Empire In-the-Round: The Tiered Stages of Naqsh-I Jahan Square in Isfahan

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*“They say Isfahan is ‘Half the World’
By saying this, they only describe half of Isfahan”*

- Iskandar Munshi (Translated by Stephen P. Blake)

Introduction

Scholars have identified an iconographic connection between the Safavid maydan (city square) and the theater,¹ the Safavid coffeehouse and the theater,² and the caravansera (inn for travelers) as an origin point for Safavid theater architecture.³ It is noteworthy that all of these types of theatrical structures are present within Naqsh-i Jahan Square in the Safavid’s capital city of Isfahan, a building complex known for its architectural unity (Fig.1),⁴ and all

¹ Sussan Babaie, Kathryn Babayan, Massumeh Farhad, Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, and Christoph Werner, *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran*, (London: Touris, 2004), 85; Babak Rahimi, “Maydān-i Naqsh-i Jahān: The Safavid Isfahan Public Square as “A Playing Field”, in *In the Presence of Power: Court and Performance in the Pre-Modern Middle East*, edited by Pomerantz Maurice A. and Vitz Evelyn Birge, 42-60, (New York: NYU Press, 2017).

² Farshid Emami, “Coffeehouses, Urban Spaces, and the Formation of a Public Sphere in Safavid Isfahan,” *Muqarnas Online* 33, no. 1 (November 2016): 177-220, 191.

³ Jamshid Malekpour, *The Islamic Drama*, (London: Taylor a& Francis Group, 2004), 111.

⁴ “Isfahan,” in *The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*, edited by Jonathan M. Bloom, Sheila S. Blair. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t276/e25>; Sheila S. Blair, “Inscribing the Square: The Inscriptions on the Maidān-i Shāh in Iṣfahān,” in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, edited by Gharipour Mohammad and Schick İrvin Cemil, 13-28, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 19; Heinz Gaube, *Iranian Cities*, (New York: NYU Press, 1979), 75; Gürkan Anar, Ayşegül Damla, “Safevi Şahlarının baniliği üzerine bir değerlendirme.” *İran Çalışmaları Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2017): 117–143, 131.

began construction at the same time, circa 1590/1.5 Historian Babak Rahimi has convincingly established the square as a "huge arena in which an imperial identity was performed."⁶ However, Rahimi limits his scope to the central square, and does not explore the implications of a unified and interconnected architectural complex of buildings with theater iconography. By contrast, this paper will holistically analyze the parallel theater iconography of the architecture at the Naqsh-i Jahan Square and argue that it lives up to the square's Persian meaning as an 'image of the world.' By building a space of intersecting and layered theater spaces from the central square and palace to the caravanserai and coffeehouses, Shah 'Abbas rendered legible in the cityscape the image of empire as layered and performative. The architectural unity of the open, parallel stage spaces invites the pedestrian to both view and participate in multi-level Empire in-the-round, while still operating within the Shah's 'stage set' and acknowledging the dominance of the elevated palace stage. Taken as a whole, the tiered theater spaces of the Naqsh-i Jahan Square physically embody the imperial ideology of the centralizing Safavid state at the turn of the 17th century.

Figure 1: View of Naqsh-i Jahan square. Source: Amir Pashaei, Creative Commons 4.0 license

⁵ Sussan Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces: Statecraft, Shi'ism and the Architecture of Conviviality in Early Modern Iran*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), xvii.

⁶ Rahimi, "Maydān-I Naqsh-I Jahān," 43.

Figure 2: Takiyeh-i Dowlat stage in Tehran. Photograph by Henry Binder, 1887, Public Domain.

Caravanserai, Coffeehouse and Maydan as Places of Theater, Commerce, and Hospitality

Before analyzing how the buildings fit together in the specific context of Naqsh-e Jahan, it is necessary to explore their general similarities. Safavid caravanserais, coffeehouses, and maydans—hereafter referred to collectively as ‘theater-type buildings’—were all theatrical spaces, both in iconography and in function. Caravanserais had a standard layout with a courtyard in the middle surrounded by a ring of rooms to provide hospitality and resting places for guests. Caravanserai inn-yards often hosted ritualistic *Ta’ziyeh* performances and other travelling performers, during which spectators gathered around the yard’s platform or water feature, which was converted into an in-the-round stage.⁷ In-the-round theater is when the audience is seated around at least three sides of the stage. When permanent theater spaces (*takiyeh*s) spread across Safavid Iran, they were based on these caravanserai performances, with a central platform, enclosing walls with arches, and an in-the-round stage (Fig. 2).⁸ As sites of performance, caravanserai inn-yards set the visual language of the Safavid theatrical space beyond just the *takiyeh*. For example, Safavid coffeehouses hosted performances such as storytellers, musicians, and travelling Dervishes,⁹ and they too had a central water feature, enclosing walls with arches, and in-the-round seating

⁷ Malekpour, vii.

⁸ Malekpour, 111.

⁹ Emami, 204; Matthee, Rudolph P. *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900*. *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900*, 167.

(Fig. 3 and 4).¹⁰ The Naqsh-i Jahan Maydan itself was also a theatrical space, and held events such as ceremonies, festivals, games and dramatic performances.¹¹ Like the coffeehouse, the visual iconography of the square reflects its theatrical function, and like Safavid theaters it heavily resembles the inn-yard of a caravanserai, with its two-story squared portico and water feature (Fig. 5 and 6).¹² Thus all of these buildings were united by their theatrical architecture and function. In addition to this similarity, Safavid theater-type buildings shared a social setting.

Safavid theater-type buildings were all state-sponsored public institutions, and they were all inherently public spaces.¹³ Even drinking coffee at a coffeehouse was an explicitly public rather than private act during the era of Naqsh-i Jahan's construction.¹⁴ Additionally, these public buildings would have seen similar clientele: craftsmen, merchants, men of letters of diverse backgrounds, such as Turks, Jews, Armenians, Georgians, English, Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, Hindu Indian, Arab, and Chinese.¹⁵ One of the reasons theater-type buildings drew such an expansive clientele is because they could be places for businessmen or patrons and clients to meet and engage in commercial exchanges.¹⁶ The building institutions acted as commercial entities themselves, and much like Safavid travelling performers changed and developed to meet the demands of the audience.¹⁷ This created somewhat of an arms race, especially among coffeehouses and caravanserais, for providing better accommodation and hospitality than their competitors.¹⁸ The public space of these buildings thus became a space not just for literal performance but also the performance of hospitality, competing to attract a diverse group of patrons.

This sense of hospitality blended well with the established Islamic practice of building charitable institutions, or *waqf*s.¹⁹ Islam places a strong value on providing hospitality, and so all of the theater-type buildings fit well within the religious worldview of Safavid Iran. This sense of religious hospitality combined with the ritualistic nature of Safavid folk performances brought a religiosity to the structures, and just like a Safavid shrine, these structures embodied the overlap of imperial ideology and popular piety in architecture.²⁰

¹⁰ Emami, 191.

¹¹ Rahimi, "Maydān-i Naqsh-i Jahān," 779; Gürkan Anar, Ayşegül Damla. "Safevi Şahlarının," 131.

¹² *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 779. Note: the modern water feature is different from what the square had in the 17th century, which was a long channel running around the square parallel to the walls, delineating the center space. ¹³ Emami, 210.

¹³ Emami, 210.

¹⁴ Matthee, Rudolph P. "Coffee in Safavid Iran: Commerce and Consumption." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 37, no. 1 (1994): 1-32. doi:10.2307/3632568, 32.

¹⁵ Emami, 197.

¹⁶ Emami, 204.

¹⁷ Malekpour, 75.

¹⁸ Bryce et al.

¹⁹ R. D. McChesney, *Waqf in Central Asia: Four Hundred Years in the History of a Muslim Shrine, 1480-1889*. (Princeton University Press, 2014), x.; Emami, 210.

²⁰ More on the shrine comparison at the end of this essay. Malekpour, vii; Kishwar Rizvi, *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine: Architecture, Religion and Power in Early Modern Iran*, (I.B. Tauris, 2011), 3.

Theater-type buildings all align perfectly with “the dynastic priorities of the Safavids in terms of aesthetic consumption, religious patronage and display” that Rizvi Kishwar identifies in Safavid shrines.²¹ The majority religion of the populace met the public buildings of the state. Thus, in addition to theater-type buildings’ public, commercial, hospitable, and ritualistic parallels, they had an additional parallel in their religious connotations. And in the Naqsh-i Jahan Maydan, these hyper-similar buildings are spatially parallel as well.

Figure 3 (Left): The upper levels of an Isfahan coffeehouse. Notice arches in the second level, which are like those of the Takiyeh of figure 2 and the caravanserai of figure 5.²²

Figure 4 (Right): Diagram of Naqsh-i Jahan coffeehouses. They are in-the-round spaces like a theater, with water in the middle. There were many coffeehouses built next to each other.²³

Figure 5: Caravanserai of Madar-e Shah adjacent to Naqsh-i Jahan Square, drawn in 1841 by French traveler Pascal Coste.

²¹ Rizvi. *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine*, 3.

²² Emami 187.

²³ Emami 194.

Figure 6: Naqsh-i Jahan Square - Note the similarity between this maydan and the caravanserai. *Source: Sara Farhang, Creative Commons 4.0 License*

Parallel Theater Iconographies in the Unified Space of Naqsh-i Jahan

The architecture of Naqsh-i Jahan's theater-type buildings follows the Safavid 'introversive order,' an architectural style with high enclosing walls around the edge of a building or complex and an inward-looking design.²⁴ The introversive order can also place a heavy emphasis on a structure's entrance, the one break in the enclosing walls. The fact that Naqsh-i Jahan is packed with introversive theater-type buildings creates a unifying effect, because the buildings and their entrances are introverted towards the central maydan in visual dialogue. The square's coffeehouses open onto the square.²⁵ A stately entrance portal on the North end of the square leads directly to the Qaysariyya with its many caravanserais (Fig. 7 and 8).²⁶ These public, ritualistic, commercial, and performative spaces were thus literally intersecting and overlapping as they are introverted towards each other, from the vast stage of the central maydan to the more modest stages of the caravanserai and coffeehouse. Even the entrance portal from the Qaysariyya was a performance space itself, the *naqqara-khana* (hall for royal musicians).²⁷

The large number of caravanserais and especially coffeehouses positioned directly next to each other present a further parallelization of theatrical space (Fig. 4). In fact, even these smaller coffeehouse stage spaces could be broken up into multiple different theaters of performance. As the contemporary travel-author Jean Chardin writes, "It often happens that two or three people talk at the same time, one on one side, the other on the opposite, and sometimes one will be a preacher and the other a storyteller."²⁸ Given the established performative nature of these buildings, and their physical relationship to each other, the

²⁴ Somaiyeh Falahat and M. Reza Shirazi. "New urban developments in Safavid Isfahan continuity or disjuncture?" *Planning Perspectives* 27: 1-14. 10.1080/02665433.2012.709695.

²⁵ Emami, 191.

²⁶ This was at a critical point in which the Safavid conception of caravanserais was changing from an "impregnable structure" to more "integrated into the surrounding landscape." See Emami, 202.

²⁷ *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 782. A performance space for royal musicians. See also Gürkan Anar, Ayşegül Damla. "Safevi Şahlarının," 132.

²⁸ Chardin, *Voyages*, translation by Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 166.

Naqsh-i Jahan maydan can be recontextualized as a central stage space orbited by and intersecting with numerous smaller stage spaces. However, there is one more stage in the Naqsh-i Jahan maydan that is unlike the others, but is critical to piecing together the full picture of the square's multi-tiered theatricality: the Ali Qapu palace.

Figure 7: Engraving from Jean Chardin's *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin, en Perse*. The center showcases Naqsh-i Jahan's impressive portal to the caravanserais and the arcades on the right side contained coffeehouses.²⁹

Figure 8: Diagram of Naqsh-i Jahan Square in the 17th century, with the Qaysariyya and its caravanserai complex attached to the square outlined.³⁰

The Ali Qapu palace stands out vertically from the rest of the buildings on the square; only the minarets of the Shah Mosque reach its height. The palace's third and fourth floors were originally the two upper levels of the palace, and these were used as a platform for performances of royal ceremonies. 'Abbas I increased the physical impact of the palace by adding a fifth floor in 1615, and 'Abbas II entrenched the palace's significance as a

²⁹ Emami, 196.

³⁰ Kevin O'Gorman, from Bryce et al. Page 215.

performative venue in 1644 with the addition of the terrace.³¹ This palatial stage (Fig. 9 and 10) dominates and thrusts itself into the square, and its architectural supremacy is cemented by two key differences between it and the other theatrical spaces on the square: the palace is elevated,³² and it is not in-the-round. This is significant, because the in-the-round structure of Safavid theaters allowed performers to go around and behind the spectators, positioning the audience in the middle of the action.³³ By contrast, the palace stage's frontality and elevation does not cast the audience as participants in the performance; only the Shah and his entourage have control of the palace stage. Paralleling the palace, the royal *naqqara-khana* which hosted music whenever the Shah was present in the palace,³⁴ was also an exclusive space as it was elevated and not in-the-round. The scholarship has yet to explore the implications of Naqsh-e Jahan square's unified architecture of tiered, in-the-round stage spaces dominated by an exclusive and supreme palace stage space.

Figure 9: The dominating Ali Qapu palace 'stage' space.

Source: Amir Pashaei, Creative Commons 4.0 license

³¹ Rahimi, "Mayd ān-i Naqsh-e Jahān," 50. The architecture of the palace building is reminiscent of that of the Chehel Sotoun Pavilion started by 'Abbas I and finished by 'Abbas II. The architectural parallel between the two palaces only further underscores this essay's argument because Chehel Sotoun too was used as a performative space to entertain guests, and is another example of "the theatrical nature of Safavid court architecture."

"Isfahan." In *The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*, edited by Jonathan M. Bloom, Sheila S. Blair. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t276/e425> ; M. Ferrante: "Čihil Sutūn: Etudes, relevés, restauration," *Travaux de restauration de monuments historiques en Iran* , ed. G. Zander, 293-322. Rome, 1968; Babaie, *Isfahan and its Palaces* , 1-2.

³² Even before the terrace was constructed in 1644, it was the exterior of the upper two levels of the palace that were used as the stage space, and this, like the terrace, was elevated and not in-the-round.

³³ Jamshid Malekpour, *The Islamic Drama*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 111.

³⁴ The *Cambridge History of Iran*, 782; Gürkan Anar, Ayşegül Damla. "Safevi Şahlarının," 132.

Figure 10: Another angle of the Ali Qapu palace ‘stage.’

Source: *Piccolo*, Creative Commons 2.0 license

Implications

When one holistically examines Naqsh-i Jahan’s multi-tiered theater spaces, ‘Abbas’s ideology of centralization shines through in a heretofore unenumerated way. Shah ‘Abbas had a systematic vision for Naqsh-i Jahan square,³⁵ and to understand his intent for the project one need only see its name, ‘image of the world.’ The square acts as a microcosm for the world of the Safavid Empire, an Empire which Shah ‘Abbas sought to centralize.³⁶ The multi-tiered stages embody an image of empire as a collection of many small spheres of influence, some interacting directly with each other but all connected to the central imperial square, dominated ultimately by the palace, the “exemplary center” as Clifford Geertz would have it.³⁷ The square, the palace, the coffeehouses, and the caravanserai were a unified space for the performance of empire in microcosm, whose palace-centric spatial relationships supported Shah ‘Abbas’s drive to centralize the Safavid state.

³⁵ Melville, Charles. "New Light on Shah ‘Abbas and the Construction of Isfahan." *Muqarnas* 33 (2016): 155-76. doi:10.2307/26551684, 171-172.

³⁶ Rahimi, “Mayd ān-i Naqsh-i Jahān,” 45; Gürkan Anar, Ayşegül Damla. “Safevi Şahlarının,” 131.

³⁷ Geertz, Clifford. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1980), 16. This research intersects with Geertz’s idea of the “theater state” from his analysis of Bali. The design intention of the centralizing Naqsh-i Jahan Square acts as a counter to horizontal and vertical decay in imperial structure (which Geertz identifies in Bali, and scholars have applied to the Safavids; I am far from the first to apply Geertz to the Safavid state, see Babak Rahimi, *Theater State and the Formation of Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran*, Leiden The Netherlands: Brill, 2011).

The square additionally acts as a macrocosm of the royal feast, a ritual that was another form of centralization.³⁸ The Safavid royal feast had a three-tier hierarchy of guests, and a three-tier architectural space to match. This paralleled the tripartite spatial organization of Naqsh-i Jahan: the palace and its square, the Shah Mosque, and the more everyday shops and caravanserai.³⁹ As aforementioned, all of the square's stage spaces had associations of hospitality, and the feast was the ultimate display of royal hospitality.⁴⁰ The connection between the royal feast and Naqsh-i Jahan is supported by the Shah's behavior. 'Abbas held great public feasts in the square on important occasions such as the New Year festival of *Nawrūz*.⁴¹ Shah 'Abbas, with Naqsh-i Jahan's structural and symbolic parallels, brought the hospitality and performance of a royal feast-hall out to the urban landscape.⁴²

Shah 'Abbas's centralizing vision for his empire extends beyond the micro/macrocosmic layout of its stage spaces, and it is also evident in the lived experience of a pedestrian in Naqsh-i Jahan square. Rahimi notes that the evolving Safavid "urban scheme" established "an integrated relationship between urban denizens and royal authority," and the integrated relationship of the square's stage spaces perfectly parallels this goal, as the modest coffeehouse stage is spatially integrated with the royal palace stage. The architecture thus supports the Shah's goal of "urban sociability in which all [...] could feel a sense of belonging as a member of an imperial order."⁴³ Furthermore, the ease of movement between the theater-type buildings facilitated the flow of Isfahan's diverse urban crowd in and out of these different theatrical spaces, mixing together and generating a shared experience. The hospitality of these spaces further encouraged their social function.⁴⁴ This architecturally generated consolidation of Safavid urban society, created by the interwoven tiered stages of the Naqsh-i Jahan square, further aligns with and supports Shah 'Abbas's push for centralization.

In addition to this integration of a diverse Safavid society, the theatrical nature of the square's many performance spaces cast the pedestrian themselves as an actor on the imperial stage. As aforementioned, Safavid in-the-round theater architecture placed the audience member in the middle of the action. The space further involves the pedestrian in that it physically invites them to become actors themselves. In order to traverse a caravanserai, one enters through the inn-yard, passing through the stage space. In order to get to a coffeehouse, one first passed through the maydan performance space. The architectural structure of the

³⁸ Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces*, 225.

³⁹ Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces*, 235; *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 782. This tripartite organization is so instrumental that it dictates the entire book outline of Stephen P. Blake, *Half the World: the Social Architecture of Safavid Isfahan, 1590-1722*. Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Pub., 1999, see table of contents.

⁴⁰ Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces*, 225.

⁴¹ Savory, Roger. *Iran Under the Safavids*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 159-160.

⁴² It is, to use a compelling phrase coined by Babaie, an 'urban enunciation of kingship,' *Isfahan and Its Palaces*, 39.

⁴³ Rahimi, "Maydān-i Naqsh-i Jahān," 43.

⁴⁴ Matthee, Rudolph P. *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005, 166.

interlocked stages thus creates these ‘moments’ in which the pedestrian is on a stage. The theater-type buildings were places of meeting and social interaction,⁴⁵ and as the buildings thrust socializers onto stages, they were invited to become a part of the imperial performance. Members of the crowd filling Naqsh-i Jahan played out their own individual dramas as they engaged in rituals, commerce, conversation, and culture. The multilayered architecture was an invitation to participate in the multilayered imperial project, an invitation again reflective of Shah ‘Abbas’s goal of centralization as well as his extension of royal hospitality out beyond the palace.

It is important to note that these individual ‘performances’ by Safavid subjects were not always favorable to the Shah. There was religious and political tension as wandering dervishes performed folk tales, mullahs gave sermons in the coffeehouses, and patrons sometimes discussed dissenting politics.⁴⁶ Indeed, Rudolph Matthee establishes that coffeehouses could be a “forum for a sufi-dominated counter culture.”⁴⁷ However, the architecture of Naqsh-i Jahan has an answer to this as well. The coffeehouse performance spaces are contained within the iconographic structure of the maydan complex, ensuring that the ‘set’ of the performance was always an imperial one, and so even performance against authority⁴⁸ happened on imperial terms. The Naqsh-i Jahan stages are also visually subordinate to that of the Ali Qapu palace, whose supremacy is enforced through its height and that it is the only stage not in-the-round, exclusive to the Shah. It is clear who owns the performative space. The unified imperial construction dominated by the palace stage thus constantly reminded the pedestrian who was ultimately in charge; the architecture itself works to contain dissent. This is the crystallization of one of the key aspects of ‘Abbas’s image of empire in the Naqsh-i Jahan square, the message being: wherever one is in the empire, one is always on the Shah’s imperial stage. This is the final and perhaps the most potent way in which the architecture of the ‘image of the world’ works to achieve the Shah’s goal of centralization.

Conclusion

Naqsh-i Jahan and its tiered stages act as a microcosm of the empire and a macrocosm of performative kingship, an idealization⁴⁹ in line with Shah ‘Abbas’s political goal of centralization. Its overlapping theater architecture orbits around the commanding and

⁴⁵ Social interaction, naturally, can be another form of performative behavior, which fits this paper’s performative conception of Naqsh-i Jahan and its buildings.

⁴⁶ Rudolph P Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005), 166, 167; Emami, 210.

⁴⁷ Rudolph P. Matthee, “Coffee in Safavid Iran: Commerce and Consumption,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 37, no. 1 (1994): 1-32. doi:10.2307/3632568.

⁴⁸ Emami, 210.

⁴⁹ Indeed, Natanzi describes the maydan as the “colored mirror of the heavens.” He interprets the square as a portrait of a divine ordering of urban space and empire. Translation from Blake, Stephen P. *Half the World*, 18.

exclusive stage of the Shah. Its structures facilitate ease of movement and consolidate urban society. Its in-the-round stages invite the Safavid subject to become an actor in the imperial project and a guest at the royal feast, while containing dissent through the visual supremacy and exclusivity of the palace stage, the only stage not in-the-round. While there has been fantastic scholarship analyzing each of these stage spaces separately, to examine these spaces separately does not do the square justice. The ‘image of the world’ must be examined holistically as a world, as a unified architectural statement. With the unified view of the stage spaces that this paper forwards, one can see more completely the Shah’s drive towards centralization, consolidation, and suppression of dissent, all made legible in the performative urban landscape of Naqsh-i Jahan.⁵⁰

There is much room for further research. This paper has alluded to the similarity between Safavid shrines and the performance spaces of Safavid theater-type buildings. Shrines too could be places of the performance of imperial authority, and be integrated into larger architectural complexes.⁵¹ If one is to read the theater-spaces of Naqsh-i Jahan as shrine-like, then they are thrust in parallel with the mosques that act as the other standout structures in the square. They are indeed already in spatial parallel: the public Shah Mosque to the south stands directly across the square from the performative spaces of the caravanserais and coffeehouses, and the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque exclusive to the royal court stands directly across from the royal palace stage space to the west.⁵² This paper’s unified view of the theatrical iconography of Naqsh-i Jahan could support the broader reading of Naqsh-i Jahan as a sort of giant, interconnected dynastic shrine, and future research could explore that symbolism and how it interacts with the conception of the square as a microcosm/macrocosm of empire as well as the lived experience of the square and its layered stage spaces.

⁵⁰ Naqsh-i Jahan is an interlocking and overlapping cultural, religious, political, and social statement. This paper addresses a very specific aspect of the square that has not been addressed before: the through-line of stage spaces. It does not focus upon the mosques of the square, nor delve too deeply into the religious symbolism or the spatial integration of the three main power groups, the religious hierarchy, the merchants, and the palace, because these and many other aspects of the Naqsh-i Jahan maydan have been comprehensively addressed elsewhere. See Melville, Charles. "New Light on Shah 'Abbas and the Construction of Isfahan."; Babaie, Sussan. *Isfahan and Its Palaces: Statecraft, Shi'ism and the Architecture of Conviviality in Early Modern Iran*; Blair, Sheila S. "Inscribing the Square: The Inscriptions on the Maidān-i Shāh in Iṣfahān."; Blake, Stephen P. *Half the World: the Social Architecture of Safavid Isfahan, 1590-1722* ; *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods* ; Gürkan Anar, Ayşegül Damla. "Safevi Şahlarının banılığı üzerine bir değerlendirme." *İran Çalışmaları Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2017): 117–143, see pages 129-136.

⁵¹ Rizvi, 128, 159.

⁵² *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 785 ; Gürkan Anar, Ayşegül Damla. "Safevi Şahlarının," 134.

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