

## Chapter XVI

### From Dome of Heaven to Pleasure Dome\*

I am dedicating these remarks to the memory of E. Baldwin Smith, my teacher of nearly forty years ago who tried to make sense of domes of all sizes by nearly always seeing kings under them, but who also knew that the art of kings separated them from their people but not from each other.<sup>1</sup>

“There was nothing,” writes the historian Suetonius about the emperor Nero, “in which he was more universally prodigal than in building.” And then he goes on in a passage which is as celebrated as it is rarely quoted in its entirety:

He made a palace extending all the way from the Palatine to the Esquiline, which at first he called the House of Passage, but, when it was burned shortly after its completion and rebuilt, the Golden House. Its size and splendor will be sufficiently indicated by the following details. Its vestibule was large enough to contain a colossal statue of the emperor a hundred and twenty feet high; and it was so extensive that it had a triple colonnade a mile long. There was a pond, too, like the sea, surrounded with buildings to represent cities, besides tracts of country, varied by tilled fields, vineyards, pastures, and woods, with great numbers of wild and domestic animals. In the rest of the house all parts were overlaid with gold and adorned with gems and mother-of-pearl. There were dining rooms with fretted ceilings of ivory, whose panels could turn and shower down flowers and were fitted with pipes for sprinkling the guests with perfumes. The main banquet hall was circular and constantly revolved day and night, like the heavens. He had baths supplied with sea water and sulphur water. When the edifice was finished in this style and he dedicated it, he deigned to say nothing

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians in March 1989, this paper remains as it was delivered, with only minimal changes in wording. A few notes either identify specific quotations or refer to common sources for the theme I am developing. For the purposes of the meeting, which dealt with the far-reaching destiny of Roman imperial architecture, it was appropriate to present what I would call a classical interpretation of architectural history, even if some of its edges are less generally known than its core. The interpretation as a whole, however, contains a number of fundamental problems, with which I shall not deal in any detail except to point out, in a few notes, alternative ways of interpreting the evidence.

more in the way of approval than that he was at last beginning to be housed like a human being.<sup>2</sup>

Nero's conception of the needs of a human being may be outrageous, but his palace, the Golden House, entered into the collective memory of the Middle Ages (and probably beyond), to which Christian and then Islamic (or perhaps first Islamic, then Christian) passion for (and actually requirement of) precedent eventually added the legendary temple-palace of Solomon, the prophet-king, known only through written and oral sources issued from usually undatable Jewish popular legends. What argues for a common, probably Hellenistic Near Eastern source for both myths is that they contain the same basic functional themes and visual images. What differentiates them is that the Roman imperial one was also rooted in memories and associations connected with existing, if often ruined, buildings.<sup>3</sup>

Although I shall not deal with all of them, six features of Nero's palace are pertinent to the argument I shall develop in this paper: grand size, which can and must be measured numerically in order better to be remembered without benefit of text; several different kinds of water, some passive in pools, others active, as for cleansing or, more likely, as the imperial Roman equivalents of today's Jacuzzis, whose sensuous function far exceeds its cleansing one; elaborate luxury of surfaces illustrated primarily through expensive techniques (inlays) and materials (gold, mother-of-pearl); artificially composed nature consisting both of formal gardens and of productive agriculture (the former is well known and often discussed, but it is more rarely noted that the edible products of the palace also had a special value used for several of the functions of an imperial palace<sup>4</sup>); representation of cities and buildings, which was the only way for making visible and perceiving the global space of universal rule as opposed to ocular space, that is to say, of the space one can see from a single vantage point; and finally, the rotating dome of heaven, with its spectacular implication of the ultimate achievement

<sup>2</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, ed. and trans. J. C. Rolfe (The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., 1979), II, pp. 135–37.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph contains two problems which require further work. One is practical and consists in establishing a typology of references to Solomon's palace from Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, Latin, Armenian and other medieval sources and a checklist of conscious references to Solomon by patrons or users of buildings. Most of the studies known to me are very incomplete and rarely go back to originals. For a partial exception, see Joseph Gutman, ed., *The Temple of Solomon* (Missoula, 1976). The second problem is that of the operation of medieval minds with respect to remaining, and usually ruined, secular buildings and especially palaces. Does the physically free-wheeling but emotionally tight scheme developed by Krautheimer apply to royal buildings? Cf. Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5 (1942), pp. 1–33.

<sup>4</sup> There is a curious but minor issue involved there. From the time when fruits from the Topkapı were sold in the streets of Istanbul to the appearance of royal or princely "appointments" for the manufacture of items for pleasure, there is a whole field of the economic exploitation of the palace which, to my knowledge, is untouched.

for a creator of visual forms, patron or architect: [16] the capture, taming and mastery of time. I shall return in conclusion to a more precise consideration of what can be called the metaphysical and ethical implications of Suetonius's text, if not of Nero's creation. In the meantime I will concentrate on the idea of a dome of heaven, whether rotating or not. I will take as more or less given general assumptions – without arguing about details in any one case, although it is easy to do so – the arguments and conclusions of Karl Lehmann, Lars-Ivar Ringbom and Hans L'Orange among others,<sup>5</sup> as follows.

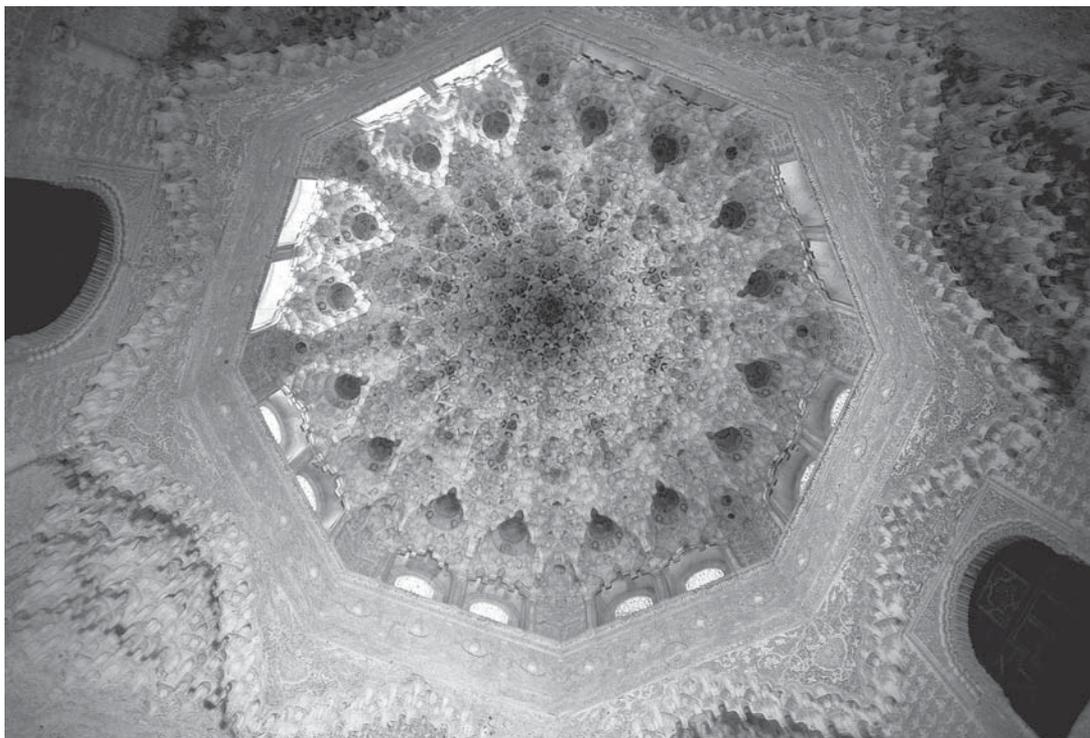
1. In the vast Late Antique *koiné* and including its Iranian, Central Asian and Indian extensions, one of the consistent components of royal space, be it an actual palace like Nero's, provincial baths like those of Gaza and of Qusayr 'Amrah,<sup>6</sup> or portable thrones like those represented on Iranian silver plates,<sup>7</sup> was the connotation and at times even the denotation of the heavenly spheres as the king's protectors through the good omens they express or as the abode the king shares with his relatives, the sun, the moon and the major constellations.

2. This theme has ideological, metaphoric and visual implications. Ideologically, power on earth is the temporary but recurring expression of an eternally legitimate power, in which all kings partake, like members of the same family. Metaphorically, the heavens with their endlessly recurring and endlessly moving constellations are the most potent image of that power; and heavenly images have affected both royal-imperial images (as late as with le Roi Soleil of the seventeenth century) and, under their impact, religious ones, as in the hymn where the Virgin is *sublimis inter sidera*,

<sup>5</sup> Karl Lehmann, "The Dome of Heaven," *Art Bulletin*, 27 (1945), pp. 1–27; Alexander C. Soper, "The Dome of Heaven in Asia," *Art Bulletin*, 29 (1947), pp. 225–48; Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Paradisus Terrestris* (Helsinki, 1958); Hans P. L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship* (Oslo, 1953). These are but the main statements of a position which has affected, directly or by intellectual osmosis, a host of roughly contemporary scholars such as E. B. Smith, Percy Schramm, E. Kantorowicz, A. Grabar and many others who saw in the expression of imperial or royal power the most universally understood visual language from Hellenistic times until the Renaissance. It is too early to know whether this position, an approach to understanding forms rather than a theory for their understanding, will survive the rigorous and at times narrow specificity of more recent scholarship.

<sup>6</sup> The Gaza bath is known through a literary description: P. Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza* (Hildesheim, 1969); and Henry Maguire, *Earth and Ocean* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1987), especially pp. 12–13. The bibliography on Qusayr 'Amrah is quite extensive, although for the most part not very useful. For the purposes of this paper, the key study is by Paul Saxl in K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1969), pp. 390–449, but mention should be made of Martin Almagro et al., *Qusayr 'Amra* (Madrid, 1975), which contains an almost complete record of the paintings as recently restored.

<sup>7</sup> Prudence O. Harper, *Silver Vessels of the Sassanian Period* (New York, 1981), pp. 99 ff., pls 33–35. K. V. Trever and V. L. Lukonin, *Sasanidskoe Serebro* (Moscow, 1987), especially around No. 15 of the catalog.



1 Alhambra,  
Hall of the Two  
Sisters, dome;  
mid-fourteenth  
century

“elevated amidst the stars.” Visually, the theme has taken forms which have primarily affected the surface of buildings, in particular ceilings or their reflections on floors, and a set of images ranging from the immediate literalness of Qusayr ‘Amrah’s ceiling, which actually reproduces the heavens with their constellations, to the studied and remote allusions of Hadrian’s villa in Tivoli discussed by Lehmann.

Let me now jump across space and time. I have argued elsewhere at some length that the *muqarnas* domes of the two large halls on the side of the Court of the Lions in the fourteenth-century Alhambra were in fact rotating domes of heaven.<sup>8</sup> The rotation is easy to establish by recalling how light (during the day or at night) turns around the base of the dome through a ring of windows and transforms an absolutely symmetrical stereotomy of shapes into an ever-changing, asymmetrical topography. What makes a heavenly interpretation possible is the poem inscribed at eye level in the Hall of the Two Sisters (Fig. 1) and of the Abencerrajes (Fig. 2):

In here is a cupola which by its height becomes lost from sight [a reference to the immensity of the sky]; beauty in it appears both concealed and visible [an allusion to traditional Islamic conception[s] of the ways to interpret the visible]. The constellation of Gemini extends a ready hand [to help it] and the full moon of the

<sup>8</sup> Oleg Grabar, *The Alhambra* (London, 1978), pp. 142 ff.



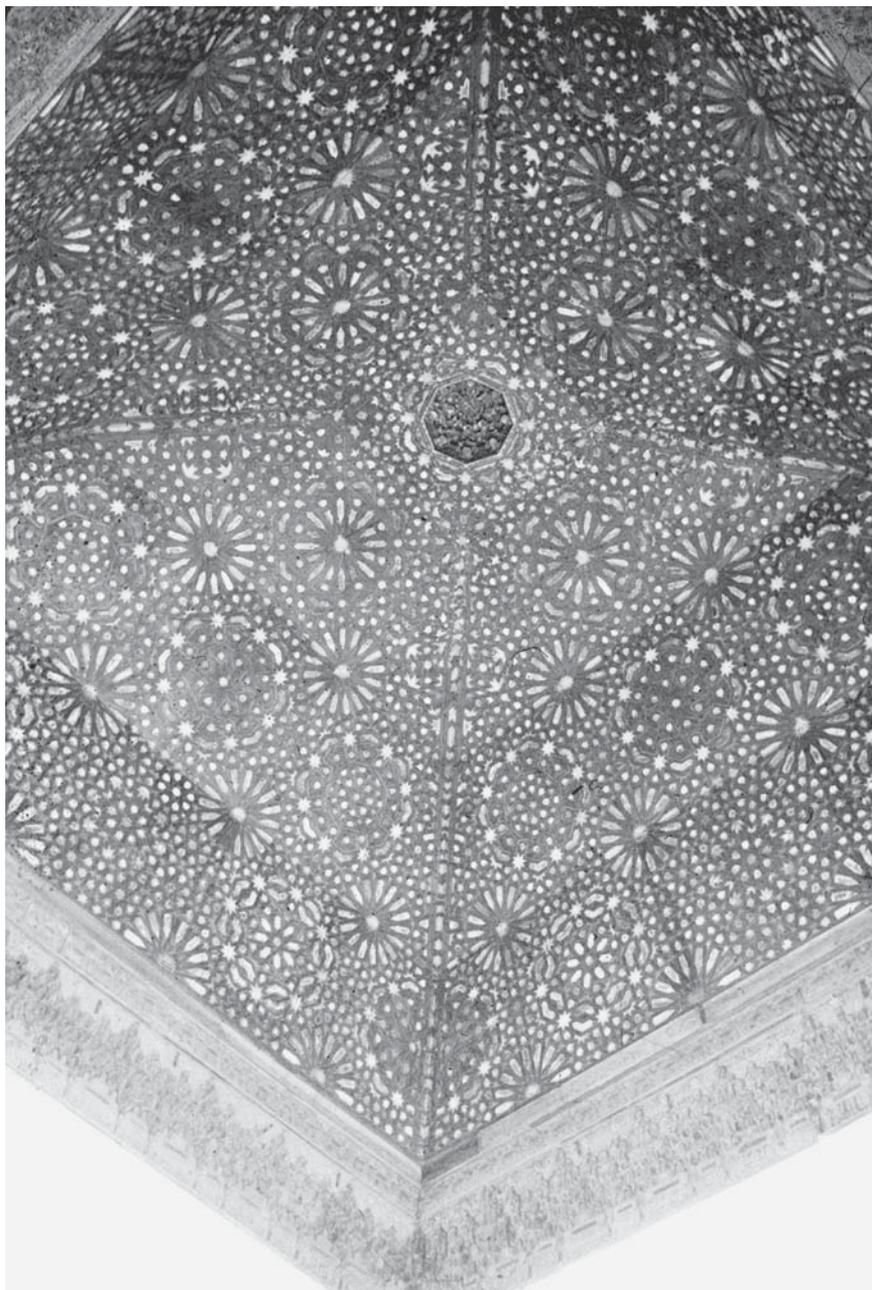
heavens draws near to whisper secretly to it.../ When they [the parts of the room] are illuminated by the rays of the sun, you would think that they are made of pearls by reason of the quantity of celestial bodies in them.

In these two domes the forms are geometrically abstract, and the meaning is provided by a text on the building, a vector external to the forms it affects, as every *muqarnas* dome is not a dome of heaven, and all domes of heaven within an Islamic language of forms need not be in *muqarnas*. Using two different idioms, the same subject matter is depicted in the wooden ceiling of the Hall of the Ambassadors (Fig. 3), where it is again the inscriptions, a rather complex lot of them, that make the meanings explicit. Visually, however, it is the two-dimensional design of six rows of star-like geometric shapes that leads to the seventh heaven, the small *muqarnas* domuscule in the center. This progressive sequence of exploding or constricted motifs was originally strengthened by a second idiom, color. Color is almost gone from the present ceiling, but repairs carried out some twenty years ago brought to light a series of notations for workers on the inner side of the woodwork; and the following three colors, from inscriptions and visible remains, are clearly identified: white in the center, red, and green.<sup>9</sup> A more laborious

2 Alhambra, Hall of the Abencerrajes, dome; mid-fourteenth century

<sup>9</sup> Dario Cabanelas, "La antigua policromía del techo de Comares en la Alhambra," *Al-Andalus*, 35 (1970), pp. 423 ff.

3 Alhambra,  
Hall of the  
Ambassadors,  
dome; first  
quarter of the  
fourteenth  
century



examination will probably yield further information, and I shall return shortly to the meaning of these colors.

Heaven it is in the Alhambra, and let us even assume that I am right in seeing two of the domes as rotating cupolas just as they were in Nero's palace. The parallelism between the Roman [17] imperial concoction and the monument of an agonizing Muslim rule in Spain does not end there. Suetonius reports that the rotating dome was in the "main banquet hall" (*praecipua cenationum rotunda*), that is to say in a space for and of pleasure. Little is known about the uses of spaces in the Alhambra. The Hall of the Ambassadors may have been used for formal receptions of foreign dignitaries, while the Hall of the Two Sisters has no obvious function. This is so, if we consider them as fulfilling a hierarchy of ceremonial and utilitarian purposes like eating or greeting guests. The spaces themselves offer a different interpretation. In both cases the dome of heaven is in fact a pavilion difficult to use except as a place through which to pass, but with edges that lead outward, to the city of Granada in one case and probably a series of gardens and living areas in the other. In both cases the richness of the applied ornament and a logic of use make, just as with Nero's creation, the provision of visual pleasure the main function of both halls. The pleasure is unspecified in the Muslim example, but it does not exclude eating. In other words, the domes of the Alhambra, like the Alhambra itself, possess a physical reality of making spaces for the senses (pleasure) and a metaphysical reality for the intellect (heavens). The forms were different, no doubt, but the idea and the two levels of meaning were probably true of Nero's palace as well.

A century before the Alhambra was built, around 1200–1220, in the small town of Ganja, now in the [former] Soviet Union but belonging to the Turko-Iranian culture of Azerbaijan just west of the Caspian Sea, one of Iran's most lyrical writers, Nizami, [18] wrote a long poem known as the "Haft Paykar," the "Seven Beauties." Clearly one of those texts that possess several parallel meanings, it contains an extraordinary account of the creation of a palace for the ruler Bahram Gur, a historical figure of the Sasanian dynasty, who ruled in the fifth century and who was known in legend, among other achievements, as a great hunter. The building was to be built by one named Shida, and I will quote at length from the poem because it is not a well-known passage:

Shida by name, sun-bright adorer, he, with (his) designs of black and white.  
 A master in the work of drawing too, and in surveying famed geometer.  
 Physics, geometry, astronomy – all in his hands was like a ball of wax.  
 A finished worker in the building-art; in painting and in sculpture artist skilled;  
 When at the feast he saw the monarch gay; fluent of tongue, with fervidness of  
 heart,  
 He kissed the earth, paid homage to the king, sat down again when he had kissed  
 the earth.  
 He said, If by the king I'm given leave, I'll keep the evil eye far from his lands;

For I can weigh the sky, I know the stars, by reason know the business of the stars.  
 In painting and in building you may think I have the inspiration of (true) art.  
 I'll form a likeness to the lofty spheres, by means of which they will not harm the  
 king.

Whilst he is in the picture-room, the world, he'll have no fear of the celestial stars.  
 Placed in the place of safety as to life, on earth he'll be, (in power), as the sky.  
 I'll make a seven-domed house.

The hue of every dome distinct, more fine than the hue of *any* idol-temple known.

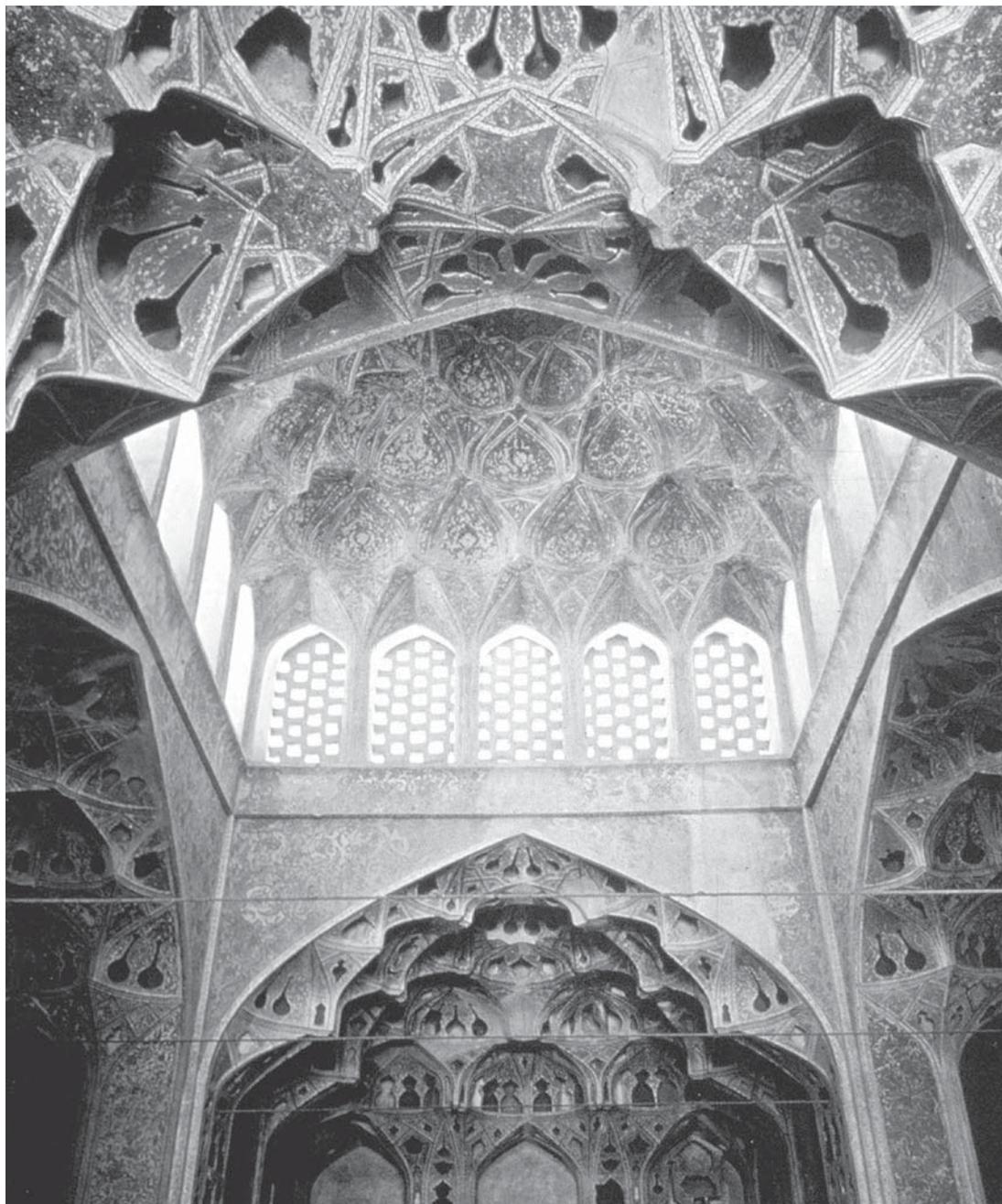
And for the seven days of every week and the seven planets, it is plain, appear.  
 On such days, days to light a festive scene, let him take pleasure in a dome each  
 day;

Put on attire in colour as the house, and with the charmer of the house drink wine.  
 If with these words (of mine) the king conform, he'll magnify himself, be glorious.  
 So long as life exists and may be used, (the king) will have enjoyment of his life.<sup>10</sup>

This lengthy passage provides another version of the ideology of pleasure under a dome of stars than the one in Suetonius. Here the ideology has acquired the additional component of protection from evil through the stars. But instead of assuming or evoking a single building space, Nizami transforms the idea of a royal palace into seven buildings and eventually identifies them by their colors, in order, black, yellow, green, red, blue, sandalwood and white. White is the last one, just as white was the color of the apex of the Alhambra's wooden dome. In later times Nizami's verses led to wonderful miniatures in which clothes and pavilions are all dyed in the same color. Furthermore, Nizami introduces into each dome the beautiful daughters of seven kings ruling the seven climes of the earth. On the one hand, the universal power or at least relationship of the ruler makes its reappearance, as it existed in the wall paintings of Nero's palace. On the other hand, with the characteristic ambiguity of the Persian lyrical and mystical tradition, pleasure, here sexual pleasure, is part of the imagery, if not of the reality, of Nizami's text. [19]

Too little is known archaeologically or architecturally about later Islamic palaces to reconstruct or even imagine the exact relationship between a complex set of myths, at times suffused with religious ideas interpreting the Qur'anic visions of buildings and gardens in the paradise to come, and actually preserved buildings. But a search for pleasure certainly dominates what remains from the seventeenth-century palaces of Isfahan, the explicit pleasure of drinking in the midst of an artificial vegetation in the small interior domed rooms of the Ali Qapu (Fig. 4), or a more implicit one in

<sup>10</sup> Nizami, *The Haft Paikar (The Seven Beauties)*, trans. C. E. Wilson (London, 1924), II, pp. 110–11. A few verses are skipped in a translation which has not taken into consideration possibly more concrete aesthetic meanings appropriate to its Persian original. Hardly any research has been devoted to the medieval language of aesthetics and of architectural concepts in Persian and Arabic.



4 Isfahan, entrance to palace complex known as Ali Qapu, detail of a cupola; early seventeenth century

garden pavilions known descriptively as the Chehel Sutun (40 columns) or metaphysically as the *hesht behesht*, the eight paradises.<sup>11</sup>

It is from written descriptions or references that intermediary steps can be sketched out. Tamerlane's great palaces (c. 1400) are only fragmentary ruins; and their descriptions are more formal than interpretative in their enthusiasm, just as other themes found in Suetonius's text, like wealth and expense of materials or striking vegetation, take precedence over overtly symbolic meanings.<sup>12</sup> In Constantinople, a Russian traveler of the fifteenth century reports the existence of a hall "in which the sun, the moon, and the stars succeeded each other as in heaven." In his day, the room was deserted and abandoned.<sup>13</sup> In the late twelfth century, a palace was built in Constantinople, which had a "dome-like heaven" made of *muqarnas*, and its paintings gave the effect of rainbows. "There is insatiable enjoyment here, not hidden, but on the surface," writes the chronicler Mesarites, and the emperor John sat drinking (says the text) "to the health of the Persians represented there."<sup>14</sup> Once again an interaction is proposed between representation and reality, or more precisely between behavior and imagination. Around 1211 William of Oldenbourg saw a blowing Zephyrus, and the sun passing through time depicted as the zodiac in the palace of a Crusader King in Beirut.<sup>15</sup> In the tenth century, the Armenian king Gagik – whose uniquely and mysteriously decorated church still remains at Akhtamar on Lake Van in eastern Turkey – had a palace whose description, partial though it is, does have both cosmic and pleasure elements.<sup>16</sup>

Pitifully few traces remain to even suggest illustrations for these texts. One eighth-century palace, Khirbat al-Mafjar, exhibits a fascinating

<sup>11</sup> The Isfahan buildings have been wonderfully restored by a superb Italian team from the Istituto per lo Studio di Medio e Estremo Oriente (known as ISMEO). For the buildings mentioned here, see Giuseppe Zander, ed., *Travaux de restauration* (Rome, 1968), and Eugenio Galdieri, "Les Palais d'Isfahan," in Renata Holod, ed., *Studies on Isfahan*, two fascicules of vol. 7 of *Iranian Studies* (1974), pp. 380–405.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilber, *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 271–81 and *passim*. All appropriate references to descriptions like Clavijo's Spanish text and to numerous Russian archaeological documents are found there. Additional information or complete translations of texts mentioned by Golombek and Wilber are found in Wheeler M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes* (The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge, 1989) e.g. pp. 85–100.

<sup>13</sup> B. de Khitrowo, *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, I (Geneva, 1889), p. 238.

<sup>14</sup> Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972), pp. 228–29. The presumably factual account is interesting to compare to the imaginary one in the epic of Digenes Akrites, *ibid.*, pp. 215–26, or to the palace allegedly encountered by Alexander the Great when he met Candace, the Queen of Merv: Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Life of Alexander of Macedon*, Elizabeth Hazelton Haight, ed. and trans. (New York, 1955), pp. 113–14.

<sup>15</sup> E. Rey, *Les colonies franques de Syrie* (Paris, 1883), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), pp. 4–5. Robert W. Thomson, "Architectural Symbolism in Classical Armenian," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 30 (1979), pp. 102–14.

interaction between pleasure and ideology, and Irving Lavin has decades ago demonstrated the relationship between another Umayyad palace and the Roman *triclinium*.<sup>17</sup> A bit more is available through a few objects which may have captured, at some other level of perception and use, the idea of a cosmic dome.<sup>18</sup> Miniatures depicting royal toys and souvenirs or utensils like lamps or inkstands in the shape of buildings may be medieval equivalents of models of Versailles with lights shining in the royal chambers.<sup>19</sup> [20]

The point of these remarks is twofold. I am arguing that the dome of heaven was in fact a pleasure dome already in ancient Rome; but I would also maintain that, within medieval traditions, it is the Eastern, Islamic world that maintained the classical Roman imperial relationship between heavens and pleasure. This occurred for two reasons. One is negative: the Muslim world rejected the Christianization of the dome of heaven which took place sometime in the fifth or sixth centuries and led Karl Lehmann to show as the first illustration for his article the east dome in San Marco, a Christian dome of heaven with a totally different story to tell. The positive reason is that during the post-seventh-century Middle Ages the Muslim world had real kings and emperors with financial resources and ideological ambitions that would not appear in the Christian world until the sixteenth century. It thus stands to reason that they, rather than the relatively impoverished and temporary dynasties of Christendom, would pick up and incorporate Roman imperial themes, at times in their Persian form, on a truly grand scale.<sup>20</sup>

However pleasing it may be for an Orientalist to suggest that the Muslim world maintained until the Renaissance a purer classical tradition than the Christian realm, my second point is less parochial and less smug. It is no doubt true that, at some point in a still-vague chronological development, traditions as different from each other as pre-modern Morocco, late-medieval Iran or Mughal India provided their secular domes with a visual sensuality that heralds Coleridge's vision of Xanadu and from which learned iconographic meanings dwindle away to be replaced with those of physical

<sup>17</sup> On Khirbat al-Mafjar the latest and most wonderful book is Robert Hamilton, *Walid and His Friends: An Umayyad Tragedy* (Oxford, 1988). On Mshatta's relationship with Rome, Irving Lavin, "The House of the Lord," *Art Bulletin*, 44 (1962), pp. 1-28.

<sup>18</sup> Although mentioned by several of the scholars quoted in n. 5 above, the object in the shape of a building, and more specifically with a cupola, has not, to my knowledge, been made the subject of a thorough investigation. It actually exists, even in areas like Central Asia and China, which are outside the regions with which this paper concerns itself, and often has funerary connotations, about which see below.

<sup>19</sup> On the so-called *Automata* miniatures, see the translation by Donald R. Hill of al-Jazari's *Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* (Dordrecht, 1974). I have discussed these objects in A. and O. Grabar, "L'essor des arts inspirés par les cours princières," *L'Occidente e l'Islam nell'alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 1965).

<sup>20</sup> A partial exception lies, of course, in Constantinople, but I wonder whether its financial resources were at the level of its ideological and intellectual depth.

well-being and pleasure.<sup>21</sup> Iranian [21] miniatures further emphasize an overwhelmingly sensuous wealth of buildings to which mystical dimensions are only attributed with considerable reluctance, as pleasure for the observer can be an end in itself.<sup>22</sup> But a loftier dome of heaven, which was not one of pleasure (even if modern man has sometimes changed that<sup>23</sup>), appears in a singularly fascinating sequence of buildings in which, once again, it is the Islamic world that picks up the heritage of S. Constanza. I refer to the imperial mausolea which, in Merv in the twelfth century, in Sultaniyah in the fourteenth, in Samarkand in the fifteenth, in Istanbul in the sixteenth, and then in a stunning succession of seventeenth-century masterpieces in India, bring to the mortal remains of sultans that protection of heaven through domes that they in turn proclaim in different styles and in different settings.<sup>24</sup> These were domes of heaven, of a different heaven from the astrological or astronomical ones built by kings, but the West decided that they were pleasure domes, and so they have been proclaimed ever since.

These mausolea tell another story in many ways. They, too, go back to Roman imperial models. And yet, it was once again Baldwin Smith who argued almost forty years ago that what he, and the type of classical tradition to which he belonged, saw flourishing in Rome from Near Eastern Hellenistic sources found one of its most visible developments in the architecture of imperial India.<sup>25</sup> For there, also, was founded in the late sixteenth century an empire with universal ambitions.

But I would like to end on a few more prosaic conclusions which may be of more importance to architectural historians. One is that the evidence for the story I am telling is found in written sources much more than in

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<sup>21</sup> A central issue here, once again beyond the point of this paper, is to explain how insiders and outsiders to the several Islamicate subcultures *seem* to have come to relatively comparable judgments about the effects of their palatial architecture. I emphasize the word *seem* in the absence of needed investigations.

<sup>22</sup> Examples of buildings that are visually stunning and yet unreal appear frequently in Iranian manuscript illustrations from the late fourteenth century onward. The first obvious example is British Library add. 18113, a 1396 copy of a *Diwan* by Khwaju Kirmani (No. 13 in Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Washington, DC, 1989)). The perusal of any one of the great later Persian manuscripts like the *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp or the 1543 London Nizami clearly shows the continuity of the tradition of an architecture of intense sensuous excitement and pleasure. See Laurence Binyon, *The Poems of Nizami* (London, 1928), and especially Martin B. Dickson and Stuart C. Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

<sup>23</sup> I am referring in particular to the use of the Taj Mahal, not only by tourists, but especially by Indian honeymooners.

<sup>24</sup> A lot of work has been done on many of these buildings over the past decade and much of that work has not yet been published. For the purposes of this paper, all the buildings are available in John D. Hoag, *Islamic Architecture* (New York, 1977), or in George Michell, ed., *Architecture of the Islamic World* (London, 1978).

<sup>25</sup> E. Baldwin Smith, *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1956), pp. 179 ff.

buildings. This is so for many reasons, one of which is the abandonment and destruction of royal buildings. The idea became a cliché of medieval Islamic poetry that the glory of kings is evil when it becomes architecture. A common theme of miniatures is the contemplation of a ruined palace as an awareness of the vanity of human pride,<sup>26</sup> and Suetonius already alludes to the judgment that the architecture of princes is in conflict with the social good expected of an architect's competence. It is an interesting instance of that necessity for ethical judgment which is ultimately the task of the critic rather than of the historian.

The second point is that this literature interprets for the most part the surface of buildings, not their structural core. Does this mean that the originality and complexity of royal monuments lie in their skin rather than their structure? Perhaps it does indeed, for one discovers in a theme like the palace that it is the metaphysical memory and vision that ruled the physical reality. A magician architect could always change any stage into a new setting. The point may be of some significance to the interpreter of buildings, old or new.

Finally, I want to argue that a community of intellectual and aesthetic purposes and meanings maintained itself throughout the Middle Ages from the Atlantic to India, especially within the world of princes. It is when the Renaissance provided humanism and liberalism to Western Europe that the Orient became rejected as alien and "other." The paradox is a fascinating one deserving more profound investigation than to be simply labeled as Orientalism, and its moral consequences are still part of our life. Thus, once again, ethics, aesthetics and praxis are inescapable issues from imperial memories. Nero did not know this, but Suetonius suspected it.

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, Binyon, *Poems of Nizami*, pl. III.

