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Original Research Article

A Recreation of the Alishah Tabrizi Mosque Complex Based on the Archaeological Excavations and the Drawings in Historical Travel Accounts

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Abstract

Problem statement: Reconstruction or recreation of the original form and structure of the demolished parts of the Tāj al-Din 'Alishāh Mosque complex has long been a fundamental question in Iranian archeology and the history of architecture. Archaeologically, what is today visible as the Arch of 'Alishāh's iwan is a solid brick structure built in two constructional phases, with the northern part predating the southern one. Furthermore, a series of historical reports exists on the entombment of Tāj al-Din 'Alishāh the Vizier, known as the Tāvus Khāna building, as being located behind the 'Alishāh Mosque. Drawing on the excavated debris of the vault of the 'Alishāh's iwan and the available historical reports and drawings, the hypothesis of this research suggests that the presently standing remains of the Arch of 'Alishāh (the southern annex to the earlier structure) served as the mausoleum of Tāj al-Din 'Alishāh's the Vizier and that the 'Alishāh Mosque should be recreated in a four-iwans plan with four minarets.

Research method: It consists of the recreation of the Arch of 'Alishāh in light of archaeological data as well as the drawings printed in Matrākçi Nasuh (Matrakchi) and Monsieur Jean Chardin's travel accounts, which show the 'Alishāh Complex before the 1780 earthquake.

Conclusion: The agreement between the archaeological data and the cited drawings in travel accounts indicates that the structure today known as the Arch of 'Alishāh is, in fact, the Tāvus Khāna building that was founded behind the four-iwans Friday Mosque of 'Alishāh. The charity religious complex of 'Alishāh consisted at least of six major architectural components: a mosque, a madrasa (school), a monastery, a large marble pool, the mausoleum of 'Alishāh, and an outer wall surrounding the entire complex with a gateway. The south iwan opened into the mosque's shabistān (prayer hall), the west iwan into the madrasa (school), and the east iwan into the monastery of 'Alishāh.

Keywords: *Alishah Tabrizi Mosque, Arch of Alishah, Archaeology, Chardin's travel account, Matrākçi's travel account.*

Introduction

Sitting in the southern quadrant of Tabriz's

historical quartier in the age-old Nārmīyān or Mahādmahin Neighborhood, the Arch of 'Alishāh is the sole survivor of the structures that once

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formed the Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh Jilāni Mosque complex. Standing as an imposingly high iwan, the structure is today known for the local Tabrizis as the Arch of Tabriz (Arg-e Tabriz), Arch of ‘Alishāh (Arg-e ‘Alishāh) or Arg Qalasi following the transformation of its function as a fortress during the Russo-Iranian Wars (Ajourloo & Babaylou, 2014). Along with the Ghazaniyya, Rashidiyya (Rab’-e Rashidi), Sultaniyya, and the Maragheh Observatory, the Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh Mosque complex represents the fifth great Ilkhanid Abwāb al-Birr building complexes (charity foundations) and was under construction between 1318–1324 by Khwāja Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh, premier of Sultan Mohammad Khodābanda (Öljeitu). Yet, the chancellor’s death seemingly put a permanent end to the enterprise, leaving the incomplete complex exposed to damages from recurrent wars and earthquakes. At long last, the northern parts of its iwan fell victim mainly to construction plans connected with the foundation and expansion of the Great Mosallā of Tabriz in 1981, 1997, and 2016.

Problem Statement

Reconstruction or recreation of the vanished portions of this great Ilkhanid Abwāb al-Birr and pinpointing their function have long been among the central and challenging questions for scholars versed in Iranian archeology and history of architecture: Archaeologically speaking, the surviving Arch of ‘Alishāh is wholly a massive brick structure put up in two separate architectural phases, and the northern part, representing the original construction, outdates the southern part, i.e. the currently visible Arch of ‘Alishāh, which was annexed at a later time to the original complex, and to which a funeral function has been assigned (Mansouri & Ajourloo, 2003; Ajourloo & Mansouri, 2006). Indeed, a number of historical reports contain explicit references to the situation of Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh the Vizier’s mausoleum, known as Tāvus Khāna, behind the ‘Alishāh Mosque complex (Tabrizi, 1965, 496). Therefore, the basic question of the present authors is: How the structure

of the ‘Alishāh Mosque complex should be recreated based on archaeological and historical facts?

The hypothesis advanced by the present authors in response to this question is that: based on the evidence of the ruins from the vault of the iwan of ‘Alishāh and the historical accounts and illustrations that corroborate the existence of such vault, the currently standing structure of the Arch of ‘Alishāh (the southern part) served as the mausoleum of Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh the Vizier, vis. the Tāvus Khāna building, which lay within the vast courtyard of the religious complex of Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh Jilāni, behind the Friday Mosque of ‘Alishāh; and a recreation of the ‘Alishāh Mosque as a four-iwans mosque with four minarets is proposed. The hypothesis of this paper about the covering and vault of the Arch of ‘Alishāh hinges on archaeological empiricism, and the present authors assume that any attempt at hushing up the vault’s remains and footprints will simply result in de-historization. And, given the several episodes of demolitions undergone by Arch of ‘Alishāh’s structure and fabric over time, resorting to recreation, instead of reconstruction, is inevitable.

Methodology

The methodology adopted here to recreate the Arch of ‘Alishāh’s structure rests on the archaeological findings of the excavations of 1971 by Ali Akbar Sarfarāz and 2017 by Bahram Ajourloo. Drawings published in historical travelogues somewhat disclose the structure and disposition of the ‘Alishāh complex before the great earthquake that hit Tabriz in 1780. Of such travel accounts, those of Nasuh al-Silāhi al-Bosnavi Matrākçi (1536) and Monsieur Jean Chardin (1673) are the most relevant. In particular, the drawings in these two sources are the most consistent with the structure and disposition of the complex and its archaeologically attested footprints. The paper proceeds to recreate the plan and the 3D form of the complex based on the four-iwans scheme of Iranian architecture and in keeping with the historical accounts of Ibn Battuta (1327) and Hamadallāh Mustawfi Qazwini (1340).

Theoretical Framework

In interpreting the dataset, the present study makes use of “abduction” logic, the concept of “de-historization” in historical studies of Iran with an emphasis on Azerbaijan (Ayorloo, 2020), archaeological empiricism, and the substantive difference between the two terms “reconstruction” and “recreation” in archeology.

De-historization, as a variety of “ahistoricism”, denotes a state in which the researcher ignores all or certain historical or archaeological reports and documents, and instead tries to construct an inconsistent and incongruent reading and account of the past to provide his audience with an interpretation and understanding of the past which, while appearing interesting and genuine, in reality, is not based on facts. In other words, one discards von Ranke’s historiographical doctrine that entails finding a past that really existed to pursue, in the words of Collingwood (1946), a particular intention from constructing a historical narrative. Thus, any understanding and interpretation of historical phenomena irrespective of pertinent historical evidence and context will in essence be a case of de-historization and ahistorical (Thiele, 1997; Johnson, 2006).

In archaeological empiricism, observation of objective data marks square one of the researcher’s analysis and interpretation process, and understanding them puts forward hypotheses that indeed need to be tested against other data (Dark, 1995). Reconstruction and recreation are two distinct forms of archaeological interpretation (Thomas, 2006; Greene, 2006): in archaeology, the reconstruction of past materials, cultural assemblages, and technical and cultural processes is only possible when we have most pieces of the puzzle. e.g., archaeological data related to the structure of a historical monument, or their experimental repetition is feasible. Otherwise, it is merely possible to “recreate” them in light of other lines of sources. To put it another way, while recreation rests on objective facts and data, it is

simply a wise guess or closely knit argument whose episteme is not in the slightest certain. That is to say, archaeological recreation is simply an instance of inference to the best explanation, termed in the philosophy of science as abductive reasoning (e.g., Ladyman, 2002).

Literature Review

The history of research on the Arch of ‘Alishāh splits into archaeological and architectural studies: Archaeological work is merely confined to the excavations of 1971 by Ali Akbar Sarfarāz and 2017 by Bahram Ayorloo (2018). Both archaeologists have dismissed as unacceptable the assumption that the iwan of the structure originally formed a part of the main shabistān (prayer hall) of the ‘Alishāh Mosque (Table 1).


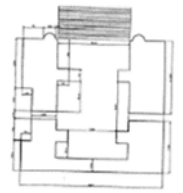
Yet, the architectural approach to understanding the nature, function, and chronology of the Arch of ‘Alishāh has a relatively long tradition. Of the researchers working on the history of Iranian architecture, the following are notable in chronological order: Arthur Pope (1939), Donald Newton Wilber (1955) Wolfram Kleiss (1981, 2015), Cəfər Əli oğlu Qiyasi (1997), Bernard O’Kane (2021), and Moradi and Omrāni (2019).

Pope (1939) solely described the disposition and structure of the Arch of ‘Alishāh as representing the ruins of the ‘Alishāh Mosque. Reproducing a plan by Peter Baggs, he further concluded that it was a single iwan in the plan.

Based on historical accounts, Donald N. Wilber (1955) deemed the Arch of ‘Alishāh the main iwan (Qibla) of a four-iwans mosque and recreation of the school and monastery buildings as flanking the right and left sides of this main iwan citing Ibn Battuta’s (1327) description. Perhaps he borrowed the idea of a large courtyard for this four-iwans structure from Hamadallāh Mustawfi Qazwini’s report in Nuzhat al-Qulub (1340), which describes a courtyard with a total area of 250 x 200 yards.

Drawing on the findings of Sarfarāz’s archaeological excavation, W. Kleiss (1981) embraced his idea of

Table 1. Summary of the excavations at the Arch of 'Alishāh in Tabriz. Source: Authors.

No.	Archaeologist	Findings	Plan of architectural remains
1	Ali A. Sarfarāz	<p>The iwan of the Arch did not belong to a mosque.</p> <p>Plans of the Ilkhanid and Qajar architectural remains were drawn.</p> <p>Debris from the brick vault reported by Hamadallāh Mustawfi was unearthed.</p> <p>The southern part was a later addition to the original northern part.</p>	
2	Bahram Ajourloo	<p>The plan of the (original) northern part of the Arch was drawn.</p> <p>Hydraulic components pertaining to the water supply system of the Arch complex were discovered</p> <p>An extension of the western wall was discovered</p>	

dividing the currently standing structure of the Arch of Tabriz into an original northern (earlier) and an annexed southern part (later) and produced the plan of the structure for Sarfarāz. However, the plan published in his latest publication (Kleiss, 2015, 727) follows Wilber's recreation and flies in the face of his personal observations during the 1971 excavation. In this latest plan, a single minaret is added to the western side, a recreation not pinned to any archaeological or historical evidence.

C. Ə. O. Qiyasi's (1997) study, which draws on Wilber's work, is incompatible with historical written sources, in that he describes the plan and structure of the 'Alishāh Mosque as having been modeled not on the Tāgh-e Kasrā in Ctesiphon but on a Seljukid small chapel (prayer room) at Siniq-Qala in Baku. Lacking in any historical validity, this assumption by Qiyasi epitomizes de-historization, as no circumstantial evidence pointing to his alleged attribution is attestable in the 14th century AD sources such as The History of Öljeitu (1317) by Abul al-Qāsim Kāshāni (2012). Furthermore, in this attribution, he not only compares a small prayer room (with a total area of 40 sq m) to an immense Ilkhanid Abwāb al-Birr complex but is also inattentive to the paradox arising from this model. The plan and structure of the Siniq-Qala chapel lack any courtyard and iwan and only contain a single annexed minaret (added in 1083) which is

detached from the main building (Qiyasi, 1992). Yet, his reconstruction is a revision of Wilber's idea of a four-iwans mosque, with the only difference that Qiyasi considered the 'Alishāh Mosque to have a composition of multiple minarets similar to the 15th-century AD examples of Samarkand and Bukhara (Qiyasi, 1997). While in fact, Wilber described the soaring, bulky tower behind the mihrab of the currently standing structure of the 'Alishāh Mosque as a minaret, because, as previously stated by Sarfarāz (1999), D. N. Wilber failed to solve the issue of the minarets of the mosque. It may be argued that Wilber's conception was fueled by the tradition of single minarets rising high behind the mihrab in Iranian architecture. A case in point is the Barsiān Mosque in Isfahan province, which on the authority of the report by Kleiss and R. Honarfar, its mihrab, and minaret bear two different dates of 1097 and 1104 AD, and the mosque's main structure and the minaret are detached from each other; and even Kleiss emphasizes that the Barsiān Mosque was a later addition to the Barsiān minaret (Honarfar, 1999; Kleiss, 2015, 728). However, at the Arch of Tabriz, the tower behind the mihrab, identified as a minaret by Wilber, forms an integral part of this solid structure.

The latest theoretical recreation charged with de-historization is a paper by Bernard O'Kane (2021): Turning a blind eye to the actual archaeological

excavations and the history of Iranian architecture, in this paper, he compared the structure and plan of the presently standing structure of the Arch of 'Alishāh to those of the 14th century AD mosques in Cairo from the Mamluk period, which is a false analogy and against the characteristics of Iranian architecture, and in recreation, its plan drew up comparand a from hypostyle shabistāns (Table 2).

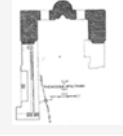
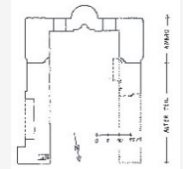


One source of de-historization in the reconstruction/recreation of 'Alishāh Mosque's structure is the exclusion of historical drawings and certain archeological findings, among them being the vault that Hamadallāh Mustawfi described in 1340, Guillaume-Joseph Grelot drew it in 1673, and most importantly Ali Akbar Sarfarāz unearthed its collapsed debris in his 1971 excavation (Fig. 1). It is as a result of the very exclusion of these pieces of evidence from the datasets of a series of recent studies that sometimes not only the 'Alishāh Mosque is illustrated in dimensions much larger than the currently standing iwan of the Arch, or without a vault, but it is even described as a Safavid construction (Kamāli & Moradi, 2021; Mizāb et al. 2021; Moradi et al. 2019; Moradi & Mizāb, 2019; Moradi et al. 2021). For example, the crenate mudbrick wall in Dieulafoy's photo has been identified, based on comparison with a feature in Matrākçi's miniature drawing of Tabriz, with the Ilkhanid wall of the 'Alishāh Mosque (Moradi & Omrāni, 2019), in fact, dates back to the Qajar period. Because, apart from the earthquake of 1780, the walls enclosing Tabriz were demolished several times during the Ottoman attacks (Ayorloo & Moradi, 2020; Çelebi, 2009), and Najaf Gholi Khān Donboli and the crown prince Abbās Mirzā Qajar restored those walls as well as the fort of Tabriz and also added a moat around it (Nejādebrāhimi, 2014). Indeed, the excavations of 1971 and 2017 failed to prove any traces of that crenate mudbrick wall, and only the extensions of the brick walls of the current structure of the Arch were encountered (Ayorloo, 2001, 2017, 2018). Also, the building visible in the lower right corner of Matrākçi's drawing of the city,

identified by the previous authors as the 'Alishāh Mosque, is Gonbad-e Sharif-e Ghāzāni. Because the lower right corner of his painting corresponds to the southwest quadrant of Tabriz where Ghazaniyya is located (Ayorloo, 2001). Furthermore, Matrākçi's drawing shows a vaulted and a domed building, while these authors deny the presence of the arch and dome (Kamāli & Moradi, 2021; Mizāb et al. 2021; Moradi et al. 2019; Moradi & Mizāb, 2019; Moradi et al. 2021), a renunciation that only gives rise to de-historization as well as ahistoricism and archaeological paradoxes. It is noteworthy that in Matrākçi's drawing the Tāvus Khāna (the currently standing Arch of Tabriz) is detached from the 'Alishāh Mosque. Also, the 'Alishāh Mosque has been recreated at a scale twice the size of the Tāvus Khāna, the current Arch (Moradi & Omrāni, 2019), while such a gigantic enterprise was technologically impossible even in the Ilkhanid period.

Structure of Arch of 'Alishāh

The extant iwan, which we call the Arch of 'Alishāh, and on the strength of Nuzhat al-Qulub's account represents the large, collapsed, iwan of the Tāj al-Din 'Alishāh Mosque's courtyard, is a solid brick structure in a U-shaped plan (Tables 1 & 2). As reported by Sarfarāz, this iwan is a vault whose span of 30.4 m was reduced by 66.6 cm for every 12 m increase in the height of the left and right walls, until at the impost (at the height of 36 m) its span decreased to 28.4 m to afford an elongated pointed arch (Ayorloo, 2001; Mansouri, Ayorloo & Sarfarāz, 2002; Mansouri & Ayorloo, 2003; Ayorloo & Mansouri, 2006). It should be pointed out again that the ruins of the collapsed brick vault of the iwan were identified and documented in the 1971 excavations (Fig. 1). The structure ran a length of 65.5 m, which was reduced to 21.1 m by the destructions of 1981 that occurred to make way for the construction of the modern Mosallā. The width of the structure, on the south side, is 51.2 m, and each of the eastern and western walls is 10.4 m thick. The depth of the south wall (mihrab) is 5.8 m, and the width

Table 2. Summary of the architectural studies of the Arch of 'Alishāh in Tabriz. Source: Authors.

No.	Architect researcher	Propositions and hypotheses	Recreated plan
1	Arthur Pope (1939)	The currently standing Arch of Tabriz is the same as the 'Alishāh Mosque and is a one-ivan mosque. No recreation was offered.	
2	Donald Wilber (1955)	The currently standing Arch of Tabriz is the same as the 'Alishāh Mosque and is a one-ivan mosque with a great pool before its large ivan. Is silent about the architectural ornaments of the 'Alishāh Mosque reported in the historical accounts. The tall, bulky tower behind the mihrab is considered a minaret. The proposed recreation is not in scale and symmetric.	
3	Wolfram Kleiss (1981)	Archaeologically, the structure consists of two northern (earlier) and southern (annexed) parts.	
4	C. Ə. O. Qiyasi (1997)	The currently standing Arch of Tabriz is the same as the 'Alishāh Mosque and is a one-ivan mosque with a great pool before its large ivan. Is silent about the architectural ornaments of the 'Alishāh Mosque reported in the historical accounts. The 'Alishāh Mosque had a multi-minaret composition. The plan and structure of the 'Alishāh Mosque were modeled on the small prayer hall of the Siniq-Qala chapel in Baku from the Seljuk period.	
5	Bernard O'Kane (2021)	Turns a blind eye to the history and tradition of Iranian architecture. Draws upon comparand from the 14 th century AD mosques of Cairo. Turns a blind eye to the findings from the excavations.	
6	Moradi & Omrāni (2019)	Dieulafoy's photo (right) of the southern façade of the Arch of 'Alishāh taken in the Qajar period shows a crenate mudbrick wall similar to the wall of a building (left) in Matrākçi's drawing. The 'Alishāh Mosque is recreated, as is the Tāvus Khāna building behind the mosque. The published recreations of the 'Alishāh Mosque and the Tāvus Khāna are disproportionate.	 

and height of the openings flanking the mihrab on both sides, interpreted as windows, are 5. 5 and 16 meters, respectively. The mihrab of the Arch of 'Alishāh ranks the tallest across the Muslim world at 30 m, and behind it stands a tower 24 m high and 12 m span. It is worth noting that no traces of the architectural ornaments of the 'Alishāh Mosque, including stuccos, tile works, and marblwork,

reported in historical accounts and travelogues are presently attestable in this completely brick structure. Another interesting point is that the weight of this brick structure was lightened through the application of the Sandougha-chini (Box) technique. In particular, some 2. 5 m of the diameter of the east and west walls was worked using this technique, while the remaining parts (7. 9 m) were completed



Fig. 1. A photo of the excavations of 1971 by Sarfarāz. Right: Debris of the brick arch reported by Hamadallāh Mustawfī. Left: A stucco panel with the Kufi inscription “الصلوة معراج المومن”. Source: Ajorloo, 2001.

as a solid structure (Ajourloo, 2001; Mansouri, Ajourloo & Sarfarāz, 2002; Mansouri & Ajourloo, 2003; Ajourloo & Mansouri, 2006). According to Sarfarāz (1999), the plan of the Arch of ‘Alishāh corresponds to neither the hypostyle scheme of the earliest mosques nor the two- or four-iwans mosque designs of the early and late Seljuk or even the Ilkhanid period. Rather, it is completely unique in the history of architecture throughout the Muslim world.

An Overview of Historical Accounts

While there are a fair number of travel and historical accounts on the ‘Alishāh Mosque complex—later the Arch of ‘Alishāh—spanning the date of the Ilkhanid to the Qajar period, given the devastating effect of the 1780 earthquake on this complex and its later transformation into the fort of Tabriz in the reign of the Qajar king Fath ‘Ali Shah, here we will consider only those travelogues and historical evidence that either recount how the complex was constructed, used, and modified or furnish drawings and illustrations that reflect the layout and structure of the ‘Alishāh Mosque prior to that earthquake. Therefore, of the all-available historical reports we will consider only those by Monshi Kermāni (1325), Ibn Battuta (1327), Mustawfī Qazwini (1340), Hāfez-e Abru (1416), Fasiḥ Ahmad Khwāfī (1441), the anonymous Venetian merchant (1514), Matrākçı (1536), Ibn Karbalāei Tabrizi (1567), Kāteb Çelebi Āghā Hāji Khalifa (1635), and Jean Chardin (1673).

In his *Nasāim al-Ashār min Latāim al-Akhbār dar Tārikh-e Wuzarā*, Nāser al-Din Monshi Kermāni (1959, 116–117) writing in 1325 puts that: “In... the Madinat al-Salām Tabriz ... [he] put in an order for the construction of a mosque with a lofty iwan and a high-ceilinged portico, which would be unsurpassed all over the globe if was accomplished”. The last statement seems to suggest that the construction project of the ‘Alishāh’s complex had come to an abrupt end, possibly by the death of Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh, in 1324.

Ibn Battuta talks about a finished stunning mosque during his visit to the city (Ibn Jazi, 2018, 280–281): “Then we reached a mosque commissioned by ‘Alishāh the Vizier, known as Jilān, and outside it on the side facing the Qibla there is a madrasa on the right and a monastery on the left. The courtyard of the mosque is furnished with marbles, and the walls are clad in tiles, something like Zellīj, and a stream runs across it, and all kinds of trees, vines, and jasmine ... were planted therein.”

Shortly after, Hamadallāh Mustawfī Qazwini (1919, 80) reports in *Nuzhat al-Qulub* (1340) the collapse of a large vault (tall iwan) in the courtyard of the ‘Alishāh Mosque: “The Vizier Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh Jilāni, outside the Nārmīyān quarter in Tabriz, built a Friday Mosque, the court of which measured 250 ells by 200 ells. A great hall was constructed for this mosque greater even than that of the Palace of Khosrow at Ctesiphon, but because they had built it in too great haste, it fell to the ground. As regards this mosque, every effort was made for its magnificence, marble unstinted being used in its construction, but to describe it all would take too long a time.”

Hāfez-e Abru (1938, 115) is the first historian to locate, in his *Zeyl-e Jāme‘ al-Tavārikh-e Rashidi* (1416), the mausoleum of Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh next to his Friday Mosque, and Fasiḥ Ahmad Khwāfī (2007, 903) in *Mujmal-i Fasihi* (1441) describes his mausoleum as being situated within the mihrab of the ‘Alishāh Friday Mosque: “... the death of Khwāja Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh Jilān, in late Jumada al-Ākhir, buried in the Meydān-e Kohan Neighborhood

of Tabriz, within the mihrab of the Friday Mosque commissioned by himself... .” Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh’s entombment next to or behind the ‘Alishāh Mosque was later confirmed by others such as Kamāl al-Din Abd al-Razzāq Samarkandi (1993) in *Matla‘-e Sa‘dayn va Majma‘-e Bahrayn* (1471), Khwāndmir (1976, 2001) in his *Dastur al-Wuzarā* (1508), and Habib al-Siyar (1523), and Ibn Karbalāei Tabrizi in *Rawzāt al-Jinān va Jannāt al-Janān* (1567). Even the latter author has specifically stated the “Tāvus Khāna” edifice is his burial place (Tabrizi, 1965, 496).

An anonymous Venetian merchant who visited Tabriz in 1514 gives an account of a marvelous mosque called *Imareth Alegate*, translated into Persian as the “‘Āli-qāpu Mansion” (Gray, 2002, 408): “This mosque is *Imareth Alegate* by name and is very big. But its middle part was never covered. In the part where Muslims pray, there is a mihrab or a vault so lofty that if one throws an arrow, it will never reach its roof. But this part is left unfinished... This mosque is visible from the villages around the city... In front of the big entrance of the mosque, a river flows under the stone vaults. Amidst the building, there is a big spring not coming from the ground but being an artificial spring, because they make the water run from one pipe and drain from another pipe at will. The fountain runs a length of one hundred feet, has the same width and its depth at the center is six feet. At this point, there is a platform that rests on six pillars or columns of highly polished marble, whose inner and outer faces bear carved designs. This building is very old, but the platform is recently built, and a bridge was put up to allow crossing the spring onto the platform...” Even if we accept that this Venetian merchant is here describing the ‘Alishāh Mosque, his narrative confirms that the building, although incomplete, had a vault and a roof. And, indeed, the assertion that the roof was unfinished can also be interpreted as the presence of a collapsed vault. It is noteworthy that Sir Charles Gray, the editor

and English translator of the Italian text of this travel account, has added in a marginal note that the “mihrab” was covered with a vault.

The renowned Ottoman historian and geographer Mustafa ibn ‘Abd Allāh Hāji Khalifa Āghā Çelebi, known as Kāteb Çelebi, accompanied the Ottoman king Sultan Murad IV during his 1635 campaign to Tabriz. When reporting the annihilation of the ‘Alishāh Mosque complex by the Ottoman king in his *Cinhannuma*, Kāteb Çelebi furnishes also a description of the mosque, which confirms Mustawfī Qazwini’s account (Çelebi, 2009): “... Khwāja Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh the Vizier put up a grand Friday Mosque outside the city, in the Nārmīyān quarter, whose courtyard was 250 yards long and had an iwan that was larger than that of iwan-e Kasrā. While Hamadallāh Mustawfī in *Nuzhat* has described its earlier circumstances, it is not like that this moment in time. In 1635, I witnessed its destruction for three days in the company of late Sultan Murad Khan: the city’s walls were razed, and there are no traces of them anymore. But of the great buildings they razed, the middle part of a lofty vault, purportedly the iwan of the ‘Alishāh congregational mosque, still survives...”

The general summary from these historical accounts is that the ‘Alishāh Mosque complex unequivocally was roofed and had a vault that was later collapsed and that the mausoleum of ‘Alishāh the Vizier lay inside the same complex.

Overview of historical drawings of ‘Alishāh mosque

Among the pre-Qajar historical reports and accounts on the ‘Alishāh Mosque, only two travel accounts, by Matrākçi and Monsieur Jean Chardin, contain pictures that unveil the structure and disposition of this building and complex before being affected by Sultan Murad IV’s campaign (1635) and the great earthquake of Tabriz (1780). The volume *Beyān-i Menāzil-i Sefer-i Irākeyn-i Sultān Süleymān Hān* (1536) by Nasuh al-Silāhi

al-Bosnavi Matrākçi (1976), the commander, engineer, and geographer of Sultan Suleymān Khan Kānuni's army, contains a miniature drawing of Tabriz, which ranks among the chief historical pictorial documents of the city (Fig. 2). In this miniature, Matrākçi depicts Tabriz with four main gates, looking from west to east. Thus, the Mehrānrud of Tabriz flows from top to bottom, and the upper and lower gates on this drawing represent the eastern (Ray and Sultaniyya) and western (Istanbul) gates, respectively. Therefore, the one on the right side is the city's southern gate, viz. the Nārmīyān or Mahādmahin gate. From this very fact, one may infer that the grand, tall structures with minarets in front of the southern gate of Tabriz are the buildings that formed the 'Alishāh Mosque complex. Also, in this drawing, Matrākçi correctly gives the location of the buildings of the Nasriyya complex, the Hasan Padishāh Mosque, and the Sahibābād Square on the left bank of the Mehrānrud in front of the northern gate, overlooking the Surkhāb Mountains. Also on this basis, the mosque with three domes and two minarets in the upper right (southeast) corner next to a Mehrānrud tributary indicates the Muzaffariyya building well-known as the Blue Mosque (e.g., Haghpārast & Nejādebrāhimi, 2014). And, the Bazaar and the Friday Mosque of Tabriz lie at the center of the drawing on the right bank of the Mehrānrud. The geographical location of all these buildings in this drawing is consistent with their current situation in the city of Tabriz. And of course, it is notable that Matrākçi intended to indicate the lofty dome of Ghazaniyya by a tall domed tower in the lower left (southwest) corner, as Ghazaniyya sits in southwestern Tabriz (Ajourloo, 2001). Having ascertained the precise locations of Tabriz's 14th and 15th centuries AD edifices and historical buildings in Matrākçi's drawing, now we must turn to the structure and disposition of the 'Alishāh Mosque complex: in Matrākçi's miniature, we see the western view of the Tāvus Khāna building behind a four-iwans structure with two minarets (Fig. 2). This view of the structure, identified here by



Fig. 2. Right: Drawing of the layout of the 'Alishāh Tabrizi's complex based on Matrākçi's drawing. Source: authors. Left: Location of the 'Alishāh Tabrizi's complex in the southern quadrant of Tabriz compared to Ghazaniyya and Muzaffariyya in Matrākçi's drawing: 1. Nārmīyān Gate, 2. Tāvus Khāna (the present-day Arch of Tabriz), 3. The Friday Mosque of 'Alishāh, 4. Entrance gate of the 'Alishāh complex, 5. Muzaffariyya (Blue Mosque), 6. The lofty dome of Ghazaniyya. Source: Ajourloo, 2001.

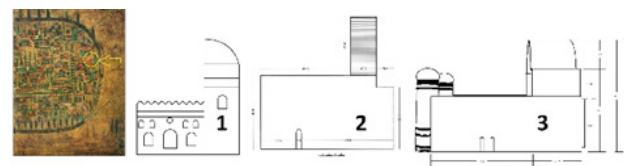


Fig. 3. Correspondence between the western profiles of Tāvus Khāna (present-day Arch of Tabriz): 1. Matrākçi, 2. Proposed by Ajourloo (2001), 3. proposed idea by the present authors for the western profile based on the rotation of the eastern profile in Grelot's drawing, as recorded by Chardin, 1711.

the present authors with the Tāvus Khāna building, is in full agreement with the western view of the present-day structure of the Arch of 'Alishāh (Fig. 3), with the difference that Matrākçi has drawn its disposition prior to its contingent destruction—that is when its vault was still standing. But the present authors consider the four-iwans building with two minarets to be the same as the 'Alishāh Mosque, indeed at a time that was not yet demolished (Fig. 2). And the third interesting building in Matrākçi's drawing, facing the Nārmīyān gate, is a structure akin to a great entrance gate (Fig. 2), and an identical structure is attested in Grelot's drawing of Tabriz and the 'Alishāh Mosque (Fig. 4). It is worth noting that great architectural complexes with their buildings at the center or around a courtyard must have an entrance or gateway, for example, is the case for the Momina Khatun complex of Nakhichevan from the Atabakān of Azerbaijan period and the Timurid palace of Ak-Sarāy in Shahr-e Sabz, modern Uzbekistan (Ajourloo, 2001, 2010; Glombek & Wilber, 1988, 37).

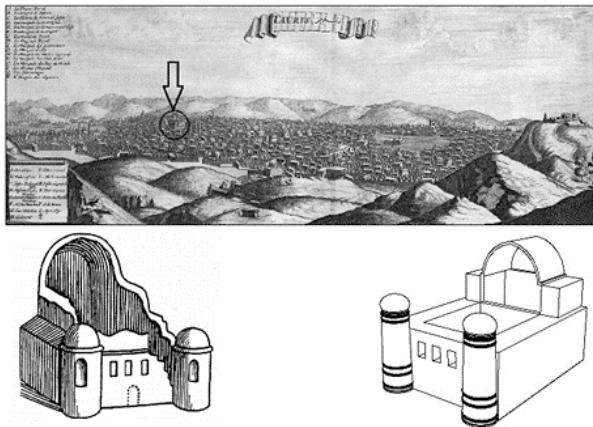


Fig. 4. Above: Grelot's drawing of the 'Alishāh Mosque in Tabriz in 1673. Source: Chardin, 1711. Bottom left: enlargement of the half-collapsed arch and the eastern profile in Grelot's drawing. Source: Mirfattāh, 1995. Bottom, right: proposed form by the present authors for the western profile based on the rotation of the eastern profile in Grelot's drawing.

In his travel to Iran during the Safavid period, the French merchant and traveler Jean Chardin enjoyed the company of a painter artist, Grelot, who drew pictures of Iranian cities for Chardin's travel account (Chardin, 1711). Chardin visited and described the 'Alishāh Mosque in 1673. He reports that Tabriz had 250 mosques, the largest being the 'Alishāh Mosque, which, although collapsed and destroyed, in addition to its high minaret, parts of it were repaired and restored for the use of local prayers. This mosque was so grand that if someone approached Tabriz from Yerevan, he would definitely see it from afar (ibid). Chardin speaks about the repair of a great lofty minaret, which might be the bulky tall tower behind the mihrab of the Arch of Tabriz. But in any case, the artist Grelot has drawn the 'Alishāh Mosque, as viewed from north to south, from the Surkhāb mountain, as a high vault with double eastern and western minarets, and of course, the vault is seen half collapsed and in ruin (Fig. 4). Grelot's drawing, together with the debris of a brick vault unearthed and documented in Sarfarāz's excavation (Fig. 1), once again confirm the authenticity of Mustawfi Qazwini's account in *Nuzhat al-Qulub*. Also, on the right side of the drawing, in front of the 'Alishāh Mosque, Grelot indicates a structure very similar to the third structure seen in front of the southern gate

of Matrākçī's drawing, and we introduce it as an entrance or a gateway to the complex (Fig. 4).

Proposed Recreation of the 'Alishāh Complex

As stated earlier, the recreation proposed here rests on the two historical drawings of Matrākçī and Grelot as well as archaeological records:

The present authors argued that in the miniature of the Ottoman Matrākçī, in front of the southern or Nārmīyān gate, there occurs three structures, the first of which we equated with the Tāvus Khāna building or the mausoleum of Tāj al-Din 'Alishāh the Vizier, on account of the correspondence between its western side and the western side of the current Arch of Tabriz (Fig. 3). Therefore, the next two structures should respectively represent the 'Alishāh Mosque and the entrance to the 'Alishāh complex, because the second structure resembles a four-iwans structure and the third is reminiscent of a building in Grelot's drawing, which we consider to be the gateway to the complex (Fig. 4). Further, in the mentioned four-iwans structure at least four architectural elements are distinguishable. These include the following: a frontal flanked by a high minaret on either side, possibly representing the 'Alishāh Mosque; an entrance porch or gateway opening to a central courtyard; and two structures on the right and left sides of the courtyard, which should be the madrasa and monastery of the 'Alishāh. The two dome-like structures flanking the entrance in this drawing might be minarets, and if such is the case, the 'Alishāh Mosque had four minarets (Fig. 4). Concerning the first structure, interpreted here as the Tāvus Khāna Building, we see in Matrākçī's drawing that it is equipped with a doorway and a window. It is worth mentioning that in the 1971 excavations, it was revealed that the earlier northern building was flanked by structures on both the left and right sides and the stucco paneling with the Kufic inscription "الصلوة المعراج" belonged to the eastern structure (Fig. 1). While sufficient information was not obtained for

the western structure, the earlier northern building clearly communicated with both structures through high doorways. Sadly, because of the 1981 and 1997 destructions, no further excavation of these structures is possible to ascertain their functions (Fig. 5). Nonetheless, the 2017 excavation confirmed the existence of architectural spaces on the western side (Ajourloo, 2018).

In the recreation based on the drawings of Matrākçi and Grelot, it is also suggested to consider the disposition and structure of the Bibi Khānum Mosque in Samarkand (Fig. 6), because, on the authority of historical accounts, it was inspired by the 'Alishāh Tabrizi complex (Ajourloo, 2001, 2010): At the Bibi Khānum Mosque complex in Samarkand there is a high entrance with two minarets on the sides giving access to the muazzina of a four-iwans building, whose Qibla iwan has likewise two tall minarets (Fig. 6; Hillenbrand, 1987, 263, Fig. 7). This structure somehow matches the third structure in Matrākçi as well as Grelot's drawings, with the difference that the gatehouse of the 'Alishāh complex has three entrances (Fig. 7, Fig. 2). Regarding the fact that Grelot indicated only a single entrance with a pointed arch it is important to note that given Chardin's intent, which presumably consisted of portraying a general view of Tabriz from the top of Surkhāb Mountain rather than giving the details of the 'Alishāh Mosque, it was natural for Grelot to simply sketch a general outline of the major buildings of the city. However, in the recreation of the 'Alishāh Mosque, as mentioned, we discern in Matrākçi's drawing the existence of a four-iwans structure, the entrance porch of which can be recreated in the form of a gateway with a corbel/honeycomb vaulting and a minaret on either side. After entering the central courtyard with a large marble pool, the famous madrasa of 'Alishāh and his monastery can be recreated on the two sides of the central courtyard, i.e., on the right and left sides of the mosque, with two iwans, behind the frontal of which there were two short domes,

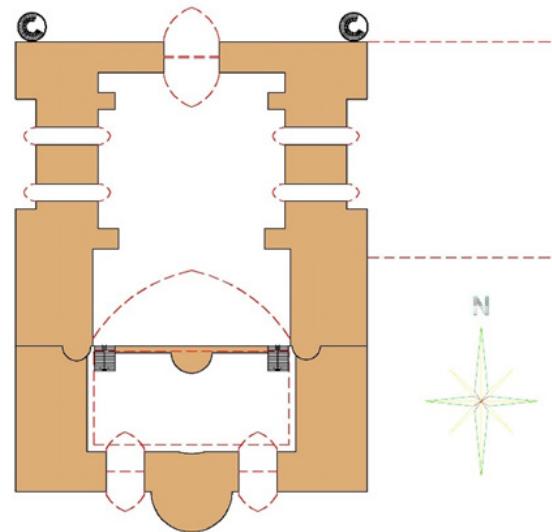


Fig. 5. The proposed recreated plan for the Tāvus Khāna (present-day Arch of Tabriz) based on archaeological data. Source: authors.

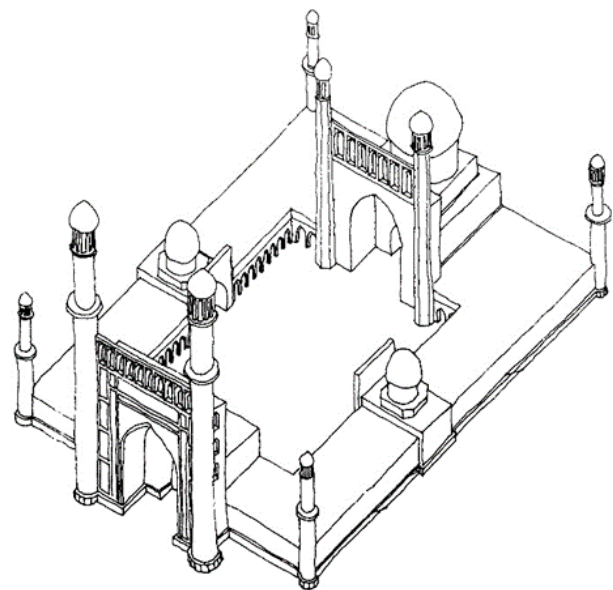


Fig. 6. The 3D scheme of the Bibi Khānum Mosque, Samarkand. Source: Hillenbrand, 1994.

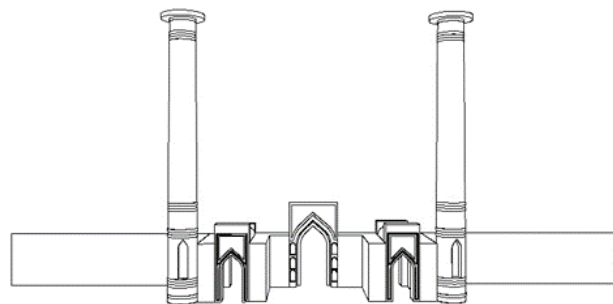


Fig. 7. The proposed recreated form for the entrance gate of the 'Alishāh Tabrizi complex based on the drawings published by Matrākçi and Chardin. Source: Authors.

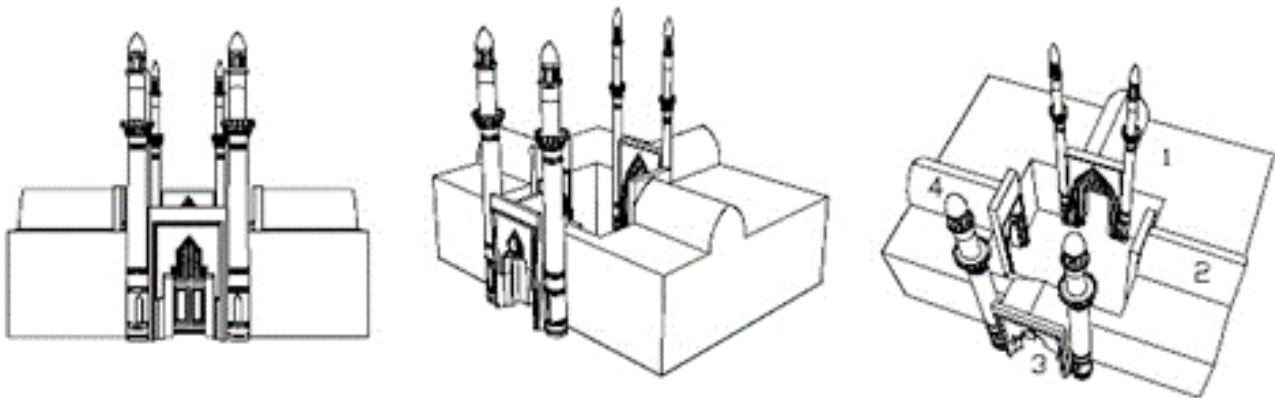


Fig. 8. Recreated four-iwans scheme of the mosque, madrasa, and monastery of the 'Alishāh Tabrizi based on the Matrākçi's drawing. Source: authors. 1. the Mosque of 'Alishāh, 2. the Madrasa of 'Alishāh, 3. the entrance to the courtyard, 4. the Monastery of 'Alishāh.

which are also visible in Matrākçi's drawing (Fig. 2). And finally, the 'Alishāh Mosque can be recreated on the Qibla side in the form of a high iwan topped with a pointed arch, and two tall minarets on both sides of the frontal (Fig. 8).

Marking the last step in the present study, the recreation of the tomb of Tāj al-Din 'Alishāh or the Tāvus Khāna building builds again on the two drawings by Matrākçi and Grelot supplemented by archaeological data: historical accounts place the mausoleum behind the 'Alishāh Mosque within the 'Alishāh complex, and the present authors argued above that at least the western side of one of the three buildings in front of the Nārmīyān gate in Matrākçi's miniature is quite similar to the western profile of the surviving structure of the Arch of Tabriz before the complete collapse of its vault. Also, the western profile of the tall building with a collapsed vault labeled as the 'Alishāh Mosque in Grelot's drawing, naturally and logically, should be the same as the western profile of the standing structure of the Arch and the same structure that is seen in Matrākçi's miniature in front of the southern gate of Tabriz (Fig. 3). It should be noted that the building interpreted by the present authors as the Tāvus Khāna is labeled by Chardin in Grelot's drawing as the 'Alishāh Mosque. That is, in his 1673 drawing, Grelot depicts not the 'Alishāh Mosque but the Tāvus Khāna building (Fig. 4), because in the 1635 campaign of Sultan Murad IV to Tabriz, as reported by Kāteb Çelebi,

he and the Ottoman king had been beholding the devastation of the 'Alishāh Mosque by the Ottoman army for three full days. Therefore, Chardin's account of the repair of the 'Alishāh Mosque can only be interpreted as the repair of parts of this great complex to make way for a place for praying. Because had the restoration of the entire complex been feasible, Grelot would not have shown the currently standing iwan of the Arch with a half-collapsed vault. Also, the heavy brick debris unearthed in the 1971 excavation corroborates Grelot's fidelity in depicting the collapsed vault of the 'Alishāh (Fig. 1).

Interpretation and Conclusion

The studies describing the Arch of 'Alishāh as representing the Safavid repairs of the 'Alishāh Mosque that was seemingly never covered with a vault not only have no archaeological evidence but also are not assisted by any historical document from the Safavid period, except the single line hearsay reasserted by Chardin, an assertion that goes against Grelot's drawing! Therefore, even the mere adducing to Chardin's travel itinerary will entail a logical paradox.

The concordance between the archaeological data and Matrākçi and Chardin's drawings suggests that the present-day Arch of 'Alishāh represents 'Alishāh's mausoleum which was known at the time as the Tāvus Khāna building. Therefore, turning a blind eye to the archaeological evidence

and the historical drawings by Matrākçi and Grelot, which indicate the existence of a vault and a covered southern iwan, will simply result in the de-historization of the Arch of ‘Alishāh, and this ahistorical narrative will produce an arbitrary and novel construct of the structure, so that by erroneously equating the southern iwan (the currently standing structure) with the ‘Alishāh Mosque, at least the story of the Safavid repairs of the ‘Alishāh Mosque will supplant the historical account of the destruction of the ‘Alishāh Mosque by the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV.

On the other hand, regarding the dilemma to choose between reconstruction or recreation as two forms of interpretation in archaeology, with

the knowledge of this historical fact that the two shocking events of Sultan Murad IV’s campaign (1635) and the great earthquake of Tabriz (1780) had severely affected the ‘Alishāh complex, recreation remains the only way available for gaining a more complete picture of Tāj al-Din ‘Alishāh’s religious complex. Reconstruction is only feasible when the archaeologist has most of the scattered pieces of the puzzle in their in-situ context; if it is not the case, we are bound to resort to recreation. Therefore, in the case of the ‘Alishāh complex, apart from the findings from the excavations and the reports by Ibn Battuta and Mustawfī Qazwini, the two historical drawings by Matrākçi and Grelot permit the following recreation (Fig. 9):

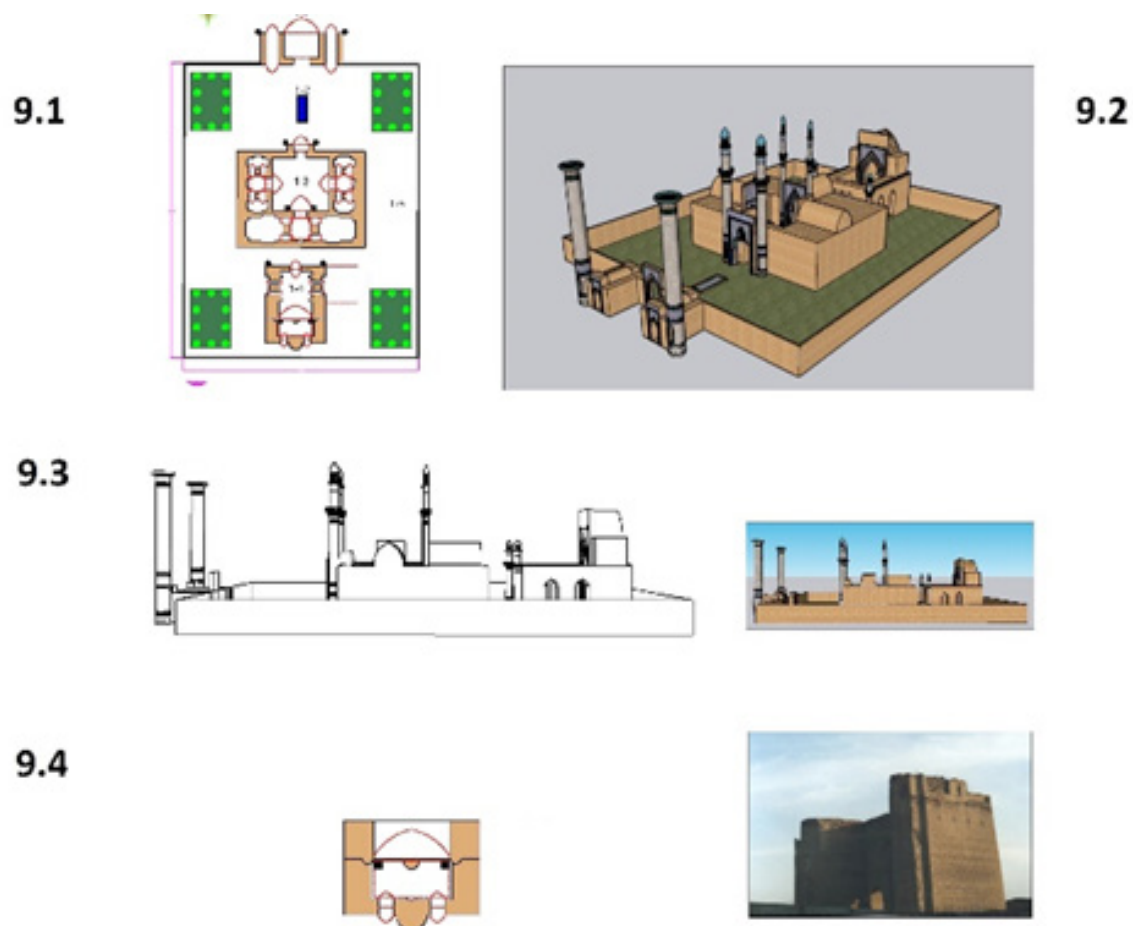


Fig. 9. Proposed recreation of the ‘Alishāh complex. Source: authors. 9.1. The plan of the ‘Alishāh complex: 1-1. Gateway of the large central courtyard, 1-2. the large marble pool, 1-3. the mosque and madrasa and monastery of ‘Alishāh, 1-4. Tāvus Khāna or the mausoleum of ‘Alishāh the Vizier, 1-5. large central courtyard (250 × 200 yards); 9-2. 3D view of the proposed recreation of the ‘Alishāh complex, which locates the Tāvus Khāna building behind the four-iwans ‘Alishāh Mosque; 9-3. The western view of the proposed recreation of the ‘Alishāh Tabrizi complex, in which the Tāvus Khāna is seen in the far right behind the four-iwans ‘Alishāh Mosque; 9-4. The plan and the western view of the present-day Arch of Tabriz, which represents the extant ruins of the Tāvus Khāna building. Source: Ajorloo, 2001.

The religious charity complex of the 'Alishāh Mosque, which consisted of at least six buildings of the 'Alishāh Mosque, a madrasa, a monastery, a large marble pool, the mausoleum of 'Alishāh (Tāvus Khāna or the high iwan) and the surrounding wall of the complex with an entrance or gate, was situated in the Nārmīyān quarter or the southern gate of Tabriz. Passing through the main entrance of the complex, the prayers entered a vast central courtyard with a large marble pool, and vines and jasmines were grown in the courtyard's gardens. Opposite the gate of the complex, facing the Qibla lay the four-iwans structure of the 'Alishāh Mosque, where to enter its central courtyard, the prayers had to pass through a frontal embellished with a corbel/honeycomb vaulting and two minarets. In 'Alishāh's central courtyard, the madrasa was visible on the right and the monastery on the left side, and on the side facing the Qibla was the 'Alishāh Mosque. Given its inspiration from iwan-e Kasrā, albeit in keeping with the Ilkhanid architectural manners, the latter mosque must have had a pointed arch worked in the technique of a rough arch; and, indeed, a tall minaret flanked both sides of its frontal (Fig. 8 & 9). And finally, behind the 'Alishāh Mosque, but as an isolated structure once again inspired by iwan-e Khosrow in Ctesiphon, was built 'Alishāh' mausoleum or the Tāvus Khāna building, which at a later time its plan was changed to outshine that of Tāgh-e Kasrā in elevation and grandeur (Fig. 9).

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