The Architectural Order of Persian *Talar*
Life of a Form

Ludovico Micara[1]

Tout est forme, et la vie même est une forme. Honoré de Balzac

La forme ... est d'abord une vie mobile dans un monde changeant.
Les métamorphoses, sans fin, recommencent. Henri Focillon

Abstract: the architectural order of the Persian *talar*, which characterized the most significant architecture of Safavid Persia and its capital Isfahan in the seventeenth century, condenses within its spaces a series of quality and characteristics that identify it as a recognizable and independent architectural form. This form syncretically collects and expresses a range of experiences and motives, that render the Persian architectural tradition and its continuity during at least 3000 years, an extraordinary unicum. The analysis of the persistence of the *talar* form to this day highlights the theme of vitality over time of certain architectural shapes and its meaning, whether overt or implied, almost independently of its temporary interpreters; perhaps proving and preluding a possible "life of forms" in architecture.

Keywords: Architectural order, Forms, Talar, Hypostyle Hall, Persia, Safavid, Isfahan, Persepolis, the Arab-Islamic Mosque, Gunnar Asplund, Frank Lloyd Wright, Ludovico Quaroni, Norman Foster.

The German naturalist, traveler and writer Engelbert Kaempfer, author in 1712 of the "relations, observations and descriptions of Persian things and farther Asia"[2], contained in *Amoenitatum exoticarum politico-physico-medicarum fasciculi V*[3], accurately illustrating the palaces and royal gardens of the Safavid Isfahan, avails himself of the opportunity to introduce and describe the *talar* palace (Fig. 1). Kaempfer distinguishes the two fundamental areas of the palatial structure of Isfahan, and more generally of the courts and royal residences of the Islamic world.

The first part "called Diwaan, dedicated those guests to be

1. Ludovico Micara, University of Pescara, email: ludovico.micara@gmail.com.

2. "*variae relaiones, observationes & descriptiones rerum persicarum & ulterioris Asiae*"

3. Kaempfer 1712.

admitted to reunions with friends,"[4] while "a second called Haraam rejects all friends, even those requesting to be admitted intimately; it is reserved exclusively for the wives of the polygamous landlord, to the concubines, the maids and eunuchs."[5] Having established the main organization of the palace, which incidentally replicates on a larger scale the traditional Persian house, as *birun* and *anderun*, Kaempfer goes on to describe the elements that make it up: «in the entrance to the Diwaan are some elegant smaller buildings equipped with numerous cells and tricliniums, but an especially large one to celebrate banquets, an atrium (called *talaar*) in the form of a dramatic theater, opened on three sides, where guests who sit next to the King can more freely enjoy the beauty of the surrounding gardens».[6] The perspective representations of this space in Kaempfer's book are quite precise and fascinating. As is extraordinarily interesting the isometric reconstruction of the complex of royal palaces, *Planographia Sedis Regiae* (Fig. 2), overlooking the large square (*Maydan*) of Isfahan, *Forum maximum, velut Regiorum Domiciliorum vestibulum*, into which the *talar* are inserted. The immense Maydan (Fig. 3), 160 x 560 meters, built by Shah Abbas, whose reign from 1588 to 1629 inaugurates the rule of the Safavid dynasty in Persia, is only one of the great urban achievements that, starting from 1598, transformed Isfahan, when it became the capital of the new Persian empire replacing the more peripheral Qazvin, until 1722, the year the dynasty fell. The plan of the new Safavid Isfahan is one of the most important urban achievements of the Islamic world, comparable, in the size and quality of its architectural interventions, to what was happening in the other capitals of the great absolutisms of the seventeenth century, from the Rome of Sixtus V and the Baroque scenographies, to the Paris of the Grand Siècle, Wren's London after the great fire of 1666, the Ottoman Istanbul, the Shah Jahan's Mughal Delhi, up to the later Meknes of Moulay Ismail in Morocco. Shah Abbas's plan for Isfahan[7] (Fig. 4) links in one grandiose urban design the ancient center of the city, developed in the Seljuk period

4. "*quarum prior Diwaan dicta, admittendis dicata est hospitibus, consessibusque amicorum"*

5. "*posterior Haraam appellata amicos omnes respuit, etiam intimae, quos vocant admissionis; solis sacra polygami patris familias conjugibus, concubinis, ancillis & spadonibus"*

6. *"in quo pro Diwanì habemus Palatia minora quaedam nitidissima, cellulis trclinisque instructa pluribus, tum inprimis uno praegrandi, pro conviviis celebrandis, atrio (*talaar *vocant) ad formam theatri scenici, tribus ut plurimum lateribus patente, quò ambientis hortis amoenitates liberiùs haurire Regii consessores possint"*.

7. Cf. the drawing by M. Alemi "Restituzione della pianta della Esfahan Safavide" in ALEMI 2003.

around the ancient Meydan (*Meydan Kohne*) overlooked by the Great Friday Mosque (*Masjid-e jameh*) and the Royal Palace, with the new Safavid urban creation, the royal square (*Maidan-i Shah* or *Naqsh-e Jahan* "Image of the world"), with the entrance to the complex of royal palaces (*Ali Qapu*), the Royal Mosque (*Masjid-i Shah*) and the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah (*Masjid-i Shaykh Lutf Allah*). The articulated route of the Bazaar, with its own entrance on the short side of the new Maydan and its own commercial area, shops and caravanserais, is the linking element between the two centralities.But this is only one part of the accomplished grand urban project (Fig. 5). The route of the Bazaar went south down to the Zayandah Rud river, crossed by the spectacular bridge-dam Pol-i Khwaju, built on two passage levels with pavilions overlooking the river, and thought of as a large public area over the water.

A second public route skirted westward the web of the buildings and royal gardens. This is the *Khiyaban-e Chahar Bagh* (avenue of the four gardens), a large tree-lined avenue, about four kilometers long, decorated by ponds and water canals surrounded by green gardens and high entrances (*balakhaneh*) to noble residences. The avenue, extraordinary synthesis of urban thoroughfare and public space for citizens' leisure time, crossed the river by the long bridge Pol-e Allahverdi Khan (also called *Si-o Se Pol*, the bridge of 33 arches). It constituted the main axis linking the royal complex (*dawlatkhaneh*) to large suburban royal gardens (*Bagh-e Hezar Jarib*) south of the river and the newly expanded districts, such as Abbasabad and the Armenian quarter New Julfa. The cross formed by the river and the *Khiyaban-e Chahar Bagh* divided the new Isfahan into four sectors, almost a citywide Chahar Bagh: the old Isfahan and the new Maydan-i Shah; Abbasabad of inhabitants from Tabriz; New Julfa inhabited by the Armenian community brought to Persia by Shah Abbas; and the Gauri or Zoroastrian district.[8]

In the new urban situation of Safavid Isfahan and its royal palaces one can better understand the role that the *talars* have had in visiting and

8. This idea of urban organization, extremely simple but that well expresses in the syncretic character of Shah Abbas's new Isfahan, is suggested by the Italian traveler Pietro Della Valle on the occasion of his trip to the Persian Shah Abbas in 1617. He attributes the idea for "a beautiful tetrapolis of four cities, so close to each other and so contiguous, divided only by the width of the beautiful Ciaharbàg road and the width of the river, which cuts it where it crosses.". Letter 19 from Spahan March 17th, 1617, in Gaeta, Lockart 1972, p. 30-40.

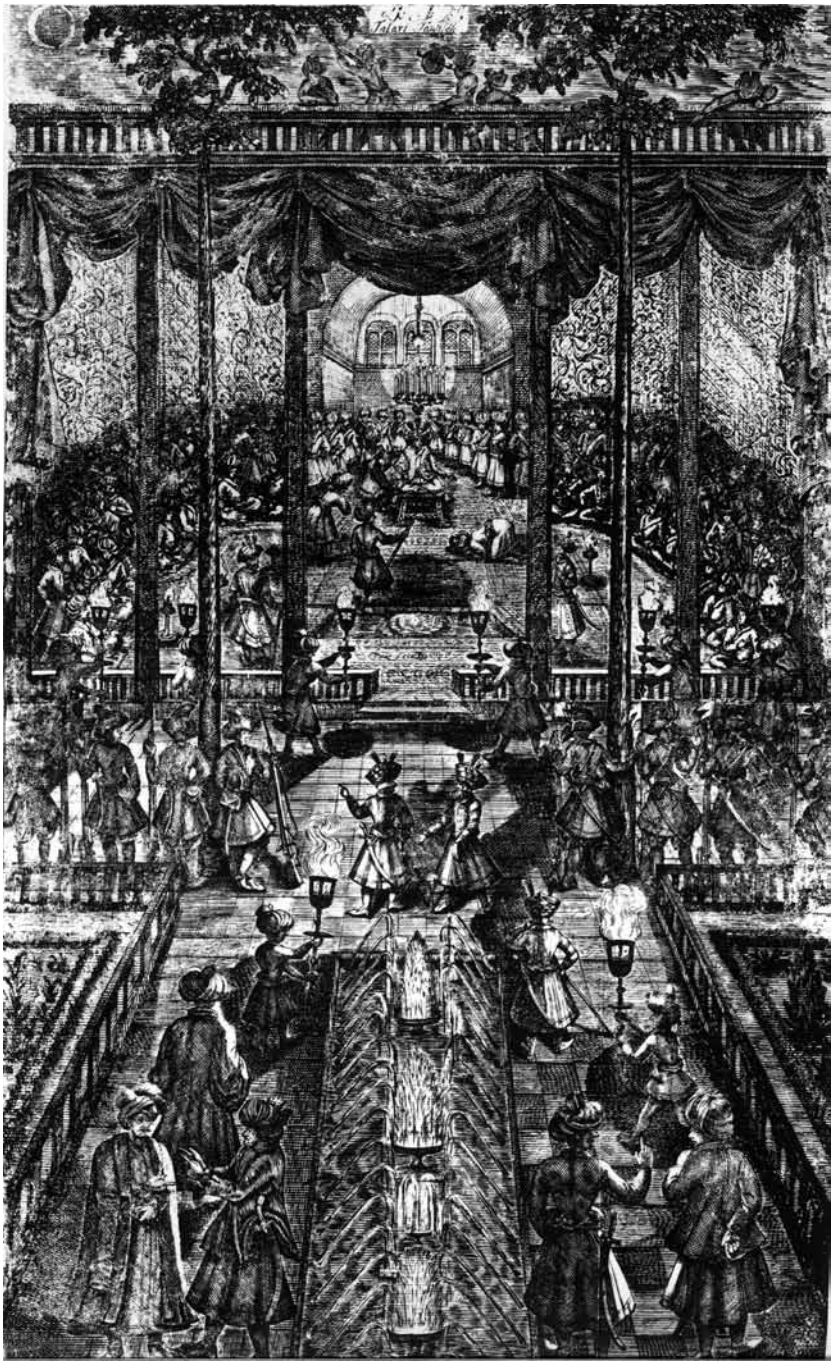


Fig. 1. Isfahan, Talar-i Tavileh. (KAEMPFER 1712, p. 35)

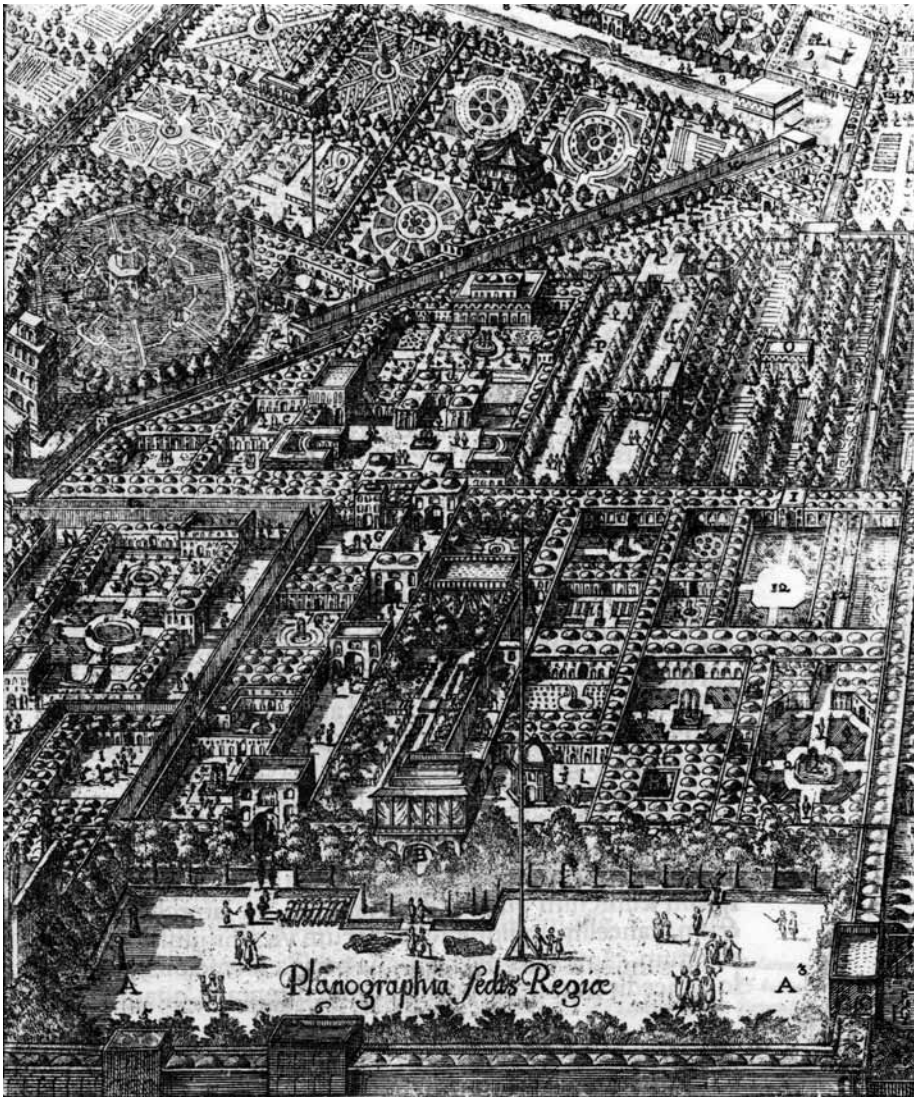


Fig. 2. Isfahan, The complex of royal palaces "Planographia Sedis Regiae". (KAEMPFER 1712, p. 179).

Fig. 3. Isfahan, Maydan. (LE BRUN 1718).

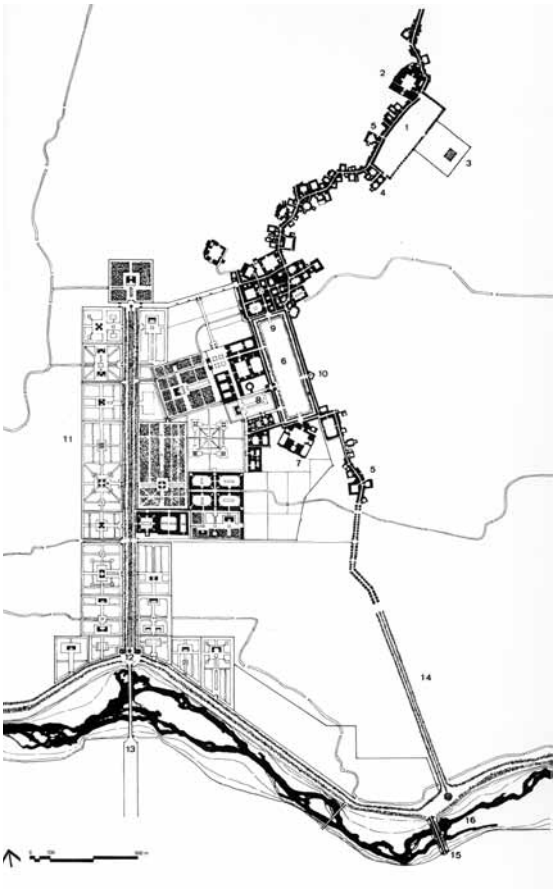


Fig. 4. Shah Abbas Plan for Isfahan. (ARDALAN BAKHTIAR 1973 , p. 127).

Fig. 5. M. Alemi, Safavide Esfahan Plan elaboration. (ALEMI 2003, p. 413).

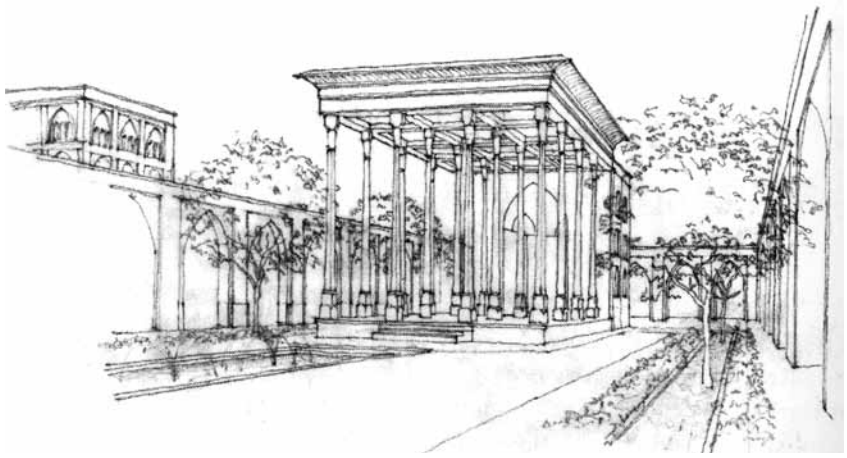


Fig. 6. Isfahan, Talar-i Tavileh. (BABAIE 2013, p. 158).

ceremonial court rituals.[9] Kaempfer in his *Planographia Sedis Regiae*[10] identifies three. Talar-e Tavileh (Fig. 6), built in 1630 by Shah Safi I is perhaps the prototype of the Isfahan *talars* and model for subsequent ones. Located in the so-called Garden of the Stables (*Bagh-i tavile*) and connected by a ceremonial path at the entrance of the royal palaces it played a key role in the Nauruz's (the Persian New Year) audiences, and reception of embassies. The construction of the Talar-e Tavileh had overshadowed the ceremonial role of Ali Qapu, the large five-storey tower built by Shah Abbas as a monumental entrance to the Diwan. Hence the decision by Shah Abbas II to restore Ali Qapu in 1644 by adding a large *talar* on the front overlooking the Maydan, projecting into the space of the square with respect to the recesses of the other major entrances to the Royal Mosque, to the Mosque of Sheikh Luftallah and to the Bazaar, thus definitely characterizing the scenic elevation (Fig. 7). A third *talar*, built in 1647 by Shah Abbas II in one of the large gardens of the palace complex, is Chehel Sotun (Fig. 8), whose name literally translates to forty columns that compose it, of which twenty are real and the other twenty virtual, reflected by the large pool of water facing it.

Another extraordinary *talar*, which Engelbert Kaempfer described and represented, is the so-called Ayene Khaneh (Palace of Mirrors) (Fig. 9) constructed in 1630, contemporary with Talar-e Tavileh, for Shah Safi I. This one was not inside the Diwan, but rather on the south bank of the river Zayandah Rud, in the stretch between the two bridges, where one may enjoy, from the court, the great potentials of the riverfront landscape, the large open spaces and the water gardens. It was also more easily accessible from the city than the large gardens and suburban residences of Hezar Jarib that Shah Abbas had wanted at the foot of the mountains south of Isfahan. A common and completely original feature of the *talar*, is the scenic and convivial space, open on three sides of the rectangular plan, raised and protected by a covering supported by tall and slender wooden pillars, where, as Kaempfer says, "guests sitting beside the king will more freely enjoy the beauty of the surrounding gardens." The fourth side of the rectangle is reserved for the entrance, through an *iwan*, to the palace connected to the *tala*r, reserved for the King's audience and court ceremonies (Fig. 10).

Another element common to the *talar* is the presence of water in various forms and dimensions: as a refreshing pool in the center of the indoor

9. Cf. Babaie 2013.

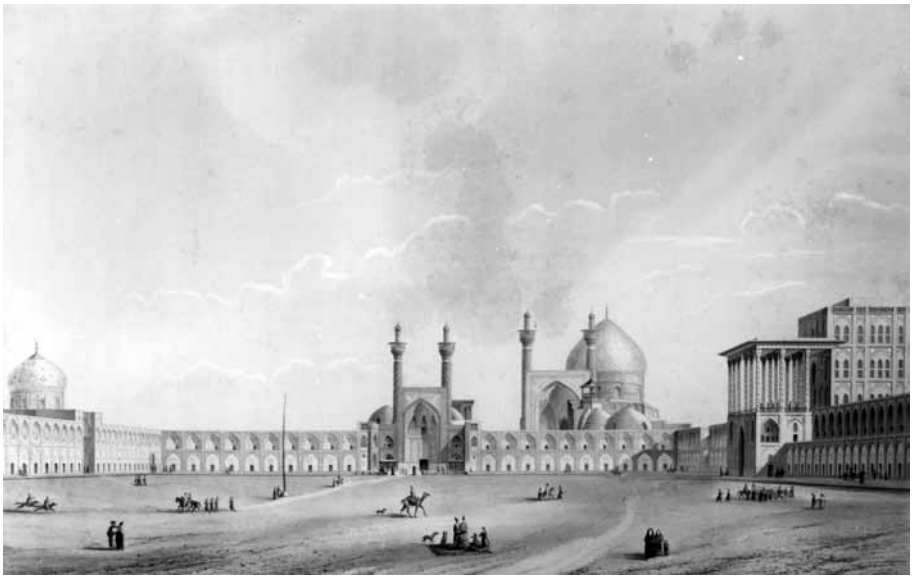
10. For a detailed analysis of the drawing by Kaempfer cf. Galdieri 1974, p. 380-393.

space as in Talar-e Tavileh, or in the *talar* Ali Qapu; as a large reflecting pool in the court of the Talar-e Chehel Sotun; or as a canal in which the water flows, with its gentle murmuring, descending to the garden from the pool in the *iwan* of the Palace of Mirrors, Ayene Khaneh, and then from the largest pool before the *talar*. These are the spaces where the king received those who asked for an audience. It is his *diwankhaneh* (audience hall) where he may enjoy «the freshness of the morning and evening air; here he smokes the *kalium*, as his eye languidly sweeps over the waters and the green retreats around, the minarets and cupolas, the gardens of the neighbouring town, the boundless reaches of the plateau and the distant mountain peaks».[11]

The specific location of the *talar* accentuates some architectural and useful features. So while Talar-e Tavile and Talar-e Chehel Sotun, within the web of the palatial gardens are mainly reserved for diners and guests of the King, protected from prying eyes, the *talar* Ali Qapu is held high above the entrance to Diwan and opens onto Maydan. The large and airy loggia thus allowed the king and his guests to watch the shows in their honor that took place in the immense space of the Maydan, even the hippodrome for the exhibitions of the knights playing polo (*chawgan-bazi*), from whose dimensions those of the square were derived, and the performance of the shooters in archery (*qabaq-andazi*). But at the same time the great *talar* had a public dimension, since it displayed to those who walked or stood in the square, ordinary citizens, merchants, visitors, embassies, an image of royal authority, not so formal, but rather closer and familiar. The *talar* Ayene Khaneh itself, opening onto the banks of the river and visible from the two bridges that cross it, afforded a spectacular landscape of the river system, enjoyed even by those who walked along the banks.

A common feature of the *talar* is the wooden material of which the tall and slender columns are made. It is surprising to note that in a country whose climate is predominantly arid and semi-desert would use wood in place of stone as the main material for such important structures. The reason is due to the increasingly influential presence in

11. Perrot, Chipiez 1982, p. 262. Thus Perrot e Chipiez continue: "Travellers who have studied Iran with intelligent curiosity, whether in the present or the past, have one and all juxtaposed modern palaces (whose images they have engraved) with ancient ones. Like the power of the sovereigns, the dimension and style of ornament of these edifices have shrunk and faded, but their essential and characteristic dispositions have remained unaltered – a fact that must be kept well in view by the architect when he essais to restore the royal houses of the Achaemenids".



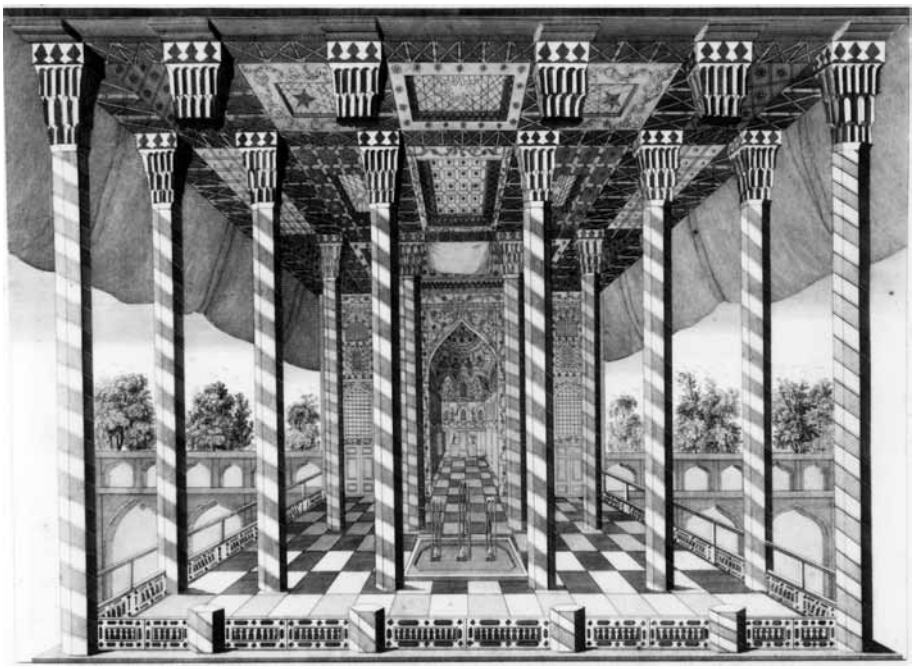


Fig. 7. Isfahan, Maydan-i Shah, Ali Qapu.
7. 1. Maydan-i Shah. (COSTE 1867).
7. 2. Ali Qapu. (CHARDIN 1711).

Fig. 7. Isfahan, Maydan-i Shah, Ali Qapu.
7. 3. Maydan-i Shah. (Photo: Ludovico Micara).
7. 4. View of the Royal Mosque from Ali Qapu. (Photo: Ludovico Micara).

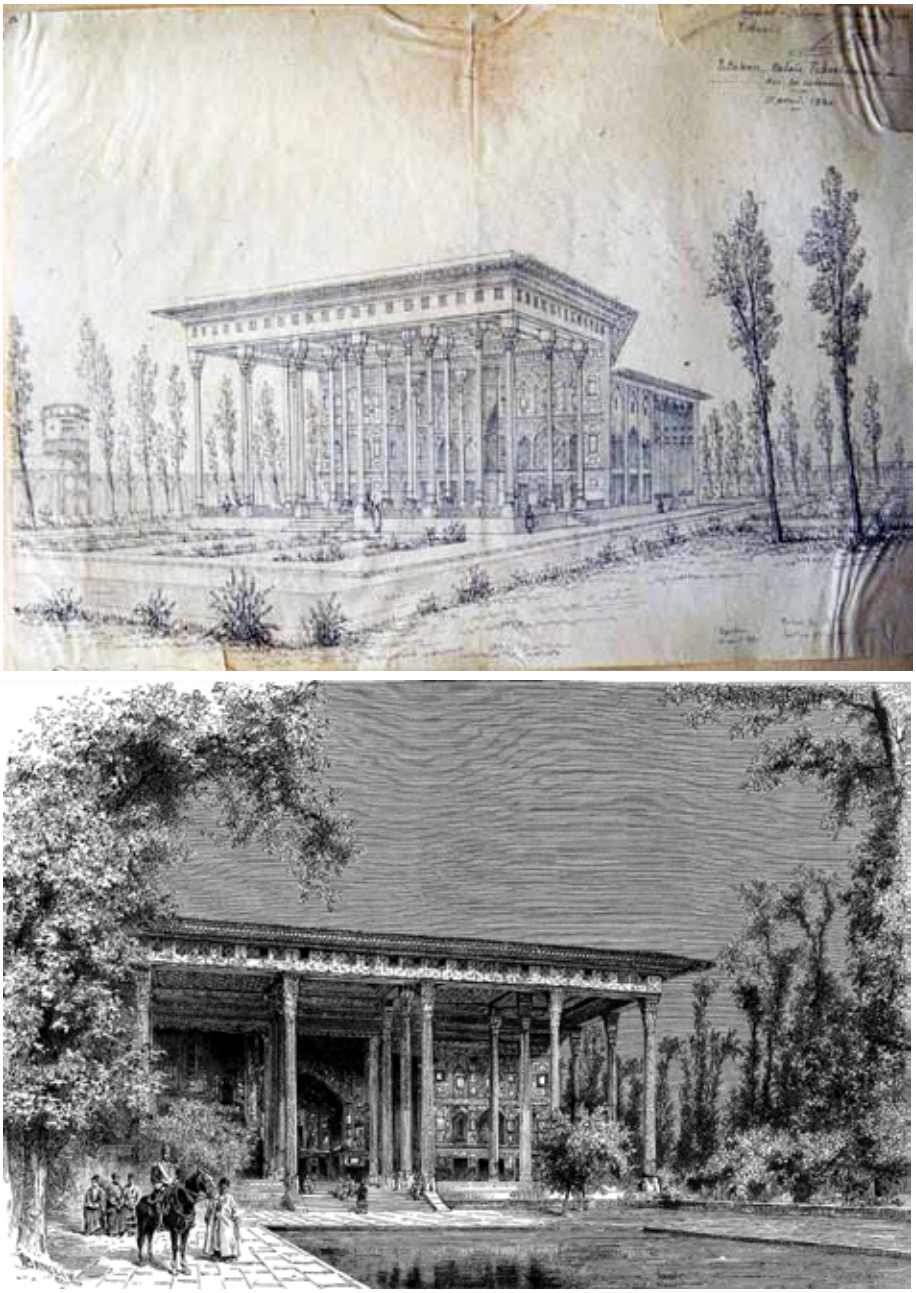


Fig. 8. Isfahan, Talar-i Chehel Sotun.
8. 1. Perspective view of the garden and Talar-i Chehel Sotun. (P. Coste, Bibliothèque Municipale de Marseille, Ms. 1132, f. 35).
8. 2. Chehel Sotun Pavilion. (DIEULAFOY 1887, p. 257).

Fig. 8. Isfahan, Talar-i Chehel Sotun.
8. 3. View of the pool and of Talar-i Chehel Sotun. (Photo: Ludovico Micara).
8. 4. View of the pool and of Talar-i Chehel Sotun. (Photo: Ludovico Micara).

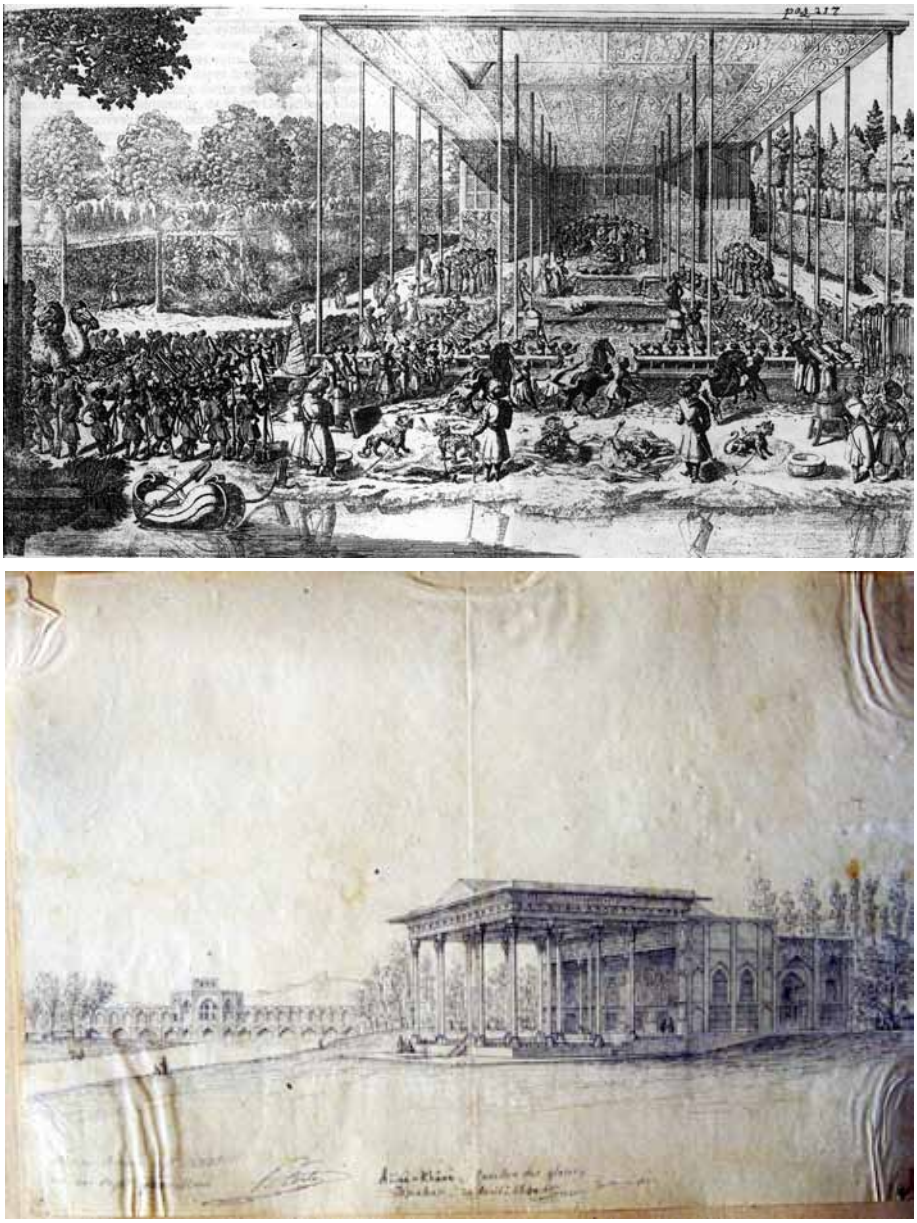


Fig. 9. Isfahan, Talar Ayene Khaneh.
9. 1. Talar Ayene Khaneh. (KAEMPFER 1712, p. 217).
9. 2. Perspective view of the garden and Talar Ayene Khaneh. (P. Coste, Bibliothèque Municipale de Marseille).

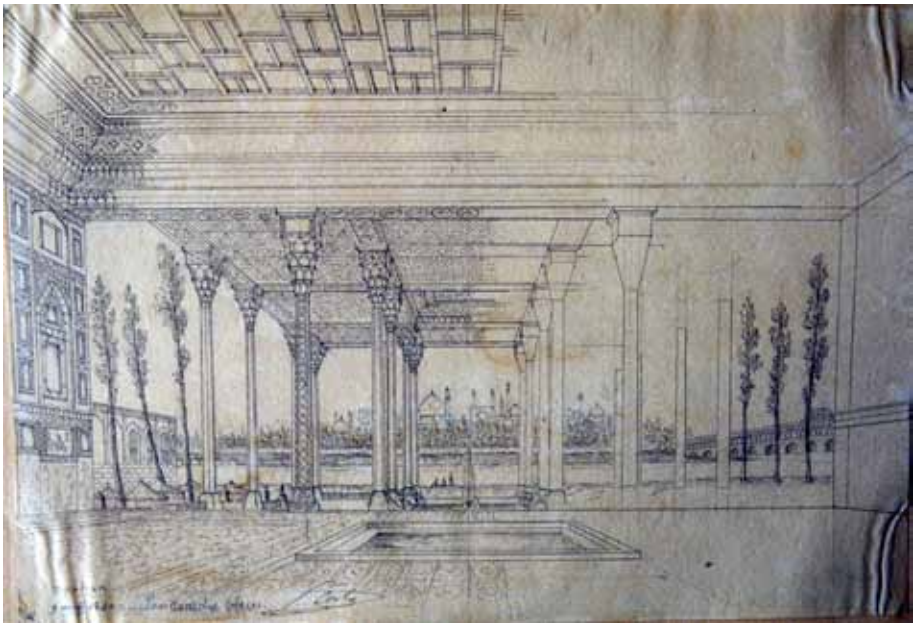


Fig. 9. Isfahan, Talar Ayene Khaneh.
9. 3. Inside view of Talar Ayene Khaneh.
(P. Coste, Bibliothèque Municipale de Marseille, Ms. 1132, f. 46).
9. 4. View of Talar Ayene Khaneh. (DIEULAFOY 1884, III, pl. 6).

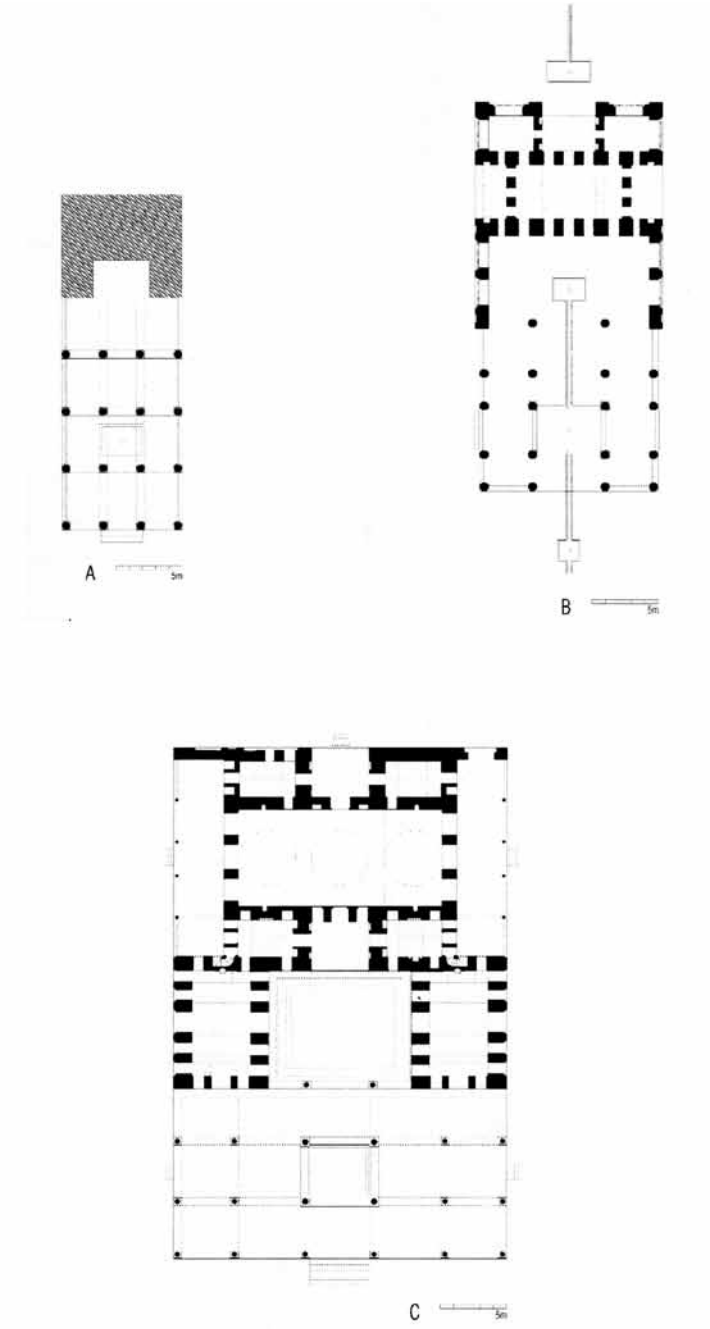


Fig. 10. Isfahan, Plans of talar (BABAIE 2013, p. 159).
A) Talar-i Tavileh; B) Talar Ayene Khaneh; C) Talar-i Chehel Sotun.

Fig. 11. Persepolis.
11. 1. – 11. 2. Views of Apadana (KAEMPFER 1712, p. 325-334).

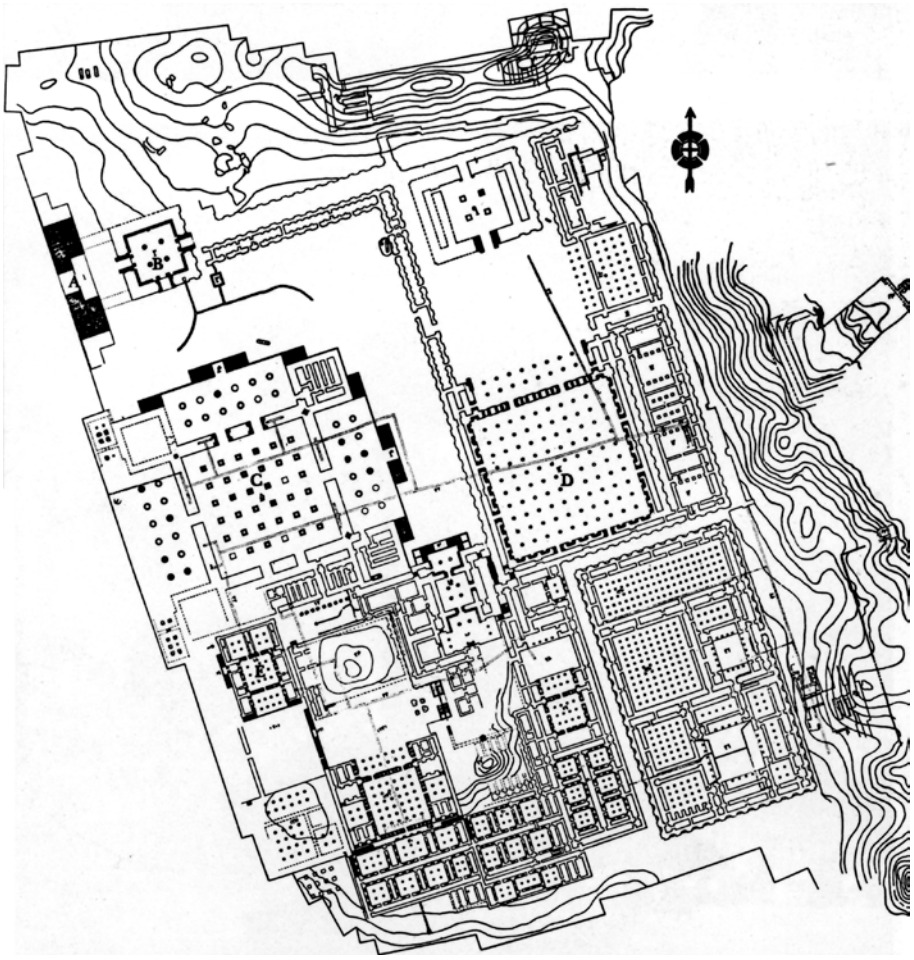


Fig. 11. Persepolis.
11. 3. Plan of Apadana. (POPE 1965, p. 25).

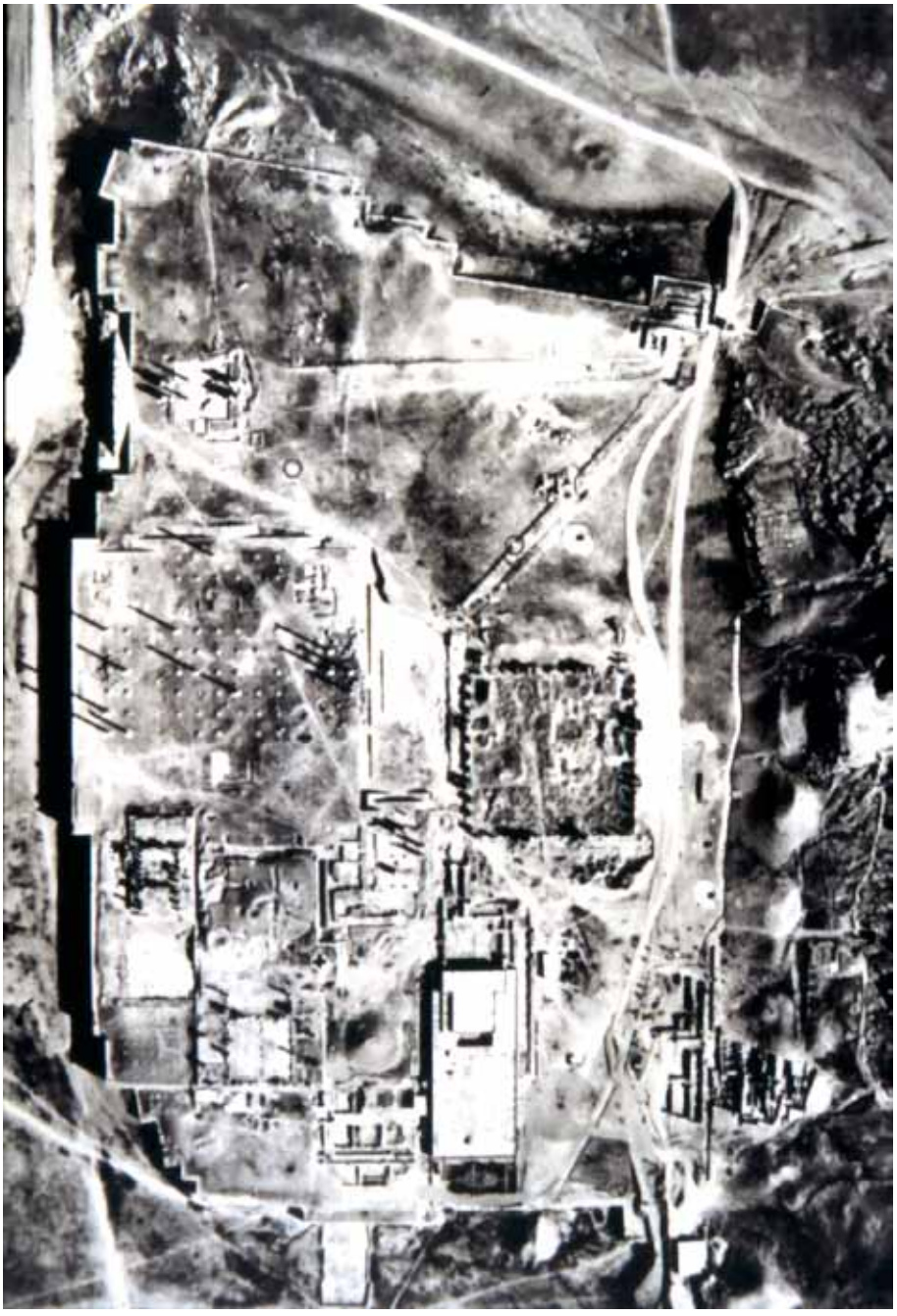


Fig. 11. Persepolis.
11. 4. Aerial view of Apadana. (SCHMIDT 1940).

the Safavid court of the Grand Vizier Mirza Mohammed Saru Taqi[12], appointed by Shah Abbas governor of Mazandaran and Gilan, the wooded and humid regions of Persia overlooking the Caspian Sea, where he had been responsible for the construction of cities and royal palaces of Farahbad and Ashraf. We owe to him the import of wood material, which characterizes not only the columns, but also the elegant capitals, entablatures, ceiling coffers and cornices of the Persians *talars*.

The *talar* is thus a type of building, a structure and architectural order very much present in Isfahan of the Safavid period. It condenses in its spaces a series of qualities, of characters that distinguish it as a recognizable and independent architectural form. Its appearance and spread overshadows the *Hasht-Behesht* (Eight Paradises) type palace, consisting of eight or four spaces in the corners of a central area, often covered by a dome, open on four axes of the *Chahar bagh* garden. We will see how the *talar* form syncretically gathers and expresses a whole range of experiences and motifs, that render the Persian architectural tradition, and its continuity and persistence, for at least 3000 years, an extraordinary *unicum*. The lofty and airy space of the *talar*, free from vertical partitions, is the most striking characteristic for visitors or travelers who have described and illustrated it over time. This great vertical extent carries with it an idea of "nobility" and uncommon quality of the space itself. Its transparency, enhanced by the slender proportions of the wooden columns, contrasted by the massive architectural masonry to which the *talar* is connected, allows for an extraordinary opening onto the surrounding landscape and at the same time, evidences those who live such a special structure.

The presence of the *talar* in Persian architecture dates back in ancient history to at least the Achaemenid period (560-330 BC), the hypostyle halls of the palaces of Cyrus in Pasargadae (around 550 BC), Darius and Xerxes in Persepolis (521-463 BC), or the tomb carved into the rock of Darius at Naqsh-e Rustam (5th cent. BC), though less illustrious predecessors have been suggested such as the wooden columns in front of the peasant houses of Mazendaran.[13]

The recurring element in these *talars* as in the Safavids is the motif of the hypostyle pillared hall. The Apadana at Persepolis presented itself as a great sacred forest, made up of about five hundred and

12. Babaie 2013, p. 157, 181-182.

13. Pope 1969, p. 6.

fifty columns,[14] emerging from a vast platform accessed by a double, majestic symmetrical staircase. Above the platform an impressive array of palaces were gathered: the Apadana of Xerxes, the so-called Hall of the Hundred Columns, Darius's palace and minor palaces, all in the form of hypostyle halls (Fig. 11).
The analysis of the complex of Persepolis is beyond the scope of this writing, for which there is, moreover, a vast bibliography.[15]
What is worth noting here is the persistence of the form of the "hypostyle hall" from the previous Achaemenid to the Safavid *talars*; moreover repeated, at least with regard to its architectural order, in the rock tomb of Darius at Naqsh-e Rustam, in the plain of Persepolis itself (Fig. 12).

This last image leads to a further reflection on the possible metaphorical meaning of the pillared hall, at least in Persian-Achaemenid setting. «The juxtaposition of a depiction of architectural columns below the throne supporters whose capitals clearly mirror the arm positions of the throne bearers, … suggests that the metaphorical reference to individuals, in particular the subjects of the king, could be extended specifically to architectural columns of the type used at Persepolis. The appearance on the northern door jambs of the Hundred Column hall at Persepolis of 100 guards bearing vertical spears that clearly are meant to mirror the 100 columns of the hall» or the series of human figures which accompany the Apadana staircase, as if supporting the enormous base, «is further evidence that the equation of an architectural column with a supporter of the power of the king was a well-accepted trope in the Achaemenid visual vocabulary» (Fig. 13).[16] On the other hand «the interpretation of a columnar support as a metaphor for a human figure was pervasive in the classical world as evidenced … by the use of caryatids and their male counterparts, telamones (both of which, interestingly were said by Vitruvius to represent Persians or supporters of the Persians)».[17]

The assumed continuity between the hypostyled Achaemenid halls and the Safavid *talars* prompts several reflections on the peculiarities of use of the "hypostyle hall" or "pillared hall" forms which would explain the spread in times and contexts different from

14. Pope 1965, p. 39.

15. To cite a few Perrot, Chipiez 1892, Herzfeld, 1935, Pope 1965.

16. Gopnik, 2010, p. 204-205.

17. Gopnik 2010, p. 204. Cf. Vitruvio 1990, 1.1.5, 1.1.6.; further cf. Hersey 2001, chap. 4, "Le cariatidi e il portico dei persiani", p. 73-81; Rykwert, 1996.

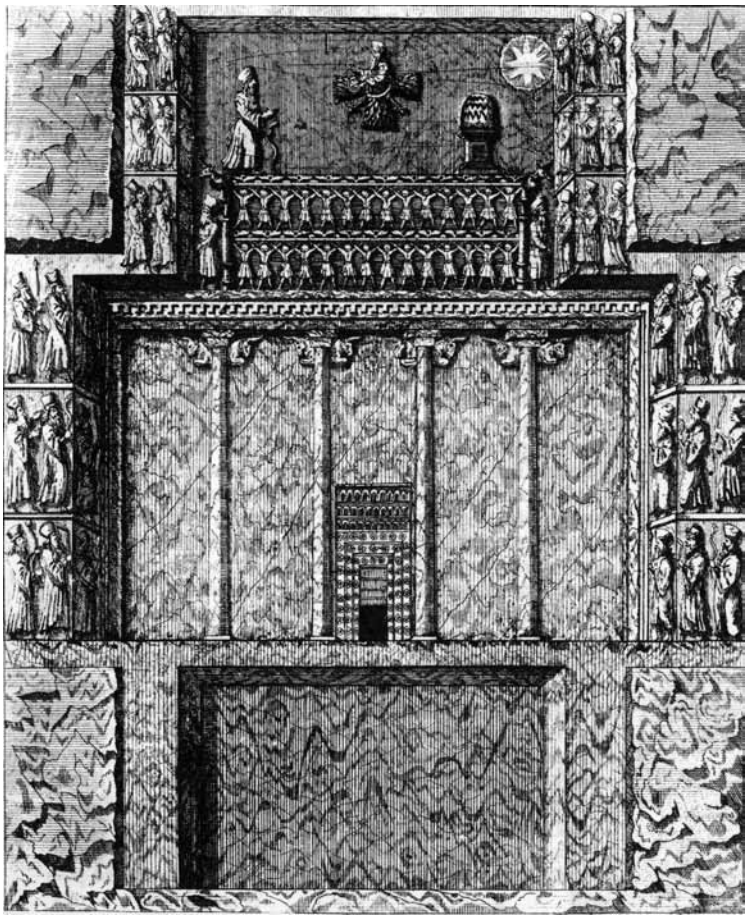


Fig. 12. Naqsh-i Rustam. 12. 1. Tomb of Darius. (KAEMPFER 1712, p. 313). 12. 2. View of the royal tomb complex (TEXIER 1842).

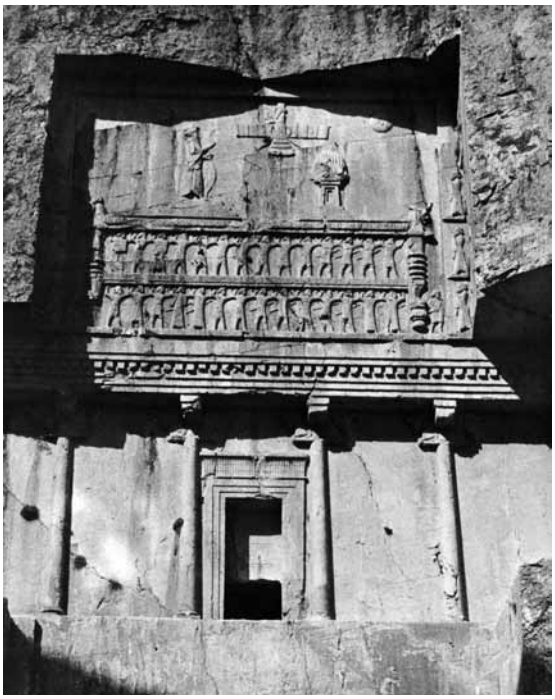


Fig. 12. Naqsh-i Rustam.
12. 3. The Tomb of Darius.
(DIEULAFOY 1884, I, pl. 10).
12. 4. Detail of the Tomb of Darius.
(POPE 1965, p. 44).

the original ones. If we examine the arrangement of the columns in these structures so far apart in time, beyond the obvious differences in materials, dimensions, architectural form, we may see a continuity and regularity in colonnade order, uninterrupted by bays or empty spaces or different dimensions of the spans. This peculiarity does not contemplate hierarchies or special space for authority, rather suggesting a less formal use, reserved for meetings of large number of persons. «If the function of these halls was ritual gathering and feasting, then it may well have been that visually emphasizing the large number of celebrants may have been as important as focusing on the power figure».[18]

We may further add, as Robert Venturi notes, that as opposed to the pillar or wall «the column form results from its dominant, precise function as a point support. It can direct space only incidentally in relation to other columns or elements».[19] In Safavid *talars* etiquette does not foresee a special space for the king, whose meetings take place in the *iwan* and in the covered central space of the palace, of which the *talar* constitutes, in Kampfer's words, a sort of "hall in the form of a scenic theater." A space "where guests ... sit next to the king" in convivial form, not subject to the hierarchy of the court rooms and where "they can more freely enjoy the beauty of the surrounding gardens": the so-called "architecture of conviviality".[20]

The hypostyle court rooms of the Mughals in India, almost contemporary with the Safavid *talars*, with stone columns rather than wood and perhaps also inspired by the ruins of Persepolis, however, take on a very different meaning.[21] In fact, these courtrooms (*Diwan-i Amm*), rectangular, open on three sides and on the long side of the rectangle against a background wall where the king's throne is, are not connected to a building, as in the Safavid *talars*, and are accessible, not by a succession of gardens or by a ceremonial route, as in the Isfahan palaces, but rather by a large courtyard reached by passing through a complex system of fortified gates (the Delhi Red Fort, the Agra Red Fort Agra and the Lahore Red Fort).

18. Gopnik 2010, p. 203.

19. Venturi1966, p. 41.

20. "It is in both design and landscaping that the specialized *talar* palaces of Isfahan – Talar-e Tavile, Ayenekhane, and Chehel Sotun – demonstrate the realization of the Safavid phenomenon I have called the architecture of conviviality", Babaie 2013, p. 213.

21. Babaie 2013, p. 179-180.

In these courtrooms the celebratory aspect of royal authority far outweighs the convivial aspect, determining a spatial structure of the columns in the hypostyle hall, which favor the greater width of the central span orthogonal to the back wall, where the throne is located.

The formal relationship linking the Safavid *talars* to the hypostyle Achaemenid halls, is also reflected in many aspects of the relative architectural orders. Apart of course from the diversity of decorative characters, dimensions and materials used, stone and wood, one can however recognize common aspects between the two architectural systems, referring to a feeling that is not so different, despite the great distance in time that separates them.

The image of a peasant's house in Mazendaran, a Persian province overlooking the Caspian Sea, published by Marcel Dieulafoy *L'Art antique de la Perse*[22] in the late 1800s, was emphasized as a rustic prototype inspiration for the elegant columns of the architectural order of Persepolis.[23] The wooden pillars of columns, derived from tree trunks, likely the predecessors of stone pillars, are slender and show a slight narrowing upwards, ending in a horizontal wooden crowning, well protruding right and left of the column, to better support the lintel of the ceiling. The columns rest on a base of rough-hewn stone and of roughly pyramidal frustum shape. Certainly the distance from this humble prototype to the elegant and sculpted Achaemenid architectural order is immense (Fig. 14). However some recurrences are striking. The pillar of the Persepolis column, is thin and slightly tapered, and twelve to one the proportion of the height to the diameter, thus considerably more slender than the Egyptian column, but also than the Doric one. The flutings much denser than any Egyptian or Greek column, significantly increases the effect of slenderness of the column. The base, in the form of bell or inverted lotus, symbol of perfection and creative power,[24] is barely distinguished from the stem by the interposition of a neck in the form of a torus; but the prevailing effect, also due to the fluted decoration of the base that anticipates that of the shaft, is quite a different integration and continuity from the emphasized distinction in Greek orders. Sometimes the base is not an isolated element, but is carved directly into the cylindrical drum of the column.

22. Dieulafoy 1884-85.
23. Perrot, Chipiez 1892, p. 98.
24. Pope 1965, p. 39.

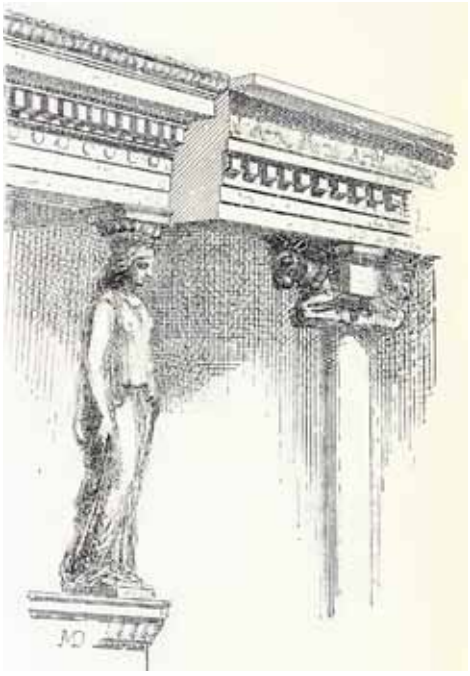


Fig. 13. Persepolis, human figures – columns.
13. 1. Human figures and columns.
(DIEULAFOY 1884, II, p. 72).
13. 2. Apadana, hall of 100 columns,
low-relief of a gate; the king appeals to the
guards. (WALSER 1980, p. 78).

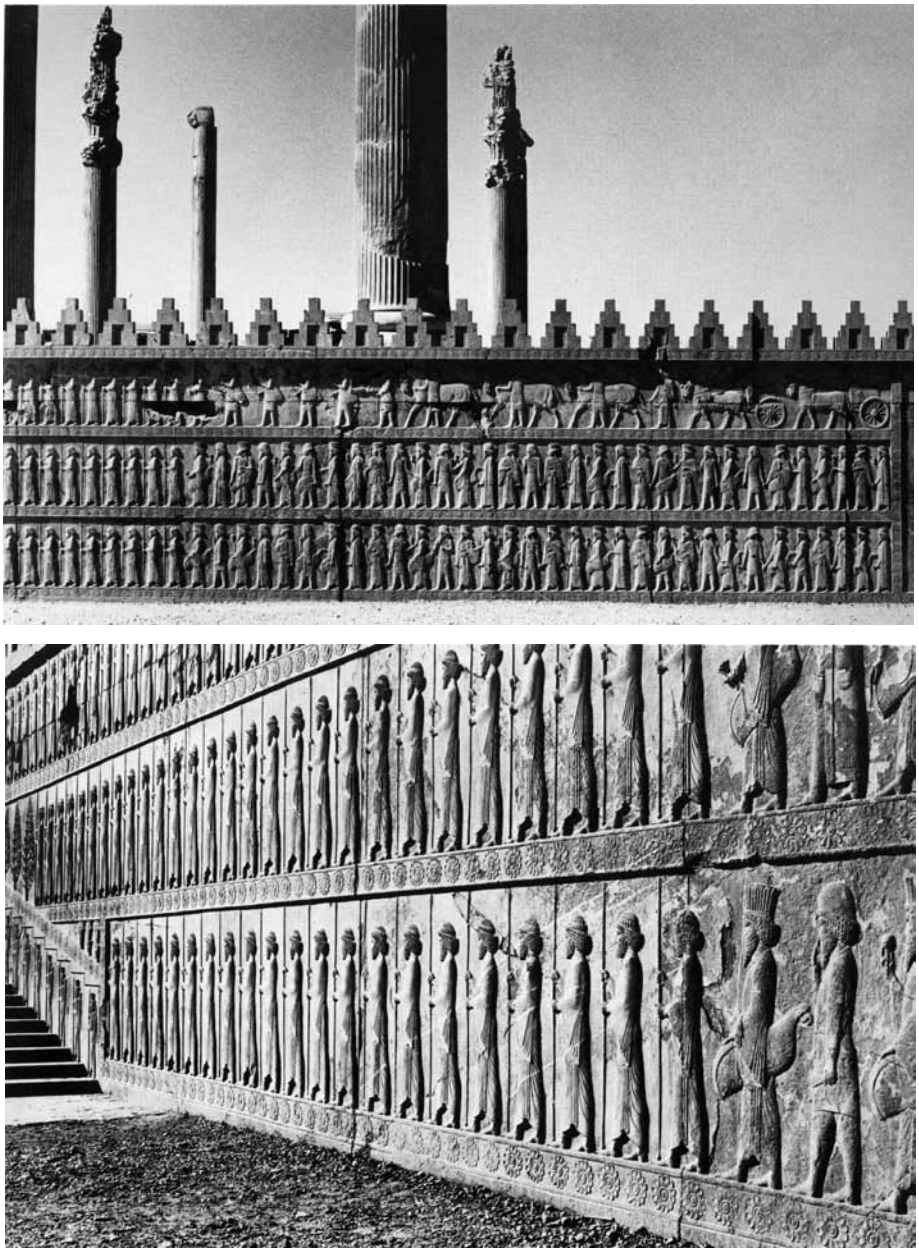


Fig. 13. Persepolis, human figures – columns.
13. 3. Apadana, eastern steps; the procession of the guests of the king. (WALSER 1980, p. 61).
13. 4. Apadana, eastern steps; the picket of susiane guards. (WALSER 1980, p. 61).

The capital interprets and perfects, with its zoomorphic depictions of bulls, symbol of a primary generative force,[25] the protrusions to the right and left of the pillar in the Mazendaran model, establishing itself as a horizontal support (and not central as in the Egyptian and Greek orders) of the architrave. Within the hollow between two powerful stone bull-heads, the crossbeam of the wooden roof structure is installed. It is interesting to note that there is no molding junction between the top of the column and the rectangular base of the capital, as is the case with the echinus of the Greek orders.[26] This absence and its visual dissatisfaction must have been cause for reflection and transformation of the form of the capital. The height of the column is thus reduced, and crowned with a capital divided vertically into two equal parts, but differing in shape. The lower part of cylindrical shape rests on the column and ends with an overturned echinus; from here the upper part of the capital originates which begins with circular base and ends with the volutes that recall the ionic order. «If, neglecting minor details, we only regard the shape as a whole, it does not seem unlikely that the first notion of it was suggested by the crowning tuft of a palm. The lower members of the capital would represent the dead twigs as they droop and fall about the steam of the tree; the upper members whose forms look upwards, would stand for the young shoots, which, full of fresh life and vigour, dart forward past the sere foliage with a slight outward curve».[27]

The tall and slender wooden columns that characterize the architectural order of the Safavid *talar* (Fig. 15) owe much to the original models described above. First and foremost, the common origin of the elegant wooden supports, back in vogue thanks to Shah Abbas's Grand Vizier, Mirza Mohammed Taqi Saru, former governor of Mazendaran, so as to cover, without massive weight, a great, tall and airy space.

The columns, faceted or fluted to minimize the visual heaviness, organically interpret the abovementioned plant metaphor. They rest on solid stone foundations, distributed regularly in the hypostyle logic, and end after a moderate but high tapering, with a capital that opens and blossoms, in continuation with the stem, multiplying the number and size of the geometric facets as stalactites or *muqarnas*.

The four crossing stone lions, on which the columns of Chehel Sutun around the central pool rest, recall, in a different way, the

25. Pope 1965, p. 39.

26. Perrot, Chipiez 1892, p. 92.

27. Perrot, Chipiez 1892, p. 92.

zoomorphic figures of the Achaemenid capitals, interpreting them as a solid foundation for the vertical thrust of the slender wooden columns.

If I may express my personal assessment, the *talar* form is presented here as «pleine possession des formes … non comme une lente et monotone application des 'règles', mais comme un bonheur rapide, comme l'ακμη des Grecs: le fléau de la balance n'oscille plus que faiblement. Ce que j'attends, ce n'est pas de la voir bientôt de nouveau pencher, encore moins le moment de la fixité absolue, mais, dans le miracle de cette fixité hésitante, le tremblement léger, imperceptible, qui m'indique qu'elle vit».[28]

The pillared hall in its various forms of hypostyled hall, as in the Apadana of Persepolis or *talar* as in Safavid Isfahan's palatial systems, then will have considerable success over time, reproducing, replicating and transforming, like genetic code, the meanings that are the origin of its appearance. The hypostyle space of the first congregational mosques of the Islamic world, especially in Arabia, Middle East, North Africa and Spain, with their unbroken series of columns and naves, whether orthogonal or parallel to the *qibla* wall, emphasizes the multitude of the faithful in the new religion; only in later times religious and civil authorities will modify the spatial disposition of these original prayer halls, introducing elements into hierarchical space, such as wider central naves or domed halls (*maqsura*) in front of the *mihrab.*[29]

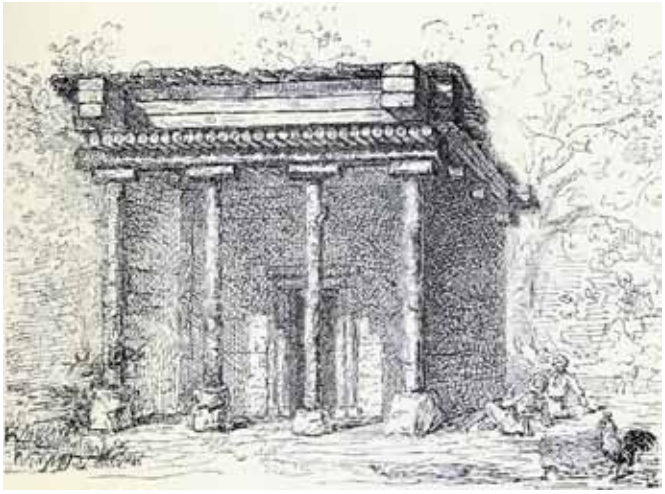
But the vibrant resurgence of this form in modern and contemporary architecture amazes and surprises.

In 1915 the Swedish architects Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz won the international competition for the South Cemetery in Stockholm (Fig. 16), also called the Woodland Cemetery (Skogskyrkogården). The site is a pine forest and the idea of the cemetery in a forest was already familiar in nordic areas. But Asplund's travels to Italy, familiarity with antiquity thus obtained, oriented the architects towards an "ingenious blend of art and nature."[30] In 1918-20 Asplund designs, within the cemetery, the Woodland Chapel (Skogskapellet). The plan of the chapel is surprising: its composition is so similar to the *talar* of Safavid Persia that you could mistake it for one, except perhaps for the refined detail that places the first row of columns against the entrance wall of the chapel.

28. Focillon 1943, p. 20.

29. On this theme cf., among others, Micara 1985.

30. Ahlberg 1950, p. 32.



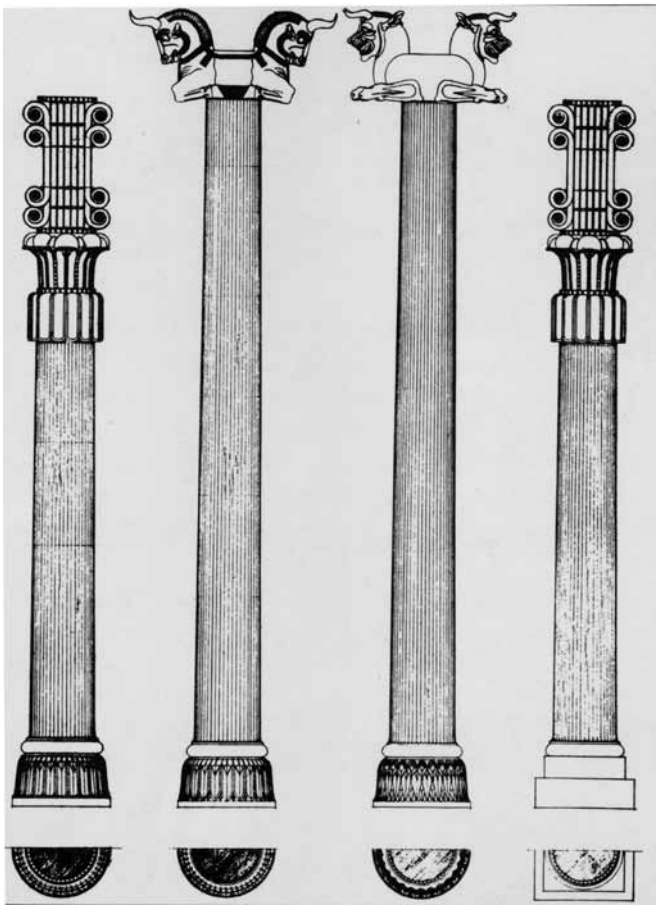


Fig. 14. The Achaemenid architectural order.
14. 1. The farm house of Mazendaran. (DIEULAFOY 1884, II, p. 47).
14. 2. Persepolis, types of columns and capitals. (POPE 1965, p. 32).

Fig. 14. The Achaemenid architectural order.
14. 3. View of the pillared hall of Xerxes.(PERROT, CHIPIEZ 1892, p. 301).
14. 4. Detail of the entablature of the pillared hall of Xerxes. (PERROT, CHIPIEZ 1892, p. 314).
14. 5. Perspective view of the interior hall of 100 columns (PERROT, CHIPIEZ 1892, p. 328).

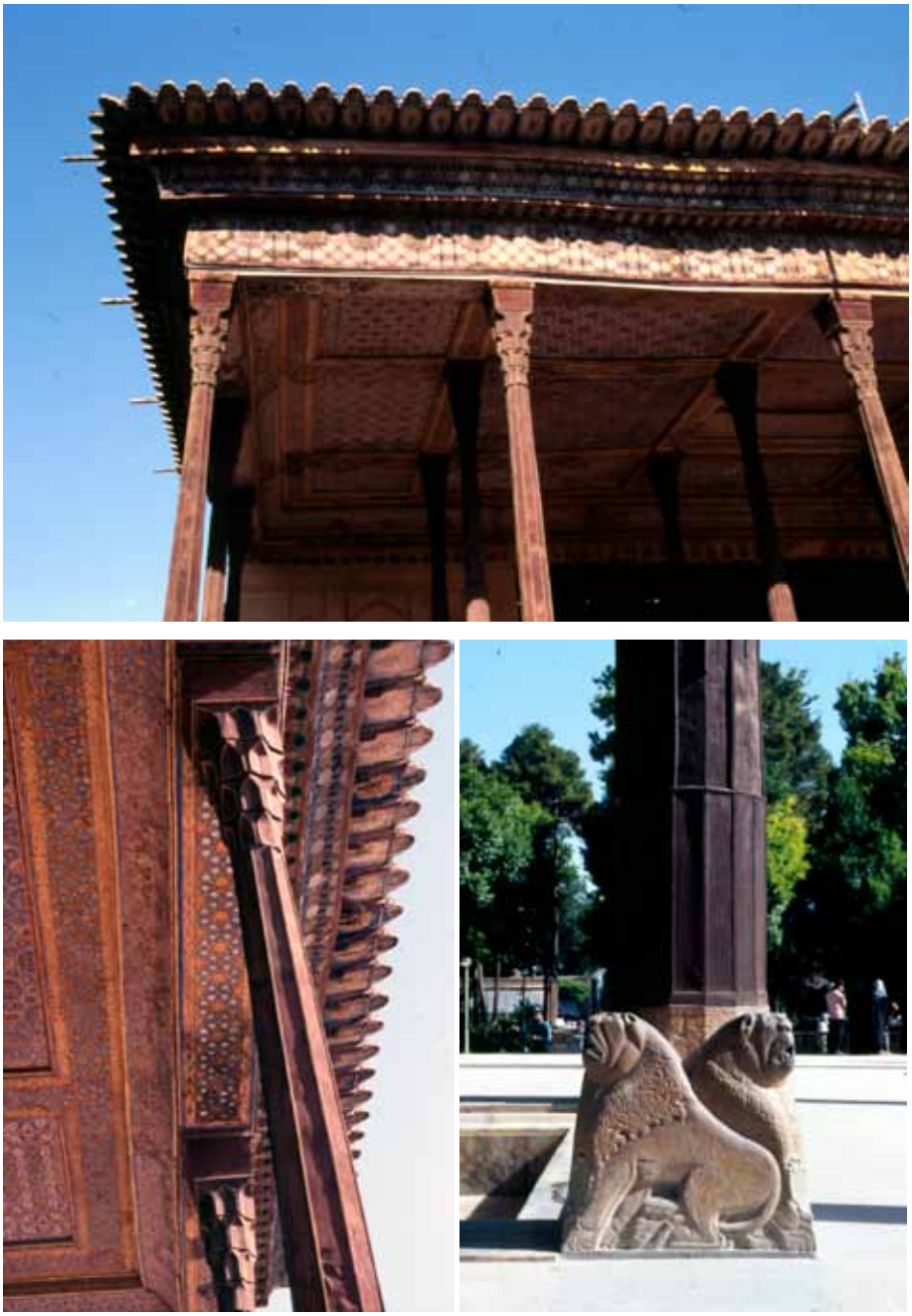


Fig. 15. The architectural order of the Safavids talar.
15. 1 – 15. 2 – 15. 3. Talar-i Chehel Sotun. (Photos: Ludovico Micara).

Fig. 15. The architectural order of the Safavids talar.
15. 4. Talar-i Chehel Sotun. (Photo: Ludovico Micara).
15. 5 – 15. 6. Talar Ali Qapu. (Photos: Ludovico Micara).

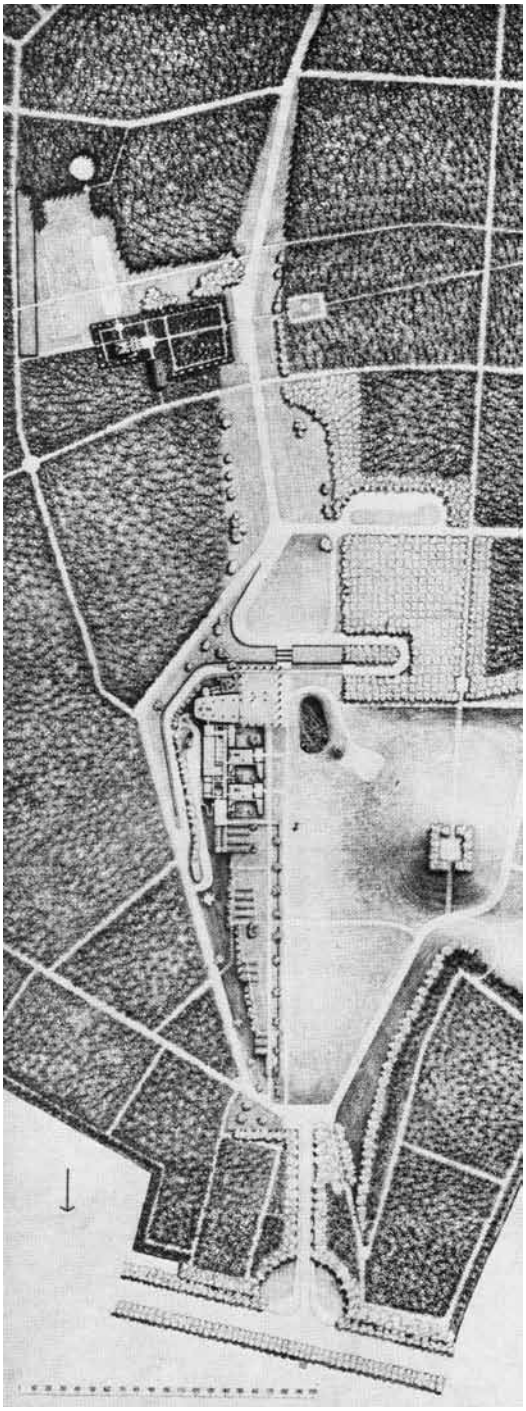


Fig. 16. Gunnar Asplund.
16. 1. Stoccolma, South Cemetery, Site plan.
(AHLBERG 1950, p. 184).

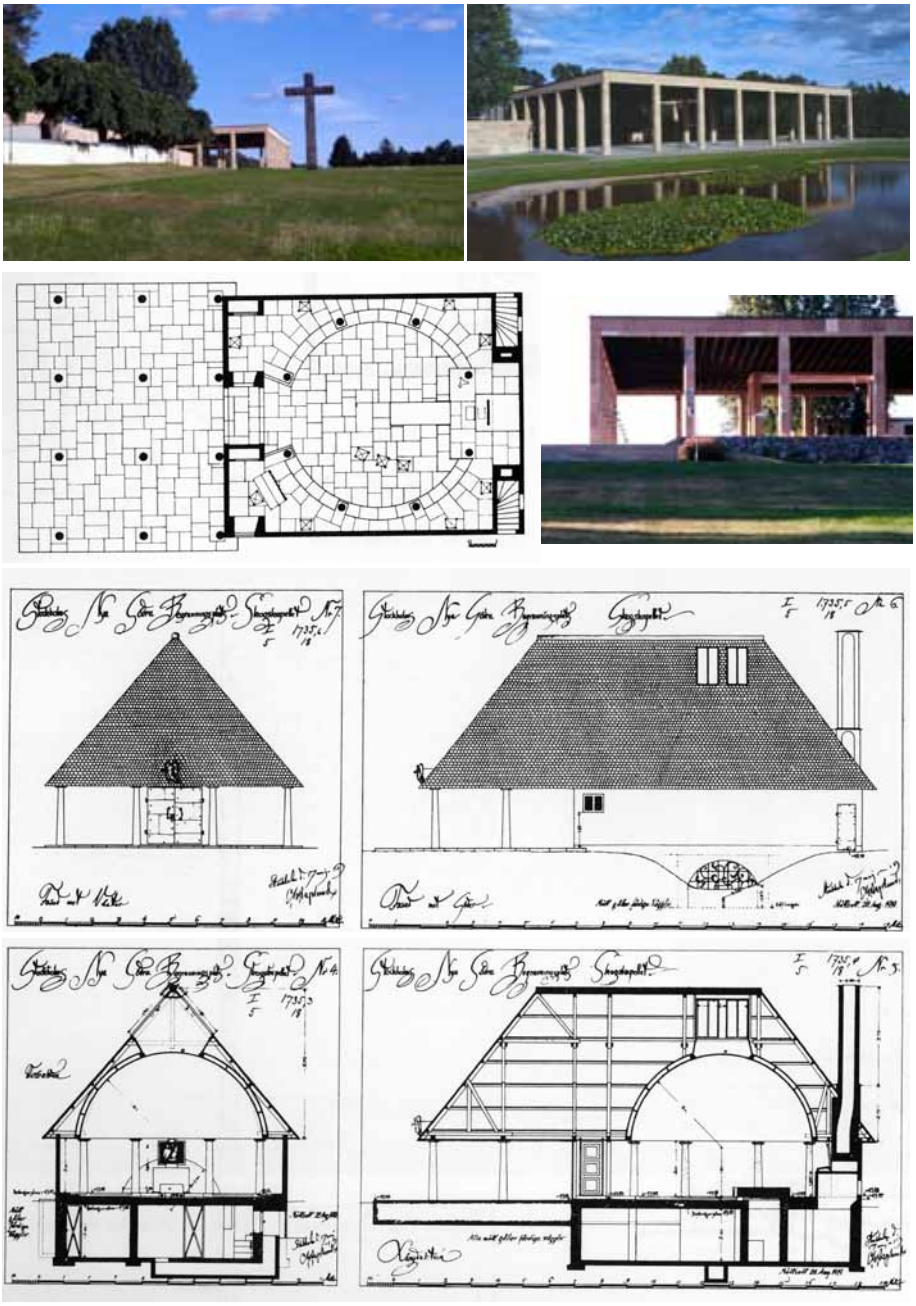


Fig. 16. Gunnar Asplund.
16. 2 – 16. 3 – 16. 4. Crematorium views. (Photos: Ludovico Micara).
16. 5. South Cemetery chapel of the forest, plan. (AHLBERG 1950, p. 95).
16. 6. South Cemetery chapel of the forest, elevations, sections. (AHLBERG 1950, p. 95).

A detail which appears to have been added at the last moment to the original project, before construction began. Obviously I do not think nor claim that Asplund managed to learn a type of building, such as the *talar*, so distant in time and space so as to probably be rarely known to the orientalists themselves in those years. I believe, rather, that when the opportunity arises, the *talar* form asserts itself as an architectural and spatial proposal suitable to expressing some contents that the specific situation requires. In this case, regardless of the form of roof, indebted to the Germanic model of the "woodland house" (but noting the extraordinary invention of the central dome in the interior), the pillared hall in front of the chapel constitutes the space of mediation between the building and the woods. Just as in the Safavid *talar*, this is the scenic space, before the actual celebratory space (in this case the chapel), open on three sides of the rectangular plan, barely raised off the ground and protected by a covering supported by wooden columns, where, as Kaempfer said, you may "enjoy more freely the beauty of nature and surrounding gardens".

But it is perhaps in the Crematorium (Skogskrematoriet) of that same Cemetery South of Stockholm, the last great work of Asplund in the years 1935-40, that the *talar* form lives in the monumental portico, a true open columnade hall in front of the large chapel. Its view from afar, in the gently hilly landscape in this part of the cemetery, the high and simple columns supporting the flaps of the covering, delineated by the rulings on the beams, converging and slightly inclined towards the central atrium, express that lofty "noble" space that distinguishes the *talar* form in its highest expression.

It is difficult not to associate the "Great Work Room" of the Frank Lloyd Wright Johnson Wax Building in Racine, Wisconsin, to the hypostyle halls of the Apadana Persepolis (Fig. 17). The creation of a hall "punctuated only by regularly spaced dendriform columns"[31] creates a sort of large common area, with no obvious hierarchical distribution, which suggests the use to be reserved for work by a large number of people. It is one of the first "open plan" work space for "white collar" employees of a large corporation, while the upstairs balcony overlooking the great hall, is reserved to the executive offices. The innovative element of Wright's hypostyled hall is the light that floods the artificial forest «bathing every surface and silhouetting the

31. Gopnik 2010, p. 203.

columns above. So rich that it appeared to have substance, the light seemed to be the matter of which the great room was made. This quality of light, enveloping the columns, lends a greater reality to the enclosed space. The columns generate the space; the light makes it tangible. Space, the stuff of architecture, is nowhere more available to human experience than it is in this building».[32] The invention, also constructive, which permits this extraordinary quality of the hall is the column that Wright called "dendriform", "tree-shaped" borrowing from botany the names of three of the four constituent segments, "stem", "chalice" and "petal", resting on a base with three spikes, called "crow's foot". The floral metaphor of Wright's architectural order very closely resembles that of the columns of the Apadana of Persepolis, such as the Safavid *talars*. But the technological and structural invention, the new materials in Frank Lloyd Wright's innovative use,[33] allow a new extraordinary transformation of the *talar* form. Still used to design the appropriate space for a multitude, it reacts to the new conditions of internal space, enclosed at its edges, capturing light from above, from the transparent sheet, formed by a grid of glass tubes, which leave a view of the sky between adjacent circular umbrellas. Thus the form «*prends corps dans la matière, par les outils, aux mains des hommes. C'est là que [les formes] existent, et non ailleurs, c'est à dire dans un monde puissamment concret, puissamment divers. La même forme conserve sa mesure, mais change de qualité selon la matière, l'outil ou la main*».[34]

The *talar* order is a form also dear to the architectural research of Ludovico Quaroni and those who, together with him, witnessed and loved the unique architecture of Isfahan and Safavid Persia.[35] How otherwise may we define the large portico in front of the mosque in the project for the Mosque and the Islamic Cultural Center in Rome (1976)[36], or the stunning avant-corps and its slender columns in the project for the Extension of the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome (1983)[37] and some of the many possible variations of the *talar* form (Fig. 18) designed on the occasion of specific designs?

32. Lipman 1986, p. 11.

33. Cf. Peter 1955-56, "Casabella" 806, 10/2011, p. 9.

34. Focillon 1943, p. 25.

35. See the many architectural projects developed for national and international contests by Ludovico Micara and Mahvash Alemi. Among those built see the front of the lecture halls and workrooms building for the Architectural Department in Pescara.

36. Cf. Micara 2015, p. 95-112.

37. Cf. Barbera 2015.

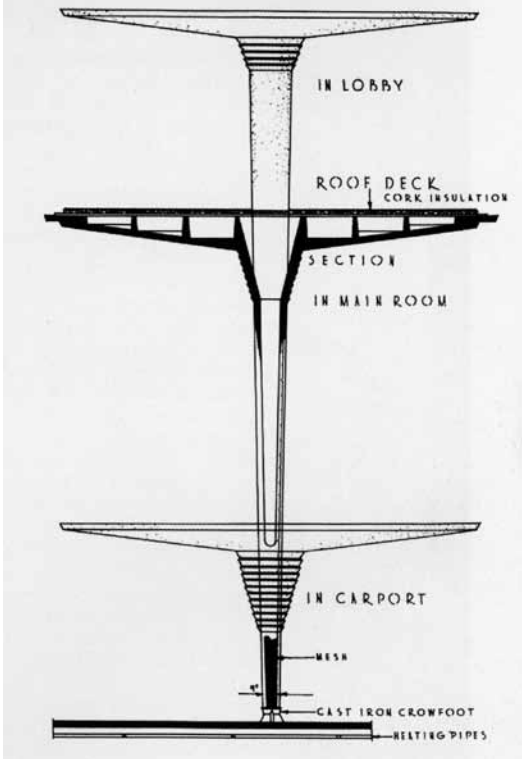


Fig. 17. Frank Lloyd Wright.
17. 1. Racine, Wisconsin, Johnson Wax Building, view of the Great Work Room. ("Casabella" 806, 10/2011, p. 15).
17. 2. Racine, Wisconsin, Johnson Wax Building, section of the tree-shaped column ("Casabella" 806, 10/2011, p. 13).

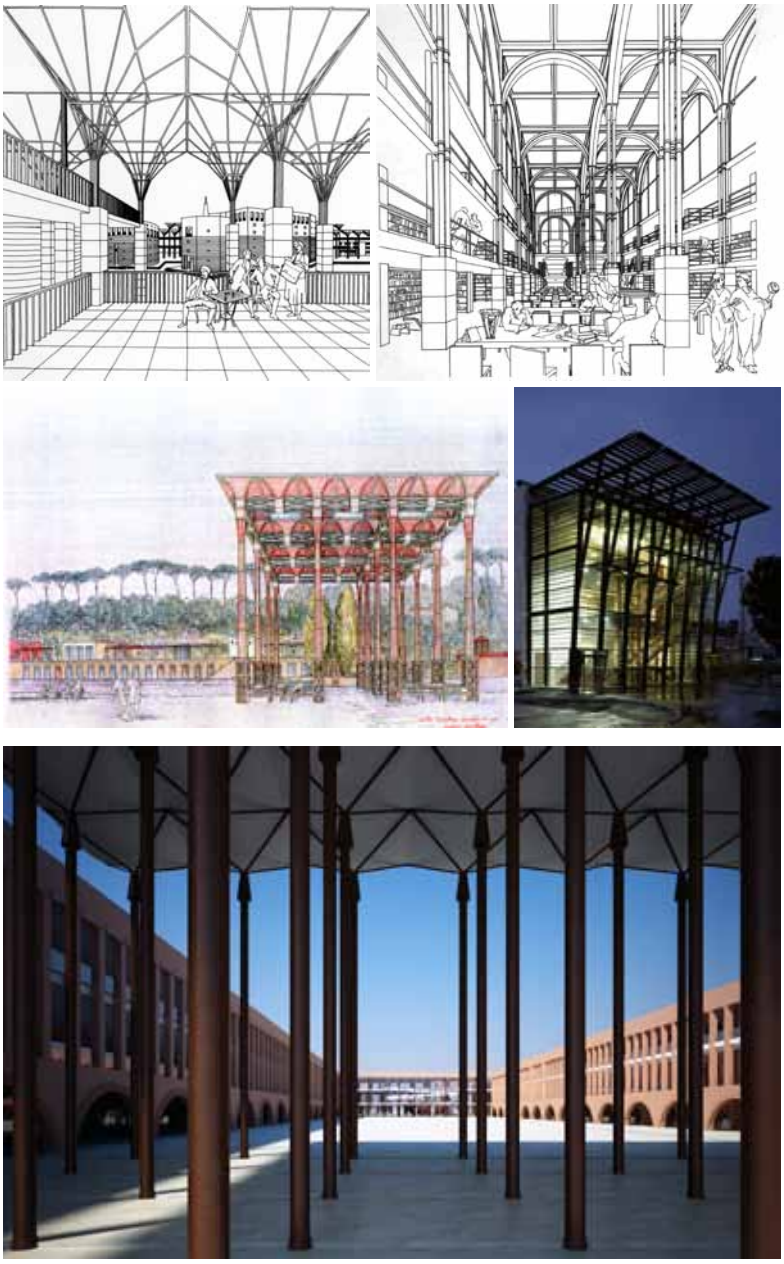


Fig. 18. Variation of talar shape. Design by Ludovico Micara and Mahvash Alemi.
18. 1. New Delhi, International competition "Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts".
18. 2. Alessandria d'Egitto, International competition "Bibliotheca Alexandrina".
18. 3. Roma, International competition"Riqualificazione del Borghetto Flaminio".
18. 4. Tehran, International competition "Islamic Revolution and the Holy Defense Museum".
18. 5. Ludovico Micara, entrance to new laboratories and classes at Faculty of Architecture, Pescara.
(Photo: Andrea Jemolo)

So the inventive and uninhibited unfolding of this form, as in the large reflective canopy by Norman Foster in the Vieux Port of Marseille (Fig. 19), or the spectacular open gallery of the cultural center of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation by Renzo Piano in Athens (Fig. 20) is amazing. I would like to conclude with a quotation of Henri Focillon about the "puissance de l'ordre formel": «*C'est dans l'état de sécurité d'une haute définition intellectuelle que l'esprit est vraiment libre. La puissance de l'ordre formel autorise seule l'aisance de la création, son caractère spontané. La plus grande multiplicité des expériences et des variations est fonction de la rigueur des cadres, tandis que l'état de liberté indéterminée conduit fatalement à l'imitation*». [38]

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38. Focillon 1943, p. 25.

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Fig. 19. Foster and Partners, Marsiglia, Vieux Port, mirroring porch.

Fig. 20. Renzo Piano, Athen, Cultural Center of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, attic.

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