



ČAHĀRBĀĠ-E EŞFAHĀN

Č(AH)ĀRBĀĠ-E EŞFAHĀN, the name of a broad avenue (maximum width 48 m/52 yards) which was a key feature of the city of Isfahan as replanned by Shah ‘Abbās I after he had designated the city the new capital of the Safavid state in 1006/1597-98. The name Čahārbāġ (lit. four gardens) is probably a reference to the four vineyards which the shah is said to have first rented and then purchased in order to secure the necessary right-of-way (Curzon, II, p. 38). The avenue ran for 1,620 yards (Kaempfer, I, p. 173) or 1,751 yards (Le Bruyn, I, p. 198) to the [Allāhverdī Khan](#) bridge across the Zāyandarūd. This bridge, built in 1011/1602-03, is popularly known as the *sī-o-se pol* “the bridge of thirty-three [arches],” although it is said (Eskandar Beg, p. 544) that there were originally forty arches. Its length is variously given as “not much less than 350 yards” (Tavernier, p. 456), 360 yards (Chardin, VIII, p. 30), 490 yards (Kaempfer, I, p. 167, 173), and 540 yards (Le Bruyn, I, p. 198). Kaempfer explains (I, p. 167) that the figure of 490 yards includes the abutments; otherwise, the length is 400 yards. South of the river the Čahārbāġ continued for more than a mile (Kaempfer, I, p. 173, has 2,200 yards; Le Bruyn, I, p. 198, 2,045 yards) through the Hazārjarīb, an area of pleasure gardens open to the public and a favorite residential area for members of the court and the nobility generally. Curzon gives lower figures for the northern section of the Čahārbāġ (1,350 yards) and for the bridge (388 yards), but it is clear that the total length of the Čahārbāġ could not have been less than two miles and may have been as much as two and a half miles.

All sources agree that Shah ‘Abbās never intended the Čahārbāġ to be a



highway; rather, the avenue and its gardens were to be a place of recreation. Contemporary observers describe the Čahārbāġ in Safavid times as a scene of animated social and commercial activity, and the women of the harem were able to gaze down upon the “merry scene” below from the seclusion of a latticed-windowed pavilion. Down the middle of the Čahārbāġ water “conducted in stone channels” fell in “miniature cascades from terrace to terrace.” Each side of this central channel was lined with plane trees, cypresses, pines, and junipers and was flanked by a pedestrian walk (Curzon, II, p. 38; Honarfarr, pp. 482ff.). Beginning in 1018/1609, the women of the royal harem were allowed to promenade unveiled in the Čahārbāġ every Wednesday and to amuse themselves in the avenue and the numerous adjoining gardens until after dark, when the scene would be illuminated by torches and candles. On such days the entire area was declared “out of bounds” (*qoroq*) for men, and only women vendors were allowed there (Honarfarr, p. 480).

By the late 13th/19th century, no trace of the Hazārjarīb remained, and the northern portion of the Čahārbāġ spoke “only in choked and faltering accents of its vanquished glory” (Curzon, II, p. 47). In modern Isfahan, only the section of the avenue north of the bridge continues to exist, as a busy shopping street.

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H. Gaube, *Iranian Cities*, New York, 1979, p. 86.

R. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, Cambridge, 1980, chap. 7. Honarfarr, *Esfahān*, pp. 479ff.

Idem, “Čahārbāg-e Ešfahān,” *Honar o mardom*, nos. 96-97, 1349 Š./1970, pp. 2-14.

D. Wilber, “Aspects of the Safavid Ensemble at Isfahan,” *Iranian Studies* 7/3-4, 1974. (“Studies on Isfahan. Proceedings of The Isfahan Colloquium, Part II, pp. 406-15 (fig. 1 on p. 412 is a useful reconstruction of the royal ensemble at Isfahan, showing the northern section of the Čahārbāg, and the palace and garden quarter).

A. Rafīī Mehrābādī, *Ātār-e mellī-e Ešfahān*, Tehran, 1352 Š./1974, pp. 160-73.