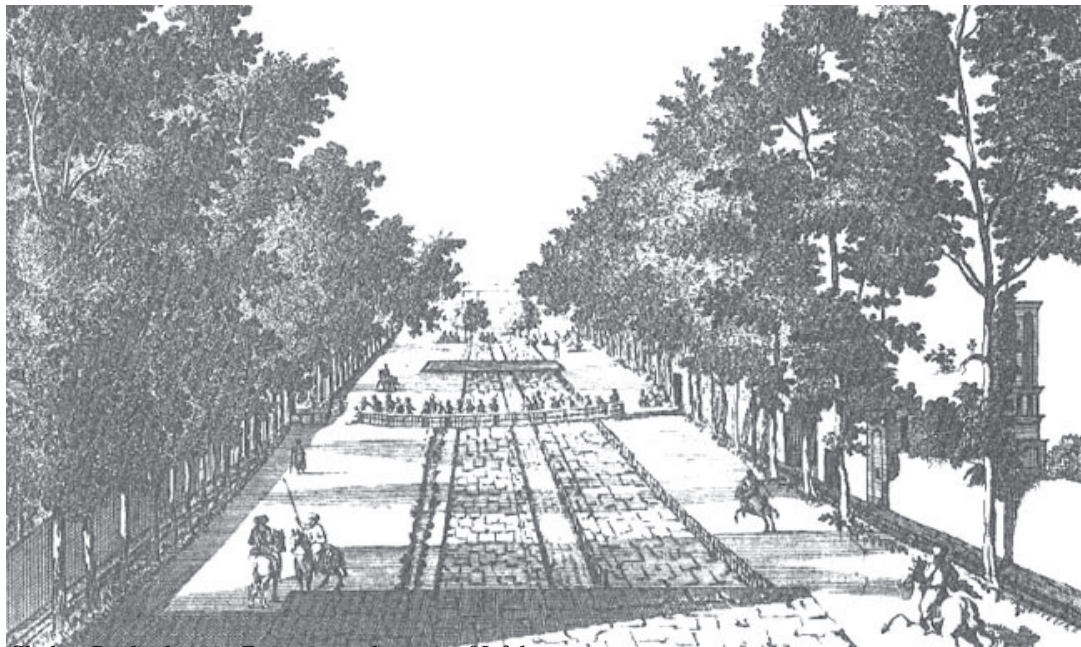
The New City Plan -- Embodiment of Safavid Ideology

The *Safavid* monuments for which Isfahan is famous were commissioned by Abbas I after 1602. Military victories between the years 1590 and 1602 had confirmed *Abbas's* capacity as an empire builder. More capital and labor were put into bridges, roads, and caravanserais to build and facilitate trade. Abbas I was now ready to supplant the city's past and construct a pristine arena of *Safavid* rule outside the historic center. He established his "new city" in Isfahan to the south of the old city center, to which he transferred the imperial household; merchants and artisans relocated there as well. In the design of the new city, Abbas mobilized certain elements of the architectural past to generate a new Iranian imperial identity in the name of Safavid religious, commercial, and political ideals.

The grand scale and inorganic mathematical order of the new city implied that the values embodied in the old capital had been surpassed and supplanted by Abbas's priorities: religious tolerance, capitalism, state *Shiism*, Sufi reverence for saintly teachers and concern for the welfare of the masses. The new maiden turned its back on the old center, creating instead an alignment with the new *Chahar Bagh* Avenue (1596-1602) and the multi-ethnic, multi-faith sacred sites and suburbs south of the *Zayandeh* River. The latter included Hindu cremation platforms, a Zoroastrian cemetery, and the suburbs of *New Julfa* (for silk-trading Christian Armenians) and *Abbasabad Chahar Bagh* (for Tabrizi war refugees). Many new bridges were built linking the northern city with the southern suburbs. Operable flood gates on the lower level of the *Khvajju* Bridge (1650-51) celebrated Safavid technological control of nature, while on the upper level social amenities such as a promenade and pavilions invited passers-by to linger and enjoy the view of the river -- source of the city's pleasure and prosperity. By designing the avenue, bridges, and streets of the suburbs in alignment with the orthogonal layout of new city, the designers succeeded in embedding Abbas's ideology inescapably into the fabric of urban life.



The Safavid map for the city



Chahar Bagh: the new European style street of Isfahan



Khawju: One of several bridges that Shah Abbas made to connect north and south of the river

Shah Square

The center of the new city was a magnificent new square (510 x 158 meters) exultantly called the “Design of the World” *Maidan (Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan)*. Its design united all of the facets of the Safavid polity into one spatial diagram: worship (the Shah Mosque), commemoration (the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfallah), sovereign administration (the Imperial Palace), and trade (Qaisariya Bazaar).

Abbas I's designers differentiated the new city from the old historical center by organizing the street patterns on orthogonal grids not oriented toward Mecca. The old city had narrow winding streets and the old maidan was oriented toward Mecca. The old and new maidans were connected by the winding covered street of the Great Bazaar (2 km long) covered by high stone and brick vaults by the order of *Abbas I*. English and Dutch traders lived near the bazaar, as Isfahan was home to one of the East India Company's warehouses. Where the Great Bazaar met the new maidan, a group of buildings was built that constituted the *Qaisariya Bazaar* (Imperial Bazaar—built and maintained by the emperor). They housed imperial manufactures (wholesale silks and fine textiles, goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewelers), the state mint, a hospital, public bath, and a caravanserai. Unlike the shops of the Great Bazaar, these were arranged on a regular grid and aligned with the new city. Their importance to the regime was represented by the *Qaisariya Gateway* on the new maidan; no other imperial bazaar in the *Safavid* realm had a monumental entrance.

The design of the individual buildings surrounding the new maidan was not shockingly innovative, but their organization into a legible spatial composition was unprecedented in Iran. The “Design of the World” Maidan was the heart of the new conception. The Imperial Palace occupied the entire west side of the double-storey, arcaded new maidan, having one monumental gateway (the *Ali Qapu* or “Sublime Portal”) and two unobtrusive minor gates there. One grand portal opened onto each of the remaining sides of the maidan, giving access to the Shah Mosque (south), the Mosque of *Sheikh Lutfallah* (east), and the *Qaisariya Bazaar* (north).

With one prodigious gateway on each of its sides, the new maidan looked as if it were the courtyard of a four-iwan mosque. Hence, the “Design of the World” was a sacralized one which nevertheless included two hundred shops occupying the arcaded perimeter of the maidan. Many other services were located inconspicuously just behind the maidan, including madrasas, factories, caravanserais, merchants' mansions, and

artisans' dwellings.

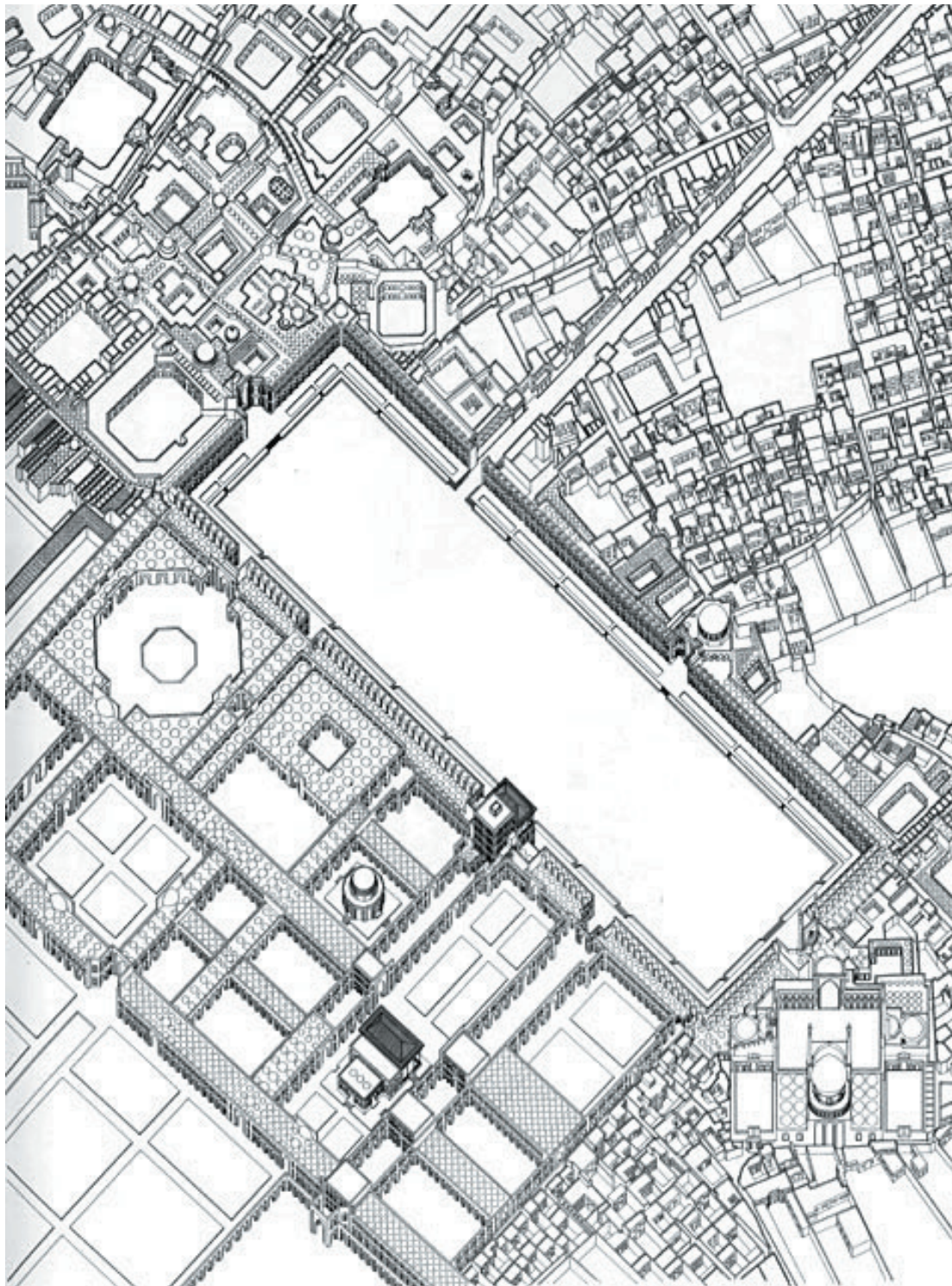
The Imperial Palace was a garden palace complex, a palace type with a long history in Islamic architecture. This palace was composed of elaborate independent pavilions set in the garden, such as the *Chihil Sutun*, which served as audience chambers, banqueting halls which served as audience chambers, banqueting halls, and residential apartments for the royal family. Garden palaces were typically surrounded by a wall, but in Isfahan's case it was not a fortification wall. The Imperial Palace is also unusual in that the imperial treasury, arsenal, and cavalry were not located inside the palace complex. Stephen Blake thinks that this reflects the casual protocol of Safavid emperors whose authority derived from traditional ideas of kingship rather than military control.



An old drawing of the new square

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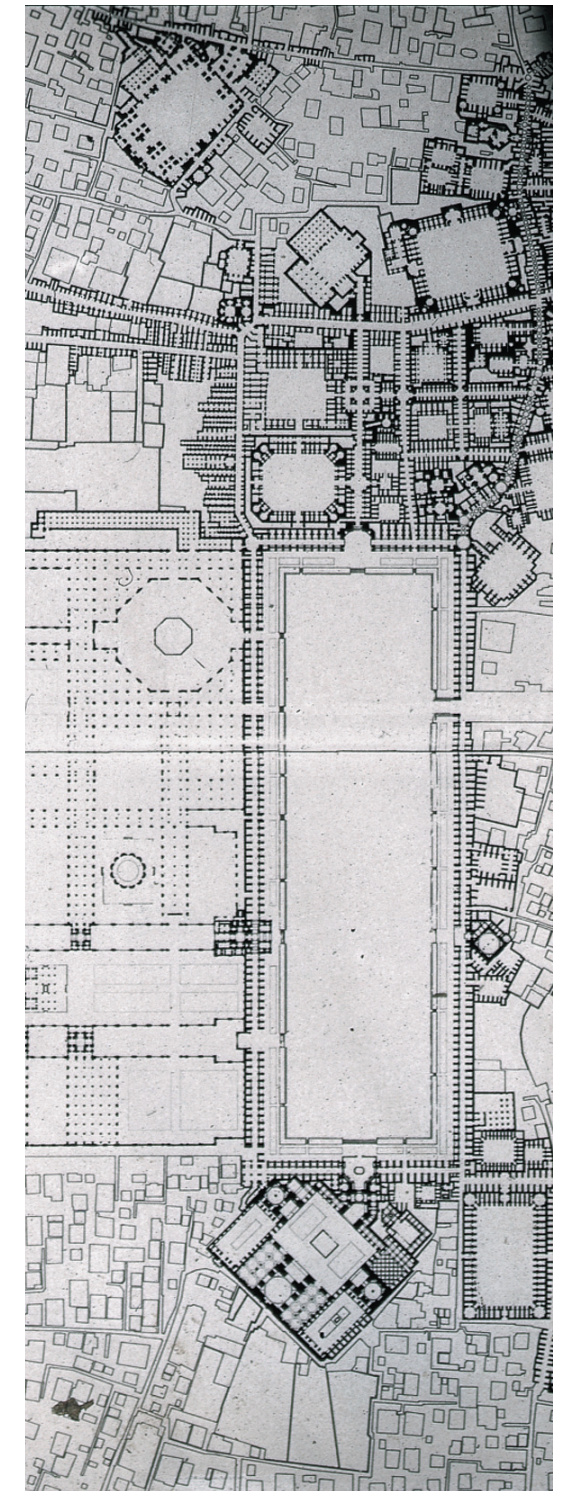
Masterpieces of Iranian Architecture

The Mosque of Sheikh Lutfallah (1603-1619) was the first monumental building to be erected in Abbas's new city. Sheikh Lutfallah was an Arabic-speaking Shiite, an imam and teacher of Islamic law, whom Abbas made part of the imperial household. The sheikh resided in this mosque, a rather novel building in that its design is a conflation of two traditional architectural types. The entire mosque is a centrally planned domed space, which is typical of commemorative mausoleums, not mosques, but this building does not house a tomb. Inscriptions call it a mosque, but it lacks the typical courtyard, iwans, and minarets. However, it does have the essential mihrab niche and is oriented toward Mecca. The interior is often recommended as the most perfectly balanced space in Persian architecture. Filtered light entering through windows in the drum of the dome flickers across the mosaic-lined walls and dome. Eight pointed arches on the walls, outlined in turquoise, bring just enough geometric discipline to this numinous, colorist space to keep worshipers from entirely losing their earthly bearings.

The Shah Mosque (1611-1666) on the new maidan replaced the Great Friday Mosque as the center of Isfahani religious life, although the latter remained open for assembly and prayer. Compared to the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfallah, the Shah Mosque has a traditional Iranian design: a four-iwan courtyard, the main iwan flanked by minarets, and a towering 170-foot high domed chamber in front of the mihrab niche. The importance of the control of education in the Shiite state is evident in the unusual presence of two madrasas (theological schools) flanking the prayer hall, each with its own arcaded courtyard. Because both the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfallah and the Shah Mosque had to be oriented toward Mecca, they are turned at an angle with respect to the maidan on which each had its monumental entrance portal. In each case, the architects diminished the disorienting linkage between portal and mosque by locating the change of axis in an entrance corridor.

Qaisariyeh or Qaisariya is a name given to the bazaar entrance on the north side of the square. The bazaar of Isfahan is a vault and non-linear, two kilometer long street that links the old city, the Friday mosque and the old square (maidan) with Shah Abbas' new maidan to its southwest. It was built and expanded over many centuries beginning as early as the 10th century. The most important recorded extension was during the reign of Shah Abbas I, between 1617 and 1619. This portion of the bazaar is referred to as the Royal Bazaar, or Qaysariya.

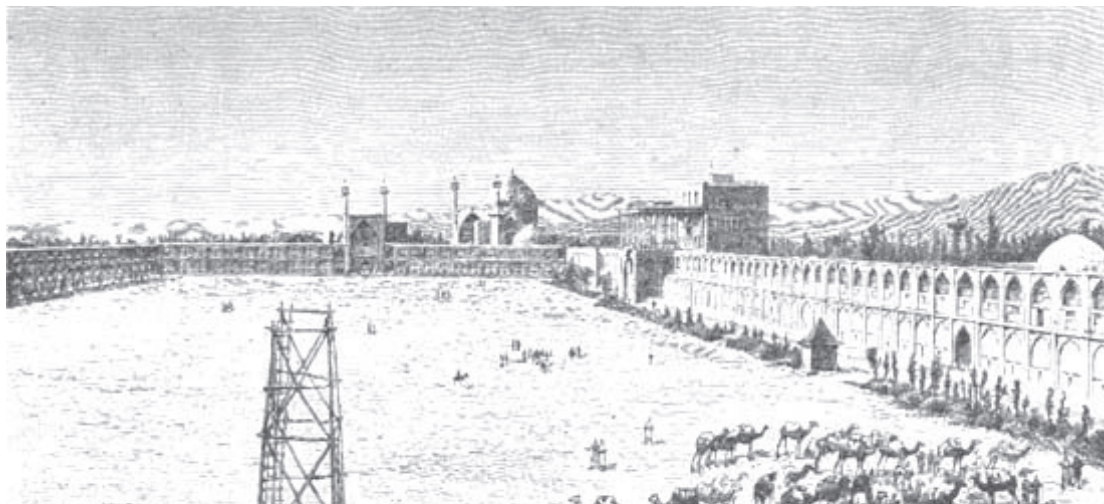
Historic Development-Shah Abbas City



Historic Development-Shah Abbas City

. The Qaysariya also refers specifically to the large portal that faces onto the new maidan. This portal serves as one of the four iwans of the rectangular maidan and is mirrored on the southern side by the iwan of the Shah Mosque. The iwan of the Qaysariya portal is flanked by galleries and crowned with a mosaic tile panel with the Sagittarius motif. The portal gives access to the Royal Bazaar, the Royal Mint and the Royal Caravanserai, beyond which begins the major artery of the bazaar. Mosques, hamams and khans are located off this main street, much of which is lit by circular openings cut into the brick vaults, creating shafts of light dotting the passage at certain times of the day. The largest of the vaults crowns the Qaysariya portal. The bazaar splits into various smaller bazaars towards the older section to the north, where each alley is dedicated to a specific trade.

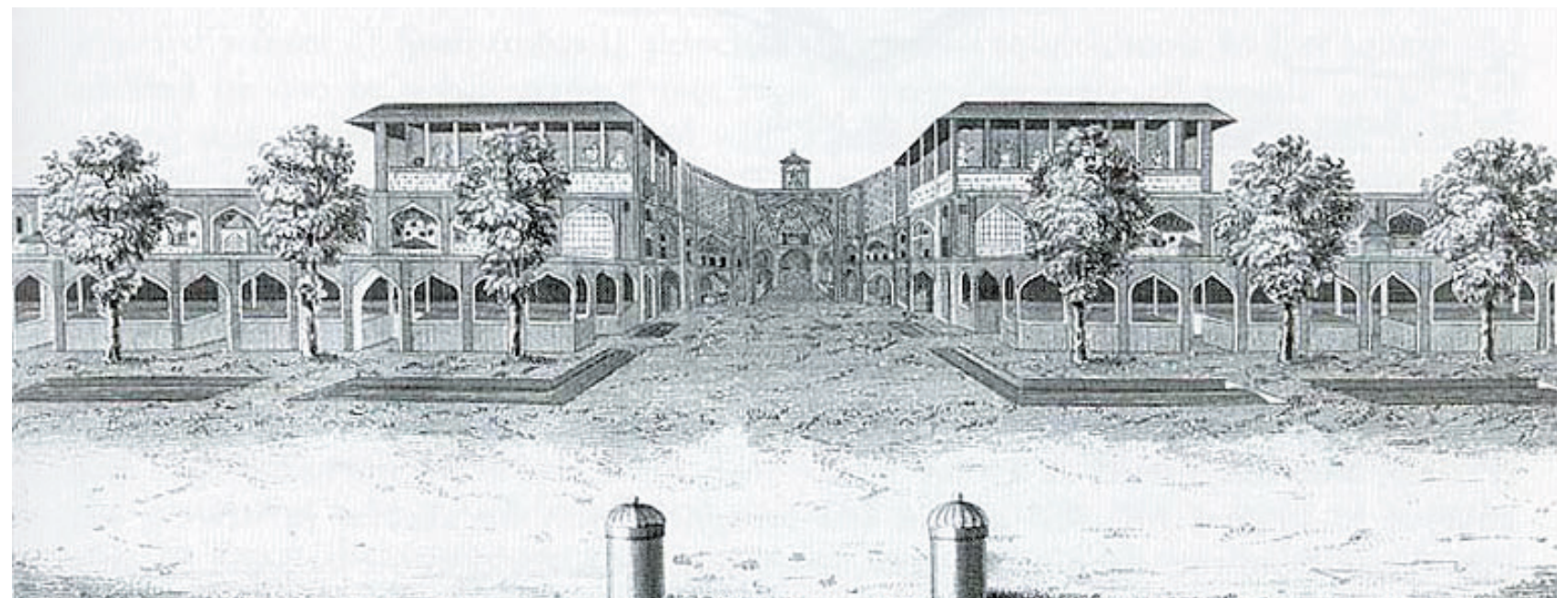
The Ali Qapu is located on the west facade of the Shah Maydan facing the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah. Originally much smaller in scale, designed as a portal between the palace gardens and the maydan, the Ali Qapu grew with a series of additions over a sixty year period to accommodate court functions. During the reign of Shah Abbas I, Ali Qapu, or the Sublime Gate became an important urban and imperial marker of Isfahan. First built as a gate, it was expanded in 1602 and 1619 to include the main royal residence of the imperial palace complex. Shah Abbas I often sat at the double-height colonnaded loggia above the heavy masonry base of the gate to observe proceedings and ceremonies taking place in the Maidan. The Ali Qapu also housed the reception rooms for foreign ambassadors and palace guests.



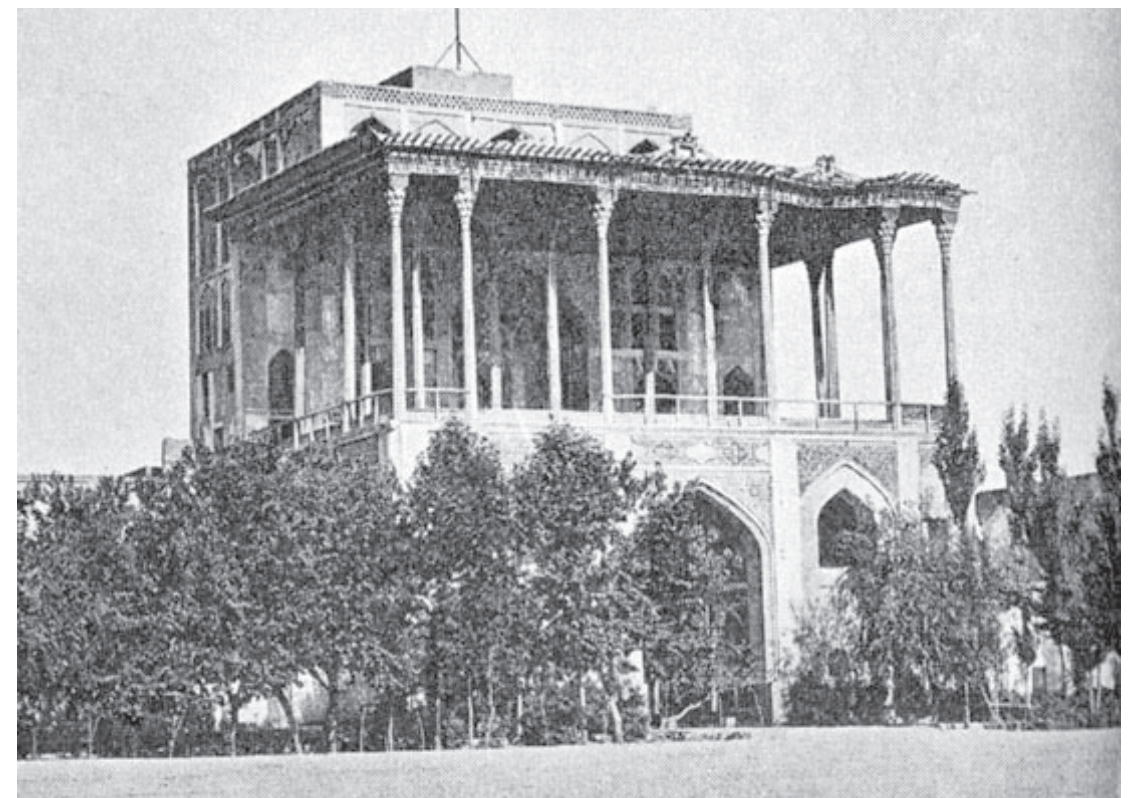
Two old drawings of the new square

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Qaisarieh or the bazaar entrance on the north side of the square



Ali Qapu: Shah's Terrace to the square on the western side

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Chahar Bagh, the Champs Elysees of Isfahan was designed by Shah Abbas to be the grand approach to his new capital. It was the main boulevard of Isfahan. Its name, literally translated as “four gardens”, refers to a popular garden typology consisting of four plots divided by waterways or paths forming a cruciform plan. It might very naturally be imagined that Shah Abbas would have made his avenue lead directly to the maidsan. Infact it came to an end on a point west of the palace grounds, where a pavilion was erected for the royal seraglio to survey the scene. It was, indeed, as much a promenade as an avenue in this upper section; in the other direction, after crossing the river it became a thoroughfare leading to the royal gardens of Hezarjarib and to Julfa.

The public boulevard consisted of four quadripartite gardens arranged along a north-south axis that slopes towards the south. Each quadripartite unit is composed of two square and two rectangular plots separated by pathways and is located slightly lower than the preceding unit. Together, they are experienced as a single boulevard with a central promenade flanked by axial garden plots. Running along the center of the promenade was a water channel with cascades; the promenade now only features circular flower beds and light posts.

The Bridge of Allahverdi Khan (or 33 bridges) begins at the termination of the Chahar Bagh, the main boulevard of Shah Abbas’ urban project. The bridge spans 300 meters, linking the city to New Julfa, the new Armenian neighborhood across the Zayandeh River. The central aisle provided passage for animals and carts. Paths to the sides are for pedestrians, from which there is access to arcaded galleries overlooking the river. Typical of the bridges of Isfahan, the Allahverdi Khan was designed as a social and contemplative space, not just a transportation structure.



The southern view of the square: The Shah mosque



Arched walls to create shadow



Two views of Allahverdi khan bridge

Historic Development-Shah Abbas City



Qaisarieh entrance to the bazaar



View of square from top of Shah mosque



The eastern view of the square: The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque

Historic Development-Shah Abbas City

The first official settlements south of the river

Shah Abbas transferred the entire Armenian population of Julfa, Azerbaijan, to the town of New Julfa on the south bank of the Zayandeh-Rud, a little upstream from Isfahan. Before long, Armenians living outside Iran as well as Christian missionaries, traders, and industrialists flooded the recent addition to Isfahan, making Julfa a showcase for Safavid achievements in economic, social, and religious spheres as well as an example of tolerance and understanding among diverse ethnic and religious groups in the region.

Shah Abbas's plan was motivated by several factors. First, the Armenians are a hardy people usually engaged in agriculture and industry. Secondly, Iran of his time was a major producer of raw silk. By introducing better carpets and a new Iranian textile to the international market, the Armenian weavers could not only compete with, but outdo the Ottomans and the Mughuls in the ever-growing silk trade. Thirdly, Shah Abbas intended to move Iran out of the middle Ages and into the 17th century. In this, the cooperation of the western powers of the time was a must. Christian Armenians, an enterprising people, could easily blend with the Christian West, especially with those involved in the Indian silk trade, and establish a foothold for the rest of the country. Finally, Shah Abbas was seeking a way by which he could decrease the fanaticism that permeated Safavid society. The city of Julfa across the Zayandeh-Rud with shops carrying Armenian names written out in both Persian and Armenian could not but inspire tolerance, especially when the goods they carried added zest to the Isfahanis otherwise austere Muslim existence.

Shah Abbas was fully aware of the international dynamics that had facilitated the entrance of the Armenians to the silk trade. In order to register this understanding as well as underscore his nation's support of foreign trade, he ordered the construction of a major Armenian church in Julfa. The church was to be built by Iranian architects with the supervision of Armenian managers. The exterior of the church was to comply with Muslim architectural decor while the interior satisfied the requirements of Christian worship. Altogether, during the reign of the Safavid monarchs, especially Shah Abbas, fourteen churches were built in Julfa. The oldest church was called the Church of Holy Jacob or Hakup the building of which was completed in 1607.

The most memorable church in Julfa, the one that comes to mind upon mentioning the name of the city, is the Amenaperkich or the Church of the Savior. Also referred to as Vank, the church was constructed between 1655 and 1664--during the reign of Shah Abbas II--by funds contributed by the Armenian population of Julfa. The exterior of Vank Church recalls the brick architecture of the Friday Mosque built by the Saljuks across the river; the interior is adorned by paintings heavily influenced by Italian artists. The amount of gold used by Iranian artists in the interior decoration of this church surpasses the gold used in all the other churches combined. Finally, the Vank museum was built adjacent, although slightly to the north of the church in 1905.



View of the town of Julfa



One of many Julfa's gardens

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The famous Vank church, inside and outside

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Historic Development-After *Shah Abbas*

Safavids after Shah Abbas the Great

“When Shah Abbas the Great ceased to breathe, Persia ceased to prosper.” So wrote Chardin who visited Iran in Safavid era. After Shah Abbas I death in 1629, his son Shah Safi I, who ruled from 1629 to 1642, is known for his cruelty, sat on the throne. He was the first of the Safavid shahs to be raised in the palace gardens. Shah Safi I put to death potential rivals to the throne as well as some of his male and female relatives on his accession. He executed most of the generals, officers and councilors he had inherited from his father’s reign. The dominant influence of Mirza Taqi, known as Saru Taqi, the Grand Vezir (chancellor) at the Safavid court allowed the government to be run smoothly despite the shah’s lack of interest in affairs of state.

On 17 may 1639, peace treaty with the Ottomans, which established the Ottoman-Safavid frontier and put an end to more than a hundred years of sporadic conflict. The treaty forced Shah Safi I to accept the final loss of Baghdad in Mesopotamia, recaptured by the Ottomans in 1638, and instead gave Yerevan in the southern Caucasus to Iran.

Era of Shah Abbas II, who ruled from 1642 to 1667, was the last fully competent period of rule by a Safavid shah. Shah Abbas II took an active role in government matters. Under his rule Iran revived, and some of Persia’s glory in the eyes of the outside world returned.

After Abbas II died in 1667, decline set in again when Shah Soleyman (Safi II), who ruled from 1667 to 1694, took power. He was renamed, superstitiously, to Soleyman because the first year and half of his reign was so disastrous. Shah Soleyman was not a competent ruler, and shortly after his accession food prices soared and famine and disease spread throughout the country. Although pressing problems faced him, he increasingly retreated into the harem and left his grand vezir to cope with affairs of state.

Shah Sultan Hossein, who ruled from 1694 to 1722, have been described as the most incompetent shah of Safavids. He was similar to some others who had inherited power by accident of birth. Indifferent to affairs of state, Shah Sultan Hossein effectively brought Safavid Empire to its sudden and unexpected end. He was of a religious temperament and especially influenced by the Shi’a religious establishment. At their insistence, he issued decrees forbidding the consumption of alcohol and banning Sufism in Isfahan.

Safavid Empire had also declined militarily, leaving it more vulnerable to invasion, which came out of the east. In 1722 Afghan invaders under Mahmoud, a for Safavid vassal in Afghanistan, captured Isfahan and murdered Shah Sultan Hossein. The Afghan invasion

was disastrous for Iran, which consequently in 1723 the Ottomans took advantage of the disintegration of the Safavid realm and invaded from the west, ravaging western Persia as far as Hamadan, while the Russians seized territories around the Caspian Sea. In June 1724 the two powers agreed on a peaceful partitioning of Iran’s northwestern provinces.

Nader Khan (Nader Qoli), an able general from the Turkman tribe of Afshar, from northern Khorasan, assembled an army and began the reconsolidation of the country under his control. He effectively became ruler of Iran, although he acknowledged the Sultan Hossein’s son, Tahmasb II, who had escaped the Afghans, as Safavid shah until 1732, then Tahmasb’s infant son Abbas III until 1736, at which time he declared himself shah. Nader expelled the Afghans by 1730 and cleared the country of them; regained control over the northwestern provinces of Iran from the hands of Ottomans in 1730; and had the lands occupied by the Russians restored in 1735.

The main buildings built by the later safavids

Chehelsotun is situated in the royal park, behind Ali Qapu. Located on axis to the west of the Maydan within what was once the palace gardens, the Chehelsotun is one of the two remaining pavilions built as part of the palace complex. The second is the Hasht Behesht. It was a ceremonial palace designed for occasions and

particularly for the reception of foreign embassies. Its construction probably started during reign of Shah Abbas the great but completed during Abbas the second in 1647.

Located in the center of the Garden of Nightingales (the Bagh-e Bulbul), the Hasht Behesht is one of Isfahan’s two surviving Safavid pavilions. Built under Shah Suleyman some twenty years after the Chihil Sutun, it is quite different in style from the earlier pavilion, although it exhibits the same concern for the interplay of interior and exterior spaces.

‘Hasht Behesht’ translates as ‘Eight Paradises’ and refers to a Timurid palace building type consisting of two stories of four corner rooms around a central domed space. In Isfahan, the corner rooms are octagonal, forming massive pillars that define four large openings leading to large porches in the south, east and west, and an iwan in the north.

Commissioned by the last Safavid Shah, Husayn I, the Madar-i Shah Madrasa (Theological school) forms the western side of a complex lying perpendicular to the Chahar-Bagh. Abutting the madrasa is a caravanserai (renovated to become the Shah Abbas Hotel) beyond which lie stables. These structures are connected by a bazaar, which lines each on their northern side. All four structures exhibit a precise symmetry and are com

posed with a strict axial concern for the Chahar-Bagh and the main portal of the madrasa is situated on the Chahar-Bagh

Built by Shah Abbas II on the foundations of an older bridge, the Khwaju bridge links the Khwaju quarter on the north bank with the Zoroastrian quarter across the Zayandeh River. It also functions as a weir; the downstream side is formed as a series of steps carrying the water to a much lower level.

On the upper level of the bridge the main central aisle was utilized by horses and carts and the vaulted paths on either side by pedestrians. Octagonal pavilions in the center of the bridge on both the down and the upstream sides provide vantage points for the remarkable views. The lower level of the bridge may be accessed by pedestrians and remains a popular shady place for relaxing.

After Safavids, Isfahan continued its life till today, but from architectural and urban point of view nothing was added to the city after the Safavids. Isfahan still carries the beauty that was given through the Safavids and the most capable of them Shah Abbas the great.

