The study of the stately residences of the political and military elites of Iran and Central Asia in the early modern (or late medieval) period presents a number of problems not encountered with other types of monumental architecture. In the first place, few such residences survive, at least in comparison with cultic buildings (e.g., mosques, madrasas, shrines, and hostels) of the same period. These latter were not solely dependent on the prestige of the individual who sponsored their construction to ensure their maintenance and preservation over time, but were generally supported by permanent endowments, as well as gifts and offerings that acknowledged their spiritual significance. The few palaces and palace complexes that do survive more or less intact are sufficiently varied in form and context as to defy easy categorization. For the historian of architecture, the relatively small number of surviving examples makes generalization about the typology of palaces difficult. Nonetheless, efforts have been made to provide a typology of palaces that is useful for comparative purposes and for placing individual cases, such as the Balkh dawlatkhāna, in a wider context. In a recent work, Sussan Babaie proposes four palace types: 1) the semi-public palace complex with congregational mosque, 2) the isolated absolutist and imperial private palace complex, 3) the urban citadel palace, and 4) the suburban garden palace. To some degree, the Balkh dawlatkhāna described in the early seventeenth-century text Bahr al-asrār fi manāqib al-akhyār does not fit precisely into any one of these categories but shares characteristics of all but the third. It had a congregational mosque and large areas open to the public; it had segregated precincts for the royals, as well as symbols of imperial power scattered through the public areas; and it was situated in a park (chahārbāgh) in the suburbs of Balkh. In many ways, it reflected the palace-building fashions of its time as seen in the rest of the Persianate world (Ottoman Turkey, Iran, India, and Transoxania).

Like any monumental structure, a palace contains symbolic as well as material meaning, and is intended to represent and project power, as well as provide shelter for the ruler or politically powerful individual. How the symbolic value of the building is interpreted and memorialized in the literary record varies with time, place, and trends in architecture. In his recent study of the various forms and functions of Islamic architecture, Robert Hillenbrand articulates the main problems involved in understanding the symbolic value of palace architecture—the most important being the lack of surviving examples, except from a few limited periods, and the formulaic, imprecise, and embellished descriptions of palaces found in literary sources. Some notable exceptions are Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, the Agra Fort, and Fatehpur Sikri, whose architectural histories over half a millennium are known in considerable detail. The geographical distribution of known examples is in part directly related to the types of available building materials. In India, the Mughal (Timurid) dynasty had access to durable materials like sandstone, limestone, and marble. Moreover, the symbolic value of their buildings was so appropriable by other rulers (especially the British) that early modern (sixteenth-to eighteenth-century) palace architecture is disproportionately well preserved there in comparison with Persianate Central Asia (Transoxania), for example, where seismic conditions and the lack of building stone adversely affected the durability of large structures. In Transoxania, except for the remnants of the enormous Aq Saray Palace of Timur at Shahr-i Sabz in present-day Uzbekistan, we have no remains of large palaces until the last amirs of Bukhara built some extravagant
suburban Italianate palaces under Russian influence.7 The typical princely residence throughout Central Asia—when the prince was not hunting or on campaign—was the fortified urban complex, the citadel (arg, bişār, qal’a), which was simply an expanded version of the vernacular rural qal’a, or residential fort, still found, for example, in Afghanistan today.8

When designing royal residences, architects and their patrons in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Central Asia were clearly inspired, or at least influenced, by the garden residences of fifteenth-century Timurid Samarqand and Herat. Robert Hillenbrand characterizes the evolution of the palace in the Persianate region in the post-Timurid era as “the translation of the tented Turco-Mongol culture into more durable elements.” He then considers the consequent palatine architecture as having a “temporary, makeshift air” about it and suggests that there was no intent to create a permanent royal residence out of an agglomeration of kiosks, pavilions, summerhouses, and audience halls that made up these royal garden habitats.9 There is undoubtedly much truth in this, though it is difficult to think of the residential parts of Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri as being erected quickly and cheaply, or having anything of the makeshift about them. Perhaps the suburban garden pavilion (kūshk) is more what was intended by his characterization, but what the description of the Balkh dawlatkhāna allows us to see is how a permanent royal residence was incorporated into a semi-public garden district or park. To some degree, the reader is in need of the “visionary imagination,” which the author of the Balkh dawlatkhāna invokes as necessary to comprehend the architecture of the private parts of the dawlatkhāna, in order to “see” the residence of the khan and assess its permanence. Since only the nearest relatives (mahramān) had access to the inner sanctums and none of them, to our knowledge, left written descriptions, there is no way to know what the private residence of the khan and his family was really like. However, certain inferences may be drawn from the surviving architecture of royal residences contemporary with the Balkh dawlatkhāna, notably those of early seventeenth-century Mughal India.10 It is certainly debatable whether the Tughay-Timurid khan in Balkh had the resources to build as luxuriously as the padishahs of India, but the basic and most intimate elements of residential design (the placement of baths and toilets, the arrangement of sleeping and living quarters, and the ways in which all these were grouped) were certainly known in Balkh through the constant movement of people between Central Asia and India—merchants, soldiers, pilgrims, and the merely curious (the author of our text being one of the latter)—and therefore it is reasonable to assume that such elements may well have been used in the private area (andarūn) of the dawlatkhāna.

In the absence of excavated material remains, the historian has to rely today on what survives of the Balkh dawlatkhāna in the written record. As Julie Meisami and Hillenbrand both emphasize, literature is a highly contingent source—stylized, representative of a now only partially knowable world view, and utilizing imagery the subtleties and nuances of which may or may not be evident to the modern-day reader. On the other hand, as Meisami has shown, it is possible nonetheless to extract concrete information, particularly architectural terminology, from poetry and prose, to observe the evolution of tropes used for architectural description, and to gain a sense of the way in which palaces were intended to represent power, both human and cosmic.11

Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s Bahr al-asrār fi manāqib al-akhyār, a universal history planned on a grand scale and labored on through the 1630s, provides a long literary description of the palace complex (dawlatkhāna) that Nazr Muhammad (d. 19 June 1651), the son of Din Muhammad of the Tughay-Timurid dynasty, built at Balkh around 1611–12. As Meisami noted about the eleventh-century poet Farrukhi, Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s description of the dawlatkhāna is “concrete in (many) details and tantalizingly vague in others.”12 Springing from a poetic imagination and written by a man with a strong literary style (the Bahr al-asrār is a fine late example of rhymed prose or saj’), the work uses familiar cosmic and mythic imagery (the dawlatkhāna’s gardens are “Iram-like,” its portico “reaches to the arc of Saturn’s vault,” its views are like those of a “Chinese picture gallery”) to emphasize scale and grandeur and so his patron’s glory. The Bahr al-asrār text is first and foremost a work of literary creativity and only secondarily a vector of architectural information. However, the text also gives specific and detailed measurements for
the entire complex as well as for sections of the building, and occasionally orients parts of the complex to the cardinal directions. It more consistently identifies the functions associated with each section of the building in specific and unambiguous terms (the area where hunting parties mount up, the place where a summer pavilion is erected for holding court, the washrooms for visitors, the zoo, the atelier for book production, etc.). To understand the text, it is also useful to know something about the author.

Mahmud b. Amir Wali was born about 1595. At the age of nineteen, he was studying hadith under his brother-in-law, Sayyid Mirak Shah Husayni, and remained with him for another ten years, until the latter’s death in 1624. A year later, he set out for India with no particular object in mind. He arrived in Peshawar in the autumn of 1625 and traveled about the subcontinent for the next six years, journeying from Delhi south to Ceylon (Sarandip, Sri Lanka), east to Calcutta, and west to Sind. On his return to Balkh he was appointed the khan’s personal librarian (kitābdār-i khān’s below’s khan’s personal librarian), in which office he seems to have remained for at least a decade. He was a prolific writer, though of all his works, carried out at the beginning of his reign over the urban confines of Balkh, was the most impressive of his career as an early modern Balkh sultan.14 In the 1980s, the Soviet scholars Buri Akhmedov and Akhror Mukhtarov both published works on early modern Balkh and neither noted the existence of the dawlatkhānā.

The section describing the dawlatkhānā appears in a chapter devoted to Nazr Muhammad’s “wondrous creations,” which included a large madrasa in Balkh, eight hunting lodges scattered through the mountains south of Balkh City, irrigation and agricultural projects, a variety of small mosques and other infrastructure projects (bridges, roads, caravansaries), and seven parks (bāghs). Certainly the dawlatkhānā, built within the urban confines of Balkh, was the most impressive of his works, carried out at the beginning of his reign over Balkh when he was in his early twenties.

Balkh City has three distinct sections all separately walled: an outer city (called variously ṭabāz, shahr-i birūn, ḥisār-i birūn), an inner city (shahr-i darūn, ḥisār-i darūn, shahrīstān), and a citadel (quhandiz, qal’ā, arg, bālā ḥisār). On the northern side of the city, the eleven-kilometer-long walls of the outer city spring from the walls of the inner city, themselves approximately three kilometers in circumference. The inner city stands on a fairly high mound above the outer city. At its southeast-
ern corner, on an even higher mound, is the third walled section, the citadel, known in early modern times as the Hinduwan Citadel (*Qal’a-i Hinduwān*), a term that also seems to have been applied at times to the entire inner city. The *dawlatkhāna*, by virtue of its described location in the “*chahārbāgh* of Mir Jan Kildi Bi,” was outside the inner city walls (see Appendix for map of Balkh). As far as is known, the inner city contained no verdant areas, no doubt because of its height above the canals that fed the Balkh oasis.

The *chahārbāgh* of Mir Jan Kildi Bi, which Mahmud b. Amir Wali mentions, was developed by its eponym, a leading amir of the Jani-Begid Shibanid ‘Abd Allah Khan, who reigned as supreme khan from 1583 to 1598. Mir Jan Kildi Bi belonged to the Utarchi tribe (*ūymāq*) and was very close to ‘Abd Allah Khan from 1552 until late 1582, when the khan sent his son, ‘Abd al-Mu’min, to govern Balkh and assigned Mir Jan Kildi Bi to be his chief advisor. He does not appear among the amirs who transferred their loyalties from the Jani-Begid Shibanids to the Tuqay-Timurid house in 1599 and therefore we can assume the *chahārbāgh* was constructed during the seventeen years between 1582 and 1599. Mir Jan Kildi Bi also built a mosque, which was located very close to the *chahārbāgh*. The *chahārbāgh* was appropriated by the new regime when it took Balkh in 1601. A decade later, when the *dawlatkhāna* was constructed and Nazr Muhammad made it his residence, the *chahārbāgh* of Mir Jan Kildi Bi was given a new name, Bāgh-i Khānī (Royal Park). It is described by Mahmud b. Amir Wali as follows:

> Among the garden parks that have been laid out in the city is one the *khāqān* himself gave the name Bagh-i Khānī, which is the place of enthronement and the residence (*mahall-i julūs wa waṭan-i ma’nūs*) of His Highness. Its length from east to west is from near the mosque of Jan Kildi Bi up to the vicinity (ḥudūd) of the New Jabba Khan Gate. Its width from north to south is from the Dih-i Shaykh Gate by the amount of area intervening (?) *bi-qadr-i* sāḥat-i wāsiṭah) between the Dih-i Shaykh Gate and Jabba Khan. In it there have been established lofty structures (*’imārāt-i ‘āliyāt*), joy-filled palaces (*qusūr-i mawfūr al-surūr*), rose gardens (*gulzār-hā*), and lanterns (*sirāj-hā*). Zeki Velidi Togan, who visited Balkh in 1968 with this part of the *Bahār al-asrār* text in hand, places the Jabba Khan Gate in the northwest corner of the pre-sixteenth-century walls of the outer city, just to the south of the southwest quadrant of the inner city walls. The Dih-i Shaykh Gate was one of the three gates linking the south side of the inner city with the outer city. The appended map shows an approximate position of the Dih-i Shaykh and the old and the new Jabba Khan Gates. The phrase “by the amount of area intervening between the Dih-i Shaykh Gate and Jabba Khan” is slightly puzzling. Having specified the “New Jabba Khan Gate,” perhaps Mahmud b. Amir Wali did not feel it necessary to repeat the word “gate.” More likely, he was referring to the area known as “Jabba Khan,” the site of an ancient fortress by that name, of which no trace remained in his time, and mapped by Togan to the area just west of the current inner city walls. Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s wording suggests that Jabba Khan was slightly south of the Dih-i Shaykh Gate and the width of the *chahārbāgh* was equivalent to that distance. The Bāgh-i Khānī / *Chahārbāgh-i Mir Jān Kildī Bi*, therefore, must have covered a sizeable area and it was inside this bāgh that the *dawlatkhāna* was built. As the *Bahār al-asrār* notes, the bāgh also contained other buildings, whose description matches parts of the *dawlatkhāna*, which he had earlier depicted.
مشکل افسانه از امتزاج نسیم اش \[1\] در خجلت در زمین رشک خلد برین

مشاهده میگردنه و نمودار ارم ذات العمام و لم یخلق مثلها فی البلد و معانی میشود (بیت)

کلام است گویی به خوشی روان \[2\] همی شاد گردید بهبیش روان

اطباق ایوان مقرنیس اش بطق قوس کیوان رسمیه کنگره قصر رفعی اش بطق مشتری بیوسته صفها و
رواقها بر اطراف و اکتفا آن با منظرهای دلگشا و غرفهای روح افزای مرتب گشته و دار عرصة و
حوالي آن احجار خام و مرمر فرویش و در سقوف و جدران آن تماثل مصور و طلسمات منبت مشیت و
منقوش نقاشیان چیک دست در هر خانه کارخانه پرداخته و بر هر گرفه منظره کون نگارخته چین ساخته
طول این فضایی بی همتا تقیبیا پناهج جریب و عرض ده جرب شریعی و از آن جمله مردم مشاهد است
دوازده دربند است که هر یک جهت مصلحی و معاملی معد و ممهد است

چنانچه دربند اول که عرصة فصیح و ساخته و سبیع دارد در ضعع جنوبی آن جامع است مشتمل بر
طاقات و رواقات دیگره و در دو صحح عرصة گه وسعت تمامت آن زیاده بر پنچ جربی است و هنگام اداه
صلات ده هزار کس را نگچایش دارد و در مشرق و شمال این دربند بعضی بیوشت واقع است و میان
میانی جنوبی و عمرانات شمالی شارعی عام و یک نهآ آب و محل نزول مواکب اقامت مراکب واسطه و
حاضر است و در این مساحت دو درب عام و یک درب خاص واقع است

و دربند دوم مربع است غیر متساوی الاضلاع برمیلی مطابع عالی است که یک نهآ بر زرگ از میان
آن جاری است مشتمل بر بیوشت متعدد یونه و در صوب جنوبی آن فارش خانه قوش \[13\] بجلو واقع است
که اخف خیام یافراش فرجام است در این مقام فرندان سعادتیار و سلطانی کامکار بهنگام خروج از دیوان
اعلا پای در رکاب یافراش انسبان یاری
ولا دربند سيم، فضيي بي است رووح افزا تخمينا سه جريب و در قبيله آن بنانا عالي واقع است مشتمل بر يك خانه بيزكرگه طول آن سی و يك درع و عرض آن پازده و نيم (ذرع) و ارتفاع آن سی کرگ و يك بيت ديگر و دهلزيي بجانب شرقی طول آن پويست و دو گز و عرض پازده دوژر و بر فرآن كوبوتر خانه در غایت بداعت و لطافت و تمامات اين منظر عالي منطق بنقوش بندیه و مصور بصور مختصره و از بديع روزگار انكه اتمام دهلزي مذكور با تمامات حجرات مبنیات و تصاویر و ساير آرايش و پيرابش در عرض سه روز سمت انجام یافته و اين بنارا كرسي است که ارتفاع آن از اصل زمين زياده از ده کرگ و در حوله

صحن سراي حجاتچي است جهت اقامت اهل حرف و پيشوران و ايضاح محل حراسة بعض سباع از شير و پلک و يوز و ساير حيوانات غريبه است و بر يك جانب اين مقام چند خانه است جهت اغشاش و اياد است و چندر غربا و مسافرين و سياه و غيرهم مدر و مهم و چندر كس بهجه تمديد لوازم آن مقر و معین در بنادر آنی است مداح جبري و دب مبادی احوال و اليومنميز كاهی بعد از اداه جمعه و اعیاد كورنسر عام در اين مقام عز انجام ميزيزد و تحقيق احوال رعايا و ساير آرای و غورسري دادخواهان و بذل ملتمرات و الحاح مامولات در اين بنای عالي شرف وقوع ميابد.

و دربند چهارم مشتمل است بر ضلعين ضلع جنوبی آن ملتني ميگرد بدمنالج بعض محمران حريم خاص و باغی که دست نشان همت عالي است و زراغيب آن با غ آنها در دو سال مثير گشتنه به او كام مرام آن حاضر در حلاوت بخشيد و ضلع گربي آن محدود است بباب دربند پنج و در حاضر آن دو دهليز واقع است يكي جهت جلوس امرا و ساير اهل كورنسر و ديگر اهل كورنسر و مطاوعات و مشروبات و در ساحت اين دربند اشجار مماليه است که در ايام غله حرارت متجلدی در دلالان ان تدلال تماما و از اين مقام محمران سراي از اختصاصی رفع دعوت اهل اخلاص فرماند و دروني و بروني از اين مقام امتياز یابند.

و دربند پنج فراخاني است محكومي بر عمارات رفيعه و صفحات منيعه و اشجار مخروس و اصناف رياحين و اجناس خضروات و نهري از يك جانب جاري و نسيمی بر يك صوب ساري و در چاق ووسط اين ساحته سماحت در تابستان شادرواني در غایت بداعت و در زمستان خرگاهی در نهایت وسعت و زينت بر افرادن و كورنسر هماليين أكثر در آن عز وقوع پذيرد و موهب و عليلت و ابتدال مستندنات و افضل متنبرات و ازدياد مواجح و اتمامی مارد و مطالب و دفع تظلمات و رفع تغلبات و ساير مراسم پداشاني و لوازم دادگستری پيشر (از حواسی: و توشك خانه بزرگ و خياب خانه خاصه و مقامگاه بعضي اهل صنعت مثل كتاب و صحاف و نقاش و مذهب غير ذلک در ضلع جنوبی اين دربند است در اين مقام با

احترام شرف وقوع (بابد)
ارائه شکوه در عصر تاریخ‌گذاری‌ها ایست با طول برکه و یک گذ و در عرض پژوهش و نیم گذ است و مهربانی به وسعت و مرکز دهلیز این خانه که در عرضه روزگار کارنامه ایست در طول بریست و یک گذ و در عرض پژوهش و نیم گذ هنگام مشتمل و مناظر مشتمل و این حفظه قدسمه را ساختی است بچندین راه‌های و از تاریخت اوره سرو و صنایع و نریگ و نیک و سایر نیازهای غربیه از قصبه دیسکار و قرنفل و عقیده وضع شده و نگهدارنگاه و توشک خانه اوی بنام مقام واقع است و دربند هنگام که نشانه اینست از دلک خواه را در آن راه نیست و خیال اعل انتهای از حفظ آن بوقوع أیها نی و آنچه از طبیع رواج و عصر فنی آن‌مانش ارباب مکافات میرس قنفر بوضوح می‌بینندن گلگاند است (مصرف)

ز باخ ارمن قطعه مقرر و حویض خانه ایست در آنکه از رشک آن آب در دهان حوض کوثر می‌گردید و دربند نهم و دهم و پازده و که حمام گاه کام در آن واقع است هر یک نمونه ایست (مصرف)

ز عیدرت پیرای خلد

بالجمله این چند دربند وشک مکوفات سراپی عصمت از نظر بر یک ارباب دیگر است و مشتری است و دربند ایستاده اثب و اثر ایستاده که واقع است با برگ سماویه دوازده دیگر است (بیت)

خزان را در آن بوستان راه نیست \ صبا هم ز خلوت‌هه آگاه نیست
در او لاله به داغ روید ز گل \ چون از صاحب سینه گل برک دل نبوده در آن غیر عصمت مقيم \ ز عفت بزنجری بار شمیم
ندیده ز بس عصمت مامن اش \ رخ مهر را دیده روزن اش
TRANSLATION

/213a/ Among these [buildings of his] is a new dawlatkhāna, for which he laid the foundations in the Chahārbāgh-i Mir Jān Kildī and completed at the inception of [his] royal accession, under auspicious signs and good omens. This is a space as capacious as the roomy arena of hope, containing structures as high as the lofty firmament, as expansive as royal dignity, with fine paradiiscal Iram-like gardens and Paradise-like palaces. Master architects and highborn engineers, in consultation with and with the approval of the world-adorning mind, laid out such a design for that world-model structure that it is as if the Chief Gardener has sent it down from Paradise. Its intimacy-increasing air is purer than the fountain of light [sun] and its consoling spaces are better embellished than the face of a houri. The Garden of Eden is in envy of the temperateness of its air, and the east wind (hemistich)

spreading musk, is confounded by its breezes.

It is seen in the world as the envy of Paradise and an exemplar of “Iram of the pillars, the like of which has never been created in the land” [Qur’ān 89:7]. And its meanings are (verse):

One would say its fragrant waters flow on their own
Joyful are those covered by the flow.

The massed elements of its muqarnas īwān reach to the arc of Saturn’s vault; the lofty battlements of its palace conjoin the arc of Jupiter. The platforms and arcades along its sides and peripheries have been laid out with heart-stopping belvederes and delightful rooms. Its floor and surrounding areas are paved with undressed stone and marble. Skilled painters have made an atelier (kārkhāna) of every room, with images and talismans permanently inscribed and painted on ceilings and walls. In every room they have made a panorama (manzara) like the picture gallery of China (nigār-khāna-i Chīn). The length of this unparalleled space is approximately fifty jaribs and its width is ten canonical jaribs.

Of what people have seen, there are twelve darbands, each of which has been prepared and readied for a use and purpose.

The first darband, which is of vast expanse and spacious ground, [contains] a congregational mosque comprising many vaults and arcades on its south side. In it (dar ā for dar dū) there is a wide plaza the total extent of which is more than five jaribs. At the time of performing the [congregational Friday] worship, it can hold ten thousand people. East and north of this darband there are some workshops (buyūtāt). A public street runs between the southern and northern buildings, as well as a water channel. This is also the place where the [royal] retinue dismounts and in the middle of which mounts stand ready. There are two public gates and one private gate into this space.

The second darband is a quadrangle of unequal sides. On the northern side is a lofty kitchen through the middle of which runs a large water channel. It has numerous work stations (buyūtāt). On the southern side [of the darband] is located the falconry (? farāsh-khāna-i qūsh jalaw), /213b/ which [comprises] the finest of triumphal tents (akhaff-i khiyām-i Ḿator-farjām). The auspicious [royal] sons and successful princes upon leaving the royal court (dīwān-i a’lā) mount their horses in this place [literally, place the foot in the victorious stirrup].

The third darband is a soul-inspiring expanse of approximately three jaribs. On its qibla [western] side, there is a lofty structure containing one large room measuring thirty-one zar’s in length, eleven and one-half zar’s in width, and thirty gaz in height, as well as some other rooms. On its eastern side, there is a hall (dīlāzī) twenty-two gaz long and eleven zar’s wide. On top of [this hall] is a dovecote of extreme inventiveness and subtlety. This entire sublime prospect (manzār) is inscribed with wonderful inscriptions and painted with creative images. One of the most novel things about it is that that hall, with all its chambers, inlay work (huwarāt-i munabbatāt), images, and other decorations and ornamentation was brought to completion in the course of [only] three days. This structure has a throne (kūrṣ), which stands more than ten gaz above the ground. Around the courtyard (ṣawān-i sarāy) [of the darband] are residential rooms for craftsmen and artisans, and also [rooms for] keeping wild beasts, such as lions, leopards, panthers, and other exotic animals. On one side of this place there are some rooms (chand khāna) where strangers, wayfarers, soldiers, and others may attend to their personal hygiene (ightisāl wa āb-dast). Several
attendants are assigned there to look after the necessities. There is a source of continually flowing water in this darband. In earlier times, as well as today, sometimes after the performance of the Friday and holiday worship services, a public audience (kārnīsh-i ‘āmm) is held in this noble place. Here in this sublime structure, [the khan] ascertains the circumstances of his subjects and other people, investigates [the cases of] those seeking justice, fulfills requests, and dispenses what is hoped for.

The fourth darband contains two [developed] sides [literally, axes (zil‘ayn)]. Its southern side terminates at the residences of some of the [khan’s] close family members (mahramān-i īrām-i khāṣṣ) and at a garden, which is the product of the sublime [royal] attention. One of the marvelous things about that garden is that it became productive in [only] two years and gave sweetness to the first fruits of His Highness’s desires. The western side is bounded by the gate of the fifth darband. At the far end of it (dar aqāṣ-yī ān—i.e., the fourth darband) are two halls, one where the amirs and other attendees of a [public] audience may sit, and the other for preparing dining cloths, tables, food, and drink. In the courtyard of this darband are shade trees, where soldiers seek shade at the height of the [summer] heat. From this place, [the khan] instructs his close family members (mahramān-i sarāy) to invite people of integrity (ahl-i ikhlāṣ). Here is found the line [literally, the distinction (intiyāz)] between the “inner” (darūnī) and the “outer” (birūnī) [i.e., the private and public areas].

The fifth darband is a spacious area containing lofty structures, mighty raised platforms, planted trees, and different types of aromatics and greenery. A canal flows from one side to the other and a breeze blows [through it] in one direction. On a platform (? chāq) in the middle of this bountiful area, an extremely fine pavilion (shādirwānī) is erected in summer and in winter a very capacious and finely decorated trellis tent (khargāhī).29 Most royal audiences take place [on that chāq], and the bestowals, grants, fulfillment of requests, dispensing of felicitations, increasing of stipends, taking care of pressing business, satisfying of demands, dealing with oppressive and unjust acts, and all those other things required of a king and a justice-giver are mostly carried out in this esteemed place.

[Marginalia] On the south side of this darband are a large furnishings [or bedding] storeroom (tūshakkhāna), a private tailor’s room (khayyāt-khāna), and places (maqāmgāh) for craftsmen such as scribes, bookbinders, painters, illuminators, and others.

The sixth darband, which is located on the southern side of the fifth darband, is encompassed by a bayt-i ma’mūr and a lofty hall (dihlīz). The former is thirty-two gaz long, twelve gaz wide, /214a/ and twenty gaz high. The ceiling is twenty-one beams, and the spacing between the beams is one gaz and a bit.30 There are fourteen doors leading into it. At the entrance there is an arch of muqarnas work on top of which is another arch of grille-work (shabaka-kārī). The wondrous paintings, images, inlay work, and talismans will soon be described (? ‘anqarīb samt-i nigarīsh pagīrufta āmad). As for the vestibule (dihlīz) of this structure, which is a model for the time, it is twenty-one gaz long and eleven and one-half gaz in width. A channel of water, sufficient for an entire city, runs through the middle of the vestibule like a shaft of lightning.

The seventh darband is a square, each side of which has several buildings with rooms and vestibules arranged with two elevations [two storeys? (dū afāqa)], benches (bar nashīman), and all-encompassing views. This enclosure (hāzira) is vast and adorned with several aromatic plants and flowers; cypress, piñon pine, orange, and lemon trees; and other exotic plants like sugarcane, clove, etc. There is a library and a private furnishings storeroom here.

[As for] the eighth darband, which is a copy of the sphere (falak) of the fixed [stars] and revolving [planets], one cannot enter it and [even] people possessing acute comprehension in fact are unable to grasp the true reality of it. [But] whatever reaches the olfactory senses (mashām) of those possessing a visionary imagination (arbāb-i mukāshaftāt) makes it clear that it [the darband] is a rose garden. (hemistich)

It is a piece selected from the Bagh-i Iram.

In it there is a reflecting pool (hawzd) the water of which is the envy of the waters of Kawsar.

The ninth, tenth, and eleventh darbands: In them are jewel-like (gawhar-qām) baths, each one an exemplar (hemistich)

from pleasure-embellishing eternity.
In short, these few darbands, like the secluded places (ma’kūfāt) of the secrets of chastity, are the enclosures (darband) of seclusion and the veil of separation from the view of anyone who is without the sight to see (har bi baṣr).

Beyond the twelve darbands, which correspond with the twelve heavenly constellations [signs of the zodiac], are another twelve darbands: (verses)

In this garden, there is no autumn
The east wind too is unaware of its secret places.
In it the tulip grows from the mud without a mark,
Like the heart’s petal [grows] from the expanse of the breast.
Nothing but virtue (‘ismat) resides there,
Feminine purity (‘ifāt) wraps it in fragrance.
Never before has virtue had such a refuge:
Its windows see the sun’s cheek.

COMMENTARY

Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s overall description of the dawlatkhāna introducing the individual parts or darbands employs conventional Qur’anic, cosmological, and mythic imagery to emphasize the grand scale of the work and thus, by extension, the power and glory of his patron. His placement of the dawlatkhāna in the chahārbāgh formerly owned by Mir Jan Kildi Bi and its size present one of the recurrent problems of interpreting the text: the ambiguity of the pronominal antecedent. The recording of the length and breadth of “this unparalleled space” raises the question: which space? The dawlatkhāna itself, which is the proximate subject and logical antecedent, or the whole chahārbāgh? Moreover, how large was an area fifty jarībs in length and ten in width, and to which of the antecedents does it most likely refer?

The jarīb may be either a unit of length or a unit of area (i.e., a square jarīb), though it is more commonly encountered as a unit of area. The area described by Mahmud b. Amir Wali would have been some 7,000 feet (2,134.1 meters) long and 1,400 feet (426.8 meters) across for an area of 9,800,000 square feet or 910,833.9 square meters, i.e., 225 acres or 91 hectares, using the jarīb of sixty gaz and the gaz of twenty-eight inches. This is a sizeable piece of property and given the even numbers “fifty” and “ten,” the author might just have been estimating (and perhaps exaggerating) the size. When the author gives żar or gaz dimensions (in his usage these are interchangeable) for individual structures in the dawlatkhāna, they seem reasonable for a building, whether the gaz / żar was the twenty-eight inches of nineteenth-century Balkh, the thirty-two inches of seventeenth-century India and Central Asia, or some other comparable equivalent. Probably at this point we should understand that when Mahmud b. Amir Wali wrote down the overall dimensions of fifty jarībs by ten jarībs, he was referring to the entire chahārbāgh and not to the palace complex itself.

His use of the term darband and specifically the “twelve darbands” that he says the dawlatkhāna comprised is also problematic. Darband is a compound word, according to Dikhkhuda, made up of dar (door) and band from bastan (to close); one has the sense that what is intended by the term here is a part of the complex that can be closed off—a wing, or simply a section. It has been suggested by Maria Subtelny that, in conjunction with the number “twelve,” it may have been applied by the author to an architectural context, but without any preexisting architectural connotation. I have not encountered this term in any other architectural description for a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Central Asian building. It does appear later, however, as an architectural term in the Sirāj al-tawārīkh (Lamp of History), an early twentieth-century chronicle of Afghanistan. In one context, the amir of Afghanistan orders one of his generals to build a fort with “one darband being a storeroom or granary.”33 In another instance, it would also seem to be referring to a section of a building: “they also destroyed one darband of the residence (sarāy) of Mir Hashim.”34 For the most part here, the term is applied to what appears to be a unit of the palace complex that generally comprises several elements—workshops, waiting rooms, washrooms, plantings, shops, throne rooms, a library. The third and sixth darbands, however, each seem to have been made up of a single monumental building (bayt-i ma’mūr), with a vestibule (dihliz) but no mention of a courtyard, walls, or gates.

The design and terminology of the dawlatkhāna could well have been shared with Mughal India during Jahangir’s and Shah Jahan’s eras (1605–ca. 1635). The
dawlatkhāna predates by a few years the Jahangirid fort at Lahore, one of the few examples of Jahangir’s work more or less untouched by Shah Jahan’s later renovations and thus existing a basis for comparison with the contemporary Balkh dawlatkhāna. Jahangir completed the Lahore Fort between 1617 and 1620 and his work remains visible today.35 In particular, there is a striking similarity between the Bahīr description of the bayt-i ma’mūr of the sixth darband, measuring thirty-two gaz long, twelve gaz wide, and twenty gaz high with its picture gallery, and the surviving “picture-wall” of the Lahore Fort, which R. Nath dates to between 1612 and 1619.36 However, the picture wall at Lahore is on the building’s exterior, while the Bahīr al-asrār text implies that the pictures are inside the building, though this is not entirely certain. Besides the Lahore Fort, the architecture of the Agra Fort, which he saw in the late 1620s, may also have been on Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s mind as he described the Balkh dawlatkhāna.37 But if the structures were undertaken as early as he states, then it is more or less contemporaneous with the work on the Lahore Fort. The royal complex of Fatehpur Sikri is also a series of connected walled compounds, which might easily have been labeled darbands. Seen from the air on Google Earth, it is not hard to imagine that this is the kind of complex described by Mahmud b. Amir Wali.

We know that architectural ideas and fashions were shared between India and Central Asia, something well documented for earlier times.38 Mahmud b. Amir Wali himself spent some seven years traveling around India between 1625 and 1632, during which time he toured and later referred to some of the extant Mughal architecture.39 Among the many cities he visited were Lahore, Delhi, and Agra, and though he does not write about the Mughal buildings of these cities, he must have been as impressed by what he saw in those places as he was by Ajmer and Fathpur in Jaipur, the buildings that he described as “inciting the envy of the Chinese picture gallery and heightening the jealousy (ghayrat) of Paradise (khuld-i barīn),”40 rhetorical images that he also employs in the description of the dawlatkhāna. Although he traveled to India well after construction of the dawlatkhāna, according to his dating, he did not write about it until his return. So it is not unreasonable to think that he carried a memory of it to India and then added his recollections of Mughal buildings he had seen or heard of when he later wrote about the Balkh dawlatkhāna.

Did Mahmud b. Amir Wali know the designers and builders of the dawlatkhāna and might he have heard the term darband from them? Although he knew the names of the architects and construction engineers41 who worked on Nazr Muhammad’s great madrasa in Balkh, where work began in October 1612, by which time the dawlatkhāna was supposedly finished, he does not tell us who was responsible for the design and construction of the dawlatkhāna.

Contemporary Safavid architecture may have been a source of inspiration for Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s patron, Nazr Muhammad. Shah ‘Abbas I (r. 1587–1629) had already commenced work on major building projects in Isfahan before moving his capital there from Qazvin in the 1590s. More than a dozen years before work began on Nazr Muhammad’s palace complex, the royal precincts in Isfahan were already known by the name dawlatkhāna and were also probably famous for their figural decoration. Moreover, the description of the various structures of the Bāgh-i Naqsh-i Jahān in Isfahan bears some overall resemblance to that of the twelve darbands of Nazr Muhammad’s dawlatkhāna.42 But until the dawlatkhāna site is surveyed and excavated, any discussion of influences and similarities has to remain speculative.

The First Darband

The description of darbands seems to proceed in a more or less linear fashion from the public, to the semi-private, to the private areas of the palace (see Appendix for tentative plan of the complex). The ordinal arrangement (first, second, third, etc.) of darbands in Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s description suggests the sequence in which they would appear to the visitor proceeding through the dawlatkhāna. Whether the visitor could enter the complex at a point other than through the muqarnas-decorated arch of the first darband, it is impossible to say. The first darband was completely public space and incorporated a large congregational mosque. In his description of the darband, Mahmud b. Amir Wali uses the areal jarīb to give some sense of its size. The mosque plaza alone was “more than five
jarīb,” about a hectare, or some two and a half acres, approximately 110,000 square feet. There is evidence from a contemporary source that the mosque did indeed exist. Mahmud b. Amir Wali, who was meticulous about recording the architectural legacy of Nazr Muhammad, attributes only one congregational mosque to him and the Mughal historian ‘Inayat Khan refers to it when recording the Mughal conquest of Balkh in 1646. On Tuesday, the third of Jumada II 1056 (17 July 1646), Prince Murad Bakhsh made a triumphal entry into the city. On the following Friday, the khutba was recited in Shah Jahan’s name “within the mosque founded by Nazr [sic] Muhammad Khan outside the gate of his palace” (my emphasis).43 There should be little doubt that the congregational mosque of the dawlatkhāna and the one noted by ‘Inayat Khan are one and the same.

The Bahr al-asrār text suggests a mosque plan not unlike that of Shah Jahan’s much later Juma Masjid in Delhi, a domed mihrab, in this case of three large iwans, probably open on three sides. Adjacent and to the east of this large mihrab was a large plaza,44 undoubtedly capable of holding the ten thousand worshippers whom Mahmud b. Amir Wali mentions. A water channel ran along the eastern edge of the sanctuary area and provided the ablution stations required by ritual. Next to it was the public road, also oriented north–south. Somewhere along the road, probably close to the entrance to the private gate leading from the darband, was the spot where the khan and his retinue would mount their horses when leaving the dawlatkhāna and dismount when returning. To ‘Inayat Khan, this probably gave the area the appearance of being at the gate of the palace, even though Mahmud b. Amir Wali clearly identifies the entrance to the mosque as the entrance to the entire palace complex. Shops (or workshops [buyūtāt]) were arrayed outside the mosque, along the east and north sides of the darband. Finally, the darband had three gates, two public and one private, which may provide a clue to the relationship of the first darband to other darbands. Although the location of the gates is not given, we have to assume that the two public gates were at either end of the north–south road leading in and out of the darband. The private gate probably led to the andarūn or private residences of the khan’s family, later described as lying to the south of the fourth darband, and was most likely in the east wall of the first darband.

The Second Darband

The author provides only a few indirect hints as to the location of this darband with respect to the first darband. Nor does he tell us about its size, other than that it held a kitchen and a falconry. The kitchen with its numerous work stations was presumably able to serve the private needs of the khan and his family, as well as fulfill his public responsibilities to provide food at holidays for the needy, and as rewards for, and for the daily needs of, soldiers, scholars, and anyone else deserving; this food would be distributed on the grounds of the mosque. Like the first darband, the second darband also had an area where, the author tells us, the khan’s sons mounted their horses, probably adjacent to the gate connecting it to the first darband and, one would assume, near the place where the khan and his retinue would mount and dismount.

The southern gate of the first darband, again on the assumption of a roughly north–south axis for the entire complex, would have most likely then been the northern gate of the second.

The Third Darband

The third darband presents more difficulty. On only one occasion does Mahmud b. Amir Wali feel it necessary to establish the relationship of one darband to another. Perhaps he felt that the reader would understand his progression and could puzzle out the relationships from the clues he gave.

For the third darband, he provides the size, three jarībs or about an acre and a half, but leaves the reader with only a vague idea of where it stood in relation to the first two darbands. The fact that on occasion the khan would conduct a durbar here after the Friday service or on holidays is some indication that it was near the mosque. Since the author only describes buildings on the east and west sides of the darband, I would tentatively locate it to the south of the second darband, assuming that the gates leading in and out of it were on the north and south road, but there is only the slight evidence of the location of the major structures in it to support this placement.

The darband included two large and probably connected structures. On the west or qibla side stood a
tall one-room building (called simply binā-yi ʿāli, lofty edifice) measuring thirty-one zarʿ in length, eleven and one-half zarʿ in width, and thirty zarʿ in height. Using the nineteenth-century Balkh gaz or zarʿ standard of twenty-eight inches, this works out to a structure 72 feet 4 inches (22 meters) long, 26 feet 10 inches (8.2 meters) wide, and 70 feet (21.3 meters) high. To the east (presumably of this tall edifice) were several other rooms (chand bayt-i digar) and an equally tall dihlīz (vestibule, hall, or passageway with rooms leading off it) measuring twenty-two gaz by eleven zarʿ (zarʿ and gaz used interchangeably) and thirty gaz in height, or 51 feet 4 inches (15.6 meters) long by 25 feet 8 inches (7.8 meters) wide and 70 feet (21.3 meters) high. I will return to the issue of this reported scale below. The dihlīz had numerous rooms, all decorated with images and inlay work (munabbatāt), and a dovecote on its roof of sufficient distinction to elicit the author’s admired note. It was in this darband, whether in the one-room hall or the dihlīz is not clear, that Nazr Muhammad Khan would on occasion hold special public audiences, after Friday and holiday worship services. The kursî (throne) in the dihlīz, which was reportedly ten gaz (23 feet 4 inches [7.1 meters]) high, was where he probably sat during those audiences. These receptions, ceremonial rather than administrative, were distinct from the durbars (kūrnīsh, kur(u)nush) held in the fifth darband (see below). The approximately one and one-half acres covered by the third darband were also home to a small zoo and facilities where “strangers, wayfarers, and soldiers” could attend to their personal hygiene in washrooms staffed by attendants.

The Fourth Darband

We have a better picture of the relationship of this darband to other parts of the palace, although the east and north sides remain undefined. The southern side was bounded by the royal private quarters, the andarun or haram-sarāy, and a garden of which, we are told, the khan was inordinately proud. In another part of his work, Mahmud b. Amir Wali commends his patron for his agricultural and horticultural interests and investments, and attributes to him the introduction to Balkh of many new species and varieties of edible and non-edible plants.45

This side of the darband, whose size is not given, is where the women of the harem could meet with invited guests; it marked the boundary between public and private space. The west side of the darband contained a gate leading into the fifth darband. Since the women’s quarters and the khan’s garden were to the south and the fifth darband was to the west of the fourth darband, a reasonable placement of this darband would be to the west of the third darband. The fourth and fifth darbands are the only ones explicitly related to each other. “At its farthest end,” i.e., on the fourth darband’s side of the gate into the fifth, were two vestibules, one a waiting room for amirs and other worthies prior to attending audience in the fifth darband, the other a kind of butler’s pantry, where the necessaries for dining were assembled and prepared. The central square of this darband was well planted with shade trees to provide a haven in the heat of a Balkh summer. Although the author provides no dimensions for this darband, its mainly garden character suggests it was of considerable size.

The Fifth Darband

The khan and his immediate entourage seem to have spent most of the working day while in Balkh in the fifth darband. With its pavilions, running water, aromatic trees, and shrubs, it was probably meant to evoke the Chinggisid and Timurid ideal of the garden residence, connecting the architecture to patterns of order and rule.46 Here Nazr Muhammad took care of “all those other things required of a king and justice-giver.” Here the khan operated in a mutable space, the royal tents (shādirwān and khargāh) being pitched and struck with the changing seasons. But that impression of nomadic life was anchored in the reality of permanent structures on the south side of the darband, which housed crucial adjuncts of the royal court—the ever-important keeper of the cushions, and the specialists in illustrated book production. The unicum manuscript of the Bahr al-asrar held now by the British Library in the India Office Collection is not an autograph copy but was made for Nazr Muhammad’s library, which was famous in its time (see below). The information about the work space for “scribes (kuttāb), a bookbinder (ṣāḥīf), a miniaturist (naqqāsh), and an illuminator (muzāḥhib) on the south side of the darband” is given in a marginal
note; indeed one can almost imagine either the copyist, Shah Qasim,47 or one of the artisans working on the volume, adding the note to memorialize themselves and their workplace.

The Sixth Darband

This appears to have entirely been taken up by what the author calls a bayt-i ma’mūr. The Qur’anic Bayt al-Ma’mūr is explained as a wondrous building in the fourth (or seventh) heaven and is the prototype of the earthly Ka’ba. It was the Prophet Muhammad’s final stop during his miraculous ascent (mi’rāj) or Night Journey from the Dome of the Rock to the Throne of God. Exactly what the author meant by this term in the case of the dawlatkhāna and what the function of the building was, we simply do not know. Particularly notable in the description of the bayt-i ma’mūr is the reference to “wondrous paintings, images, inscriptions, and talismans.”

Mahmud b. Amir Wali gives very specific dimensions for the bayt-i ma’mūr and for the vestibule attached to it so that one tends to think that it is not just rhetorical flourish. As described, the building itself was thirty-two gaz long, twelve gaz wide, and twenty gaz high—that is, 74 feet 8 inches (23 meters) in length, 28 feet (8.5 meters) in width, and 46 feet 8 inches (14.2 meters) in height. It was covered by a “twenty-one beam” roof. This suggests that the “beam” measurement in Balkh was somewhat longer than in Bukhara (see note 30). The bayt-i ma’mūr itself had a large vestibule leading into it measuring twenty-one gaz by eleven and one-half gaz (49 feet by 26 feet 10 inches, or 15 meters by 8.25 meters).

The major question we are left with is: what was the function of the building? The fourteen doors would indicate a public building, but its location deep within the dawlatkhāna and the fact that other areas and structures have been already designated for public audiences and receptions suggest it was the khan’s own residence and possibly housed his chancellery, secretariat, and other offices of officials close to him.

The Seventh Darband

The seventh darband, a square whose dimensions are not given, contained the khan’s library, which must have been sizeable. From the description of this darband as well as the fifth darband, it appears that the kitābbkāna corresponded more with library as repository than with library as an atelier for the production of books, since the craftsmen associated with the production of manuscripts had their workshops in the fifth darband. Nazr Muhammad Khan must have had a remarkable collection. He is said to have donated more than two thousand volumes to his great madrasa, which is also dated to this early period of his time in Balkh.48 Mahmud b. Amir Wali, as head librarian, was able to do most of his research for the Bahr al-asrār in the khan’s library, although he also had access to the collection of his brother-in-law, Sayyid Mirak Shah Husayni, which probably focused more on hadith and related Qur’anic disciplines. In the Bahr al-asrār he cites a large number of the works he consulted and provides an idea of the books at his disposal.49 Geographies and histories predominate because these were the subjects in which the Bahr al-asrār was mainly interested, but Nazr Muhammad’s library certainly would have included the standard works in Hanafi jurisprudence, Qur’anic commentary, hadith and hadith studies, Arabic linguistics, rhetoric, theology, Sufism, and classical Persian poetry—the typical kinds of titles that would have made up a book donation to a madrasa library at the time.50

The Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Darbands

It is probably fair to say that the dawlatkhāna accessible to the public was limited to the first seven darbands. The description of the eighth through eleventh darbands ascends into the metaphorical and imagistic, and one has the impression that either they were a private space that Mahmud b. Amir Wali had not himself examined, or he was struggling to make the description of the actual complex correspond with the duodecimal literary structure he had imposed on it. There is hardly anything specific about the eighth darband except for the fact that it had a pool. Mahmud then moves on and conflates the next three darbands into one description, which again suggests that he is writing about something that he never saw himself, a private area of the palace to which he did not have access. He never mentions a twelfth darband.
There are elements, probably attributable to the demands of style, that make one wonder sometimes about the correspondence of the description with reality. Not least of these is the parting remark that “beyond these twelve darbands lie another twelve darbands,” which may be understood as simply a way to reinforce the reader’s impression of a truly grand complex or to correspond with a mystical world view in which a truer reality lies just beyond the physical world. If the twelfth darband and another twelve did indeed exist, the evidence for them suggests that any such areas were deep in andarūn territory, in the private space inaccessible to outsiders, or more likely deep in the imagination of the writer.

CONCLUSION

The precise description of eight of the darbands of the dawlatkhāna is compelling evidence that the building was at least partially occupied by 1635, when this part of the Bahr al-asrār was written. Certainly the use of the mosque by invading Mughal forces in 1646 corroborates its existence. From the description, it clearly corresponds with three of the four palace types proposed by Sussan Babaie. The evidence is equally clear that the dawlatkhāna was planned and served as a permanent residence and not simply as a garden pleasance for the khan. The architecture and its use provide a sketch of the daily activities of the khan. The andarūn, which could only be hinted at by the author, was the center of the khan’s family life, while the adjacent bayt-i ma’mūr might well have housed both residential quarters and the bureaucratic offices that his government relied on. The fifth darband with its seasonally tented audience chamber area must have required his presence for a substantial part of every working day. There he would hear and act on appeals to the throne, dispense favors, receive foreign envoys (there was a continual flow of envoys between Mughal India and Balkh, and Isfahan and Balkh), read out proclamations, award (and increase) salaries and stipends, preside over the sessions (majālis and maḥfīl) at which scholarly and literary talent was displayed and occasionally rewarded, and undertake “all those other things required of a king and justice-giver.” When he tired of these duties, he might find relief from the strain of rule in his nearby garden and various agricultural projects; not far away were the stables and falconry, where he could equip himself for the hunt. The shops, kitchen, and workshops provided for the needs of the court, and during the three-decade long rule of Nazr Muhammad at Balkh we find him in residence for the vast majority of the time. When campaigns were mounted against the Safavids in the marches to the west and the Mughals to the south, he tended to send his sons or his amirs. He is said to have had a number of hunting lodges in the mountains south of Balkh, but there is not much evidence in the Bahr al-asrār or elsewhere that he made a great deal of use of them.

As far as we know, no physical traces survive today of the dawlatkhāna, but only a careful survey of the area in which it was located will verify that it has indeed completely vanished. While the description of it brings to mind two well-preserved palace complexes—the dawlatkhāna in Isfahan and the Mughal suburban residence of Fatehpur Sikri, both of which might have served as models for Nazr Muhammad’s architects—without an archaeological survey it is difficult to go beyond general remarks about the similarities.

There is, however, some intriguing photographic and plan evidence that substantial remains of the dawlatkhāna survived as late as the third decade of the twentieth century. In 1922, Alfred Foucher signed a treaty on behalf of the French government with the Afghan government of Amir Aman Allah Khan (r. 1919–29) that established the Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan (DAFA) and gave the French rights to survey and excavate in the country. As DAFA’s main academic interest in the 1920s was the Hellenistic legacy in Afghanistan, it turned its attention first to Balkh as the center of Bactrian civilization. In 1924, an expedition under Foucher surveyed the area around the inner city, made some sondages inside the inner city, took photographs, and produced a few plans. The results of the work were not published for almost twenty years.51 In a letter to Émile Senart dated 10 February 1924, which is included in the published volume, Foucher wrote:
The richest collection of Musulman ruins is found, as I have already told you, in the western part of the city, especially between the roads to Aqcheh and Kelif. In this regard, there are the remains of the old Charsu, the crossroads market; surviving porches of two colleges; (the ruins) of a fine mosque, the boldness of whose still-standing arches were worth including on the general plan and photographing; and finally numerous wall panels, the vestiges of palaces referred to by Marco Polo and Arab authors. But similar debris is spread almost everywhere both inside and outside the (city) walls and awaits the attention of specialists in Islamic art.52

While it is doubtful that either Marco Polo or the Arab geographers spoke of these particular ruins, Foucher’s brief remarks are significant: first, they establish that some portion of the ‘Abd Allah Khan and Nazr Muhammad Khan Madrasas (the “two colleges”) survived well into the twentieth century,53 and second, they give us the only known evidence that the Nazr Muhammad palace complex was actually built out to the degree that Mahmud b. Amir Wali describes. However, it is quite possible that the ruins photographed by Alfred Foucher in 1924 and labeled by him mosquée du quartier ouest (pl. 1), ruines de la ville moderne (pl. 2), and restes d’un palais musulman (pl. 3) are important elements of Nazr Muhammad’s extensive dawlatkhāna.54 These photographs show the surviving portion of a mosque, a three-bayed mihrab, from two sides, the north (pl. 1) and the west (pl. 2). The latter photograph, in which the mosque is on the far left-hand side of the picture, shows its relationship to most, if not all, of the entire complex and gives a vivid sense of the vast area that the complex covered, one that fully confirms Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s description. Moreover, in plate V (d), quartier ouest of the published volume (not reproduced here), taken from the heights of the Balkh citadel and looking down on the dawlatkhāna district, ruins are clearly visible, standing where the Bahr al-asrār situated the dawlatkhāna inside the chahārbāgh of Mir Jan Kildi Bi. According to Foucher’s measurements, the mihrab was 27 meters long and 12 meters wide, giving a floor area of about 324 square meters (3,500 square feet) (fig. 1). Judging by the person posed to give scale (pl. 1), the arches supporting the three domes, which had collapsed by 1924, were at least six or seven meters above ground level and probably originally much higher, the ground level having silted up considerably in the meantime.

A comparison of the dimensions given by Mahmud b. Amir Wali for the bayt-i ma’mur and the measurements taken by the Foucher expedition of the palais musulman reveals considerable correspondence. Foucher’s plan (fig. 2) of the building, as well as the photograph, shows a rectangular structure flanked at right angles by two connecting wings. The central structure measures 79 feet 1 inch (24.1 meters) long by 30 feet 2 inches (9.2 meters) wide, numbers and proportions that correspond closely to Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s thirty-two gaz by twelve gaz (75 feet 6 inches [23 meters] by 27 feet 11 inches [8.5 meters]), allowing for some uncertainty about the actual length of the seventeenth-century Balkh gaz. The northern wing on the plan measures 65 feet 7 inches (20 meters) by 30 feet 2 inches (9.2 meters), somewhat longer and wider than the gaz dimensions of Mahmud b. Amir Wali for the vestibule (49 feet 3 inches [15 meters] by 27 feet 1 inch [8.25 meters]). More difficult to reconcile is the presence of a second wing (or vestibule) not mentioned by Mahmud b. Amir Wali. Nonetheless, the overall dimensions and the photograph provided by Foucher show a building very much in keeping with the one described by the author of the text. In the case of the height of these buildings, the height dimension of about forty-seven feet given by Mahmud b. Amir Wali seems to correlate well with plate 3 showing the palace building with a man standing against one wall for scale. In 1924, the height of that wall was at least five times the height of the figure standing in front of it and it is evident that erosion has reduced the height while no doubt raising the grade level around the building on which the man is standing.

If we assume for the moment that the DAFA expedition did indeed photograph the remains of the dawlatkhāna, we can use the shadows on the buildings to tentatively establish that the complex was oriented along a north–south or northwest–southeast axis, beginning at the main entryway. In addition, Foucher’s plans of the mosque (fig. 1) and the palais (fig. 2) orient them north–south. The mihrab wall of the mosque had to have faced west (or actually more southwest). In plate 2 the facade of the mosque is in full sun and the

Pl. 2. View of the dawlatkhāna from the southwest, with the three-bay mihrab to the left and the bayt-i ma’mūr to the right. (After Foucher and Bazin-Foucher, *La vieille route*, vol. 1, pl. XXVI [c])

Pl. 3. Remains of the bayt-i ma’mūr. (After Foucher and Bazin-Foucher, *La vieille route*, vol. 1, pl. XXVI [d])
shadows on the palace to its far right are on the walls at right angles to the mosque. This indicates that the photograph was probably taken in the afternoon and the photographer was facing the mihrab wall with the sun at his back and his camera pointed east or northeast.

All of these ruins seem to have been leveled by the abortive plan to rebuild Balkh as the “cradle of Aryanism” in the 1930s. A series of concentric ring roads with the Abu Nasr Parsa Mausoleum at their center was laid out and excavated though never developed further. The pattern of these ring roads is still visible from the air. Those excavations appear to have included the area where the dawlatkhāna was constructed and there has been no report since then of anyone seeing anything like the structures photographed by the DAFA expedition.

One hopes future archaeological work may be able to establish the entire plan of the dawlatkhāna, but in the meantime, the Bahr al-asrār text offers compelling evidence of the architectural vision of the leaders of early seventeenth-century Balkh and the technical expertise they could call on. Though the structure itself has now disappeared, the remarkable description of it by Mahmud b. Amir Wali is another reminder of this region’s full incorporation in the larger Persianate cultural realm.

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Map of Balkh, showing approximate location of the Bāgh-i Khānī. (Map: Robert McChesney)
Tentative plan of the Balkh dawlatkhâna. (Plan: Robert McChesney)
AN EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY PALACE COMPLEX (DAWLATKHĀNA) IN BALKH

NOTES

Author’s note: I am grateful to Sussan Babaie, Ebba Koch, Bernard O’Kane, and Florian Schwarz for reading drafts of this paper and sharing their insights on architectural terms and their use at different times and in different contexts, and to Maria E. Subtelny for suggestions on the translation and interpretation of some of the Persian imagery.


4. Robert Hillenbrand, Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 377. It should be noted that he does not include in his discussion the rich palace-building tradition of Mughal India, for which see the works of Ebba Koch and R. Nath.


12. Ibid., 24.


15. The Bahre Al-Asrar only covers his reign at Balkh until Zu’l-Qa’da 1050 (February–March 1641), a year before Imam Quli Khan abdicated and Nazr Muhammad moved from Balkh to Bukhara. For a general account of the period between 1641 and 1651, see Audrey Burton, The Bukharans: A Dynastic, Diplomatic and Commercial History 1550–1702 (Surrey: Curzon, 1997), chap. 7.

16. Bahre Al-Asrar, fols. 305a–375a. This segment of the India Office Library (henceforth I.O.L.) ms. no. 575, which describes Balkh, its lore, and its famous people, has recently been published in typescript by Mayil Haravi as Bahreh-i Balkh: Tārīkh-i Bahre Al-Asrar fi manaqib al-akhyār (Bukhur: Akhādimi-yi ‘Ulūm-i Afghanistan [Afghanistan Academy of Sciences], 1360 [1981]). Unfortunately, there are many errors in the transcription.


19. It should be noted that qal’a and hisār are somewhat general terms and could be applied to the inner city as well, or to the walls of any of the sections.

21. For Mir Jan Kildi Bi’s appointment to Balkh, see Hafriz-i Tanish b. Mir Muhammad Bukhari, Sharaf-nama-i shahi, I.O.L., ms. no. 574, fol. 307b. His participation in Abd Allah Khan’s many campaigns can be found passim in Sharaf-nama-i shahi. There are twenty citations for his name in the index of M. A. Salakhedtinova’s incomplete edition of the Sharaf-nama, which only covers (in two of four projected volumes) the period up to the beginning of 987 (early 1579), ten years short of the period covered by the entire work; see Hafriz-i Tanish ibn Mir Muhammad Bukhari, Sharaf-nama-i shah = Kniga shakhskoi slavy, ed. and trans. M. A. Salakhedtinova (Moscow: Nauka, 1983–89).

22. See n. 16 above.


26. According to Togan, “Topography of Balkh,” 282, jabbâ or jubbâ is a corruption of the Turkic word yulgha, the title of the pre-Islamic ruler of Balkh, and is not to be confused with the word for armory or arsenal (jubbah khana or jaba khana), ‘Ali Akbar Dikhudâ, Lughat-nama, s.v. “jaba khana,” citing Yaqt, Mu’jam al-buldân, identifies it as a village near the “gate of Balkh,” probably a gate of the inner city. The toponym has long since disappeared.


30. I am grateful to Florian Schwarz for telling me that in Bukhara the size of certain buildings, in particular guest houses (mihmânkhanas), is still measured in terms of the number of ceiling beams, usually spaced a gaz apart.

31. E. A. Davidovich, Materialy po metrologii srednevekovoi Srednei Azii (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), does not include the jarib in her chapter on terms of linear measurement (pp. 109–121). She concurs with A. A. Semenov that jarib and tanab (the more commonly encountered areal units of measurement) were synonymous and were equal to 3,600 square gaz. The jarib as a linear measurement would therefore have been equal to sixty gaz. See Davidovich, Materialy, 110–18, for a full discussion of the various sizes of the gas in post-Mongol Central Asia, and 122, 125–28, on the tanab and jarib as areal measurements. In Riazul Islam’s edition of the travelogue of the Seventeenth Century, he takes the author’s use of jarib as a unit of length equivalent to 144 yards! (Riazul Islam, ed., Travelogue of South Asia, 34.) That would have made the chaharbâgh three-quarters of a mile wide and four miles long, impossible for the area within the outer walls of Balkh. A contemporary Mughal work, ‘Abd al-‘Hamid Lâhâwri’s Bábdshâhnâmah, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Press, 1865–72), vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 15, states “one kurâh (karoh) is 200 jaribs, one jarib is 28 zirás, one zirá is forty angush.” I am grateful to Ebba Koch for this reference and for the information that the Shâhjahânâ gas or zirâ corresponded ideally to 81.28 centimeters, or 32 inches. In this case, the jarib would be equal to 66 feet, 8 inches, or a little more than 22 yards (20 meters). John T. Platts, A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English (orig. pub. London, 1884; repr. New Delhi, 2004), s.v. “Jarib,” gives the equivalent length of the (presumably nineteenth-century) jarib as 55 English yards. By that standard, the Bagh-i Khani would have been about 1,650 feet in width and 8,250 feet in length, for a total of about 310 acres, or 124 hectares. This would have made the Bagh-i Khani larger than Balkh’s inner city. The nineteenth-century Balkh gaz, according to a British source, was 28 inches and the jarib therefore 140 feet, or 46 yards and 2 feet. (India Army, General Staff Branch, Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan, ed. Ludwig W. Adamec, 6 vols. [Graz: Akadem. Drucku, 1972–85], vol. 4, xi.) This corresponds somewhat with the eighteenth-century gaz-i shar-i of Bukhara of 31 inches. See Davidovich, Materialy, 113. Where building dimensions are given for the darvâlakhana and the chaharbâgh in which it was sited, I have converted them using the twenty-eight-inch gaz/zir (Mahmud b. Amir Wali uses the terms interchangeably) and the jarib of sixty gaz.

32. Private communication.

33. Fayż Muhammad Kâtib Hazârah, Sirâj al-tawârikh (Kabul, 1333 [1915]), vol. 3, 1109.


35. Koch, Mughal Architecture, 84–85.


37. Koch, Complete Taj Mahal, 68, fig. 85, is particularly evocative of what Mahmud b. Amir Wali might have meant by darband, the figure showing two darbands.


39. See Riazul Islam, ed., Travellogue of South Asia, 88–89; and Alam and Subrahmanyam, “From an Ocean of Wonders,” 162–89.


42. See Babaie, Isfahan and Its Palaces, chap. 4. It is worth noting that (depending on the size of the linear jarib in Balkh)
area of the Bagh-i Khani was twice the size of the Isfahan dawlatkhāna. Ibid., 119.


44. This is comparable to the size of the plaza of the Juma Masjid, the area of which, including the three-bay īwān-mihrāb, is slightly less than a hectare. See Koch, Mughal Architecture, 119, pl. 142.

45. This information is found in vol. 1 of Bah sr al-asrār, the geographical part of the work. B. Akhmedov has edited and translated into Russian the portions of this volume relating to the geography of Central Asia. See Maḥmūd b. Amīr Wali, More tain otnosit‘no doblestei blagorodynykh, trans. and ed. B. A. Akhmedov (Tashkent: Fan, 1977), 4–5 (text), 25–26 (translation).


47. Bahsr al-asrār, colophon, fol. 409a.

48. On Nazr Muhammad’s library and its formation, see Maḥmūd b. Amīr Wali, Bahsr al-asrār, fol. 350a. His madrasa is dated 1021 (1612–13) by a much later work, Mirzā Muḥammad Amin b. Mirzā Muḥammad Zamān’s Muḥıṣ al-tawārīkh, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, ms. no. 472, fol. 95a–b. The two thousand books he endowed to the madrasa library comprised a collection he had bought and some of his own books. Presumably the remainder of his collection was kept in the dawlatkhāna library.

49. For a partial listing of the works and authors he was able to consult for the Bahsr al-asrār, see B. A. Akhmedov, Isto- riko-geograficheskaia literatura Srednei Azii XVI–XVII vv.: Pis’mennye pamiatniki (Tashkent: Fan, 1985), 68–70; and idem, “Bahsr al-Asrār of Maḥmūd b. Valī,” 164, 166–67.

50. Numerous such donations of books are found in endowment deeds (waqf-nāma) of the late sixteenth to eighteenth centuries held at the Uzbek State Archives in Tashkent in Fond I-323. For a recent study, see Stacy Liechti, “Books, Book Endowments, and Communities of Knowledge in the Bukharan Khanate” (PhD diss., New York University, 2007).


52. Ibid., vol. 1, 64–67, including plans of the mosque and one of the main buildings of the dawlatkhāna (65, figs. 11 and 13).


54. Foucher and Bazin-Foucher, La vieille route, pls. XXVI (b), (c), and (d).
