

Lesson Objective: Students will investigate the architectural plan of a palace of the Safavid dynasty; they will also examine some of the palace wall paintings.

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Studies on Persianate Manuscripts, Arts, and Literature
Courtesy of Chihil Sutun (Chehel Soutoun) Palace, Isfahan

The Chihil Sutun Palace of Isfahan

Chihil Sutun (chehel Sotoun) of Isfahan (Esfahan) is a palace completed in 1674 C.E. by Shah Abbas II. The palace was the site of Persian New Year festivities and receptions for dignitaries and foreign ambassadors. What makes the palace more glamorous is the wall paintings depicting floral and geometrical motifs, scenes of festivals, battalions, literary themes, standing figures in European costumes, and receptions of foreign envoys.

Palace's Southern pavilion is named "Charshanbe-i Suri" since one of the paintings on its wall elaborates on a festivity with fire in the background. Some scholars highlighted that the scene is just the celebration of "Charshanbe-i Suri," but others identify the scene as the "immolation of a Hindu princess."

The Chihil Sutun is a testimony to the glorious reign of the Safavids when the court was a place for international politics, festive gatherings, and cross-cultural understandings. Depictions of Armenians and Europeans among the wall paintings of the audience hall of Chihil Sutun underscore the favorable attitude of the king toward Christian and European subjects.

Look at the plan of the audience hall and identify the spaces based on the picture.

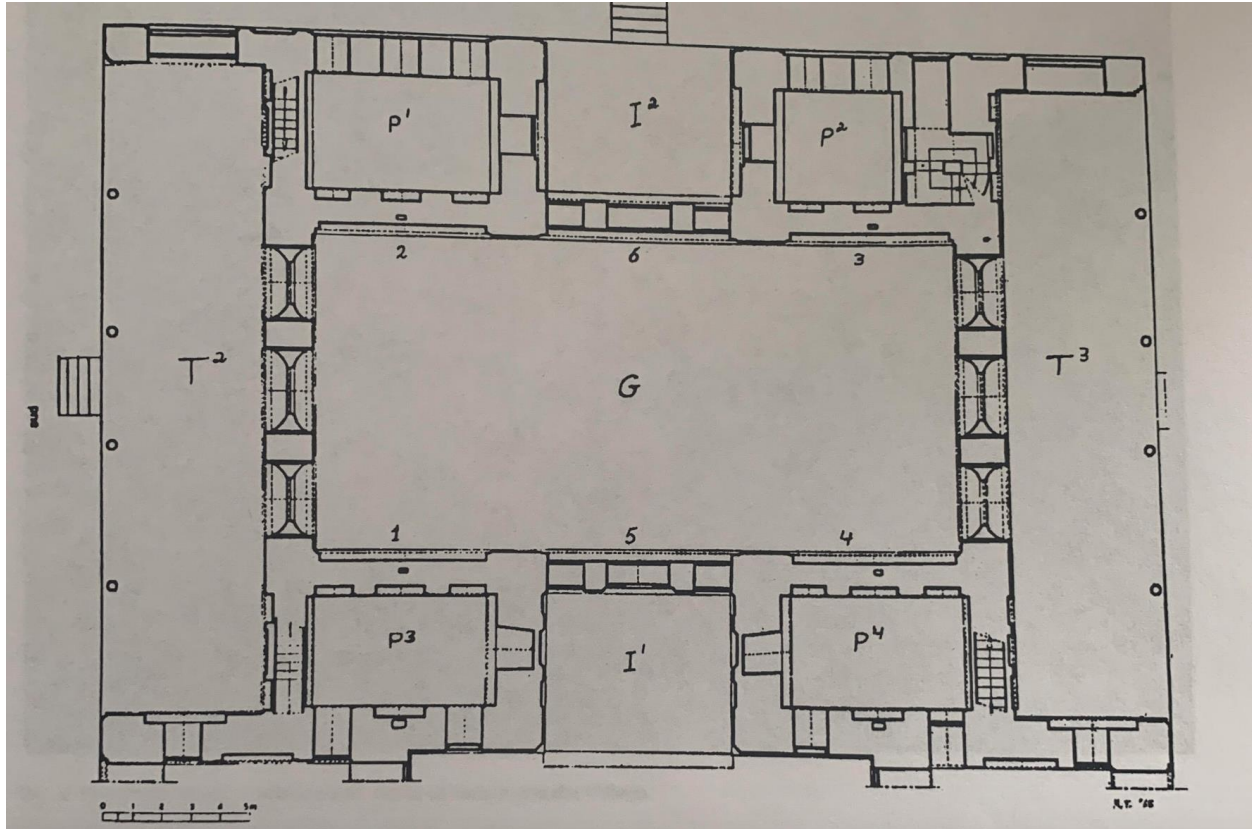


Fig. 3. The Chihil Sutun. Schematic plan of the audience hall (G), the four corner rooms (P¹⁻⁴), the two iwans (I¹⁻²), and the two verandas (T²⁻³). Placement of the large paintings in the audience hall: (1) Battle of Isma'il and the Uzbeks; (2) Shah Tahmasp and Humayun; (3) Shah 'Abbas I and Vali Muhammad Khan; (4) Shah 'Abbas II and Nadr Muhammad Khan; (5) Battle of Nadir; (6) Battle of Chaldiran. (Plan: After Ferrante, "Čihil Sutūn," fig. 4, p. 301)

In detail, draw a plan of your favorite place and point out all the spaces you created for the class. This plan can vary from an art exhibit gallery, a museum, a theater, a music studio, a restaurant, a bakery, a stable, a palace, or a house. Explain to the class why you chose the specific plan and what you like most.

You can be creative in drawing a dining hall, exhibition hall, hotel entrance, restaurant, castle, theater, etc. What kind of decorations or entertainment do you add to your plan to entice your visitors?

“Battle of Shah Isma’il and the Uzbeks”



“A Scene Recognized as Immolation of an Indian Prince or A Scene of Charshanbe-i Suri”



“Abbas II Meeting Mughal Ambassador”



English: Chehel Sotoun (also Chihil Sutun or Chehel Sotoon; Persian: چهل ستون, literally: “Forty Columns”) is a pavilion in the middle of a park at the far end of a long pool, in Isfahan, Iran, built by Shah Abbas II to be used for his entertainment and receptions. In this palace, Shah Abbas II and his successors would receive dignitaries and ambassadors, either on the terrace or in one of the stately reception halls.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tATL0mKQdYA>

Terms:

Audience hall

Immolation

Charshanbe-i Suri

Geometrical motifs

Literary theme