FRAMING THE GAZE IN OTTOMAN, SAFAVID, AND MUGHAL PALACES

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The Topkapi Palace in Ottoman Istanbul, the Safavid palace in Isfahan, and the Mughal Red Fort in Delhi, three palaces built for the rulers of three rival empires that dominated the early-modern Islamic world, used architecture in different ways to frame the gaze in representing the monarch's official public image. These vast imperial palaces, conceived as architectural metaphors for three patrimonial-bureaucratic empires with their hierarchical organization of state functions around public, semi-public, and private zones culminating in gardens, constituted elaborate stages for dynastic representation. Animated by court rituals, each of them projected a distinctive royal image, invented with a specific theory of dynastic legitimacy in mind.

The gaze has been analyzed in recent critical theory as an instrument of control and supervision, particularly over women. No doubt gender played an important role in the zoning and social organization of the gaze in Islamic palaces where royal women were generally kept away from public view. Relegated to their private spaces in the harem and outlying garden pavilions, the female inhabitants of most palaces could only peer at public court ceremonies from rooftops or from behind screened galleries or grilled windows. No matter how influential their position, therefore, they were forced to exercise their power through intermediaries. Ocular politics also played a role in delineating asymmetries of power in the predominantly male public realm of patrimonial political discourse. The ways in which the three palaces framed the gaze in staging the public appearances of the monarch articulated the nature of his relationship to the extended royal household, his subjects, and the world at large, a relationship that was rooted in a different concept of absolute monarchy in each case.

The Topkapi Palace

The Topkapi is chronologically the first of the three palaces to have been built, but all three assumed their definitive layout about the same time, that is, by the mid-seventeenth century. Each palace no doubt represents the culmination of dynastic traditions that had evolved gradually. Here, however, I will treat them as ideal structures, synchronically located in a slice of time roughly encompassing the late sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century.

The Topkapi Palace, built by Mehmed II between 1459 and 1479, had assumed approximately its present layout by the late sixteenth century. Various rulers had modified it, but chose not radically to alter its original conception (figs. 1–2). Aside from changes in detail introduced to augment the royal magnificence, the sultans also continued to regulate court ceremonial according to the specifications of a book of ceremonies that in the late 1470s had codified the imperial order invented by Mehmed II after the conquest of Constantinople. Mehmed, no longer the chief of a modest nomadic frontier principality, now stood at the head of a world empire ruled by a centralized bureaucracy and an army of household slaves whose ranks and careers were dictated by the book of ceremonies. This rule book stipulated that the monarch remain aloof; he would no longer sit at banquets or appear regularly in public audiences as he used to do. Except for the two religious holidays in which he agreed to give public audiences, he would remain in seclusion, only receiving privileged dignitaries and ambassadors in his private audience hall four times a week.

Majestically perched on a hilltop next to Hagia Sophia, which had been turned into the premier Friday mosque of the new Ottoman capital, the Topkapi was separated from the city by fortified walls. Its three increasingly secluded courts were experienced in a processional sequence that drew the official visitor from one clearly marked ceremonial station to the next. Three monumental gates occupying the central position at the head of each court funneled the ceremonial procession toward the sultan's private reception hall attached to the inner threshold of the third gate where all movement converged (fig. 1 [1–3]). The first two outer courts housed various workshops, service areas, and administrative functions, mere extensions of a much more
magnificent inner palace constituting the sultan's inaccessible private domain (fig. 1 [A, B]). The innermost third court, divided into male and female zones and fronted by a walled hanging garden with kiosks, was more than just a royal residence (fig. 1 [C, D, E]). In it the sultan's obedient, originally non-Muslim slave pages and concubines who had been converted to Islam were educated in the court culture and then married off to one another. They constituted the Ottoman Empire's artificially instituted ruling elite that served to consolidate the absolute monarch's centralized power.

The first gate leading into the first court, known as the Court of Processions, linked the walled-in palace to the city beyond through stately parades. Hidden like a pearl "in the depth of the oyster shell," the sultan could survey his capital and view public spectacles without himself being seen by sitting behind a grilled window above the entrance arch of that gate, which was originally surmounted by a royal pavilion with an internal gold dome (fig. 3). With its well-established imperial iconography this ceremonial window was reminiscent of the ones used in the domed gatehouses of Byzantine, Abbasid, and Fatimid palaces. It inscribed the sultan's invisible gaze on the façade of the Imperial Gate (Bab-i Humayun), thus implying his symbolic presence even when he was absent.

During his rare public appearances at such festivities as princely circumcisions the otherwise secluded monarch went to the neighboring Hippodrome where he watched the parades of guilds and other entertainments from the elevated royal balcony of the Ibrahim Pasha Palace, just as the Byzantine emperors had sat in an imperial loggia to watch the games held there (see O'Kane, fig. 13). The Hippodrome, surrounded on such occasions by temporary wooden booths, thus functioned as an extension of the palace grounds as it had done in the Byzantine era. The only other times the sultan appeared in public were during ceremonial processions through the city. Before these carefully staged parades the royal horse was suspended in the air and left without food all night to guarantee a stately pace that would reinforce the monarch's awesome magnificence.

Every embassy to the Ottoman court began with a procession through the city which the sultan could watch unseen from behind the grilled windows of a tower-shaped belvedere, known as the Kiosk of Processions, abutting the fortified walled enclosure of the Topkapi (fig. 4). Then the ambassadors entered from the first gate and paraded along a path that led to the double-towered second gate beyond which only the sultan could ride on a horse. Here a respectful silence was imposed, and thereafter progressively increasing degrees of silence prevailed throughout the palace, culminating in the third court whose inhabitants had been taught sign language in order to communicate in total silence.

The second court's centerpiece was the third gate, fronted by a domed canopy from which one entered directly into the sultan's private audience hall (fig. 2 [13, 16]). The main administrative structures reached by a diagonal path from the second gate were clustered together in the far left corner and marked by a tower (fig. 9-11). Inside the public council hall (Divan-i Humayun), a tribunal of justice, the grand vizier's cabinet met four times a week. During those sessions the sultan sat behind a grilled window opening from the tower into the council hall so that he could watch legal proceedings and the banquets for ambassadors without himself being seen (figs. 5-7). The window allowed him to check on how his officials were administering justice and whether the reports they later presented to him in the private audience hall were accurate. The sultan's ceremonial window, reminiscent of those used in the audience halls of the secluded Abbasid and Fatimid caliphs, was connected by a staircase to a belvedere pavilion on top of the tower, behind whose latticed shutters the hidden monarch could survey the second court.

The gilded royal window was placed directly above the seat of the grand vizier, who administered the state in the sultan's name, to represent the ruler's centralized authority metonymically. The public council hall's off-center position inside the second court visually expressed the subordination of administrators to the autocratic ruler, who was represented architecturally by the Tower of Justice that rose high above the palace's skyline and by the centrally placed domed third gate. The tower's grilled window and shuttered belvedere pavilion signified the invisible but omniscient sultan's eternal vigilance against injustice, since his presence there was always palpable even in his absence.

The sultan came out to the second court only twice a year, on the main religious holidays when he was enthroned under the third gate's domed baldachin. On other days this courtyard resembled a vast theater with an impressively large cast
from which the main actor was perpetually absent. It represented the Ottoman notion of Porte (kapu), that is, the administration of the state and of royal justice in front of the sultan's gate by his extended family of household slaves (kapu kulu, lit. "slaves of the gate"). The second court encapsulated the Ottoman theory of dynastic legitimacy that revolved around the role of the sultans as just rulers whose administration relied on dynastic law codes (kanunname) which came to be harmonized with the Shari'a by the middle of the sixteenth century. A brief period of experimentation with messianic charisma during the early part of Süleyman I's reign had been followed by the definitive formulation of an orthodox image of kingship devoid of semi-divine or supernatural elements. The legitimate ruler had to be a descendant of the Ottoman family, distinguished by its victorious record in the holy war, its commitment to Sunni Islam, and its just administration.10

Dynastic law codes complementing the Shari'a allowed the sultans to exercise power in seclusion by delegating authority to other dignitaries. This was noted with surprise by a Moroccan ambassador in the late sixteenth century, since in the Maghrib, a ruler's visibility and accessibility were central to court rituals:

All the affairs of the empire, interior and exterior are regulated among the Turks by constitutions and written laws that have been codified. The grand vizier has to follow them to the letter and must never deviate from them. In doing so he does not need to consult at all with the sultan; he must only do so for important affairs.11

The consolidation of the empire's centralized administrative apparatus by the late sixteenth century allowed the sultans to withdraw even further into seclusion, since the self-perpetuating bureaucratic machine had rendered government impersonal.

The private audience hall behind the third gate, where the ruler regularly met with the grand vizier's cabinet after he had overseen the proceedings of the public council chamber, represented the monarch's absolute authority (fig. 2 [16]). It was there that the sultan received emissaries who sought the help of his "court of world refuge" by bringing gifts and tribute in return for which they were given ceremonial robes of honor.12 The hall expressed the idea of justice dispensed by the ruler at the threshold of his palace gate, referred to in Ottoman imperial decrees as the "most sublime threshold." The palace's outer courts, the city beyond, and even the empire at large represented an extension of that threshold, signifying the invisible sultan's role as the omnipotent center of the empire from which all power radiated and to which it converged.

The private reception hall obstructed the view into the third court to focus attention on a large ceremonial window with gilded iron grilles placed on its facade (fig. 8 a-b). From that window the enthroned ruler could view the third gate's vestibule where officers found guilty of injustice were executed and ambassadorial gifts were paraded. It also gave official visitors a preview of the sultan enthroned in majesty, framed by the window like an icon. During the silent reception ceremony inside the domed chamber, which sparkled with gold and jewels, the ruler sat in the corner facing his ceremonial window like a speechless and immobile idol (fig. 9). Ambassadors were conducted to him with their arms secured by two gatekeepers; everyone else obediently stood, hands crossed and eyes lowered. The diagonal approach to the royal presence heightened the mystery of the ceremony that allowed only a brief encounter with the sultan, who considered himself beyond any relationship of reciprocity.

Because the ordinary visitor was not allowed to penetrate beyond the private audience hall, attached to the mysterious threshold of the third gate, the processional journey into the heart of the inaccessible inner palace was abruptly arrested. The secrets of the legendary royal setting that lay hidden beyond the palace's public zones were thus withheld from the public gaze. The spectacular silhouette that the Topkapi projected to the world could only be perceived from a distance. To be viewed as an aesthetic object prominently displayed in the urban fabric, and, in turn, to provide spectacular vistas of the surrounding metropolis to its privileged inhabitants were two central themes informing its design. From the domed belvederes of the third court the sultan, who boasted being "Ruler of the Two Continents and the Two Seas," could infinitely extend his mastering gaze over his world empire as it fanned outwards from the third court's silent nucleus of pure potency, known as the Abode of Felicity. The ruler's gaze, architecturally framed by grilled windows, view-commanding private kiosks, and belvedere towers, signifying his power to see without being seen (or to be seen only as a shadowy silhouette), accentuated the unbridgeable distance between the ruler and the ruled. The privilege of the gaze was so fully embodied in the semiotic discourse of the Topkapi Palace that
catching a momentary glimpse of the omnivoyant but invisible monarch became the propelling motive of the whole ceremonial.

The impermeable inner palace thus assumed the attributes of a harem, an inaccessible private space differing from its Safavid and Mughal counterparts, which readily displayed their royal halls precisely in order to overwhelm their visitors. The late-sixteenth-century writer Mustafa 'Ali was quick to note that unlike the Ottoman sultans the contemporary Muslim rulers of Iran and India chose not to remain secluded. The major difference between the Ottoman court and its Islamic contemporaries in the east was its dependence on the master-slave relationship upon which its rigidly centralized organization was based. By contrast the Safavid and Mughal rulers had to rely on the fickle allegiance of powerful nobles and tribal chieftains whose constantly shifting loyalties had to be carefully balanced. They could not afford to remain invisible; the privilege of the gaze was not theirs alone. Their more accessible palaces emphasized the reciprocity of the gaze between the ruler and the ruled, even though the nature of that reciprocal relationship assumed a distinctive coloring in each case.

Much like the Spanish Hapsburg kings, whose dignified majesty also depended on withdrawing from the public gaze, the Ottoman sultans were perpetuating an imperial tradition going back to Byzantine and ancient Near Eastern precedents that had been synthesized by the early Islamic universal caliphates. This allowed them to bolster their claims to the Islamic caliphate after having put an end in 1517 to the line of Abbasid caliphs stationed in Mamluk Cairo and having gained control of the holiest centers of Sunni Islam in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. By contrast the Safavids and Mughals modeled their rule on the charismatic tribal clan confederations of the Mongols and Timurids. Their royal image thrived on visibility like that of the French kings who rejected the Spanish Hapsburg tradition of seclusion.

According to Peter Burke, Louis XIV, in his memoirs, contrasts the French style of monarchy with the style of nations where “the majesty of kings largely consists in not allowing themselves to be seen.” In addition to the Spanish monarch, as Burke suggests, this statement may also allude to the Ottoman sultan whose rule French writers of the time had come to regard as the epitome of Oriental despotism. Many of them contrasted the sultan’s awe-inspiring invisibility with the public accessibility of the French king who wanted to be loved by his subjects, a topos that links hiddenness with despotism. Their discourse, which used Ottoman rule as a foil for the enlightened ideals of the French monarchy, proved to be so effective that, combined with several other factors, they forced the sultans to reject seclusion in favor of a more accessible royal image in the early eighteenth century.

This transformation of Ottoman court ceremonial, marked by the construction of display-oriented monumental palaces inspired by French models, is foreshadowed by the memoirs of an Ottoman soldier named Süleyman, who had spent a decade in the France of Louis XIV. The repatriated soldier wrote approvingly of how accessible Versailles and the king were and contrasted the Ottoman and the French courts in favor of the latter. When he was asked whether seeing the ruler every day did not reduce the dignity and esteem his subjects held him in, Süleyman answered, “The people not only love him more (ziyade severler) but also esteem him more (ziyade saygıdectdirler).” Eighteenth-century Ottoman shore palaces set in public parks gave way by the nineteenth century to even more openly Europeanizing palaces no longer hidden behind forbidding walls, and finally to the total abandonment of the Topkapi together with the antiquated political order it represented.

The Safavid Palace in Isfahan

Safavid court ceremonial shared an affinity with that practiced by the French kings in its emphasis on the accessible image of the ruler who readily appeared in public on every possible occasion. Instead of remaining hidden to make himself worthy of respect, the Safavid shah manifested his royal power through constant visibility, spectacle, and display. In his official chronicle of Shah 'Abbas I’s reign, the court historian Iskandar Munshi praised the ruler’s complete “lack of ceremony,” and his custom of mixing freely “with all classes of society”: “When he is in a good temper, he mixes with the greatest informality with the members of his household, his close friends and retainers and others, and treats them like brothers.”

The Italian traveler Pietro della Valle, who visited Isfahan in 1617-19, wrote that ‘Abbas I frequently strolled through the city either alone or with a few companions, talking to and joking
with all sorts of people. During audiences the affable shah refrained from "odious gravity," treating his guests as companions, and honoring those seated next to him by offering them food and drink with his own hands. In 1608 the Carmelite Friar Paul Simon wrote, "He will go through the public streets, eat from what they are selling there and other things, speak at ease freely or sit down beside this man and that. He says that is how to be a king, and that the king of Spain and other Christians do not get pleasure out of ruling, because they are obliged to comport themselves with such pomp and majesty as they do." In 1609 Friar John Thaddeus provided a similar description of 'Abbas I:

He will go to the place where Julfa Armenians are, to the house of a private person and sit there two or three hours drinking with them, finding out what he wants to know. . . . He is also wont to go for a pastime to other places hardly respectable. . . . Sometimes passing through the city on foot he will come to the shops of the greengrocers, fruiterers, and those who sell preserves and sweetmeats: here he will take a mouthful, there another: in one place taste a preserve, in another some fruit. He enters the house of a shoemaker, takes the shoe that he fancies, puts it on at the threshold of the door, and then continues on his way. Once walking about after this fashion he said to the Augustinian Fathers: "How does what I am doing appear to you, Fathers? I am a king after my own will, and to go about in this way is to be king: not like yours, who is always sitting indoors!"21

'Abbas I’s rule was personal and absolute. Using an informal style the ruler sought to gain the love of his subjects and dependents, much like his charismatic forebears who had appealed to the concept of shahā sevanā, or "love of the shah." His public image as an accessible monarch left its stamp on both the layout and the ceremonial of the Isfahan palace. Though 'Abbas I's successors remodeled the palace and augmented its ritual pomp, they nevertheless perpetuated the tradition he had established. Their reigns marked a departure from his informal style, just as the growing bureaucratic apparatus of the state made them more aloof. Yet in comparison to Ottoman and Mughal court ceremonial, that of the Safavids still remained relatively informal, dominated as it was by banquets where the shahs interacted with their guests.

The Safavid palace in Isfahan, most of which Shah 'Abbas I built in the Bagh-i Naqsh-i Jahan (World-Adorning Garden) between 1590 and 1611, was modified by his successors until it came to approximate the plan seen in Engelbert Kaempfer's drawing from 1684–85 (figs. 10a–b, 11).22 In contrast to the Topkapi's organization as a processional sequence of three diminishing courts, the Isfahan palace (now largely destroyed) had no large courtyards. It was instead a collection of many small courts, walled gardens, and pavilions following Timurid precedents, especially in its lack of fortified walls. Far from being isolated from the city by fortifications, the palace complex comfortably merged with two public spaces, the royal square (Maydan-i Shah) and the mansion-lined boulevard (khīyābān or Chahar Bagh avenue) that acted as the stage for royal pageants.

The palace was sandwiched between these public spaces and was composed of two zones. The first communicated through several gates with the maydan; it contained the royal workshops, service quarters, administrative offices, and residential facilities for gatekeepers and eunuchs. The second zone, which extended beyond this area, was more private; it culminated in the royal gardens lined up along the Chahar Bagh avenue. Its left side housed the imperial harem, which was attached to the shah's residence. Its right side contained two walled rectangular formal gardens—the Bagh-i Khalvat (Garden of Seclusion), and the Bagh-i Chihil Šutun (Garden of Forty Pillars)—featuring various pavilions and communicating with a small vineyard (fig. 10a [o–q]). Beyond these were several other royal gardens (including the still extant Hashi Bihisht built by Shah Sulayman), which were reserved for private assemblies with male or female companions (fig. 10a [r–t]). Their surrounding walls were surmounted by a continuous upper gallery allowing the shah to pass from one enclosed space to the other without being seen.23

A diagonal corridor joined the harem to a square multistoried viewing pavilion with latticed balconies at the head of the Chahar Bagh avenue (fig. 10a [u]). There without being seen the royal women could watch the processions of ambassadors and courtiers, who tried to outdo each other in the pomp of their numerous retinues. The shah's parades as he left the palace precincts to visit Isfahan's suburbs also marched down that ceremonial artery, which functioned as a public promenade open to all classes. The tree-lined Chahar Bagh avenue was bisected by a channel whose water dropped in cascades that collected in differently shaped marble basins (figs. 12 a–b).
It extended from the viewing pavilion to a multi-tiered suburban royal hunting garden (the Hazar Jarib, or Bagh-i 'Abbasabad) on the opposite shore of the Zayandah river (fig. 13). The terraced garden on a sloping hill, bisected by a tree-lined central grand alley with a channel whose water cascaded into variously shaped basins, provided majestic prospects of the whole city.²⁴

The two sections of the Chahar Bagh avenue were connected by the bridge of Allahverdi Khan, the Georgian commander-in-chief of the slave troops of Abbas I had established as the backbone of his autocratic regime (fig. 14). Inspired by the Ottoman model, this new standing army of converted Georgian, Circassian, and Armenian slaves free from tribal allegiance (whom the ruler used to call his "mounted Janissaries") had been instituted to counterbalance the unruly chieftains of the Turkmen tribes.²⁵ On the orders of Shah 'Abbas I renowned officers of slave origin and the court's leading dignitaries had built their garden mansions along the Chahar Bagh avenue and on both shores of the river as manifestations of the shift from a polycentric tribal feudalism to a centralized absolute state. The contemporary historian Junabadi describes these mansions:

According to the world-obeying order, the khans, great amirs, viziers, sadrs, and noble 'āmilis who held official rank at that time, whether they were people who lived at the foot of the caliphal throne or held grants (iqā'āt) in the country . . . , [all] erected fine chahār-bāgh parks each to his own taste and opposite one another along both sides of the avenue beginning at 'Abbasabad. At the entrance of each park they built lofty structures of brick and stucco, the walls and roofs of which were faced with colored tilework. Some were decorated with delightful portraits . . . and colorfully exotic paintings . . . . On the avenue in front of each [of these structures] they built large cisterns in a variety of forms. Inside [each] park, they took great pains to follow the architectural canon (qānūn-i jarrāh).²⁶

According to Iskandar Munshi, "the land along the sides [of the avenue] was divided among the amirs and notables of the all-powerful state, each of whom was to erect . . . at the entrance (dargāh) of his park a suitably royal structure consisting of an entry gate (dargāh), a lofty roofed passage (sabāḥ-i rafī'), an iwan, second-story galleries (bāla khānā-hā), and belvederes (mansāra-hā) beautifully decorated with paintings in gold and blue." The variegated pavilions visible from the avenue through latticework screens were all similar in size and construction, and each had a monumental gatehouse, made to conform to a master plan "fixed in the blessed heart of the eminent one" (fig. 12a-b). They were a product of 'Abbas I's own "fertile imagination," just as Mehmed II had once planned the layout for the Topkapı Palace as his "own independent invention" guided by "the architect of his mature royal intellect."²⁷

Adam Olearius, who accompanied an embassy sent by the duke of Holstein to Isfahan in 1637, writes that the cross shape formed by the intersection of the water channel of the Chahar Bagh avenue and the river divided the royal gardens in that area into four large plots from which the name Chahar Bagh (Four Gardens) originated. It was as if the traditional quadripartite scheme of a chahār bāgh garden had been magnified to an urban scale, turning the whole garden-city into a metaphor of paradise. Just as Kaempfer compared this scheme to earthly paradise, so too Junabadi wrote that "in those buildings and parks, the people of Isfahan encounter 'Paradise, the houris, and the young pages' and the [true] meaning of 'Paradise, beneath which flow the eternal waters' [Quran 13:35]," a statement repeated by Iskandar Munshi. The painted walls and tiles of the pavilions (often depicting single youths or couples in contemporary costume, comfortably reclining on cushions in gardens with wine cups in their hands, surrounded by precious vessels of gold and porcelain) can therefore be interpreted as allusions to paradise, with its eternally young inhabitants exemplified by the Safavid court's pages and courtiers. Indeed, Munajjim-i Yazdi referred to these "portraits of wondrous figures" as "effigies of houri-like youths."²⁸

Pietro della Valle described Isfahan as a "tetrapolis" united by the crossroads of the royal boulevard and the river. 'Abbas I's urban project, still incomplete at that time, was made up of four cities (fig. 11 [A–D]), with Muslims residing on the river's north side and non-Muslims on its south. The shah's palace attached to the new maydan and bazaar was complemented by three royal colonies featuring wide tree-lined avenues bisected by canals which differed from the crooked alleys of the old city center: 'Abbasabad (or Tabrizabad), where the uprooted Muslim citizens of Tabriz were resettled; Guebrabad, populated by the Zoroastrians; and New Julfa, settled by Armenian merchants and Europeans.²⁹ The inhabitants of these colonies, mostly merchants and artisans, were indebted to the shah for the land and interest-free loans he had given them.
Concentrating these loyal colonies, who enjoyed royal protection, and the ruling elite’s mansions at the very foot of the shah’s palace created a microcosm of absolute monarchy. With its new maydan that challenged the old maydan of Isfahan, dominated by interest groups opposed to the shah’s centralizing policies, the royal city objectified ‘Abbas I’s vision of centralized government (fig. 11 [6, 1]). Junabadi proudly wrote, “Now they call former Isfahan (Isfahan-i sābiq) the “old city” and these places and residences the "new city." 

The new royal city not only reflected ‘Abbas I’s autocratic aspirations but also his eagerness to establish trade relations with Europe. The Maydan-i Shah appended to the palace complex was a bustling center for international commerce, surrounded by shops encircled with a tree-lined water channel, and covered by the pitched tents of merchants during the day (fig. 15). At night it became a place where marionette players, comedians, and storytellers performed, while prostitutes plied their trade; nearby were taverns, teashops, and coffeehouses. With its proplike screens rising much higher than the structures behind the stagelike maydan, surrounded by upper-story apartments fronted by balconies, formed a focal point for court ceremonies. Like the Hippodrome in Istanbul, it functioned as a sand-covered arena for sports and festivities, provided as it was with polo posts and an archery target (fig. 14). The shows staged there included polo games, archery competitions, wrestling matches, animal fights, military parades, fireworks, and exhibits of ambassadorial gifts. These displays were accessible to all, unlike the exclusive ceremonies enacted at the public courts of the Topkapi Palace, open only to a restricted audience of courtiers and officials. With the exception of the rare public festivities held at the Hippodrome,

The rents from the shops, caravansarays, and baths around the royal square yielded a substantial income for ‘Abbas I who with it endowed a pious foundation on behalf of the Fourteen Infalibles (the Twelve Imams plus the Prophet and his daughter Fatima), to whom he also dedicated the religious monuments of the maydan. This demonstrated the shah’s support of the Twelver Shi’i state religion, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of his rule, which was based on his fabricated holy lineage (traced back via the Seventh Imam and ‘Ali to the Prophet), his role as the representative of the Mahdi, and his veneration as the spiritual leader of the Safaviyya order. Unlike the Ottoman sultan, who was no more than a modest servant in the service of Sunni Islam, the Safavid ruler claimed to be a supernatural being whose powers blessed whatever he touched. Loyalty to the shah resembled a master-disciple (pir-murid) relationship transferred into the political sphere. Nevertheless, ‘Abbas I routinized Safavid messianic charisma to bring it in line with his centralizing policies. In his madrasas around the maydan Shi’ism was being codified by powerful theologians, the exponents of a new orthodoxy that assumed rigid doctrinal forms and diminished the centrality of the shah’s person in religion.

Unlike the Topkapi the Isfahan palace projected an image of holiness through its domed octagonal shrine, known as the Tawhid-Khana (House of the Oneness of God), which provided royal asylum to criminals and fugitives much as the ancestral Safavid shrine in Ardebil had done (fig. 10a [1]). In this sanctuary, into which no one was allowed to enter with a weapon, the loyal disciples of the Safaviyya order charged with guarding the ‘Ali Qapu chanted a loud dhikr affirming the unity of God and prayed for the welfare of the dynasty. ‘Ali Qapu, the main ceremonial gate of the palace, was also endowed with a special sanctity as a sacred and inviolable asylum (fig. 10a [B]). Those wishing to receive grace from the shah would kiss a stone incorporated into its threshold, said to have been transported from the shrine of ‘Ali in Najaf. The shah’s subjects prayed there for the prosperity of their ruler and ambassadors had to salute the gate because of its sacred stone on which nobody was allowed to step. Each new ruler had to cross over that stone without touching it after having received the royal insignia. The shah, referred to in a dedicatory inscription as the “watchdog of ‘Ali’s threshold,” dismounted from his horse before the ‘Ali Qapu beyond which no one was allowed to ride. In addition to the stone associated with the first Shi’i imam ‘Ali, the gate also featured two columns removed from Persepolis, spolia whose royal associations linked the shahs with the prestige of the ancient Persian kings of the Shahnama.

In front of the gatehouse, which functioned as the administrative center of the state where the daily councils of justice were held, Ottoman cannons captured during ‘Abbas I’s conquest of Iraq and others taken from the vanquished Portuguese port of Hormuz were displayed as emblems of victory (figs. 10a, 14).
Despite its prominent religious monuments, the overriding purpose of the maydan was commerce. That it was a royal shopping center added to the accessible public image Shah 'Abbas I cultivated. He has been aptly described as a grand state capitalist who turned the lucrative silk trade into a royal monopoly as part of an overall policy of centralizing the state under his authority. McChesney has argued that just as the shah had counterbalanced the Turkmen amirs with loyal supporters from the ranks of his household slaves, so he challenged the commercial establishment of the old maydan by using as his agents in the silk trade a rival group of Armenian and Tabrizi merchants more vulnerable to his control. 'Abbas I also sought to attract English and Dutch trading companies to Isfahan to promote overseas trade that would supplement the land routes passing through Ottoman territories.

The presence of European merchants and diplomats in Isfahan, who also frequented the shah's informal banquets and participated in his hunting parties, was captured in the wall paintings that evoked the city's cosmopolitan climate. The monumental portal of the Qaysariya (royal clothhouse) which connected the maydan to the baazar was decorated with images of Europeans holding wine glasses, men and women in debauched postures, and a clock conspicuously placed there by 'Abbas I to impress the Europeans (fig. 11 [9]). Above the clock hung a big bronze bell which never rang, an emblem of victory removed from a Portuguese nunnery in Hormuz. The same gate, crowned by the music gallery (naqqāra-khana)—a royal prerogative since Abbasid times—also featured battle scenes (now badly damaged) depicting the shah's victory over the Uzbeks. Together with other paintings that once covered the maydan's walls, these paintings prepared the visitor for the ones that decorated the reception pavilions of the palace and the Chahar Bagh avenue which depicted ambassadorial receptions, military victories, hunting scenes, amorous couples drinking wine, curtly assemblies in garden settings, and images of Europeans. This unrestrained use of figural imagery contrasted sharply with the aniconic decorative program of the Topkapi Palace.

The late-sixteenth-century Venetian diplomat Giacomo Soranzo noted that, unlike the Ottoman sultan who "did not speak to anyone and was visible only rarely," the Safavid shah who was fully engaged in commercial and diplomatic transactions “constantly stayed in public,” holding audiences several times a week. In contrast to the Topkapi, which featured only one private audience chamber where all ceremonial movement converged, the polycentric Isfahan palace had a diffuse layout with several audience halls. Kaempfer noted that the shah's receptions called majlises (assemblies) were not linked to a single building, but held wherever he chose. Much like the Timurid majlis, these audiences took place in monumental garden pavilions embellished with narrative paintings. They were often fronted by wooden-pillared porches (tālār) that have been compared to Achaemenid apadana.

The now lost Talar-i Tavileh (Hall of Stables) featured vaulted halls behind a porch of gilded wooden pillars hung with red curtains that could be lowered and raised by silk ropes (fig. 10a [m]). Two drawings by Kaempfer and Olearius allow us to visualize the evening receptions that were held there (figs. 16, 17). Hung with large historical oil paintings executed in Europe, the pavilion's richly carpeted porch, featuring a central marble basin with floating flower petals, was subdivided into three areas separated by gilt ballustrades. On the uppermost platform a central iwan framed the shah, who was accompanied by attendant eunuchs and pages lined up to form a crescent behind him. Grandees and nobles sat along the two sides of a lower second platform, while visitors, ambassadors, and merchants were assigned seats at a lower, third platform, with pages and servants standing outside the porch where wrestlers performed. In several places chained horses decorated with jewel-encrusted gold caparisons were displayed inside a garden bisected by a long central pool with fountains.

The Chihil Sutun, or Hall of Forty Pillars, built by 'Abbas I and remodeled by 'Abbas II in 1647, also stands in a walled rectangular formal garden fronted by a long reflecting pool (fig. 10a [o]). The free-standing structure has a similar layout, consisting of vaulted halls behind a wooden-pillared porch provided with a central royal iwan.

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The iwan, now faced with mirrors, was originally covered with figural paintings. Restored wall paintings inside the pavilion include depictions of banquets for famous embassies, with dancers and musicians performing in the front; they well capture the informality of the royal receptions, dominated as they were by merrymaking and wine-drinking (fig. 18).40

The late-sixteenth-century Ottoman historian Lokman denounced such banquets as unorthodox feasts better suited to taverns and praised the total absence of entertainment at the sober official ceremonies of the Topkapi Palace. The painted reception scenes of the Chihil Sutun, where the ubiquitous wine cup is an indispensable element of the royal iconography, recall those of the Shāhnāma, the ancient Persian royal epic that was the favored subject of illuminated manuscripts at the Safavid court, which had no counterpart for the illustrated dynastic histories of the Ottomans and Mughals. The analogy between Safavid royal receptions and those of ancient kings depicted in Shāhnāma manuscripts was often underlined by rendering the miniatures with figures in contemporary garb. Another reference to the pre-Islamic Persian heritage can be found in the Chihil Sutun’s wooden pillars whose bases with sculpted lions were inspired by ancient Near Eastern models.41

The five-storied gatehouse of ‘Ali Qapu, built by ‘Abbas I and modified by his successors, also features a tālār from which the shah and his guests watched performances enacted in the maydan, while exposing themselves to the curious gaze of the crowds gathered below (figs. 10a [B], 14, 15, 20). The gatehouse, whose ground floor housed the divan where public justice was administered, contained various administrative offices, spaces for guards, guestrooms, and richly decorated royal halls. Although its tālār is generally attributed to ‘Abbas II, it must have featured one from the very beginning. Pietro della Valle refers to a viewing balcony overlooking the magnificent “theater” of the maydan where ‘Abbas I held several evening receptions for ambassadors in 1619. The prominent wooden porch, which was hung with red silk curtains, once again features a central royal iwan and a basin in the middle. Besides serving as an audience hall this was the site of the shah’s annual receptions during the Persian New Year (Nauruz), and of the councils he held to discuss matters of state and business.42

During evening receptions given there to ambassadors thousands of musketeers would line up around the maydan whose arcaded shops were lit with a myriad of candles that reflected on its channel, a ceremony called chirāghān (illumination). After observing the displays at the maydan from the gatehouse, ‘Abbas I would come down from it with his guests to tour the royal cloth-house, the mint, the caravansarays, and the gaily decorated shops where they were offered drinks by the merchants. Pietro della Valle, who participated in one of these tours in 1619, describes how the shah wandered up and down the square, looking more like a manager than a king. He would stop here and there to drink a cup of wine, all the time chatting with the ambassadors, laughing, and cracking jokes. He especially favored the Spanish and Indian ambassadors, treating the Indian more familiarly than all the rest, calling him “old cuckold,” giving him digs in the back, whispering funny things into his ears, and then pulling them both. The unpopular Ottoman ambassador was humiliated by a group of courtiers who pushed him so hard that he fell on the ground and his turban came off to roars of laughter. The astonished ambassador swore at this unseemly behavior which was so foreign to the “serious gravity of his nation.”43

The informality of these spectacles is also captured in Iskandar Munshi’s description of a
reception given in 1611 for a deposed Uzbek ruler who sought 'Abbas I's help. First the guest was received at the royal quarters where the shah "with complete lack of formality" supervised the arrangements for the banquet, where "rosy-faced pages" poured the wine, and musicians and dancers "banished care from all hearts." Then the displays at the maydan, where a packed crowd came to watch the show, were followed by a tour the shah gave his guests who walked around the square to admire its illuminated shops and caravansarays in celebration of Isfahan's prosperity. Iskandar Munshi writes: "Convivial private parties were going on on all sides. The Shah became momentarily more unbuttoned, and radiated even a greater degree of geniality and hospitality than before, and kept talking about other celebrated festive occasions held in the Naqsh-e Jahan Square [i.e., Maydan-i Shah]."

These illuminated festivities occasionally spilled beyond the confines of the palace when the shah ordered the inhabitants of the suburbs of 'A Abbasabad and New Julfa to decorate the uniformly built gatehouses of their garden mansions with candles so that he could watch the spectacle with his guests from the 'Ali Qapu which commanded a view of the whole city.46 From there the monarch extended his masterful gaze over the illuminated city in celebration of his autocratic power, which could magically transform the "new Isfahan" into a brilliant stage for courtly spectacles. The whole royal city thus became a theater that helped enlist popular support for the Safavid shah’s charismatic rule. The frequent extension of royal pageants into the city turned public spaces such as the maydan, the Chahar Bagh avenue, the Allahverdi Khan Bridge (used during the annual Ab-Pashan festival), and the suburban royal colonies into appendages of the palace whose boundary as a result became blurred.47

The Red Fort in Delhi

By contrast to the palace in Isfahan but not unlike the Topkapi, fortified walls clearly divide the palace-fort of Shahjahanabad, now known as the Red Fort, from the royal city Shah Jahan built in Delhi between 1639 and 1648 (figs. 21, 22). Like 'Abbas I’s “new Isfahan,” which may well have inspired its wide avenues bisected by water channels, the “new Delhi” was built next to the city’s old core whose ruins provided it with construction materials. The contrast between the crooked alleys of Agra, which Shah Jahan had found too narrow for royal processions, and the wide regular streets of Shahjahanabad was apparent to the eighteenth-century French traveler Bernier.48

The Red Fort of Delhi was modeled on earlier forts in Agra and Lahore, but it remolded their irregular layout into a system of axially ordered rectilinear courts on a larger scale.49 Shah Jahan played a central role in conceptualizing its plan and ceremonial, as Mehmed II and 'Abbas I had done before him. Rather than invent a new imperial order, however, he chose to consolidate one that had already been developed by his predecessors, modifying its details to conform to a more orthodox Islamic framework. Because the Mughal emperors ruled over a predominantly non-Muslim population, the syncretic practices they adopted to appeal to Hindu sensibilities at times contradicted Islamic traditions. Shah Jahan and his successor Aurangzeb tried to eliminate these contradictions by recasting court rituals into an orthodox Islamic mold. While Akbar’s innovations have their parallel in those of Mehmed II, Shah Jahan’s can be compared to Süleyman I’s “classical” Ottoman order harmonizing inherited dynastic tradition with the prescriptions of the Sharī’a.

Shah Jahan was dissatisfied with the palace-forts in Agra and Lahore some of whose old red sandstone structures he replaced with white marble buildings of his own design. The Red Fort in Delhi gave him the chance to create a new palace whose royal structures, built entirely of white marble, would express his imperial vision. The court historian Lahori describes the emperor’s involvement with the planning of royal buildings which would be a memorial to his glorious reign:

The royal mind, which is illustrious like the sun, pays full attention to the planning and construction of these lofty edifices and substantial buildings, which in accordance with the Arabic saying “Verily our relics tell of us,” speak with mute elegance of His Majesty’s God-given aspiration. . . . For the majority of buildings, he himself draws the plans. . . . And, on the plans prepared by skillful architects, after long consideration he makes appropriate alterations and emendations.51

With its three successive courtyards culminating in a royal residence that overlooks the Jumna river, the Red Fort in Delhi, though now largely destroyed, still carries the distant memory of the riverfront palaces in Abbasid Samarra, particularly the Balkuwara. Proceeding from public to
increasingly private zones these three central courtyards also recall those of the Topkapi Palace, except that they are governed by the strictest symmetry and axiality. Two monumental gates connect the main bazaar arteries of the city to two avenues inside the fort; their intersection is marked by a large square courtyard with a central water tank (figs. 21–22 [1, 2, 5]). The shorter avenue is a covered imperial bazaar based on Safavid prototypes. The longer one was originally bisected by a straight water channel recalling those in Isfahan.

Like the Safavid palace in Isfahan, the Red Fort in Delhi establishes a strong connection with neighboring bazaars and caravansarays built by the leading members of the royal household along the city's main arteries, a connection notably absent in the Topkapi, where politics dominates commerce. The two avenues that intersect inside the palace-fort were flanked by arcaded shops, royal workshops, offices, storerooms, mints, and stables. The longer avenue parallel to the river divided the palace grounds into two zones. The larger one along the riverfront contained the king's administrative and residential courts; the smaller public one facing the city housed most of the palace's inhabitants and its outer services.

The first court, known as the Jilau-Khana (forecourt), was surrounded by booths where the vassal Rajput amirs pitched tents to mount their weekly guard. Like the maydan of Isfahan this informal public forecourt was a rendezvous for jugglers and astrologers as well as the locale for an occasional bazaar; in it grooms exercised horses and officials inspected the mansabdārs. At the head of the forecourt is a monumental gatehouse, known as the Naqqar Khana because the royal band performed in its upper gallery (figs. 21–22 [4]). This was the ceremonial entrance to the administrative second court, beyond which only the emperor and the royal princes could ride on horseback. Here the amirs, ministers, ambassadors, and petitioners assembled before attending the emperor's daily public audiences (darbār) in the second court, which was once surrounded by porticoes.

A central axis passes through the gatehouse, the emperor's public audience hall in the second court, and his private palace (Rang Mahal or Imtiyaz Mahal) in the third court beyond, bisecting the strip of white marble royal halls along the riverfront (figs. 21–22 [4, 6, 11]). The private half at the right functioned as the harem (zenāna) and the semiprivate one at the left contained the emperor's reception halls, his ceremonial bath, and formal gardens with several pavilions. Unlike the Topkapi, where centrally placed monumental gates dominate each court and off-center buildings and diagonal movement articulate the absence of the ruler, in the Delhi Fort there is hardly a diagonal line; its frontally approached halls occupy central positions at the head of their respective courts. This crucial difference can be explained by the centrality of the emperor's person in Mughal court ceremonial, punctuated by the ruler's regular appearances in public and private audiences several times each day. The emperor, whose revered body was weighed on his birthday against various precious materials, which were then distributed to the poor, embodied in his person the political center of the empire.

Mughal court ceremonial, as it came to be codified by Shah Jahan, occupied an intermediate position between the official impersonality of its Ottoman and the festive informality of its Safavid counterpart. The Red Fort in Delhi was built to frame Shah Jahan's exalted royal image, an image rooted in a theory of kingship first formulated in Akbar's reign, which syncretically combined Turco-Mongol, Persian, and Hindu traditions. Following Timurid precedents Akbar's father Humayun had largely relied on Persianate royal themes originating in the Shāhnāma. The historian Khvandamir's description of court ceremonial under Humayun testifies to the inspiration provided by the Haft Paykar, a legendary palace built for the Sasanian ruler Bahram Gur in the image of the heavens with its seven domed pavilions, each painted in a different color corresponding to the hues of the seven planets. Humayun copied Bahram Gur by giving audiences in a different room of his palace at Din-Panah in Delhi each day of the week, varying the color of his robe to match the decor of that day's room. The Mughal ruler, who also had tents and pavilions constructed to imitate the structure of the heavens, used to put a veil over his face and then raise it to the acclaim of his courtiers who would shout, "Light has shined forth."

One of the popular games in Humayun's court involved a round Carpet of Mirth that depicted circles corresponding to the sun and the planets on which courtiers would sit after throwing dice to determine their position. Humayun himself occupied the central circle of the gold-embroidered cloth "like the Sun," reflecting "beauty," "light," and "purity." The game embodied the kernel of the theory of a heavenly court with a sun
king at its center, a theory that was further elaborated by Akbar's court historian Abu al-Fazl. This he did by linking the Mughal imperial lineage to the legendary Mongol princess Alanquwa, who had been miraculously impregnated by a divine light like "her Majesty Maryam" (i.e., the Virgin Mary). From Chingiz Khan and Timur, the Lord of the Conjunction of Planets (Sahib Qiran) from whom the Mughal emperors traced their genealogy, this "world illuminating light" passed through the generations on to Akbar, who thus became endowed with a spiritual authority strengthened by the legitimizing charisma of the Timurid line.

Referring to the divinely illumined right of the emperor to rule, Abu al-Fazl wrote:

"Royalty is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe. . . . Modern language calls this light farr-i izzat (the divine light), and the tongue of antiquity called it khán khura (the sublime halo). It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of anyone, and men, in the presence of it, bend the forehead of praise towards the ground of submission."58

This divine aura (possessed by the pre-Islamic Persian kings) is represented in Mughal imperial portraits by a halo; it endowed the just ruler with the virtues needed to govern successfully, including a paternal love of his subjects, trust in God, prayer, and devotion.

Through Abu al-Fazl's ingenious theory Akbar could assume the role of spiritual leader, the long-awaited Mahdi whose reign marked the beginning of a "divine era" celebrated by the adoption of a new solar calendar. The calendar announced the end of Islam's first millennium, during which the Muslim lunar calendar dating events from the hegira had been in use. At that time Akbar also instituted the so-called "divine faith," a form of imperial discipleship that turned loyalty to the person of the emperor into a master-disciple (farr-murid) relationship recalling the Safavid example. The Mughal circle of disciples, however, transcended religious affiliation. It constituted a much smaller, intimate group of Muslim and non-Muslim nobles who formed a loyal body unified by its ties to the emperor's person. Those nobles chosen for initiation as imperial disciples were required to wear as a token of devotion the emperor's portrait adorned with the genealogical tree of the Timurid dynasty, and to prostrate themselves before their master, a practice abolished in the more orthodox reign of Shah Jahan.60

The concept of divinely illumined kingship found special resonance among the emperor's non-Muslim subjects because of the importance the rising sun had in Hindu phenomenology and the semi-divine status of some Hindu kings seen as incarnations of the sun. Akbar expressed this connection by instituting the darshan (a Sanskrit term for "sight" or "beholding"), a ritual in which the emperor would appear before the gaze of the public every morning after sunrise. The ritual enabled the disciples of the darshaniyya sect, who were devoted to emperor worship, to offer prayers to and to prostrate themselves before the sun king in order to receive his benediction.61 The darshan was abolished by the orthodox ruler Aurangzeb, who regarded it as an un-Islamic practice smacking of idol worship. Shah Jahan's chronicler Lahori describes it as follows:

"About two or three gharis after sunrise, the mercy-crowned monarch appears at the palace window which is called in the Hindustani language the Jharokha-i Darshan ("Balcony for Viewing"). Upon His Majesty's appearance, the assembled masses in the plain beneath the window perform their obeisance and all their temporal and spiritual desires are gratified. . . . The object of the institution of this mode of audience, which originated with the late Emperor Akbar, was to enable His Majesty's subjects to witness the simultaneous appearance of the sky-adorning sun and the world-conquering Emperor, and thereby receive without any obstacle or hindrance the blessing of both luminaries. By their presence in this space . . . the harassed and oppressed of the population may freely represent their wants and desires.62"

As the emperor stood framed by the jharokha-i darshan that overlooked the river, his gaze emanating from above assured the multitudes gathered below of his continuing existence, without which they feared the universe might collapse, while their upward gaze convinced him of the adoring devotion of his subjects. However, the architectural and spatial framing of the ritual emphasized the disjuncture of these reciprocal gazes. Two Mughal miniatures depict Jahangir and Shah Jahan at their jharokha-i darshan in the Agra fort, with nobles standing below on a raised platform, separated from the common people (fig. 23; see Asher, fig. 1). There is no eye contact between the emperor shown in profile and the crowds gathered below the fortress walls. The profile, presenting an averted gaze, is used in
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these miniatures as a pictorial convention to express the remoteness of the iconic ruler whose central window is flanked by two smaller windows framing the princes who would perpetuate his rule for all eternity. The miniatures effectively express the asymmetry of power that turned the idol-like emperor’s fetishized body into an object for the gaze.

The miniature representing Jahangir in his jharokha-i darshan at the Agra fort also shows the “chain of justice,” a chain hung with golden bells that was an ancient symbol of royal justice associated with the Sasanian ruler Anushirvan and believed to have been attached to the Taq-i Kisra in Ctesiphon (fig. 23). This chain was revived by Jahangir to exhibit his commitment to justice; it could be pulled any time by the oppressed to alert the emperor to an injustice that had been perpetrated. Anushirvan’s chain of justice also appears in a nineteenth-century inscription on the Tower of Justice in the Topkapi Palace which refers to the sultan’s ceremonial window overlooking the grand vizier’s public audience hall: “The grilled window resembles the chain of justice. It shows the one who is right to the sovereign without having to be pulled.” Unlike the window from which the unseen sultan could check officials administering justice in his name, however, Jahangir’s chain provided direct access to the emperor who promised personally to hear the grievances of his oppressed subjects any time of the day.

In the days of Akbar and Jahangir the jharokha window in the Agra fort was located in a white marble pavilion that crowned an octagonal tower known as Shah Burj (Royal Tower) (fig. 23). When Shah Jahan replaced that building with the belvedere pavilion known today as Muthamman Burj (Octagonal Tower), the jharoka-i darshan was moved to a tripartite bangala pavilion situated between the royal bedroom and the octagonal tower (see Asher, figs. 1, 2). Lahori describes it as follows: “Midway between this auspicious building [the royal bedroom] and the Shah Burj [Royal Tower] is the famous Bangala Darshan of marble, which is the rising place of the sun of caliphate, adorned with paintings in gold. On its roof the gold plates have been so used ‘That the people are misled to think of two suns’.”

In the Red Fort of Delhi the jharoka-i darshan is generally believed to have been located in an octagonal tower pavilion of white marble crowned by a gilded dome (figs. 21–22 [12]). However, a now lost projecting white marble balcony with three windows, which is shown on a nineteenth-century painting in exactly the same position as Shah Jahan’s triple-arched bangala pavilion in Agra, is a more likely candidate for that function (fig. 24). After he appeared there at sunrise, the emperor often watched elephant fights which, like jharokas, were considered a royal prerogative and forbidden to others. Written petitions gathered beneath the jharoka by the administrators of justice were then brought to the public audience hall (Daulat Khana-i Khass o ‘Amm, or Audience Hall for High and Low) at the second court, where the emperor regularly held audiences after the darshan ceremony (figs. 21–22 [6]).

During his daily public audiences at the Red Fort of Delhi the emperor again sat framed by a raised jharoka of white marble in the shape of a baldachin with a curved bangala roof supported by four baluster columns (fig. 25; see also Asher, fig. 5). The throne’s baluster columns and its baldachin form, inspired by European illustrations of royalty and of holy personages, have been interpreted as symbolizing the image of Shah Jahan (World Emperor) as a semi-divine world ruler. Its pietra dura revetments, which depict birds and lions amidst floral motifs, inset with a Florentine panel showing Orpheus playing his lute to pacified wild animals, have been identified as references to the throne of Solomon and the Solomonic justice of Shah Jahan’s ideal rule.

The jharoka throne in Delhi has restrained figural imagery dominated by floral motifs. It no longer features the Christian imagery seen in miniatures that depict the public audience jharokas of the Agra and Lahore forts, an omission that demonstrates the growing religious orthodoxy of Shah Jahan’s reign, when Jesuit missionaries had lost their earlier influence (figs. 26–28). Paired portraits of Christ and the Virgin, accompanied by winged angels, had been used in jharokas and on the walls of the private reception halls to enhance the semidivine Mughal imperial image. The portrait of the Virgin depicted in a miniature above Jahangir’s jharoka of public audiences most likely alluded to the Queen Mother, the “Mary of the Age” (Maryam al-Zamani), who was revered for giving birth to the divinely illumined emperor, the counterpart of Christ (fig. 26).

Miniatures representing Shah Jahan at the public audience halls of the Lahore and Agra forts depict under his jharoka allegorical scenes showing the scales of justice, the chain of justice,
Chishti shaykhs holding the insignia of royalty, as well as wild and tame animals lying peacefully on the earth’s globe (figs. 27, 28). Seen in conjunction with these allegorical images, the Orpheus panel in Delhi can be read as alluding to much more than Solomonic symbolism. It no doubt evoked the universal justice inaugurated by the millennial regime of the world emperor Shah Jahan, the long-awaited Mahdi whom blissful messianic rule would unite a single flock under a single shepherd. Shah Jahan was in fact hailed in official chronicles as the mujaddid, the “renewer” who ushered in a golden age of peace and justice by reviving the law of Islam.

The protective canopies seen in early miniatures in front of public audience jharokas were first replaced by Shah Jahan with a wooden-pillared hall at the Agra fort. The emperor then ordered the construction of a more permanent stone structure there; it is he who built the forty-pillared public audience halls seen today at the Red Forts of Agra, Lahore, and Delhi, which reflect the increased pomp and formality of court rituals in his reign. These Chihil Sutun halls, which resemble their wooden Safavid counterparts, also carried the distant memory of shared Timurid prototypes. Built in white-plastered red sandstone they imitated the private palaces of Shah Jahan’s forts whose white marble halls signified royal status. The one in Delhi is a hypostyle hall with cusped arches open on three sides; its wider central aisle culminates at the emperor’s mihrab-like niche containing his inlaid white marble baldachin throne (figs. 21–22 [6], 25). Before that throne all petitioners had to signify their readiness to serve the emperor by a salutation that replaced Akbar’s custom of prostration. The latter had been abolished as irreligious because it recalled the posture of prayer in front of a mihrab.

Shah Jahan’s public audience halls were divided by three railings of differing materials (gold, silver, and red sandstone) into zones reserved for groups ordered according to their place in the hierarchy. Unlike the tripartite tālārs of Isfahan, where guests were seated by rank on both sides of the shah, in the Mughal case only the emperor sat in his raised jharoka (which corresponds to the central royal iwans in wooden-pillared Safavid audience halls), with all others standing below, except for those few honored by a reception at the royal balcony. The emperor’s jharoka can also be seen as a Mughal counterpart of the Ottoman sultan’s ceremonial window overlooking the grand vizier’s public council hall. Unlike the grilled window that framed the depersonalized sultan’s omniscient gaze whose potency was felt indirectly through its effects, the jharoka exhibited in glory the Mughal emperor who personally administered the state without any intermediary.

All office holders and nobles had to report directly to the emperor and to attend his court at regular intervals, including such annual celebrations as the Persian New Year (Nauruz), when the sun crosses the vernal equinox, and the royal birthdays. The emperor, whose “royal sight” was “as efficacious as alchemy,” handled the routine matters of state himself, received ambassadors, conferred ranks, awarded robes of honor and other gifts, and watched the stable masters parade horses and elephants before his “blessed eye.” Petitions, reports, and gifts were handed to an officer, who stood on a marble platform below the jharoka, rather than directly to the emperor. Miniatures depicting Jahangir’s and Shah Jahan’s public audiences show them accompanied by princes, attendants, and nobles being honored by an invitation to the jharoka (figs. 26–28). Those attending the public audience had to remain silent, standing with their hands crossed in a gesture of obeisance, and their eyes avoiding direct contact with the paternalistic gaze that the emperor extended over them from his raised position. The lack of eye contact between the ruler and his subjects is once again captured in these miniatures which depict the icon-like emperor and his audience in profile, their mute and expressionless faces reflecting the gravity of a timeless ritual that gave the illusion of an order transcending mere human experience.

The French physician Bernier wrote to the inquisitive Colbert that the daily public audiences of the Mughal ruler involved a “disgusting adulation”: “Whenever a word escapes the lips of the King, if at all to the purpose, how trifling soever may be its import, it is immediately caught by the surrounding throng; and the chief Omrahs, extending their arms towards heaven, as if to receive some benediction, exclaim Karamat! Karamat! wonderful! wonderful! he has spoken wonders!” Then the emperor suddenly gave the order, “takhliya” (meaning “leave”) and the red curtain of his jharoka dropped to mark the end of the show. Shah Jahan then went to his inlaid white marble private audience hall (Daulat Khana-i Khass) facing the river, where he held daily
meetings with a more restricted group of trusted advisers, nobles, and ambassadors. As in Agra the hall is in a small court, paired on an elevated marble platform with a ceremonial royal bath of inlaid white marble whose intimate atmosphere provided an ideal setting for even more exclusive audiences where the most delicate matters were privately discussed by a select few (figs. 21–22 [14, 15], 24, 29).73

The private audience hall whose white marble piers support cusped arches was once inlaid with precious stones and covered with a silver ceiling. A continuous straight water channel, the Nahr-i Bihisht (River of Paradise), which runs through this hall connects it to others along the riverfront and alludes to the ubiquitous theme of paradise made explicit in the inscription: "If there is a paradise on the face of earth / It is this, it is this, it is this." As the emperor sat there on his famous jeweled peacock throne raised on a central platform, he wrote replies to petitions, awarded grants, held philosophical and religious discussions, inspected the artifacts produced by the court artisans, and approved architectural projects. A miniature, which depicts Shah Jahan receiving his son and grandson at the private audience hall in 1651 (fig. 30), captures the increased formality of court rituals that departed from the relatively informal assemblies of Jahangir at his private audience hall where he used to eat opium and drink all night with guests and attendants.74

From the private audience hall Shah Jahan went to the Royal Tower (Shah Burj) where his privy council met; it consisted only of the princes and a few dignitaries. This must have been the octagonal tower attached to a group of chambers, marked by a carved marble screen over the River of Paradise which depicts the scales of justice on a crescent moon amidst clouds and celestial bodies (figs. 21–22 [12], 24, 29[top]). A long Persian inscription there refers to the mīzān-i 'adl (balance of justice), mentions the construction dates of the fort, cites its cost, and praises its patron Shah Jahan, whose palace is compared to the mansions of heaven.75 The small size of the tower complex reflected privacy and intimacy. Here the emperor addressed the most secret affairs of the state, cultivating close ties with the highest officers of his court, even though these ties were no longer expressed in terms of imperial disciples as they were in the days of Akbar and Jahangir.

After a nap at noon in the harem, where he responded to petitions from women, Shah Jahan continued to make his rounds from audience to audience until he finally retired to his bedchamber.76 Marking the times of the day by regular appearances in the morning, at noon, in the evening, and at night, the just emperor thus followed the movement of the sun, the center of the universe which was the source of his divinely illumined kingship. A Persian inscription of Shah Jahan at the private audience hall of the Red Fort in Agra, dated 1636–37, takes up this theme when it compares the hall to the highest heavens and the emperor himself to the sun in the sky. The royal timetable was as precise as an astronomical phenomenon, reinforcing the idea that the emperor was the undisputed center of the empire; without him the very foundations of the state and of the world would be shaken.77

The Red Fort in Delhi, built to frame the various functions of the divinely illumined royal person, was a celestial abode of felicity. Unlike Akbar's predominantly red-sandstone palace-fort in Agra, where the only white marble structure facing the river had been an octagonal tower pavilion functioning as his jharokha-i darshan, all the royal structures of Shah Jahan's Red Fort in Delhi were built of white marble, like the illuminated pure white shrines of India (fig. 24). Their glittering gilded domes and curved bangala roofs covering brilliant white marble royal halls were no doubt intended as metaphors for the aura of sublime light radiated by the sun king.78

The Red Fort in Delhi functioned as an extravagant stage for the daily performances of an endless show that exalted the Mughal emperor as the most powerful ruler of the world, worthy of his title Shah Jahan (World Emperor). Louis XIV, another sun king whose palace-theater reflected the cosmos, was familiar with the Mughal court. His advisers had diligently gathered information about the Mughals, Ottomans, and Safavids, as well as the rulers of China and the ancient Near East. Despite the obvious parallels between various versions of absolute monarchy in early-modern Europe and in the East, however, French writers of the time would insist on classifying the latter as examples of Oriental despotism, far removed from the ideals of the enlightened French kings.79

Comparing Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal palaces shows that their architecture and ceremonial fabricated distinctive images of absolute kingship rooted in different theories of dynastic legitimacy. The gaze was carefully controlled in
each case through framing and staging, from the grilled windows screening the omniscient but invisible Ottoman sultan, and the open tâlâns of the accessible Safavid shah acting as interactive stages, to the jharokas where the auspicious Mughal sun king exhibited himself in glory. The theatrical "display culture" of these three early-modern courts assigned a central role to the gaze in articulating the social hierarchies built into the discourse of absolutism. In each of the three palaces the power of the eye to naturalize the culturally constructed royal rhetoric of dynastic legitimacy was fully exploited. Just as in the realm of gender relations, so in the sphere of patriarchal political discourse the gaze played its role in constructing asymmetries of power.

The three palaces in which sign systems governed everything from uniforms, food, and gift exchange to architecture and ritual constituted rich semiotic universes that served to validate the imperial systems they represented in microcosm. Embodying a particular blend of sacred and imperial themes, dominated by the leitmotif of royal justice, these palaces shaped the perception of the imperial order as it was passed from generation to generation. They therefore provide an essential key to the understanding of the court-centered artistic and architectural products of each empire which developed their own distinctive visual idiom that functioned as a recognizable stamp of dynastic identity. The three palaces, which made use of cultural practices sometimes at odds with orthodox Islam, had a diversity that cannot be accounted for by a monolithic concept of "Islamic" palace.
Notes

1. The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires are compared in Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam: The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times, vol. 3 (Chicago and London, 1974). For a comparison of their capitals (Istanbul, Isfahan, Delhi) with those of the Tokugawa shogunate (Edo) and the Ming empire (Beijing), see Stephen P. Blake, Shahjahanabat: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639–1739 (Cambridge, Eng., New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney, 1991), 183-211. Diplomatic relations are discussed in Riazul Islam, Indo-Persian Relations (Tehran, 1970); Riazul Islam, A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations (Karachi, 1979); Naimur Rahman Farooqi, Mughal-Ottoman Relations (Delhi, 1989); and Adel Allouche, The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906–962/1500–1555) (Berlin, 1983).


6. For the Ibrahim Pasha Palace and Ottoman festivities held at the Hippodrome, see Nurhan Atasoy, İbrahim Paşa Sarayı (Ibrahim Pasha Palace) (Istanbul, 1972); Metin And, Osmanlı Şenliklerinde Türk Sanatları (Turkish Arts in Ottoman Festivities) (Ankara, 1982).

7. The sultan’s horse is mentioned in Philippe du Fresne-Canaye, Le Voyage du Levant de Philippe du Fresne-Canaye (1573), ed. M. H. Hauser (Paris, 1897), 126. The seventeenth-century French traveler Bernier found the Mughal emperor’s Friday processions on an elephant less impressive: “I cannot say that this train resembles the pompous processions, or (which is a more appropriate term) the masquerades of the Grand Seignior”; François Bernier, Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D. 1656–1668, trans. A. Constable (New Delhi, 1983), 280.


9. The second court is described in Necipoğlu, Architecture, Ceremonial and Power, 53–90. For the argument that the grilled window at the public audience hall of the Topkapi originated in late Abbasid ceremonial where the secluded caliph observed councils from behind a grilled window covered by a curtain made from the kiswa of the Ka’ba, see İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, Osmanlı Devleti Topkâlatına Medhal (Ankara, 1941), 5. The insignia of the Abbasid caliph al-Qa‘im bi Amr Allah (overthrown in a rebellion at Baghdad in 1055–56 by Fatimid allies) which the amir al-Basasiri sent to Egypt as a trophy
for the Fatimid caliph included a large ceremonial iron grilled window originally installed in the Dar al-Khilafa in Baghdad behind which the caliphs sat in state. First reinstalled in the Fatimid grand vizier’s palace in Cairo, which later served as a residence for Ayyubid rulers, the grilled window was subsequently reused on the street façade of the khanaqah of the Mamluk amir Baybars al-Jashankir built in 1308–9 on the site of the Fatimid grand vizierial palace (see Howyda Nawaf al-Harithy, “Urban Form and Meaning in Bahri Mamluk Architecture,” Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992, 78–96; Behrens-Abouseif, “The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque,” 34). For the audience halls of the Fatimid caliphs, where they sat on an elevated throne (sidillâ) behind a grilled window (shubbâk) draped by a curtain, with their grand vizier seated below, see Behrens-Abouseif, “The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque,” 34–35. During the audience the ministers stood to the right and left of the Fatimid caliph’s window with the grand vizier sitting directly under it, an arrangement strikingly similar to that of the Ottoman sultan’s public audience hall in the Topkapı. A similar ceremonial window (shubbâk) existed in the Dar al-Niyaba (Vicegerency Palace) built in the Mamluk citadel of Cairo by Qalawun for his vicegerent ‘Uruntay in 1288, where this user used to sit when he presided over official hearings; see Rabat, “Citadel of Cairo,” 76–77, 110–11. An elevated grilled window in the Mustansiriyya madrasa in Baghdad which overlooked the lecture hall below and allowed the Abbasid caliph to eavesdrop without being seen is mentioned in Yasser Tabbaa’s paper in this volume. Also see n. 5 above.


12. For the history of robes of honor used by Islamic dynasties since Abbasid times, see N. A. Stillman, “Khilâf,” Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed. (hereafter EI2), 5:6–7.

13. The sultan’s private audience hall, the third court, and the royal garden pavilions beyond are described in Necipoğlu, Architecture, Ceremonial and Power, 91–241.


15. For the long history of household slaves recruited from non-Muslim backgrounds and trained to rise to high offices from the days of the Abbasid dynasty onward, see D. Sourdell, P. Hardy, and H. Inalcik, “Ghulâm,” EI2, 2:1079–91. The Mamluks of Egypt and the Ottomans were the last great examples of centralized sedentary dynasties that relied on slave-soldiers on a large scale. The predominantly nomadic Mongols and Timurids, by contrast, were tribal clan confederations in which the role of slave troops was considerably smaller. The Safavids and Mughuls largely perpetuated the Timurid heritage. Unlike the medieval sultanates of Delhi, under the Mughuls, slaves played a very minor part in the administration and the army. The military basis of the early Safavid state was the Turkmen Kizilbash tribal divisions. Although Shah Abbas I attempted to balance their power with converted slave troops of Georgian, Armenian, and Circassian origin, the Kizilbash continued to outnumber them.

16. The mechanisms of state formation and the dynamics of tribal politics under Timur, who transformed a loose nomadic confederation of Turco-Mongolian tribesmen into a disciplined army subservient to him, are discussed in Beatrice Forbes Manz, The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane (Cambridge, Eng., 1989).

17. Louis XIV’s Spanish uncle and father-in-law Philip IV rarely appeared in public; when he did he remained virtually immobile “like a marble statue” with only his lips moving. Calm dignity, gravity, and sobriety were highly prized qualities in the Spanish royal tradition, much as they were at the Ottoman court; see Peter Burke, The Fabrication of Louis XIV (New Haven and London, 1992), 180. The statement in Louis XIV’s memoirs was repeated in a funeral sermon which described the late king as “very different from those mysterious kings who hide themselves to make themselves respected”; Burke, Fabrication of Louis XIV, 184.

18. For example, an eighteenth-century French traveler contrasted the invisibility that the Ottoman sultans adopted to inspire awe in their subjects
with the exhibitionism of the French kings, who wanted to be loved by them; see Jean-Claude Flachat, Observations sur le commerce et sur les arts d'une partie de l'Europe, de l'Asie, de l'Afrique, et même des Indes Orientales (1740–1758), 2 vols. (Lyons, 1766–67), 2:177. For a Lacanian deconstruction of the fiction of Oriental despotism in European travelogues written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Alain Grosrichard, Structure du rêve: La fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique (Paris, 1979). The Ottoman political discourse in the early eighteenth century, at the time when court ceremonial was being transformed, has not yet been studied.


25. The term “mounted Janissaries” (janissaires à cheval) is mentioned in Chardin, Voyages, 5:507; and Vladimir Minorsky, ed. and trans., Tadhkira al-Mulik: A Manual of Safavid Administration (ca. 1137/1725) (reprt., Cambridge, Eng., 1980), 33. Chardin adds that ‘Abbās I also trained infantrymen armed with muskets to imitate the Ottoman janissaries so that he could fight them back more effectively; Chardin, Voyages, 5:297–98. For ‘Abbās I’s centralizing reforms, the groundwork of which was laid by Shah Tahmasp, see H. R. Roemer, “The Safavid Period,” in Cambridge History of Islam, vol. 6, ed. P. Jackson and L. Lockhart (Cambridge, London, New York, 1986), 262–78, 343–47. Besides serving in the new regiments, slaves were also employed in the royal household and made their presence felt at the higher levels of Safavid administration until they filled about one-fifth of the high administrative posts; see R. M. Savory, “The Safavid Administrative System,” in Cambridge History of Iran, 6:351–72.


29. Pietro della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 2:53, describes the grand "tetrapolis" of Isfahan as "une belle ville de quatre citez, qui sont si proches l'une de l'autre, & si contigues entre elles, qu'elles ne sont separées seulement que de la largueur de la belle rue de carahbagh, & de celle du feuie, qui la divise justement en croix"; also see 2:39–45, 53, and 3:40–41. The inhabitants of Tabriz and New Julfa were resettled in Isfahan's new colonies because 'Abbas I had ruined their cities in order to combat the Ottomans. For Isfahan's suburbs, see Kaempfer, Am Hofe, 192–97; Olearius, Les Voyages, 2:775–76; Chardin, Voyages, 8:67–117. The district of Zoroastrians was moved to New Julfa after 'Abbas II converted it into a royal garden.

30. Junabadi's passage is translated in McChesney, "Four Sources," 114. For the opposition to Shah 'Abbas I in the old maydan, see McChesney, "Four Sources," 112, 114, 117–18. For the statement that 'Abbas I built the new maydan in order to divert commerce away from the old one where an influential prince belonging to the old aristocracy held rights which he refused to transfer, see J. B. Tavernier, Voyages en Perse (Geneva, 1970), 54–55. Tavernier says that the vengeful shah lodged the Augustinians and Carmelites there to annoy the inhabitants of the old maydan. Chardin says 'Abbas I lodged the Augustinians at the Husayniyya district of the old maydan in order to annoy the revered descendants of Husayn who lived there. Their leader, a powerful mujahid, had named his sons "Shah" in order to challenge the legitimacy of the Safavid ruler; see Chardin, Voyages, 8:7–12.


33. For the still extant octagonal shrine, see Zander, ed., Travaux, 206, figs. 94 and 95; della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 2:69–70; Kaempfer, Am Hofe, 212, and Minorsky, Manual of Safavid Administration, 33–34, 55, 126. Iskandar Munshi, History, 1:463, describes the ritual at the octagonal shrine where those who "love the shah" formed a "circle of divine unity [halqa-e tawhid] as is the custom of the Sufis of the Safavid Order, and began to chant the name of God and to declare His unity." He also mentions (History, 2:1166) the death penalty given to some assassins who had forced their way into the private quarters of the palace with weapons, "since they had violated the sanctity of the royal palace, which is a place of refuge for criminals." Chardin, Voyages, 7:369–71, says that the 'Ali Qapu, the tombs of imams, and the stables and kitchens of the Safavid kings also provided asylum to criminals.

34. For the gatehouse, see Galdieri, Esfahan: Ali Qapū; Zander, ed., Travaux, 133–289; Blunt, Isfahan, 72; della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 2:47, 70; Kaempfer, Am Hofe, 208; and Chardin, Voyages, 7:368–69. There is some confusion about the name of the gatehouse; Kaempfer, Am Hofe, 208–9, 211, says that it was not called the "Gate of 'Ali" or the "Gate of Allah," but rather "Colored Gate" (Ala Qapū). According to Chardin, Voyages, 7:368, it was not called the "Gate of 'Ali," but the "Sublime Gate" (i.e., 'Ali Qapū). However, the gate's inscriptions added by later rulers consistently allude to 'Ali; see Galdieri, Esfahan, 149–53.

35. Minorsky refers to the shah as a grand capitalist in Manual of Safavid Administration, 14. Pietro della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 3:50, wrote that the shah was the only great merchant in his kingdom since he monopolized the commerce of almost every article sold in Isfahan's maydan where "they even sell the onions of the king." For the
shah's centralizing economic policies that paralleled his political reforms, see McChesney, "Four Sources," 118-19; and Linda K. Steimann, "Shah 'Abbas and the Royal Silk Trade, 1599-1629," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1986.

36. The Qaysariyya portal is described by Chardin, Voyages, 7:356-57, who says the clock had been removed in his time because nobody could repair it. The clock was made by an Englishman according to Olearius, Les Voyages, 2:768. Pietro della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 2:47-50, describes 'Ali Qapu's erotic figural paintings, which depicted men and women in lascivious postures representing Bacchus and Venus united. Holding wine cups in their hands, most were dressed in contemporary costumes, some of them wearing European clothing. For the few paintings that survive, see J. Daridian and S. Stelling-Michaud, Le peinture séfévide d'Ispahan. Le Palais d'Ala Qapu (Paris, 1930). Natanzi compares the painted walls of the maydan to "a copy of the 'Aṣīr al-makhkhaqa" (trans. in McChesney, "Four Sources," 107). Chardin, Voyages, 7:19, observes that the Safavid rulers were more tolerant of figural paintings in secular buildings than the Ottomans and Uzbeks. The Safavids had inherited the Timurid tradition of figural wall painting described in Basil Gray, "The Tradition of Wall Painting in Iran," in Highlights of Persian Art, ed. R. E. Ettinghausen and E. Yarshater (Boulder, Colo., 1979), 313-27.

37. Archivio di Stato, Venice, Busta 5, no. 13, fol. 7r; no. 15, fol. 22r.

38. Kaempfer, Am Hofe, 246. Olearius, Les Voyages, 2:706-55, describes a wide variety of pavilions in which banquets were held for ambassadors; some of them were located in suburban hunting parks where ambassadors were invited to participate in royal hunting parties. 'Abbas I used to give audiences "in all sorts of places" according to Friar Thaddeus, Chronicle of the Carmelites, 1:286.

39. See Luschey, "Der königliche Marstall," 71-79; Kaempfer, Am Hofe, 210-11; Olearius, Les Voyages, 706-11; and Jean Chardin, Le Couronnement de Perse (Paris, 1671), chap. 108-35. Ambassadors were held under the arms by officials while being led to the shah's presence to perform obeisance; they then had to retreat backwards to their assigned seat. During their farewell audience they had to wear the robe of honor given them by the shah.

40. Chardin, Voyages, 5:468-500 and 7:377-79, describes the Chihil Sutun as the palace's largest reception hall capable of accommodating 250 to 300 people, and provides a detailed account of a banquet held there which was much more formal than those given in 'Abbas I's time. For Chihil Sutun, see Zander, ed., Travaux, 291-382. The paintings are discussed in Grube, "Wall Paintings," 511-42; and E. C. Sims, "Late Safavid Painting: The Chihil Sutun, the Armenian Houses, the Oil Paintings," in Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für Iransche Kunst und Archäologie (Berlin, 1979), sec. 3, 408-18.

41. Lökman, Hânernâme, Topkapi Palace Museum Library, ms. H.1523, fols. 16r-18r.

42. Kaempfer, Am Hofe, 252-83.


44. Iskandar Munshi, History, 1:536, refers to 'Abbas I's gatehouse as "the five-storied royal palace." For the theory that 'Abbas II added its tâlân, see Galdieri, Esfahan, 38-40. Also see the descriptions in della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 2:47, 3:35-36; and Kaempfer, Am Hofe, 208-10. The daily council (divân) of ministers at the ground floor of 'Ali Qapu is described in Chardin, Voyages, 5:237-39, 7:369; and Minorsky, Manual of Safavid Administration, 42-55.

45. Della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 5:9-56. Sometimes the maydan's illuminated shops were visited in the company of harem women, eunuchs, the wives of ambassadors, and of Armenian merchants; della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 3:10-18. The illumination spectacles are also described in Herbert, Travels, 128. Chardin, Voyages, 7:337, says 'Abbas I was particularly fond of these pompous spectacles which his successors repeated less frequently and only to impress ambassadors.

46. Iskandar Munshi, History, 2:1044-48. The New Year's (Nauruz) celebrations also had an informal atmosphere: "Every night, the Shah would wander through the park, stopping to talk with whichever group he pleased; sweet-voiced singers and dexterous musicians banned everyone's cares, and rosy-cheeked girls passed the wine and kept the revelers in a happy mood"; Iskandar Munshi, History, 2:977.


48. For the Water Festival in 1619 when people of all classes started to throw water on one another at a sign from the shah, who watched the spectacle together with ambassadors from the belvederes of...
the bridge, see della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 3:38-40; and Iskandar Munshi, History, 2:1046.


50. Many parts of the Red Fort in Delhi have been altered; it was sacked by Nader Shah in 1739 and used by the British in 1858 as their headquarters, when nearly eighty percent of the buildings were destroyed. The walls that divided the fort’s interior into a series of quadrangles were entirely eliminated, leaving only isolated buildings considered to be of architectural merit. The Mughal Red Forts in Delhi, Agra, and Lahore are discussed in Oskar Reuther, Indische Paläste und Wohnhäuser (Berlin, 1925); Ebba Koch, Mughal Architecture (Munich, 1991), 53-63, 84-86, 103-17, 125-27; Catherine B. Asher, The New Cambridge History of India: Architecture of Mughal India (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 111-16, 179-200. For the Delhi fort, see Blake, Shahjahanabad, 36-44, 85-86, 90-97; Gordon Sanderson, “Shah Jahan’s Fort, Delhi,” Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1911-12 (Calcutta, 1915), 1-28; G. Sanderson, A Guide to the Buildings and Gardens, Delhi Fort, 4th ed. (Delhi, 1957); John Burton-Page, “The Red Fort,” in Splendors of the East, ed. Mortimer Wheeler (New York, 1965); and Louise Nicholson, The Red Fort, Delhi (London, 1989).


52. Blake, Shahjahanabad, 55-57, also see map on 72-73.


54. Bernier, Travels, 258-60; Blake, Shahjahanabad, 42-43.

55. The Rang Mahal (Colored Palace), also known as Imtiyaz Mahal (Distinguished Palace), corresponds to the Khass Mahal that Shah Jahan built in the Red Fort of Agra which functioned as the emperor’s sleeping quarters, according to Lahori. It was in this principal courtyard of the zenāna, the emperor’s private palace, that Shah Jahan listened to music, poets, and storytellers, played with his children, and watched dancers; see Blake, Shahjahanabad, 39. Although the adjacent octagonal tower in Delhi is known today as the emperor’s sleeping quarters (khwābgah), it seems more likely that he slept in the Rang Mahal since the tower had official functions; see nn. 65, 75. Unlike the Red Fort in Agra where official buildings (the public and private audience halls) are aligned on a central axis, in Delhi the central axis culminates at Shah Jahan’s private palace, an arrangement that highlights the centrality of the emperor’s person.


58. The carpet is described in Khvāndamīr, Qānūn-i Humāyūnī, 80-81. For Abu al-Fazl’s theory of kingship, see J. F. Richards, “The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir,” in Kingship and Authority in South Asia, ed. J. F. Richards (Madison, Wisc., 1981), esp. 260-66. Abu al-Fazl who compares Alanquwa with the Virgin Mary writes, “That day of Alanquwa’s conception was the beginning of the manifestation of his Majesty, the King of Kings [Akbar] who after passing through diverse stages was revealed to the world from the womb of her Majesty Maryam Makani (i.e., the Queen Mother)”; Abū al-Fazl, The Akbarnāma, vol. 1, trans. H. Beveridge (Calcutta, 1907), 179-80.

59. Abū al-Fazl, A‘īn-i Akbārī, 1:3. The same text refers to the sun’s light as the source of kingship, 1:163.

60. Richards, “The Formulation of Imperial Authority,” 267-71; Abū al-Fazl, A‘īn-i Akbārī, 1:170-76; Rogers and Beveridge, trans., Memoirs of Jahāngīr,
62. Anushirvan's chain of justice, which can be traced out that Akbar's tolerance of all religions differed from the practice of the Safavids, Ottomans, and Uzbeks: "This was different from the practice in other realms, for in Persia there is room for Shias only, and in Turkey, India, and Turan there is room for Sunnis only." Akbar and Jahangir were married to Rajput princesses to seal political alliances. According to Blake, Shahjahanabad, 126–30, between 1658 and 1678, the corps of mansab-дарис, or office holders, was 41 percent Indian, 36 percent Iranian, and 18 percent Turanian. Rajputs, Hindu warrior clans from North India who had been drawn into the Mughal system by Akbar, comprised just over one-third of the Indian group. For the abolition of prostration by Shah Jahan, see Mubarak Ali, Court of the Great Mughuls, 32.

63. For darshan in Hindu kingship, see Ronald Inden, "Ritual, Authority and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship," in Kingship and Authority, ed. Richards, 54. The ritual of darshan in Hindu temples, where to see and be seen by the image of a deity continues to play a central role, is discussed in Diana L. Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India (Chambersburg, Penna., 1985). See also Catherine Asher’s discussion of darshan in this volume.


65. The octagonal tower pavilion in Delhi is identified as the jharīka-i darshan in Blake, Shahjahanabad, 37, 39; Asher, Architecture of Mughal India, 198; and Nicholson, The Red Fort, 50. Jahangir forbade the amirs at the provinces to make use of the following royal prerogatives "which are the private affair of kings": sitting in the jharīka, having officers perform the kūrīnīsh (prostration), staging elephant fights, inflicting the punishment of blinding or cutting off ears and noses, forcing Islam on others, conferring titles, forcing singers to remain on duty in the manner of royal darbars, beating drums (naqqārs), making elephants perform obeisance, going in procession with retinues, and using a seal on written documents; see Rogers and Beveridge, trans., Memoirs of Jahangir, pt. 1, 205. For the use of jharīkas in sub-imperial palaces, see Catherine Asher’s article in this volume.


67. For the use of Christian imagery in Mughal palaces before Shah Jahan’s reign, see Asher, Architecture of Mughal India, 112–15; Ebba Koch, "The Influence of the Jesuit Mission on Symbolic Representations of the Mughal Emperors," in Islam in India, ed. C. W. Troll, Studies and Commentaries 1 (New Delhi, 1982), 28–29; Ebba Koch, "Jahangir and the Angels: Recently Discovered Wall Paintings under European Influence in the Fort of Lahore," in India and the West, ed. J. Deppert (New Delhi, 1988), 173–95. Also see the accounts of William Hawkins (1608–13) and William Finch (1608–11) which describe the figural paintings in Jahangir’s palaces, in Early Travels in India (1583–1619), ed. William Foster (repr., New Delhi, 1968), esp. 115, 162–64, 184. In 1623 della Valle, Les fameux voyages, 1:97–98, wrote that Shah Jahan, who disliked the Christians, had removed from the Ahmadabad palace a picture of the Virgin put up there by Jahangir. For the analogy between the Mongol princess Alanquwa, the Virgin Mary, and Mughal queen mothers, see n. 58 above.

68. For the allegorical images depicted under the
73. Bernier, "Imperial Symbolism in Mughal Painting," in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, ed. Priscilla P. Soucek (University Park, Penna., and London, 1988), 177-87. Koch overemphasizes the theme of Solomon's throne in her iconographic study of the *jharōka* throne in Delhi, thus underplaying its messianic message. Apocalyptic millennialism, with its vision of a golden age, played an important role in Mughal theories of dynastic legitimacy ever since Akbar had inaugurated the millennium. For chronicles referring to Shah Jahan as the mujaddid, see Koch, *Shah Jahan and Orpheus*, 44 n. 93. Apocalyptic millennialism in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean world in Muslim, Jewish, and Christian settings is studied in a forthcoming book by Cornell H. Fleischer.

74. For Shah Jahan's ceremonies at the private audience hall, see Blake, *Shahjahanabad*, 40-41; and Bernier, *Travels*, 265-67. Jahangir's private audiences are mentioned by Hawkins and Finch in *Early Travels in India* (1583-1619), 116, 185.

75. Begley and Desai, eds., "Daily Activities of the Emperor Shah Jahan," 571. Asher identifies this place as the Shah Burj, or King's Tower at the northernmost edge of the palace's river front (figs. 21-22 [18]), but Lahori's description of the Agra fort implies that the audience tower was adjacent to the emperor's bedroom to which he retired directly after holding his late-night meetings at the tower; see Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, 196.

76. Begley and Desai, eds., "Daily Activities of the Emperor Shah Jahan," 571-73. Shah Jahan's ceremonial schedule had grown more complex than that of his predecessors, who did not give as many daily audiences.

77. The full inscription is cited in Nur Baksh, "Agra Fort," 177-78. The centrality of the sun, which was associated with the emperor, was expressed in astrological charts cast by the court astrologers for Shah Jahan's important audience sessions. The emperor was the sun, the amirs the planets, and the lesser *mansabdars* the minor heavenly bodies; Blake, *Shahjahanabad*, 96. This scheme was foreshadowed in Humayun's *Carpet of Mirth*; see n. 58 above.

78. A passage by Lahori describes Akbar's marble *jharōka*: "In the reign of His departed Majesty [Akbar], on the Shah Burj which is adjacent to the Daulat-Khāna-i-Khās there was a small marble pavilion with a chamber of the same stone in front, excepting which no other building had been built of marble. In the reign of His departed Majesty [Jahāngīr] marble halls were built on the three sides of it. As the said buildings were not liked by the critical disposition of...[Shāh Jahan]...they were demolished in his august reign, and a new marble building, extremely delightful, was made, consisting of an octagonal chamber"; cited in Nur Baksh "Agra Fort," 180. For the use of white marble to "blur the lines between ruler and the divine," see Catherine Asher's article in this volume.


80. Official written sources and miniatures rarely provide a glimpse of the varied responses court rituals evoked in participants, including a critique of the very institutions they sought to legitimate. Far from remaining static, these rituals were modified over time to accommodate changing circumstances. For an application of recent theories of ritual to artifacts and architectural settings, see Kathleen Ashley and Irene J. Winter, eds., *Art in Ritual Context*, special issue of the *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6 (Winter 1992).
Fig. 1. Model of the Topkapi Palace around the 19th century.
From the exhibition catalogue Türkische Kunst und Kultur aus osmanischer Zeit (Frankfurt, 1985).

Key:
A. First Court, B. Second Court, C. Third Court (court of male pages), D. Third Court (harem), E. Third Court (hanging garden with pavilions), F. Outer Garden with Pavilions, 1. First Gate, 2. Second Gate, 3. Third Gate.
Fig. 2. Axonometric drawing of the main core of the Topkapı Palace as it stands today, drawn by İlhan Öz.

Key:
Fig. 3. Parade of the carriages of royal women entering the First Gate. From Muradgea Ignace d’Ohsson, Tableau général de l’Empire ottoman (Paris, 1787–1824).

Fig. 4. Murad III watching the parade of a Safavid embassy from the tower pavilion known as Kiosk of Processions. From Lokman, Shahanṣhahnama, 1592, Topkapi Palace Library, B. 200, fol. 33v–34r.
Fig. 5. Ceremonies at the second court with the sultan overseeing the proceedings at the public council hall from his grilled window at the Tower of Justice. From Lokman, Hünemâne, ca. 1584–85, Topkapı Palace Library, H.1925, fols. 18v, 19r.

Fig. 6. Selim II overseeing the proceedings at the public council hall from his grilled window at the Tower of Justice. From Lokman, Shâhnâme-i Selim Khân, ca. 1581, Topkapı Palace Library, A. 5595, fol. 1fr.

Fig. 7. A banquet given in honor of a European ambassador at the public council hall, with the sultan’s silhouette seen behind his grilled window, which is flanked by the royal monogram (tughra) and topped by Qur’anic inscriptions referring to justice. From D’Ohsson, Tableau général de l’Empire ottoman.
Fig. 8a–b. Ceremonial grilled window on the façade of the sultan’s private audience hall.

Fig. 9. Murad III receiving Austrian ambassadors at his private audience hall. From Album, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ca. 1590, Cod. 8626, fol. 122r.
Fig. 10a. Engelbert Kaempfer's axonometric drawing of the palace grounds in Isfahan executed in 1684–85. From Amoenitates Exoticarum (Lemgo, 1712).

**Key:**

Fig. 10b. E. Galdieri's redrawing of Kaempfer's "Planographia,"
copied by H. Gaube with added cross-hatchings to indicate still-extant buildings.
From H. Luschey, "Der königliche Marstall in Isfahan in Engelbert Kaempfers Planographia des Palastbezirkes 1712."
Fig. 11. Plan of Isfahan. From N. Ardalan and L. Bakhtiyar, The Sense of Unity (Chicago and London, 1975).

Key:
Fig. 12 a–b. Views of Chahar Bagh avenue. From Cornelis de Bruyn, *Cornelis de Bruyns reizen over Moscovie door Persie en Indie* (Amsterdam, 1711).

Fig. 13. Hazar Jarib Garden. From Jean Chardin, *Voyage en Perse, et autres lieux de l’orient*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam, 1711).

Fig. 14. Views showing the Maydan and the Bridge of Allahverdi Khan.
Fig. 15. The Maydan-i Shah with pitched tents. From Cornelis de Bruyn, *Reizen over Moscovie*.

Fig. 16. Evening Reception at the Talar-i Tavileh showing Shah Suleyman's accession ceremony in 1666. From Kempler, *Amerciantes Exoticarum*. 
Fig. 17. Reception given at the Talar-i Tavileh to the embassy of the duke of Holstein by Shah Safi in 1637. From A. Olearius, Muskouitische oft begehrte Beschreibung der neuen orientalischen Reise (Schleswig, 1556).

Fig. 18. Wall painting at the Chihil Sutun depicting a royal reception, mid 17th century.

Fig. 19. Royal reception at the Garden Pavilion of Asadabad, located on the riverfront adjacent to the Chahar Bagh avenue. From Kaempfer, Amoenitates Exoticaeum.

Fig. 20. Talât of 'Ali Qapu. From Chardin, Voyages en Perse.
Fig. 21. Reconstruction plan of the Red Fort in Delhi adapted from Sanderson. From L. Nicholson, The Red Fort, Delhi.

**Key:**
Fig. 22. Axonometric view of the Red Fort showing buildings up until the British occupation in 1858, adapted from Sanderson. From L. Nicholson, *The Red Fort: Key to Same as fig. 21.*

Fig. 23. Jahangir at the jharokha darshan in the Red Fort of Agra, Tusahi *Jahangir*, ca. 1620. Collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, Geneva.
Fig. 24. (top) Panoramic view of the Red Fort in Delhi seen from the river; (bottom) The Octagonal Tower, with the private audience hall to the right and the Rang Mahal (Imtiyaz Mahal) to the left; the triple-windowed balcony between the Rang Mahal and the tower possibly functioned as Shah Jahan’s jharōkāi darshan. From Emily Bayley and Thomas Metcalfe, *The Golden Calm*, ed. M. M. Kaye (Exeter, England, 1980).

Fig. 25. (top) Public audience hall at the Red Fort in Delhi; (bottom) The jharōkā throne for public audiences. From Bayley and Metcalfe, *Golden Calm*. 
Fig. 26. Jahangir at the jharoka of the public audience hall in Agra, receiving Prince Khurrum (Shah Jahan) and his grandson, Tuzuk-i Jahangir, ca. 1620, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund, 14.654. Photo: courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 27. Shah Jahan honoring Ali Mardan Khan at the jharoka in the public audience hall of the Lahore fort in 1638. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Album, Ousley Add. 178, no. 13.

Fig. 28. Shah Jahan's ceremonial reunion with his three sons at the jharoka of the public audience hall in the Agra fort in 1628, Windsor Castle, Royal Library, Padshah-nama, fol. 50v. Photo: courtesy The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, 1995, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.
Fig. 29. (top) Private audience hall with a partial view of the neighboring Octagonal Tower in the Red Fort of Delhi; (bottom) Interior of the private audience hall with central throne platform. From Bayley and Metcalfe, *Golden Calm*

Fig. 30. Shah Jahan receiving Prince Aurangzeb and his grandson in the private audience hall of the Red Fort in Delhi in 1651. Leningrad, Institut Narodov Azii, Album no. E. 14, fol. 25.