

SAFAVID PALACES

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MOST OF THE PALACES, PAVILIONS, AND VILLAS BUILT IN the Safavid period have not survived. Many were destroyed, especially during the Afghan conquest of Isfahan in 1722. Others were neglected and left to decay, or fell victim to earthquakes. Of those that remain many have been altered in their outward appearance by structural changes. Fortunately, European travelers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have left sketches and drawings of several of them, so if we can no longer discern function and ground plan, at least we can gain an impression of general appearance.

Knowledge about the details of plan, form, and function of both large and small Safavid palaces can be gathered from the number of palaces and ruins that remain in Isfahan, Qazvin, in small towns, and in the countryside.¹ Safavid palace architecture—as can be verified from the still extant buildings in Isfahan—marks the climax in the development of Iranian palace construction.

In Iran, the art of building showed great concern for tradition throughout all periods of Persian culture. Thus, Achaemenid motifs were still in use in Parthian architecture, and details of Achaemenid columns, like the double-protome capital, can still be seen in Tehran on twentieth-century buildings. In view of this, it is not astonishing that similar organizational principles remained in use from late Sasanian to early Islamic times. Usually it took the form of a tripartite arrangement composed of three parallel axes sometimes constituting a cross-axial plan. This system can be observed in its early form in the so-called Sasanian palaces near Sarvistan² (fig. 1; the date of Sarvistan is still uncertain) and near Damghan (about whose hypothetical reconstructions Lionel Bier has raised some doubts elsewhere in this volume). Its later, more common, form of ground plan and distribution of rooms can be seen in the Safavid palaces of the seventeenth century, like that of 'Aliabad near Furk (fig. 2) in southern Iran.³ It was later handed down to the Qajar architecture of the nineteenth century.

It is important to stress the similarity of the tripartite organizational system in the building of Sarvistan and in seventeenth-century palaces, and

the fact that only Islamic pottery can be found in the area around the domed building of Sarvistan. No matter when it was constructed it continued to be used without any significant change in its architecture into the Islamic period.

In the ground plans of many Safavid pavilions the Achaemenid *apadana* can be recognized, with its four iwans opening onto the outside and its four corner buildings or groups of rooms, like those in the pavilion (fig. 3) east of the Hasht Bihisht in Isfahan, the remaining parts of which were recorded before its complete disappearance several years ago. The form is also seen in the late Safavid–early Qajar pavilion at the citadel of Bam (fig. 4).

Variations in this cross-axial ground plan developed in the Iranian building tradition to serve diverse functions. First was the palace for the royal court. Royal pavilions in cities were linked to spacious gardens, to the surrounding countryside, or to a small garden at least, as in Isfahan at the Chihil Sutun and the Hasht Bihisht (see Necipoğlu, figs. 10a [o,t], 11 [8]). The plans and functions of these are well known and will not be discussed here in detail.⁴

There were also villas belonging to rich landowners and seats of the royal court in the countryside. We do not know to whom they belonged or what the position of a particular owner was. An example is 'Abbasabad, north of Natanz (fig. 5) on the old road from Natanz to Kashan, a mud-brick building on a foundation of rubble which also uses the tripartite system of organization in its layout.⁵ It is a typical domed hall with one story, part of which was divided into two stories by inserting a floor in between to provide living and storage units. The building opens toward a water basin and a rectangular terraced garden. A cypress on a mound dominates the garden on its main axis.

Tajabad,⁶ on the caravan route from Isfahan to Natanz, also belongs to this group (fig. 6). It is situated in a large garden with fountains and water basins and was connected with a farm. The complex also includes a bathhouse of Safavid origin. The tripartite structure of the main building is cross-axial. The rooms are richly decorated with painted stucco; some of them have domes.

Another domed building in the park of the complex at Tajabad (fig. 7), the conception of which had originally been a very regular cross-shape, was obviously never finished; its architecture has changed considerably over the years.

In Isfahan palaces and pavilions of diverse sizes and functions did exist, but they were pulled down in the course of time. One of them was the Talar-i Ashraf which had a cross-axial tripartite arrangement similar to that of the building in 'Aliabad near Furk (fig. 2) or the viewing pavilion at the north end of the Chahar Bagh avenue, which fell victim to modern development. The pavilion's façade is known only through old photographs (see Necipoğlu, fig. 10a [8]).

A special type of ground plan is the eight- or sixteen-sided pavilion, like that in the Rose Garden at Isfahan (fig. 8; see also Necipoğlu, fig. 10a [r]), which is known only through some drawings by Engelbert Kaempfer⁷ who accompanied a European embassy to the Safavid court in 1684–85. Another pavilion of this type (which still exists) is the octagonal tower-shaped building visible from afar on its steep conical mountain (fig. 9) above Natanz.⁸ It was a royal hunting pavilion which the monarch used when he was in residence near Natanz to hunt the numerous deer there. Yet it may equally well be called a *mil*, a landmark for caravans, because of its exposed position and its tower-shaped high outer dome.

The projecting pier in the middle of the Khaju Bridge in Isfahan, which is laid out in the shape of a pavilion on both sides of the roadway, also functioned as a recreation lodge, as did the no longer extant Mirror Pavilion (*Ayina-khana*) on the river bank of the *Zayanda Rud* in Isfahan. Like the bridge, the pavilion is counted among the best works of Safavid art and architecture.⁹

From the so-called summer residences of the Safavid kings near the Caspian Sea, Farahabad, situated on the coast and now in ruins, may be reconstructed in its outward form with the help of nineteenth-century drawings, like those of the *Jahan-numa* palace (fig. 10). Its cubically massed shape is rectangular, with a symmetrical division of the façade into five sections. The two outermost ones are narrower than those in the center. The central section is even broader than the others, lending it additional importance. Thanks to old photographs, both the palace in Safiabad (fig. 11a–b) and the palace of Saahib-i Zaman in Ashraf/Behshahr (fig. 12) can be reconstructed in spite of recent changes in the

building. Photographs show a cubic structure with a basically tripartite façade.

Along the so-called Royal Road from Isfahan to these countryside palaces on the Caspian Sea six desert palaces acting as way stations have come down to us (fig. 13). Unlike the palaces at Isfahan with their two or more stories and the two-story palaces on the Caspian coast, these have only one story and are often built around a central court just like the caravansarays that are often located near them. Those at Dombi, Sefid Ab, and Germab (fig. 14) have two courtyards each, recalling the layout of Seljuq-period royal caravansarays in Iran and Anatolia. The courtyards are surrounded by halls and single rooms that open into them through arcades. Architecturally, these halls are designed as two-story buildings as they are seen from outside, with entrances on the ground floor and above them a line of windows, but inside there is only a one-story room with walls designed in two stories. The room is covered by vaulting, with small domes in between. The center of each façade is accentuated architectonically by an *iwān*, as in Safavid caravansarays. Some have bent entrances as at Sefid Ab, to prevent people from looking into one court from the other, thus allowing one to function as a *selamlīk* (men's quarters) and the other as a *haremlīk* (women's quarters). Large caravansarays along important trade routes may have had double courts, with several rooms in one or two corners, for the separate accommodation of the royal entourage and embassies from abroad. This arrangement can be found in both Safavid and Qajar caravansarays.

Along other highways small pavilions were built to serve as royal way stations as well as hunting lodges. One such example is the 'Aliabad pavilion, with one story (fig. 2)¹⁰ and nine rooms of unequal size on a stone platform of 17.5 x 16.7 m (outside measurements) which would be too small to house the whole entourage of a prince. It can be assumed that they lived in tents in an enclosed area around the stone pavilion to which only the prince and his closest companions had access. Unfortunately all possible traces of such an enclosure have been erased from the terrain by farming. The domed rooms at the center of the 'Aliabad pavilion are richly ornamented by stellate vaults with intersecting ribs, but their state of preservation is too poor to show painting or other vault decoration.

Safavid palaces in Isfahan, Qazvin, and Kashan

were enclosed by walls which had their own impressive gatehouses. Several types of buildings were used for this function. At the 'Ali Qapu in Isfahan¹¹ the open loggia (*tālār*) is supported by wooden columns standing above the gateway's monumental ground floor. In Kashan¹² the gatehouses of the palace and of the Bagh-i Fin garden bore a strong resemblance to each other, as the sketches of Engelbert Kaempfer reveal (fig. 15). The façades of both buildings had a tripartite elevation. The heavily modified gatehouse of the palace quarters in Qazvin, also called the 'Ali Qapu,¹³ can be reconstructed (fig. 16) using a drawing by Kaempfer. It had a façade of arcades or blind arcades similar to those in mosque courtyards and caravansarays.

Building materials used for these structures ranged from mud brick and baked brick (used on the foundations of quarried stone) to quarried stone mixed with lime mortar, to square stone, to wood. Vaulted ceilings of stone or mud brick were often richly decorated with painting, carved stucco, and tiled muqarnas. Carved wooden columns and wooden capitals, painted flat wooden ceilings, fresco paintings on the walls and ceilings, and painted muqarnas were often used for the interior design of important buildings. They can be found in the 'Ali Qapu and other surviving pavilions at Isfahan, as well as smaller palaces such as the one in Tajabad and others in the city of Nayin.¹⁴

In contrast to the richly decorated interiors, the outer walls were sparingly decorated in palaces, caravansarays, and sacred buildings during the Safavid period, but their segmented façades were well proportioned. In them, structural elements functioned at the same time as decoration. The layout of Safavid palatial buildings is usually more harmonious than that of their more recent

Qajar counterparts which show a tendency toward exaggeration in design, although they still firmly adhere to the building tradition of ancient Persia.

Like religious buildings, palaces influenced the architecture of those regions that were conquered and at times governed by the Safavids. Before the Safavid era, Iranian Islamic architecture had already influenced neighboring countries. The Çinili Köşk (Tiled Kiosk) of Mehmet II in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul completed in 1472 is a well-known example.¹⁵ The Safavid art of building also influenced palace architecture in Georgia after its conquest, as can be seen in the palace of the Palavandishvili in Sagina near Tiflis, built in the seventeenth century. It can be compared with the Safavid pavilions along the Royal Road from Isfahan to the Caspian Sea. As early as the sixteenth century the residence of the shah of Nardaran in northern Azerbaijan shows the characteristic features seen in later Safavid pavilions, both in its ground plan and its façades.¹⁶

Influences from abroad are hardly discernible on Safavid buildings with the possible exception of the interior design of palace architecture, where European-influenced painted decorations were widely used. On the mural paintings of the Chihil Sutun in Isfahan, for example, courtiers of both sexes are represented in typical European dress of the seventeenth century.¹⁷ It was not until the Qajar period that the influence of European architecture was increasingly felt in such interior-design elements as local interpretations of classical columns, capitals, or mirrors (already encountered in late Safavid architecture).¹⁸ Despite their rapid incorporation of foreign elements, however, these buildings perpetuated a long-established local tradition of palace architecture.

Notes

1. For Qazvin, see Wolfram Kleiss, "Der safavidische Pavillon in Qazvin," *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* (hereafter *AMI*) 9 (1976): 290–98. Bibliography on the Isfahan palace is provided in Necipoğlu's paper in this volume.
2. Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art* (Tokyo, 1967), 2:536 f.; Lionel Bier, *Sarvistan: A Study in Early Iranian Architecture* (University Park, Penna., 1986).
3. Wolfram Kleiss, "Schloss Aliabad bei Furk in Fars," *AMI* 24 (1991): 261 f.
4. Kurt Würfel, *Isfahan nisfi-dschahan, das ist die Hälfte der Welt* (Zurich, 1974), 147–54, 160–65.
5. Wolfram Kleiss, "Schlösser und Herrensitze auf dem Lande aus Safavidischer und Qadjarischer Zeit," *AMI* 20 (1987): 345 f.
6. I have measured Tajabad, but have not yet published the results.
7. Hans Hüls and Hans Hoppe, *E. Kaempfer zum 330. Geburtstag* (Lemgo, 1982), fig. 32.
8. Kleiss, "Schlösser und Herrensitze," 365 f.
9. Henri Stierlin, *Ispahan* (Geneva, 1976), 72 f.
10. Kleiss, "Schlösser und Herrensitze," 358 f.
11. Würfel, *Isfahan*, 118 f.
12. Kleiss, *Die Entwicklung von Palästen und palastartigen Wohnbauten in Iran* (Vienna, 1989), fig. 67.
13. Kleiss, *Die Entwicklung von Palästen*, fig. 45.
14. For Nayin, see S. K. Yetkin, *İslam Mimarii* (Ankara, 1959), 421; for further bibliography, see O'Kane's article in this volume.
15. W. Beridse, *Die Baukunst des Mittelalters in Georgien* (Berlin, 1981), 237 f.
16. K. Gink, *Azerbaidjan* (Hanau, 1980), 52 f.
17. For the mural paintings in Isfahan and further bibliography, see Necipoğlu's article in this volume.
18. For Qajar palaces, see J. M. Scarce, "The Royal Palaces of the Qajar Dynasty: A Survey," in *Qajar Iran*, ed. C. E. Bosworth and Carol Hillenbrand (Edinburgh, 1984), 329–51.

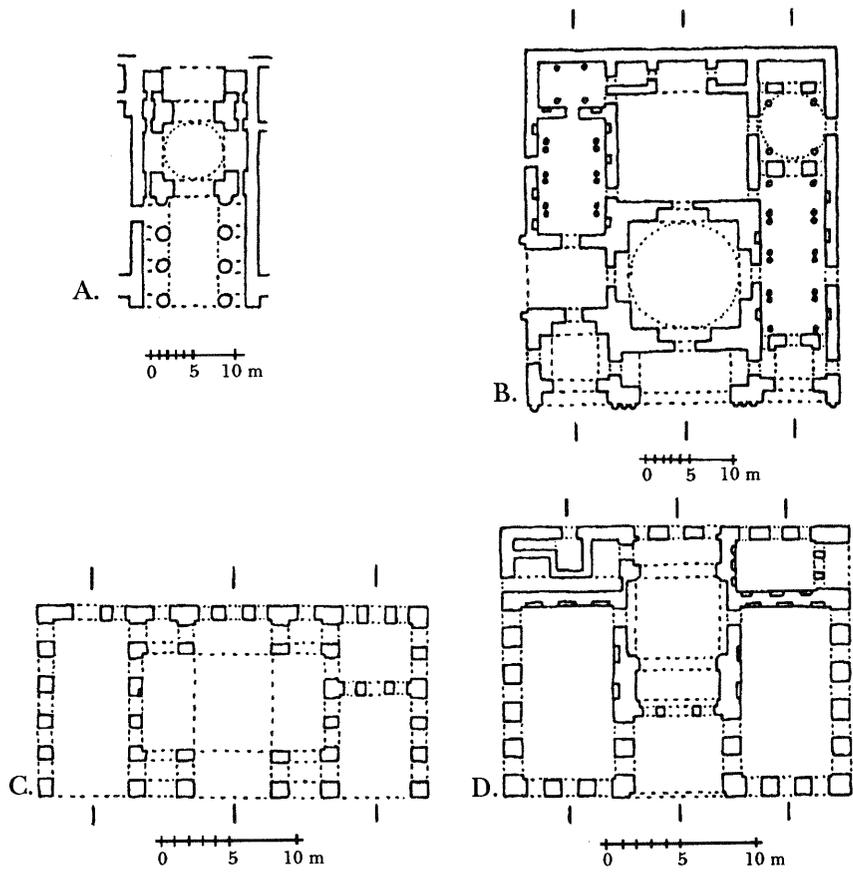


FIG. 1. Ground plans of (A) the Sasanian building at Damghan, (B) the "Sasanian" palace of Sarvistan, (C) the Safavid palace of Talar-e Ashraf in Isfahan, and (D) the palace near Natanz with the tripartite arrangement of parallel axes.

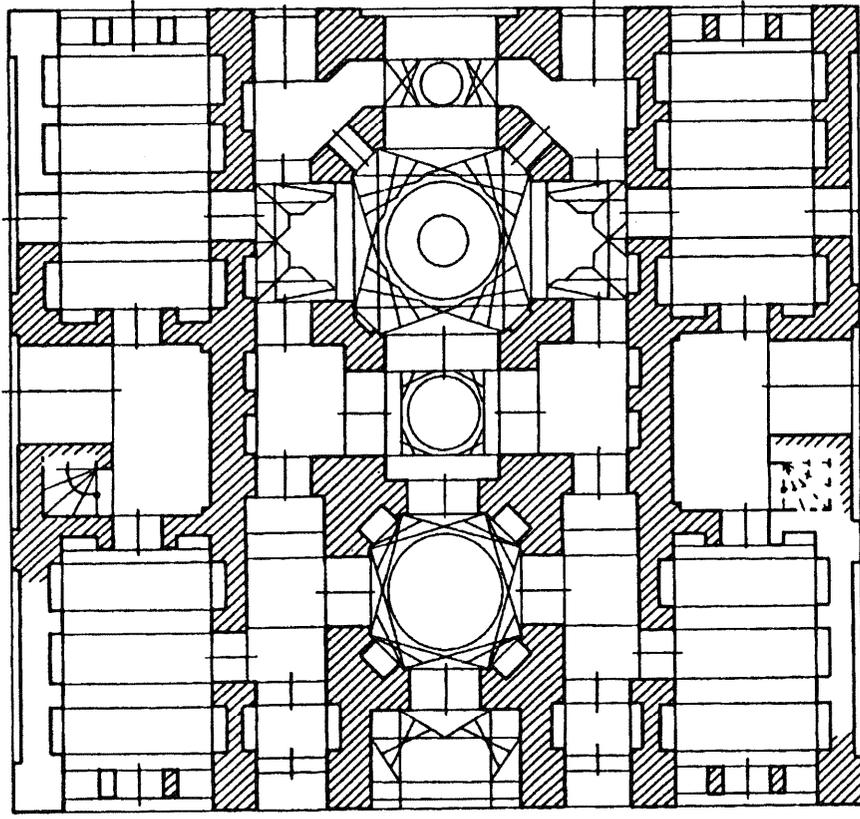


FIG. 2. 'Aliabad near Furk. Plan of the palace building.

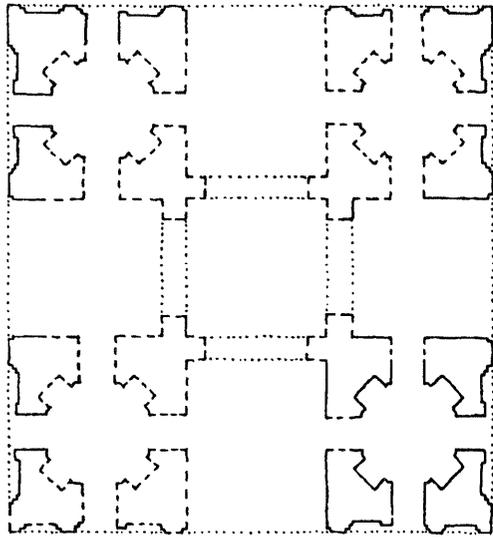


FIG. 3. Isfahan. The Safavid pavilion east of the Hasht Bihisht.

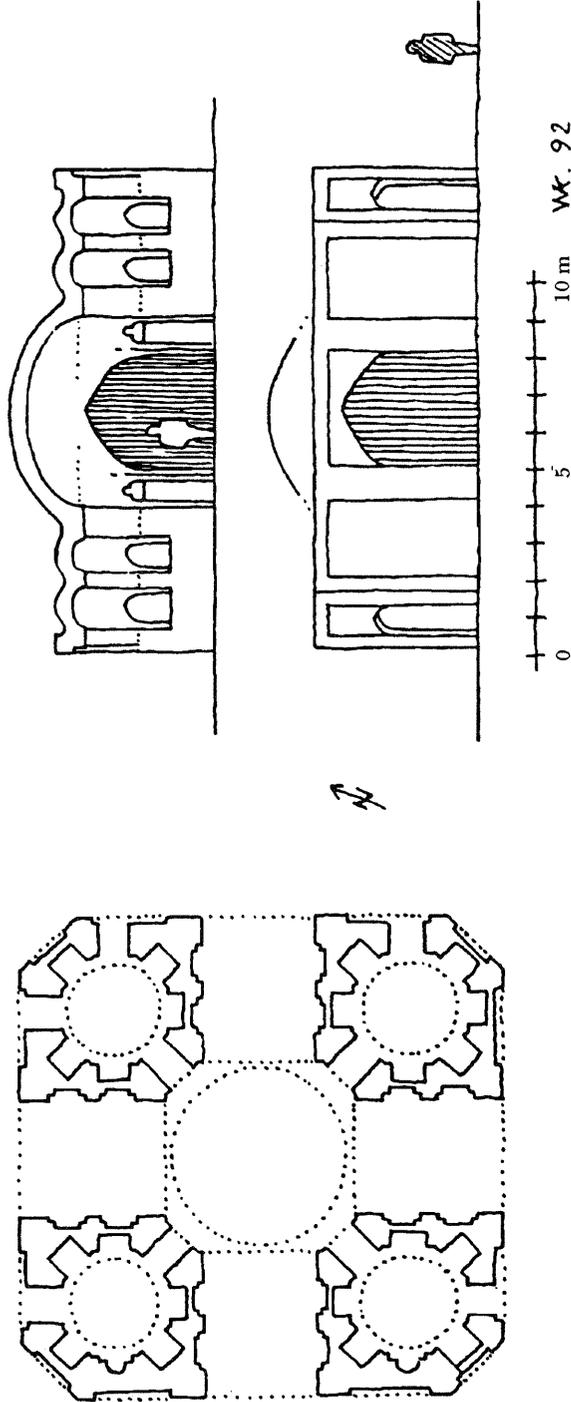


FIG. 4. Pavilion at the citadel of Bam.

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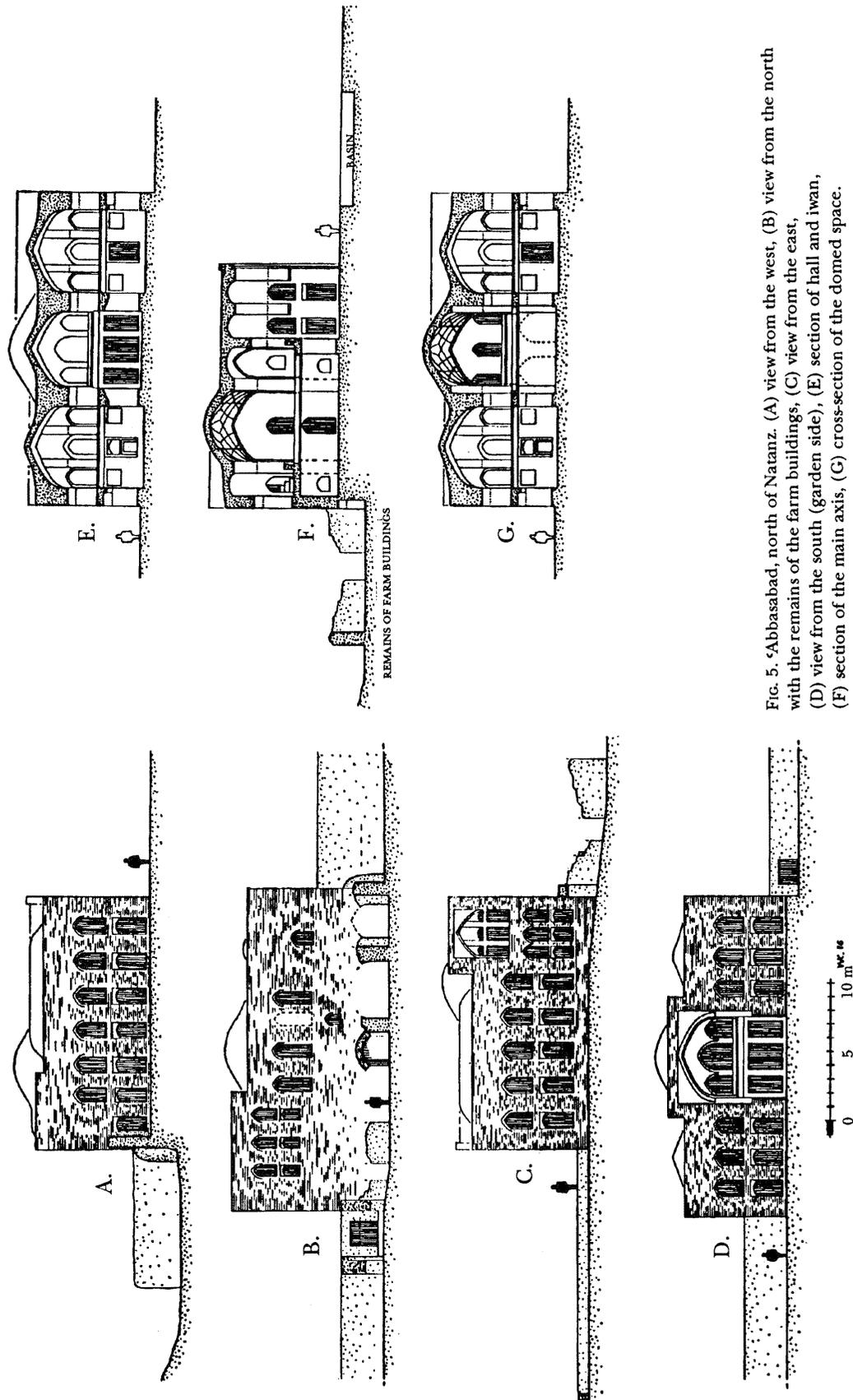


FIG. 5. ʿAbbasabad, north of Natanz. (A) view from the west, (B) view from the north with the remains of the farm buildings, (C) view from the east, (D) view from the south (garden side), (E) section of hall and iwan, (F) section of the main axis, (G) cross-section of the domed space.

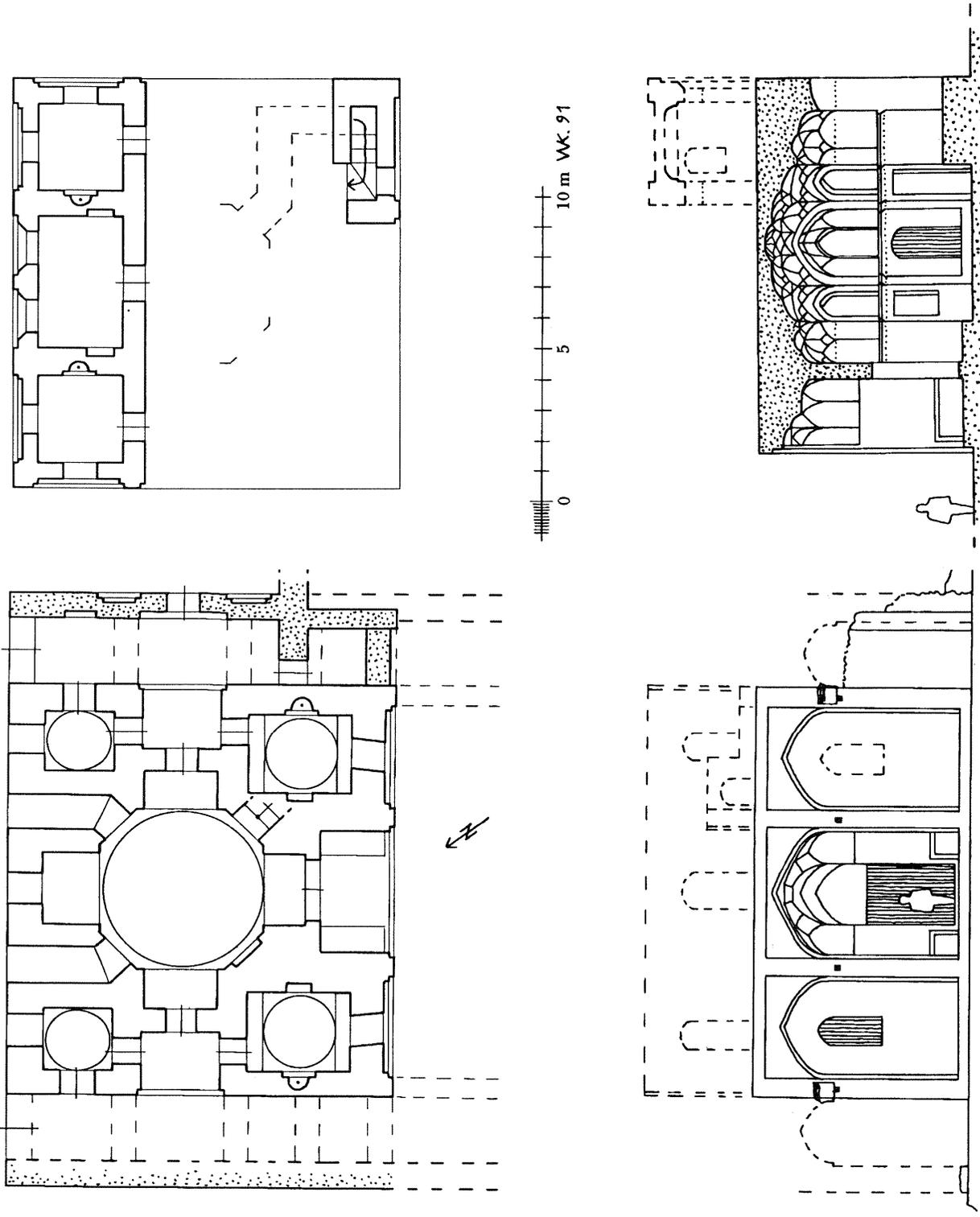


FIG. 6. Tajabad. Domed building. Floor plan and section.

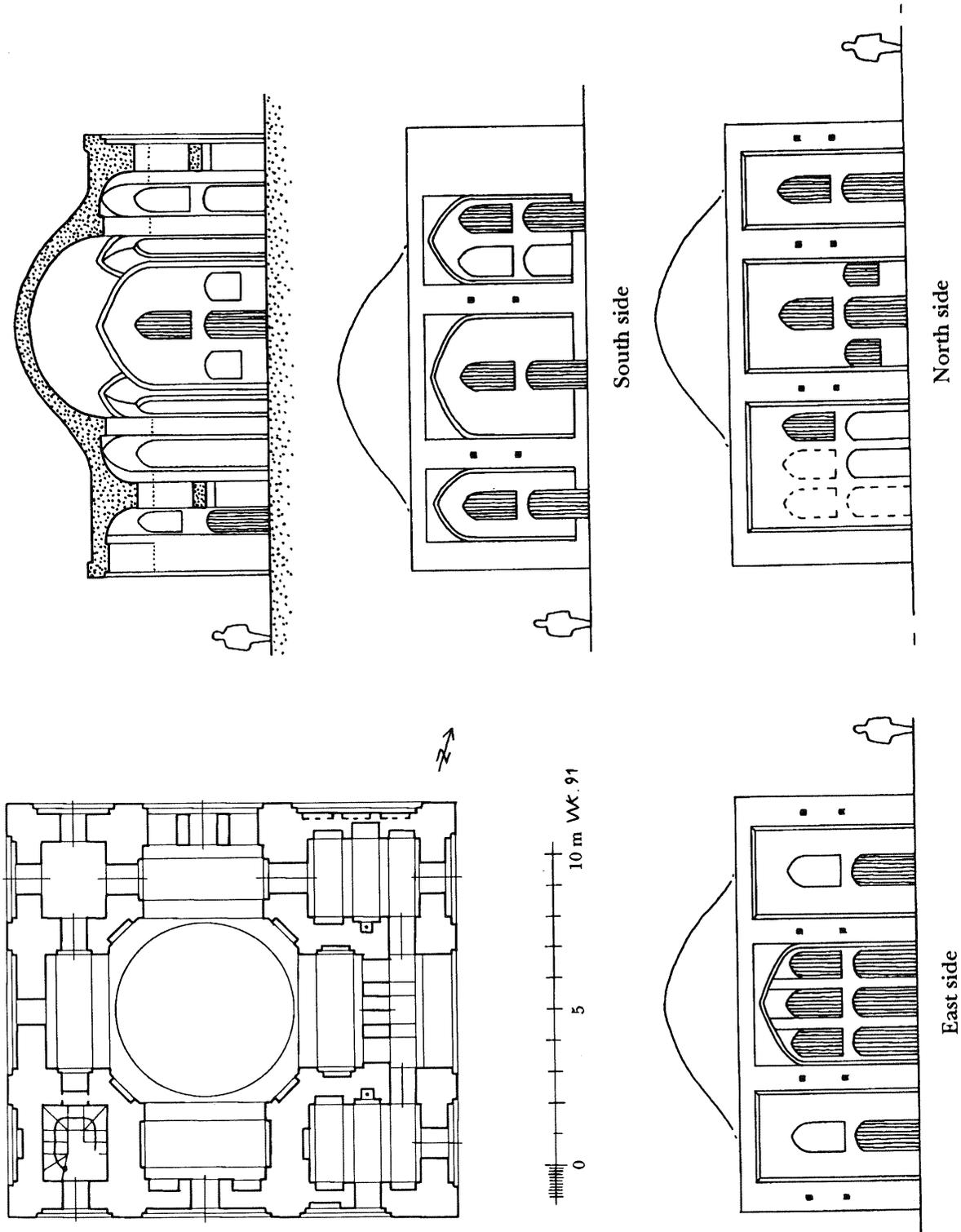


FIG. 7. Tajabad. Palace. (top) Plan of ground and upper floor; (bottom) longitudinal section of the front of the south side.

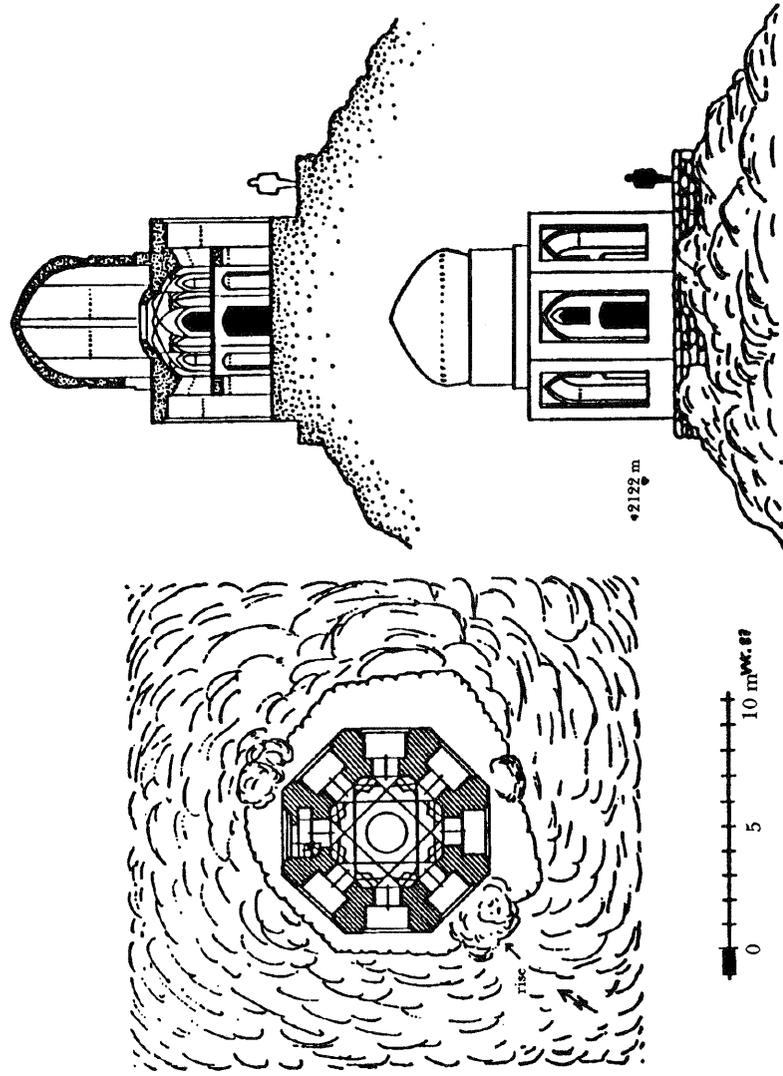


FIG. 9. Natanz. Conbad Baz. (left) Ground plan; (right above) east-west section; (below) view from the south.

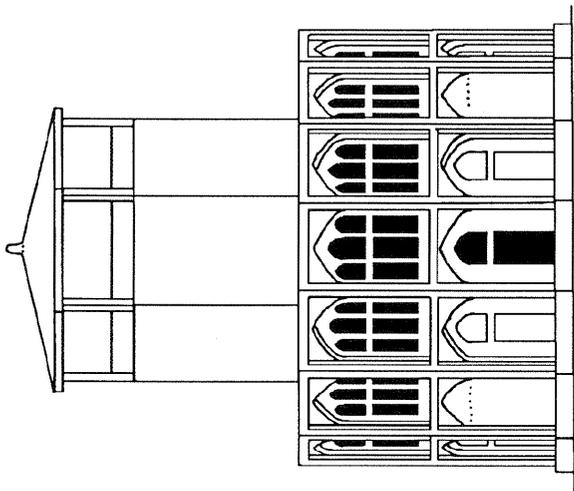


FIG. 8. Isfahan. Pavilion in the Rose Garden. After E. Kaempfer.

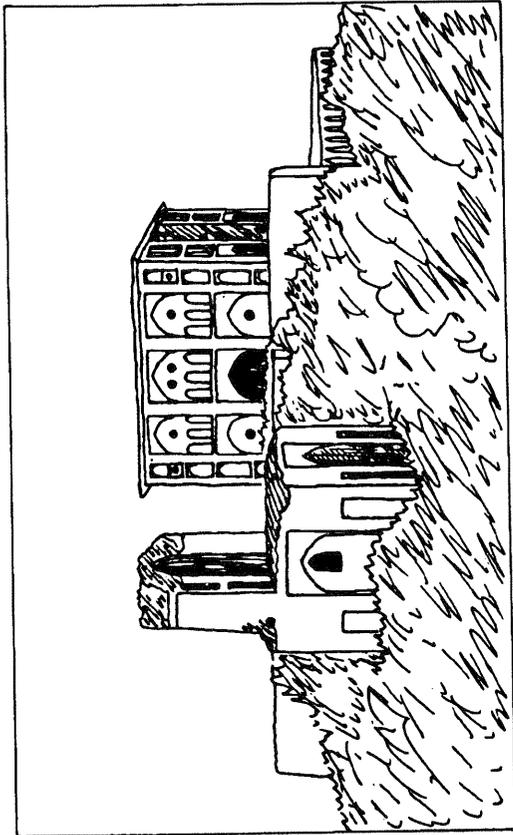


FIG. 11a. Palace of Safiabad. Entrance. After Rabino, *Les provinces caspiennes de la Perse*, pl. 88.

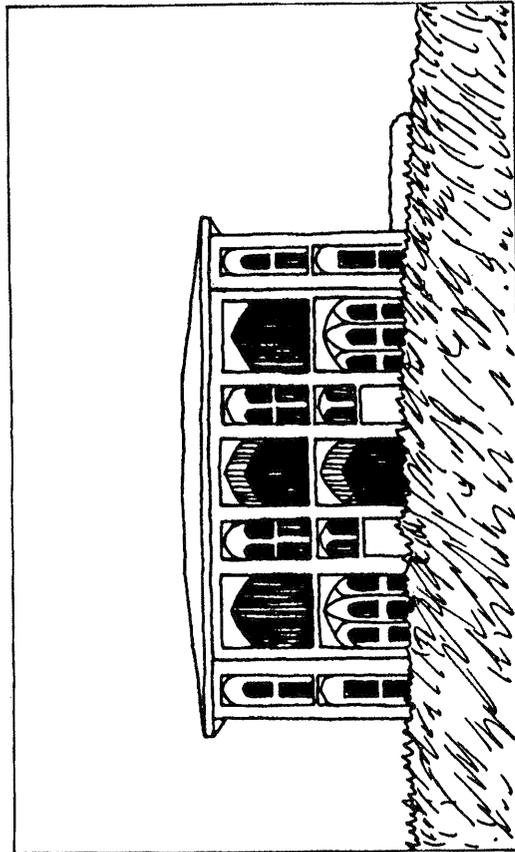


FIG. 12. Palace of Saahib-i Zaman in Ashraf/Behshahr. After Rabino, *Les provinces caspiennes de la Perse*, pl. 93.

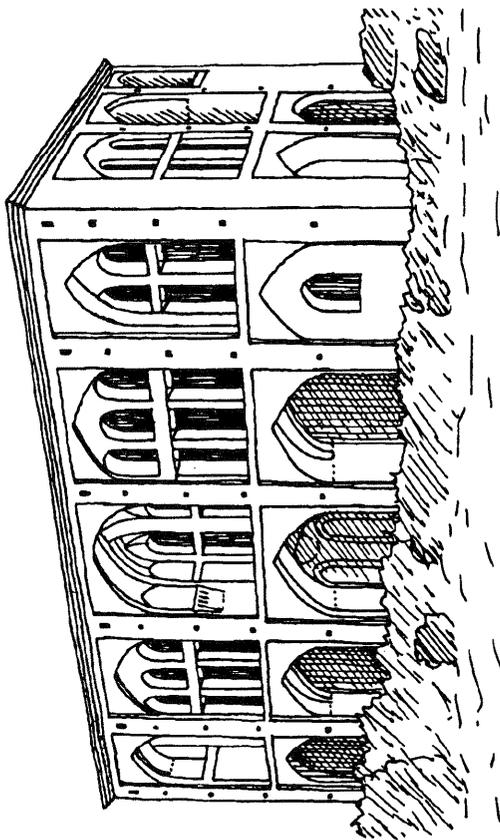


FIG. 10. Farahabad. Jahan-numa palace. Reconstruction. After H. L. Rabino, *Les provinces caspiennes de la Perse* (Paris, 1917), pl. 97.

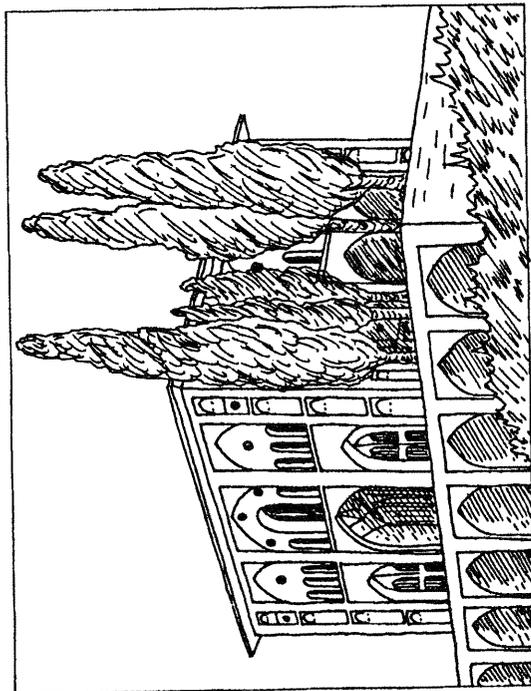


FIG. 11b. Palace of Safiabad. Building with terrace substructure. After Rabino, *Les provinces caspiennes de la Perse*, pl. 94.

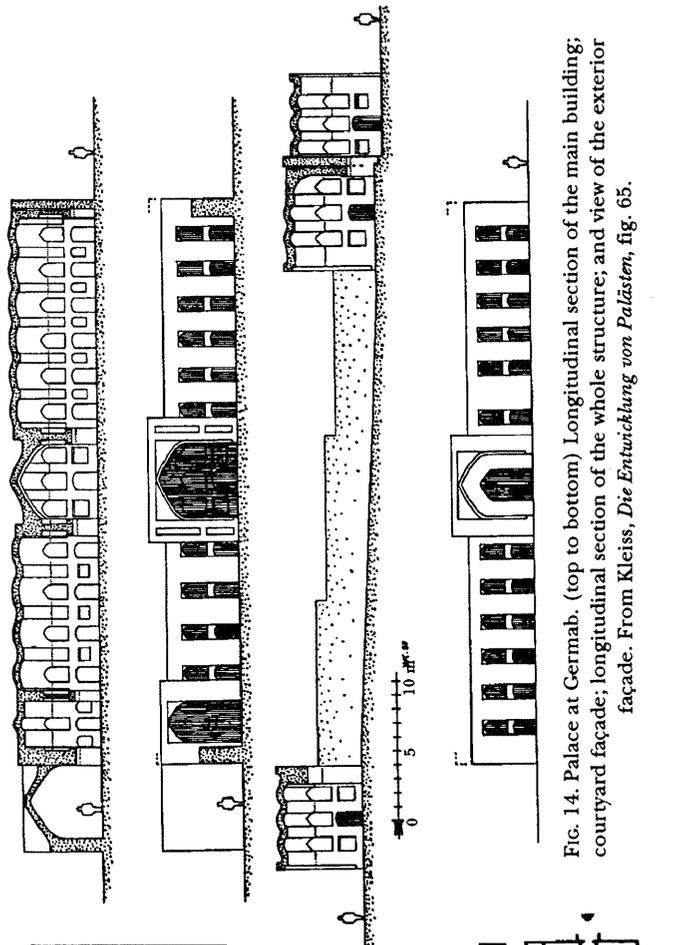


FIG. 14. Palace at Germab. (top to bottom) Longitudinal section of the main building; courtyard façade; longitudinal section of the whole structure; and view of the exterior façade. From Kleiss, *Die Entwicklung von Palästen*, fig. 65.

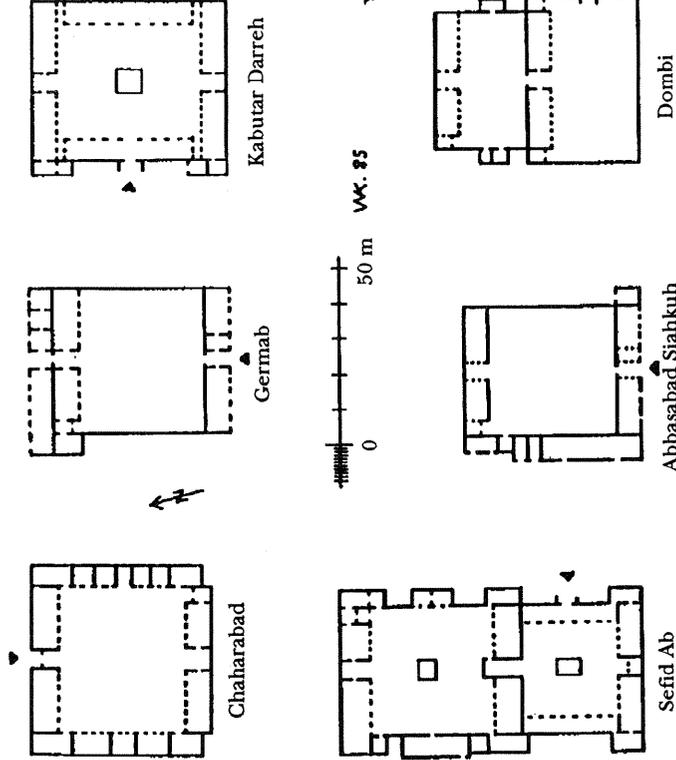


FIG. 13. Six desert palaces along the Royal Road. From Wolfram Kleiss, *Die Entwicklung von Palästen und palastartigen Wohnbauten in Iran* (Vienna, 1989), fig. 64.

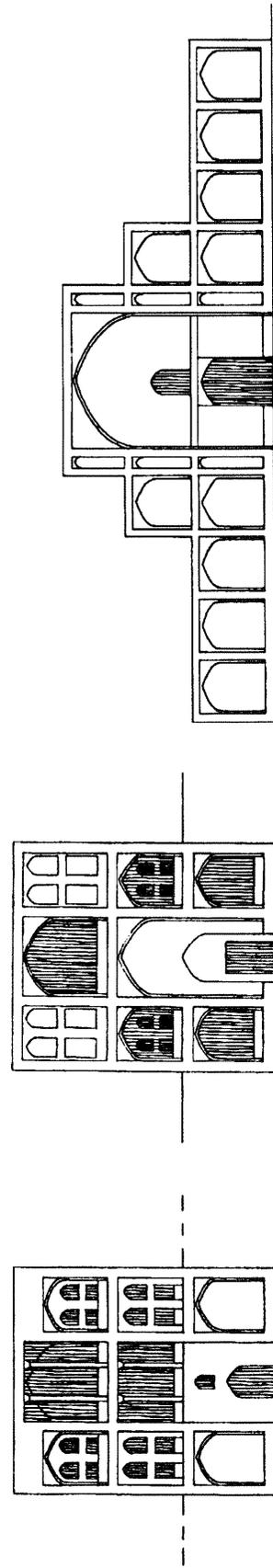


FIG. 15. Kashan. Reconstruction of the gatehouses of the Safavid palace. After E. Kaempfer, pl. 24.

FIG. 16. Qazvin. Gatehouse of the palace ('Ali Qapu) as reconstructed by E. Kaempfer. From Engelbert Kaempfer zum 330. Geburtstag (1982), fig. 13.