



GARDEN VI. ISLAMIC PERIOD

Donald Wilber's study of the Persian garden remains the most comprehensive (1979a), to which should be added the articles by Ettinghausen and Pinder-Wilson in the proceedings of the Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the Islamic Garden (eds., Macdougall and Ettinghausen). Much of the detail found in these and other accessible sources has been omitted here. This discussion concerns the evolution of the formal aspects of gardens, as known from archaeological, textual, and pictorial evidence.

Pre-Mongol garden estates. The great wealth required to finance the acquisition, development, and maintenance of a formal garden, especially in the Persian arid landscape, made this type of holding a symbol of power and prosperity. Little is known about the form of the Persian garden before the Islamic period, but its existence at that time and its importance as both a symbol of power and resource for pleasure is widely acknowledged (Pinder-Wilson, pp. 71-73). The 'Abbasids continued this tradition, and detailed accounts of their fabled gardens in Baghdad (Lassner, p. 90) and Samarra (Herzfeld), as well as the ruins of the latter, testify to the antiquity of the common elements found in Persian gardens through the ages. The density of urban fabric deterred most princes from building garden tracts within a city. Most lay outside the city walls or in the countryside. The Buyid 'Azod-al-Dawla (r. 338-72/949-83, q.v.) constructed a royal suburb outside Shiraz, called Kard-e Fanā Ḳosrow, which contained an extensive commercial district as well as large gardens and palaces (Moqaddasī/Maqdesī, pp. 430-31; Ebn al-Balkī, p. 132). At Baghdad, however, he incurred great expense when he decided to



transform a former polo field (Maydān Subuktekīn) and the adjacent residences within the town into a garden (Ebn Kaṭīb, tr. Lassner, pp. 92-94; Le Strange, pp. 235-38). The Saljuqids built several garden estates at Isfahan, most of them outside of the city gates, each 1000 *jarībs* in area. The Qaṣr-e Moḡīra had a garden with many trees; the Bāḡ-e Kārān, south of the city and bordering the river had two palaces, one on either side; the Bāḡ-e Aḥmad Sīāh resembled a fortification (*ḥeṣn*); the Bāḡ-e Bakr included a *takīyagāh* with thrones (perhaps a throne platform), as well as several pavilions (*qaṣr*). All had pools fed by channels of running water (Māfarrūkī, pp. 52-58; tr., pp. 25-28; Rāvandī, pp. 132). No traces of these early gardens remain.

For the approximately contemporary Ghaznavids (366-582/998-1186), both the archeological and literary sources are rich. Ghazna was well-watered by streams but had few gardens before this time (Eṣṭakrī, p. 280; Moqaddasī/Maqdesī, p. 304). The Ghaznavids exploited these resources and developed extensive gardens there. Maḥmūd's burial site (d. 421/1030) is believed to mark the location of the celebrated Bāḡ-e Pīrūzī (q.v.), and excavations have brought to light the splendid palace of Mas'ūd III (492-508/1099-1114; Bombaci; Scerrato). Large enclosed tracts nearby that have yet to be excavated may represent other Ghaznavid gardens.

Mas'ūd I (421-32/1030-40) founded numerous *bāḡs* in or near the major towns of Balk, Herāt, Bost, Nīšāpūr, and Ġazna (Bayhaqī, *passim*). The sultan moved about between them, spending little time in any one place. At Herāt, Balk, and possibly even Laṣkarī Bāzār, he seems to have used existing installations and expanded them (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 139-40; Allen, 1988). The Herāt garden contained a *kūšk*; that of Balk included the old *kūšk* and new buildings as well as a *bāzār*. At Nīšāpūr Mas'ūd designed his own palace, introducing there for the first time (Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāz, p. 18, tr. p. 155) the *meydān* (large court) and reception hall (*dargāh*). The large courtyard complex which was excavated ("Tepe Madrasa"; Wilkinson, pp. 47-185) may correspond to this foundation, as most of it dates from the time of Mas'ūd. The garden itself could have been planted in the courtyard or in a tract nearby. But the excavated remains and the texts describing Mas'ūd I's gardens indicated that the buildings were richly decorated.

It is at Laṣkarī Bāzār, however, that the most significant traces of the pre-Mongol garden architecture have been discovered. The site of this royal city lies 6 km north of Bost (q.v.), the main urban center on the route from Sīstān to India in early Islamic times. Three huge complexes line the east bank of the



Helmand River. On the south was a very large palace courtyard (Schlumberger, sec. C); on the north, a group of palatial dwellings (sec. A); and in the middle a “chateau” or *kūšk* (sec. B) overlooking the river on the west, with a large enclosed garden in the east (Figure 1). While some of the unidentified enclosures surrounding sections A and C at Laškarī Bāzār may have been gardens, there is no doubt about the function of the central tract (sec. B). The original garden consisted of a square enclosure with gate houses on the cross-axes and a square pavilion in the center. The garden was extended westward to form a rectangle when the large river palace was built. The plan of the palace is a cross inscribed in a square; the building stood on a platform, with four *ayvāns* open to the exterior on the axes and square rooms in the corners (Schlumberger, pl. 31; Figure 2). In front of each *ayvān* a small patio projected from the platform. A hexagonal basin was set in the center of the ground floor. Small patios project from the platform in front of the axial *ayvāns*. With its two levels of apartments divided by cross-axial hallways, a pattern familiar from Central Asia (e.g., 9th-cent. Kirk Kiz at Termed; see Pugachenkova and Rempel, fig. 35), this building would have provided more substantial living quarters, while the pavilion was reserved for briefer visits.

The adjoining enclosure on the north (area A) may have served as yet another type of garden. In literary sources palaces are described as having several different types of gardens, distinguished by orchards, floral plots, fowl, game, and zoological curiosities. Bayhaqī (ed. Fayyāz, p. 659, tr. p. 447) reports a round-up of beasts from the countryside, driven into the garden in the Dašt-e Langān (near Bost) in 428/1036. Mas‘ūd watched the slaughter from a vantage point. A late 12th century *bāg* near the Caspian Sea had several gardens as well as a large *sarāy*, a *meydān*, and a pavilion (*hawz-kāna*) known as the wind house (*bād-kāna*; Ebn Esfandiār, II, pp. 122-23). As at Laškarī Bāzār, residential quarters (*sarāy*) stood near, but apart, from the pleasure gardens. This complex had two gardens, one with a pavilion in the center containing a pool and a larger garden containing an artificial lake. A pavilion reached by a drawbridge was erected in the middle of this fish-stocked lake. Half of the garden was planted with all kinds of trees and flowers, while the other was a menagerie including a giraffe. The smaller garden also served as an aviary, complete with granary. Ebn Esfandiār reports that Ḥosām-al-Dawla Šahriār (r. 466-503/1074-110), the *espaḥbad* of Ṭabarestān, owned many such estates throughout his realm (II, pp. 122). No traces of these estates have been recorded, but some of the Safavid and later gardens on the Caspian may have re-used the earlier installations (see below).



Garden estates of the 13th to 15th centuries. The Mongols and Timurids continued the practice of their predecessors of entertaining important guests and foreign envoys in their gardens, but they adapted the prevailing ‘Abbasid model to customs derived from steppe culture. Ceremonial surrounding events, such as weddings or investitures, required an outdoor setting. Such occasions still took place in magnificent tents, pitched in the open meadow, but, alternatively, the formal garden and pavilion could provide a substitute. In its design the garden changed little, with the possible exception of the disappearance of the massive *kūšk*. Little information is available for the forms taken by domestic quarters, which probably were accommodated in elaborate versions of the courtyard house or in facilities built into the garden enclosure.

Attention focused on developing the architectural complexity of the pavilion and adapting landscape architecture to challenging terrain. The mountain-top “hunting lodge” of the il-khan Abaqa/Abāqā (663-80 /1265-82; q.v.), excavated at Taqt-e Solaymān in Azarbaijan, re-used a Sasanian temple site built beside the lake formed by a volcanic crater (Naumann, pp. 74-112). The natural lake was enclosed to form a sea-garden like those artificially created in the past. Some of the pavilions surrounding the court looked out on the lake, while others were perched on the enceinte. The two magnificent octagonal pavilions attached to the west side of the court may have been intended to overlook gardens (Naumann, pp. 84-97).

The most famous Mongol garden described by texts was that of Ūjān near Tabrīz, built in 701/1302 by Ġāzān Khan. It consisted of a walled enclosure with tanks and cisterns, avenues planted with willows, and in the center a very large and splendid tent (*ḵargāh*) containing a throne (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme’ al-tawārīḵ*, Baku, pp. 346-48; idem, *Tārīḵ-e ġāzānī*, pp. 137-41; Pinder-Wilson, pp. 76-77). The term *ḵargāh* seems later to refer also to a platform for such a tent or a masonry support for a tent (for a similar ambiguous use of this term in the description of a garden at Yazd, cf. Aḥmad b. Ḥosayn, pp. 205, 211; masonry structure in Bāḡ-e *ḵargāh* in Safavid Isfahan; see Alemi, 1997, p. 78). At Laškarī Bāzār the paved platform with a polylobed pool in the center that replaced the Ghaznavid garden pavilion at an unspecified date may also have been served as a tent base (Schlumberger, pp. 81-82).

Descriptions of gardens in the Timurid chronicles (Šāmī, Yazdī, Ebn ‘Arabšāh, ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Samarqandī, Ḥāfeẓ-e Abrū) are supplemented by the vivid accounts of Ruy González de Clavijo, the Spanish envoy to Tīmūr (1403-06),



and the memoirs of Bābor (d. 937/1530), himself a Timurid descendant, founder of the Mughal dynasty of India, and a great patron of gardens. Donald Wilber has described in detail these gardens, which formed a “necklace” around Samarkand and proliferated at Herāt (Wilber, 1979b; Allen, 1981, pp. 192-227). Pinder-Wilson utilized the early 16th century treatise *Eršād al-zerāʿa* (q.v.) on husbandry by Qāsem b. Yūsuf Abūnaṣrī to define the ideal *čahārbağ*. Pictorial sources have also been used to amplify this definition (see below), as the garden was a favorite theme of Timurid painters (see [Figure 3](#)).

The standing remains of Timurid palaces, however, are disappointing, and only three sites have been (partially) excavated. At Šahr-e Sabz excavations behind the great portal of the Aq Sarāy (781-98/1379-96; Golombek and Wilber, 1988, pp. 271-275) uncovered a large rectangular courtyard but no trace of the magnificent gardens that Clavijo found beyond it. Near Samarkand, on the banks of the Dargom River, I. A. Sukharev conducted excavations at Tīmūr’s garden palace known as Dawlatābād, uncovering two adjoining walled, square areas, one with a central platform for a pavilion, the other presumably the vineyards described in texts (Pugachenkova 1987, pp. 177-78). On the slopes of the hill of Čopan Ātā northeast of Samarkand, M. E. Masson found the remains of the Bāğ-e Meydān, a terraced garden leading up to a dodecagonal platform with circular pool in the center and a square *takṭgāh* (throne-place), paved in onyx, to the side; close by were the foundations of a building with a water conduit leading to an octagonal pool (Pugachenkova, 1976, p. 45; idem, 1981, p. 57; idem, 1987, p. 178). Elaborately fluted stone columns and glazed tile found in the vicinity of Bāğ-e Meydān are believed to come from the Čehel Sotūn palace and Uluğ Beg’s Čīnī-kāna (Porcelain pavilion; Pugachenkova, 1976, p. 178).

Of the dozens of garden residences at Herāt, described by K̄vāndamīr (see Allen, pp. 192-223), nothing remains, with the possible exception of the “Namakdān,” a twelve-sided, two-story pavilion at Gāzorgāh (q.v.), which some scholars attribute to this period ([PLATE I](#); O’Kane, 1987, pp. 299-300; for a 17th century dating see Golombek, 1969, p. 70). The site of Mīr ‘Alī-Šīr Navā’ī’s *bāğčā* at Gāzorgāh, identified by Allen on the basis of aerial photographs and traces on the ground, consisted of “a loosely axial distribution of pavilions, reservoirs, and gardens behind a large entry complex” (1983, p. 52).

The Timurid histories of Yazd are replete with descriptions of gardens. A district called Aharestān, contained numerous gardens, ranging in size and pretension from modest to equivalents of the princely establishments of



Samarkand and Herāt. Only the older estates, such as the Bāḡ-e Lāstān, which became the governor's residence, contained a mansion (*qaṣr*) and a pavilion (Aḥmad b. Ḥosayn, pp. 73, 87, 195-213). Little is known of the garden estates of Turkmen rulers in Tabrīz and other towns except for the 'Ešratābād gardens and the extraordinary octagonal pavilion of the Hašt Behešt palace of Üzün Ḥasan, which was described by an Italian merchant (trans. Grey, pp. 173-75). Traces of the summer residence of the Šarvānšāhs, including a two-story pavilion, with a cross-in-square plan, exist in the village of Nardaran on the Apsheron peninsula about 2 km from the Caspian Sea (Golombek and Wilber, p. 398).

The typical garden estate during this period appears to have been a rectilinear enclosure, surrounded by a wall with one or more prominent gates and normally containing one or more pavilions. Water channels intersected the garden following an orthogonal or geometric pattern. The Bāḡ-e Delgošā at Samarkand was apportioned "in accordance with geometry," its garden plots forming an interlocking grid of hexagons and triangles surrounding the square pavilions (Yazdī, ed. Elāhdād, II, pp. 6-9, ed. 'Abbāsī, II, p. 14; Šāmī, I, p. 169). The plantings combined shade, fruit, and ornamental trees with flowerbeds, designed so that the garden was continually in bloom. Gardens built on the slopes of a hill were terraced. The most common forms of garden pavilions as suggested by texts are the cross-in-square plan with its four axial *ayvans* looking out on the garden and the hall with columned porches (*talār*). There were also polygonal pavilions, like the octagon of the Hašt Behešt at Tabrīz and those depicted in miniature paintings. All three forms provided sheltered places from which to view and savor the garden, both at ground level and from balconies. In front of the pavilion extended a paved patio with recessed pool (for ideal dimension, see Subtelny, pp. 110-28).

Safavid and later garden estates. The gardens of the Safavids are the best known and appreciated today because some of them have actually survived, particularly in Isfahan. Shah 'Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629) included large garden areas in his master scheme for the development of Isfahan as the imperial capital. The royal gardens were aligned with the old Timurid garden, Naqš-e Jahān, which became the Meydān-e Šāh, or with the great avenue, the Čahārbāḡ (q.v.), extending from the entrance to the palace grounds to the bridge over the river and continuing on the hillside gardens of Hazār Jarīb. Parcels of land bordering this avenue were assigned to notables to develop as gardens (Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 544-47). Two garden agglomerations, the palace



grounds west of the Meydān-e Šāh and the flanks of the Čahārbāg, filled the undeveloped area south and west of the pre-Safavid walls. Shah ‘Abbās II (1052-77/1642-66) built the Sa‘adatābād gardens along the south bank of the river, formerly occupied by Zoroastrians. (Honarfar, *Esfahān*, pp. 575-81).

Wilber’s reconstruction of the Safavid gardens is based primarily on accounts and drawings by European visitors and on some standing remains. This vast area that they covered, part of which was accessible to the public, was subdivided into traditional rectangular tracts, each with its own gate, arrangement of canals, and pavilions. The incorporation of park land into a city plan may have been a new idea at this time, but the forms of the individual gardens and their architecture follow Timurid models. The ‘Ālī Qāpū (q.v.), which serves both as a gate to the palace grounds and a viewing station for spectacles in the Meydān-e Šāh, was originally a pavilion of the cross-in-square type. The projecting, elevated *tālār* was added by Shah ‘Abbās II in 1053/1643-44 (Honarfar, *Esfahān*, pp. 422-25). The pavilion known as the Čehel Sotūn (q.v.) lies toward the end of the long garden tract situated immediately behind the ‘Ālī Qāpū, although not on its axis. Originally, it, too, was a square structure; in 1057/1647, however, Shah ‘Abbās II added the lateral verandahs and the magnificent columned porch, for which it is named Čehel Sotūn “Forty columns” (Honarfar, *Esfahān*, pp. 566-70). Even the Hašt Behešt pavilion (PLATE II), built in 1080/1669-70 on the site of the earlier Safavid Bāg-e Bolbol, is an elaborate version of the traditional cross-in-square plan. The lost pavilions of the Sa‘adatābād gardens, such as the Ā‘īna-ḵāna, known from old photographs and engravings, repeated these forms. Of particular interest was the three-storied octagonal Namakdān, which bears the same name as the twelve-sided pavilion at Gāzorgāh (Honarfar, *Esfahān*, pp. 577-80).

Shah ‘Abbās I created at least seven garden estates along the Caspian coast at Āmol, Bārforūš (present-day Bābol, q.v.), Sārī, Faraḥābād, Šafiābād, Ašraf (present-day Behšahr, q.v.), and ‘Abbāsābād (q.v.). They are known primarily from reports and drawings of European travelers like Thomas Herbert (1628), Jean Chardin (1666-1677), and Jonas Hanway (1744), and are discussed by Wilber (1979a, pp. 55-64). The garden at Ašraf consisted of at least eight formal gardens with pavilions, arranged in three rectangular tracts, laid out at the foot of the mountains, with a view of the sea. Although the vegetation of the Caspian area is rain-fed and lush, the Safavid gardens here assumed much the same form as at Isfahan, where vegetation depends on irrigation through



canals drawn from the river and underground *qanats*. The garden at Bārforūsh, which contained a lake about two miles in circumference, with a large artificial island in the center, may have been a Safavid restoration of a 12th century garden of the type described by Ebn Esfandiār (II, pp. 122-23).

Gardens of the Zand and Qajar periods show the impact of Mughal and European ideals on the Persian model (Wilber, pp. 60-86). The most famous are Bāḡ-e Delgošā (1163-73/1750-79), Bāḡ-e Taḡt (1203/1789), Bāḡ-e Eram (q.v.; 1239/1824), and the Nāranjestān, a house with garden-court (ca. 1287/1870) at Shiraz; Bāḡ-e Fīn (q.v.) in Kāšān (1214-50/1799-1834; [Figure 4](#)); and the gardens at the Golestān Palace (1221/1806), the Negārestān (1225/1810), and the castle of the Qajars (Qaṣr-e Qajar) in Tehran (1214-50/1799-1834). Many of these later gardens are still in use. Despite the foreign look of their pavilions, they conform to the basic concepts of the Persian garden (geometric formality, continuous blooming, and focus on the pavilion and its views of the garden and, where possible, the river or sea).

Little is known about the persons responsible for designing these gardens. The Ghaznavid sultan Mas‘ūd I is reputed to have drawn the plans for his own garden at Nīšāpūr (see above). The names of two landscape architects of the Timurid period are known: Šehāb-al-Dīn Aḡmad Zardakaši (Wilber, 1979a, p. 31) and Mīrak Sayyed Ġiāt (Golombek, 1981, pp. 48-49), who was brought to Delhi to build the garden of Homāyūn’s tomb.

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