



ČEHĚL SOTŪN, QAZVIN

ČEHĚL SOTŪN, QAZVĪN, a Safavid pavilion that stands amid gardens in the central *meydān* (square) of the old city and in which the QazvĪn museum is installed. QazvĪn was the capital of Persia between 955/1548, when Shah Ṭahmāsb I settled the court there, and 1005/1596-97, when Shah ‘Abbās I moved it to Isfahan. The Čehel SotŪn (lit. “forty columns,” a popular designation that has no meaning in reference to the building) was originally part of the early Safavid palace complex. The only other surviving part of the palace is a free-standing portal structure (‘Ālī Qāpū), which, owing to its function as police headquarters for QazvĪn, has never been properly photographed or studied. The palace precinct is located in what must have been the center of the later Safavid city (Ešrāqī, pp. 20ff; [Figure 9](#)). The *bāzār*, the Friday mosque, and the pre-Safavid city lie to the west and south of it, which suggests that the site was originally near the northern perimeter of the city, for in Iran before the 11th/17th century citadels and princely residences generally were located adjacent to city walls. As QazvĪn expanded toward the north, the palace precinct was then engulfed in the city proper, perhaps after the shift of the capital to Isfahan.

The pavilion itself is generally attributed to Shah Ṭahmāsb, but the attribution remains uncertain in the absence of a building inscription (Kleiss, 1976). The interior was radically altered in the Qajar period (13th/19th century), but in the 1350s Š./1970s it was largely restored to its original appearance.



The building consists of two stories. On the ground floor a quadrangular central room (8.40 x 5.10 m) communicates with the surrounding gardens through four *ayvāns*, one on each side. Each *ayvān* was originally connected to the central room by three short passages. The four corners between the *ayvāns* contain four rooms, each on a different plan. On the exterior instead of corners there are oblique walls, so that the plan is that of an unequal octagon. Around the exterior of the structure eight massive columns and eight corner piers with engaged columns support a gallery encircling the upper story, which is reached via a bent staircase leading from the southeastern corner room. Upstairs thirty-two slender wooden supports carry the roof of the gallery. The main portion of the upper story consists of a large cruciform hall, with four corner rooms, each with a small adjacent chamber. Whereas the rooms on the ground floor and the *ayvāns* are vaulted, all the rooms on the upper story have flat wooden ceilings.

Restoration work in the 1350s Š./1970s revealed the remains of wall paintings on both levels. Upstairs, on the south wall of the western arm of the cruciform hall, there is a very lively representation of a harem girl wearing European dress in the style of the 16-17th centuries.

The pavilion in Qazvīn in its present form is a unique survival from the Safavid period. Its Safavid and Qajar decorations are clearly distinguishable: tiles, mostly of the Qajar period, on the exterior and both tiles and wall paintings from the original Safavid structure on the interior. The high quality of the surviving wall paintings suggests a date in the period when Qazvīn was the capital. In the development of Persian palace architecture the pavilion thus foreshadows the fully developed style of Safavid pavilion exemplified by the Hašt Behešt at Isfahan.

Three early Safavid glazed tiles, each bearing the image of an angel, are relevant to discussion of the building. One is to be found in the pavilion itself, in the collection of the Qazvīn museum; another, similar example, said to have come from Qazvīn, is in a private collection; and a third, of unknown origin, is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Luschey-Schmeisser). These pieces convey an impression of the type and quality of ceramic decoration on the walls of the palace pavilion in the early Safavid period.



The Čehel Sotūn palace at Qazvīn is referred to in a number of Safavid chronicles and in the works of European travelers (see refs. in *EI*², pp. 860-61, 862-63). Shah Esmā'īl II, probably Solṭān-Moḥammadšāh, and Shah 'Abbās I were enthroned there. On 27 Jomādā 984/22 August 1576 there was a sumptuous celebration in the Čehel Sotūn hall on the occasion of the coronation of Esmā'īl II (Eskandar Beg, I, p. 207; tr. Savory, I, pp. 307-08), and in 996/1587-88 'Abbās I was enthroned there (Müller, p. 30).

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Figure 9. Sketch plan of Qazvīn in the Safavid period. After E. Ešrāqī.