

Original Research Article**Typology of Safavid Era Accommodation Buildings Based on Non-Iranian Travelogues**Nima Deimary¹, Aida Maleki^{2*}, Farhad Akhouni², Ahad Nejad Ebrahimi²

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Abstract

The Safavid era is often referred to as the “golden age of caravanserai construction”, with Šāh Abbās referred to as “father of caravanserai construction” in Iran. During this period, the prosperity of trade on the one hand and consolidation of relations between Iran and Europe on the other, the construction of roads and roadside facilities flourished greatly. Many travelers took advantage of these accommodation buildings, traversing the roads of Iran. European travelers described these facilities in considerable detail and introduced lesser-known types of accommodation buildings. However, no independent research has yet been conducted based solely on travelers’ reports regarding these facilities. The main objective of this study is to identify and classify the types of Safavid-era accommodation buildings from the perspective of non-Iranian travel writers. This fundamental qualitative research employed a mixed-method approach. Data were collected from 20 travelogues from the Safavid period, and the resulting information was analyzed through an analytical-comparative method to produce the final typology. The accommodation buildings that travel writers spoke of and described in detail included Sābāt and Langar, Rebāt, Xān and Xāneqāh, Karbāt and Caravanserai, Mehmān-xāne and Urban Caravanserai, Bridges and Qahve-xāne, Royal Residences and Daskare, Residential Villages and Private Houses, Religious Sites, Tents and Mobile Structures, and Temporary Stations.

Keywords: *Roadside Buildings, Caravanserai, Accommodation Buildings, Safavid Architecture, Travelogue.*

Introduction

Structures built to provide lodging and other services to travelers along roads or within cities were known by various names – the most famous being “inn” in Europe and “caravanserai” in the Middle East. Since these buildings vary greatly in form and function, for consistency in this study, the term “accommodation building” is used conventionally to avoid confusion and dispersion in the text.

Many scholars consider Iran the birthplace of the caravanserai, attributing its invention to the Achaemenids (Ghirshman, 1974/1990, 206), and regard the construction of caravanserais as one of the triumphs of Iranian architecture (Pup, 1976/ 1987, 238), even calling them “palaces in the desert” (Hillenbrand, 1994/ 1998, 406). Tavernier, while passing through the Kermān-Yazd road, writes: “Most of this road is tedious and monotonous sand.

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The only solace for travelers on this dry, barren road is that each night they reach a caravanserai and an underground cistern to reside” (Tavernier, 1957, 115). The condition of Iran’s roads reached its peak quality during the Safavid period, and In addition to the construction of numerous lodging facilities, travel was conducted in complete safety, making Iran one of the best most attractive travel and trade destinations in the world.. Road guards were responsible for maintaining the safety of people and their belongings in exchange for taxes (Matoufi, 2003, 693). Moreover, strict royal orders obliged residents along trade routes to host travelers and meet their needs. “Today, all parts of Iran are well-developed... and safe for travel... if anything is stolen from someone... the governor must compensate the exact property or its value” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 23). Regarding the quality of travel in the Safavid era, it suffices to say that in many areas, the caravanserai was considered the best building. Kotov describes the city of Natanz as lacking defensive fortifications and with low-quality buildings, and even the bazaar -the most important commercial building- is in poor condition, “but its stone caravanserai is a newly built high-quality building” (Kotov, 1996, 62). Despite such an integrated system and Iran’s worldwide fame in roads and travel facilities, our knowledge of roadside buildings is limited to a few types. Non-Iranian travelers’ reports, however, mention a wide variety of structures designed to accommodate travelers – especially foreign ambassadors and high-ranking merchants – that significantly expand our understanding of roadside architecture. Nonetheless, most researches have focused on more well-known types of roadside structures like caravanserais, while types like coffeehouses, residential villages, bridges, and royal residences have mostly vanished without being studied or documented. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by compiling, from Safavid-era European travelogues, a comprehensive inventory of accommodation building types, describing their architectural features, and answering two central

questions: How many distinct types existed, and what were the defining characteristics of each?

Research Background

The surveyed scholarship includes two groups: historical studies on Iranian accommodation buildings and theoretical works on architectural typology. Previous Iran-focused studies examine spatial organization, climatic adaptation, regional variations, cultural significance, historical development during the Safavid era, and the relationship between lodging structures and Iran’s extensive road networks. Typology-oriented studies provide analytical and methodological frameworks for distinguishing types and variants. As is clear, the study of accommodation buildings in Iran, particularly during the Safavid era, has attracted considerable scholarly attention, reflecting both their architectural significance and their role as vital nodes in the empire’s trade and communication networks, and some of which have become important references in this field. Below is a table of both types of research on “typology” and “accommodation buildings” in order of publication date (Table 1). Despite this substantial research body, there remains a need for an integrated typological analysis dedicated to less-known Safavid accommodation buildings identifiable only through travelogues. The present study engages with this scholarly landscape by identifying major contributions and gaps.

Research Method

This is a fundamental historical study employing a qualitative method to examine the criteria necessary for typologizing accommodation buildings. Given its qualitative and data-driven nature, this research does not aim to refute or prove a hypothesis but seeks to answer research questions through the research process. To achieve its goal, it employs a descriptive-analytical method to examine documentary data.

In the research process, the full list of Safavid travelogues was extracted, and from this list

Table 1. Research background. Source: Authors.

Author(s) & Year	Title / Focus	Scope / Method	Key Findings
Argan, G. C. (1963)	On the Typology of Architecture	Theoretical philosophy of type/ Classic theory of typology	Classic essay on type; Established foundational concepts of type and morphology.
Siroux, M. (1970)	Caravansérails d'Iran et petites constructions routières.	Architectural documentation/ Comprehensive survey of Iranian caravanserais	Detailed drawings and structural descriptions of caravanserais and other roadside buildings
Pirmia, M.K. & Afsar, K. (1971)	Roads and Ribats	Historical–architectural study/ Accommodation buildings in Iranian architecture	Explained the etymology, historical-typological, and functions of Accommodation buildings and their relation to road networks
Takmil-Homayoun, N. (1990)	Caravanserais in Iranian Culture	Historical–cultural study/ Cultural and historical role of caravanserais	Defined caravanserais as cultural institutions reflecting economic, social structures, and symbolic functions
Kleiss, W. & Kiani, Y. (1995)	Iranian Caravanserais	Archaeological and architectural survey/ Comprehensive survey of Iranian caravanserais	Documented major Iranian caravanserais and construction systems
Hillenbrand, R. (1998)	Islamic architecture: form, function, and meaning	Comparative historical survey/ Islamic architecture (includes caravanserai chapter)	Position and typology of caravanserai within Islamic architecture; form–function relations
Savagheb, J. & Najafi Aliabadi, F. (2012)	Role of Safavids in the Growth of Caravanserais	Historical analysis/ The Role of the Safavids in the Development of Caravanserais	Demonstrated state-sponsored expansion of caravanserais in the Safavid era
Labaf Khaniki, R. (2000)	Change in the Concept and Usage of Rebat	Historical-functional study/ Evolution of the caravanserai	Traced evolution from military Ribats to service-oriented Ribats, meaning and function
Memarian, Gh. (2011)	Iranian Architecture	Theoretical & historical overview/ General reference on traditional Iranian architecture	Conceptual frameworks; typological references applicable to caravanserai analysis
Amirhajlou et al. (2012)	Contemplation on the Reason of Development and Destruction of Safavid Midway Royal Residences	Case-study historical research/ Royal caravanserais of the Safavid period	Analyzed three key royal residential buildings and the explanatory factors behind their growth and decline.
Memarian, Gh. & Tabarsa, M.A. (2013)	Type and Typology in Architecture	Theoretical paper/ Theoretical foundations of architectural typology	Clarified the concept of “type” in architectural design and its methodological synthesis
Memarian, Gh. & Deghani Tafti, M. (2018)	Seeking to Find a Novel Concept to Type and Typology in Architecture	Typological-theoretical study/ Theory of typology in architecture	Provided new conceptual framework for architectural typology
Moshbeki Esfahani, A. (2018)	Comparative study of the Architectural Space of Safavid Caravanseries with a Physical Approach	Morphological study/ Physical and spatial analysis of Safavid caravanserais	Compared plans and spatial hierarchy of Safavid caravanserais

(Rafaty, 1989), 12 titles containing information relevant to the research were purposefully selected and marked with an asterisk in Table 2. The data extraction method is a mixed method of content analysis and coding. During the feasibility stage of the research, content analysis was used. However, because some types of residential buildings fall outside known studies and were not accessible through content analysis, to avoid

omitting these samples, all travelogues were studied, and the extracted information was coded in two stages. In the open coding stage, all reports related to accommodation buildings were extracted, and then in the axial coding stage, the information was categorized into 10 main groups. After studying and coding all the travelogues and achieving theoretical saturation, using the analytical-comparative method, the necessary

Table 2. List and specifications of Safavid travelogues, in order of the author's arrival in Iran. Source: Authors.

Author	Nationality	Years of presence in Iran	Contemporaneous	Purpose of the Voyage
Giovanni Maria Angiolello	Republic of Venice	1499-1515 AD.	King Ismail	Political
Vincenzo degli Alessandri	Republic of Venice	1530 AD.	King Tahmāsb	Political
* Robert Shirley	Britain	1598 - 1609 AD. 1613 - 1615 AD. 1627 - 1628 AD.	King Abbās	Political
* García de Silva Figueroa	Spain	1617 AD.	King Abbās	Political
* Pietro Della Valle	Italy	1617 – 1622 AD.	King Abbās	Exploring
* Fedot Afanas Yevic Katof	Russia	1623 AD.	King Abbās	Political- Commercial
* Robert Stodart	Britain	1626 AD.	King Abbās	Political
* Thomas Herbert	Britain	1628 – 1632 AD.	King Abbās	Political
Ian Smith	Netherlands	1628 - 1630 AD.	King Abbās	Political
* Jean-Baptiste Tavernier	France	1632-1668 AD.	King safi King Abbās the 2nd King Solomon	Commercial- Exploring
* Adam Olearius	Netherlands	1636 – AD.	King safi	Political
* Jean Chardin	France	1665-1670 AD. 1673-1677 AD. 1681 AD.	King Abbās the 2nd King Solomon	Commercial
* Engelbert Kaempfer	Germany	1683 - 1686 AD.	King Solomon	Political
* Pere S. N. Sanson	France	1683 – 1686 AD.	King Solomon	Political
* Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri	Italy	1694 AD.	King Solomon	Exploring
Gregório Pereira Fidalgo	Portugal	1696- 1697 AD	King Hussein	Political
Judasz Tadeusz Krusinski	Poland	1707-1725 AD.	King Hussein	Missionary
Petros de Sarkis Gilanentz	Armenia	1722-1723 AD.	King Hussein	Missionary
Jonas Otter	France	1734-1743 AD.	King Abbās the 3rd King Solomon the 2nd	Political

criteria for typology were prepared based on the frequency of the features of each type. Conducting the research requires a precise and unique definition for typology that is not justified by the criteria of the core theories of architectural typology (Fig. 1). Due to the inability to generalize all indicators, this research uses a multifaceted and composite typology approach (Fig. 2).

Theoretical Framework

To establish the research foundations, it is essential to understand two aspects: the Safavid era and the specific conditions that led to the prominence of accommodation buildings, as well as the general definition of typology and the specific typological criteria for this study.

• Safavids

The Safavids (1501-1722 AD) emerged at one of the most critical points in history, a time when the West had entered the Renaissance and, with the help of science and technology, was stepping into the Age of Discovery. These developments led to the arrival of various groups of travelers, from political envoys to adventurers and merchants, who recorded their observations in travelogues (Daneshpazhooh, 2006). During this period, the Safavids, by establishing a powerful and centralized government and new commercial and financial policies, brought back authority and security to the country and achieved economic prosperity. The Safavid economy was based on taxation, agriculture, handicrafts,

Criteria for the typology of	Functional (Broadbent,1973)
	Spacial (Rossi,1982)
	Structural (Frampton,1995)
	Cultural-Historical (Argan,1963)
	Climatic (Olgyay,1963)
	Social (Lefebvre,1991)
	Aesthetical (Gombrich,1950)

Fig. 1. Criteria for the typology of architectural works. Source: Authors.

Criteria for the typology of Accomodation buildings	Main Function (Broadbent, 1973)
	Locating (Kostof,1992)
	Spatial Structure (Hillier & Hanson,1984)
	Building Technology (Frampton,1995)
	Ownership (Matthee,2012)
	Service Level (Floor,2006)
	Durability (Rizvi,2011)
	Scale (Grabar,1980)
	Ornaments (Necipoglu,1995)
	Flexibility (Habraken,1998)
	Climate Compatibility (Olgyay,1963)
	Security (Horden & Purcell,2000)

Fig. 2. Accommodation building typology criteria. Source: Authors.

and most importantly, trade (Floor, 2000). Iran's geographical location along the Silk Road and between the two great empires of the Ottomans and the Mughals made it a communication hub between the East and the West and a center for trade between Asia and Europe (Matthee, 1999).

Understanding the vital role of trade at this time, the Safavids provided a range of facilities, infrastructures, and supportive policies to promote commerce. The most important of these efforts, ensuring security on trade routes, offering services to travelers along the way, and organizing a customs system (Herzig, 1991). This led many travelers to describe Iran and its roads as the best in

the world (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, Sanson, 17th/ 1967; Tavernier, 1957). "Upon reaching Iran, everyone notices the significant superiority this country has over the Turks [Ottomans], and I can confidently say this region is in no way inferior to Christian territories... There was no longer a need for tents because all along the entire route, there were large and suitable caravanserais built by kings or other dignitaries, available to the public at no charge for lodging" (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 17). The precision and dedication made to improve the roads were such that they impressed almost every traveler. "The Siyāh-Kūh caravanserai lacks fresh water, and thus the king ordered another caravanserai to be built nearby, close to a fresh underground cistern, and severely punished the architect of the caravanserai for his negligence regarding water... I wrote these notes to show how much King Abbās spends and strives to make his country more beautiful, prosperous, and suitable for transportation and trade" (*ibid.*, 125).

Since Šāh Abbās built and restored many caravanserais, he has been called the "father" of caravanserai construction (Siroux, 1971/ 1978, 191), and many caravanserais built during the Safavid era were named Šāh Abbāsi (Blair & Bloom, 2006). "Some raise the number of Šāh Abbāsi caravanserais to 30,000, which seems exaggerated... but based on my personal observations, the figure of 9991 is far below the actual number of existing caravanserais in Iran" (Siroux, 1949/ 1949, 27). This is why Kleiss refers to the Safavid era as "the golden age of caravanserai construction" (Kleiss, 1995, 2). These accommodation buildings were built in a chain to support travelers, and the distance between caravanserais on main roads was typically no more than six Farsangs² apart (Pope, 1939, 238).

• Typology

A type is a class, or group of objects that share common characteristics that distinguish them. This categorization aims to place a group of complex objects into an orderly set to achieve greater generality for better understanding (Mashhadi & Aminpour, 2017).

Typology is derived from the Greek roots “Topos” and “Typos”, equivalent to the words model, sample, form, category, symbol, and characteristic; However, contemporary research results in the discourse of typology show many contradictions in defining the nature and concept of type and typology in architecture as a simple and general image representing a group of buildings. In these definitions, some have considered formal aspects, while others consider the semantic and intuitive dimensions of the type (Memarian & Dehghani Tafti, 2018). Therefore, because architecture is a multifaceted phenomenon (Fig.1), each research should define or choose their criteria for typology based on their research type (Memarian & Tabarsa, 2013). “General” typological methods defined for architecture can only create a general criterion for understanding and are not effective as suitable guidelines for all research, and are unable to interpret multifaceted phenomena and the product of the combination of various factors that cannot be interpreted with a single criterion (Mashhadi & Aminpour, 2017). In the bigger picture, types can be divided into Genotype and Phenotype, which have roots in biology, with the genotype refers to the hidden biological pattern such as genes, which is actually a collection of information seen within a biological type of species, which in architecture, referring to the internal information of space, and the phenotype to the appearance or physical entity, which is interpreted as the physical form of the building (Addy, 1933). Therefore, the genotypes of Iranian buildings, such as houses, mosques, and accommodation buildings, have their specific phenotypes. Accommodation buildings have phenotypes like caravanserais, Rebāts, Sābāts, Xāns, and the like, which have been typologized by different researchers with different criteria (Fig. 2).

Findings

The research findings reveal 9 main categories and

one subsidiary group of Accommodation buildings, introduced in this section as a synthesis of reference sources and travelers’ reports.

• Sābāt and langar

“In the East, it is customary to travel a day’s journey in one move, without any stops, whether by a caravan, as a skilled rider, or all alone... One day, one may travel six hours, one day ten hours, and another day twelve hours, and the reason for this difference is the lack of water” (Tavernier, 1957, 125). The distance that travelers could cover in one day was called a stage or Marhale. If a lodging place was found between two cities, it was called a light stage. In a light stage, the distance between resting places was called a Langar. If there were fewer lodging places along the road and Langars were scarcer, and the distance between the two Langars increased, it became a heavy stage. Sābāts were built in heavy stages, and Langars in the light stages (Pirmia, 2013).

Dehkhoda Persian dictionary defines Sābāt as a covered passageway or a roof between two walls over a path (Dehkhoda, 1953, 1232). Sābāt is composed of two words, meaning comfort and building or structure (Pirmia & Afsar, 1991, 124). This covered pathway provided a temporary resting place for Caravans. Due to the temperature difference created between the shade of Sābāt and outside sunlight, a cool breeze is generated. Combined with an Underground Cistern, it alleviated travelers’ fatigue and thirst. Sābāts look like a Bazaar and were built to a length of 20 to 30 meters. Underneath, there were several Blind Niches over Plinths which were used for short rests, an underground cistern at the central opening, and in a few cases, one or two small rooms (ibid., 122).

• Rebāt, xān and xāneqāh

Rebāt etymologically shares its root with connection and tie, and refers to taking the reins and tying an animal. This word has also been used to mean a place for preservation and protection. Today, Rebāt in Persian and Arabic means a border post, caravanserai, Xāneqāh, hospice, guesthouse, fortress,

and temple (Pazuki, 1997, 277). Historically, Rebāts were military garrisons and places for keeping horses and supplies for the early Islamic warriors built on the borders of newly conquered lands (Shanawaz & Khaghani, 2015, 19). At first, Rebāts were simple fortifications for lodging, storage of provisions, and ammunition, with a rectangular plan and towers for observation (Labaf-Khaniki, 2000, 91). With the establishment of order in conquered territories and over time, a Rebāt came to be called the “house of Sufis”, a building where Sufis lived, therefore becoming synonymous with a Xāneqāh (Shanawaz & Khaghani, 2015, 19); Therefore, Rebāt and caravanserai took on a single meaning and became a place for pilgrims and travelers to rest and stay overnight (Hadizadeh Kakhki, 2010, 60) but practically it is a caravanserai used for keeping horses and camels, with multiple rooms around a courtyard with a Howz-traditional Persian pool- and underground cistern (Pirnia & Afsar, 1971, 122). Della Valle describes Rebāt as a “simple caravanserai”, playing an important role on secondary routes, sometimes consisting of only a few rooms and stables. In some cases, they did not even have “permanent custodians” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991). Chardin also speaks of the “simplicity” of Rebāts, describing them as “clean and orderly” buildings, managed by locals and endowments (Chardin, 1957/ 1643). Rebāt in the sense of Xāneqāh was located outside the suburbs in secluded and pleasant areas (Pirnia, 2013) and served as a refuge for the poor and stranded wayfarers, temporarily housing those who had no shelter (Pirnia & Afsar, 1971, 129). Chardin considers the components of a Xāneqāh to include an indoor Howz, an underground cistern, and a garden (Chardin, 1957/ 1643, 1578). He mentions the Xāneqāhs as “free guesthouses” that provide shelter not only for Sufis but also for poor travelers (ibid.). Della Valle also mentions a Xāneqāh near Naqsh-e-Jahān where Sufis and passersby would eat and sleep together, and calls the Sufis “welcoming to every stranger” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991).

• Kārbāt and cārāvānsērāi

In the past, travelers preferred to travel in groups for financial, security, and supportive reasons; thus, the caravans emerged (Meshbaki Esfahani, 2018, 14). Caravanserai means the house of caravans, because it has the word “house” inside (Hillenbrand, 1994/ 1998, 333). Caravanserai, with slight differences, refers to a wide range of buildings such as Inn, Kārbāt, Rebāt, Xān, Fandūq, Tim, and timcheh (Hadizadeh Kakhki, 2010; Pirnia & Afsar, 1971).

Caravanserais, unlike other types of Iranian buildings, have undergone only a few changes and have followed relatively fixed patterns. “Durable and beautiful caravanserais, similar to each other, have been built all along the roads of Iran... and in terms of beauty, proportion, and sustainability, they are comparable to the best European buildings” (Gemelli Careri, 2011/ 1969, 44). Caravanserais “are made in the style of monasteries; built around a central courtyard surrounded by numerous rooms” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 108). “They are square in plan... and usually one-story. Two-story Caravanserais are rarely seen” (Tavernier, 1957, 122). “After the entrance gate, there was a large courtyard sufficient for accommodating a large number of travelers with their animals and loads. In the middle of this courtyard, there was a large square platform with an area equal to twenty square feet and a height of two feet from the ground, on which several people could easily settle. Around the platform, there were mangers for the horses, camels, and mules” (Silva Figueroa, 1931, 118). Travelers’ rooms are located around the courtyard, and in the middle of each courtyard side, an Iwan with a large arch is located. Each room is built two or three feet above the courtyard floor and aligned in a row along the courtyard sides” (Tavernier, 1957, 122). “Behind each room, there was a backroom, with a narrow and short door that only one person could pass through. In this small room, there was space for two beds, without any extra features. These small rooms were designated specifically for women’s privacy

and comfort so that they would not be exposed to the strangers” (Silva Figueroa, 1931, 118). The person who arrives earlier has the priority for taking a room he likes, and no one has the right to forcibly take someone’s room” (Tavernier, 1957, 123). “In the wilderness, no rent is charged from travelers for the rooms of caravanserais, but in cities, a nominal fee is charged” (ibid., 123); therefore, “one can reside in a caravanserai without paying any rent, even if someone stays there for a year” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 108). “The stables are located behind the rooms. Sometimes the stables are as comfortable as the rooms for lodging. Most travelers prefer to stay in the stables during winter because they are warm. The stables, like the rooms, all have vaulted ceilings, and from the caravanserai rooms, a small window opens toward the stable, from which a person can look and see if their horse is well cared for. Recently, a platform has been built in the stable where three or four people can cook, rest, and sleep on those platforms” (Tavernier, 1957, 122). “Additionally, at the entrance of the caravanserai, there were several other rooms designated for vendors who sold bread, fruits, eggs, cheese, meat, fodder, and barley” (Silva Figueroa, 1931, 118). “Since most of the time the number of travelers is so great that the capacity of the caravanserai is not sufficient for their overnight stay, travelers are accommodated over plinths covered by blind niches which can house two or three people with their belongings. Camels and horses are also tied in front of these plinths outside the caravanserai. Since the outer perimeter of the caravanserai is much larger than the interior space, there is enough room for lodging and protection from summer heat and winter cold” (ibid., 277). “At night, the caravanserai keeper closes the gate and is responsible for everything. Some guards are also on patrol around the caravanserai” (Tavernier, 1957,123). “In caravanserais, if any merchandise was lost or stolen, the caravanserai keeper was responsible for compensating it” (Gemelli Careri, 2011/ 1969, 99). Caravanserais are of two types; one group are financed on endowments and

hosted travelers receive services free of charge... and the second type has no free service, and the traveler is only offered a free room with no facilities” (Tavernier, 1957, 122). The capital required for the construction of caravanserais is provided by three groups: the king, who builds royal caravanserais, investors who build caravanserais for earning money, and benefactors and philanthropists who build endowed caravanserais (Sarikhani et al., 2013,163).

• **Ehmān-xāne and urban caravanserais**

Another type of building classified as urban accommodation buildings is Mehmān-Xāne or guesthouses, which played the role of today’s hotels; splendid and magnificent caravanserais mostly used by dignitaries (Pirmia & Afsar, 1971, 128). Tavernier considers the Royal Mehmān-Xāne as official residences for merchants and foreign ambassadors and one of the manifestations of the Safavid government’s hospitality policy, describing the Qazvin Royal Mehmān-Xāne as “magnificent” with clean rooms, furnished with carpets and curtains and servants” (Tavernier, 1957). Careri refers to a Royal Mehmān-Xāne in Isfahan that “was reserved for royal guests” and was impressed by its “orderliness” (Gemelli Careri, 2011/ 1969).

Besides the Royal Mehmān-Xāne, there were also urban caravanserais that were used simultaneously for trade and accommodation. Urban caravanserais were often two-story buildings, with the ground floor designated for storing goods and the upper floor for housing foreign travelers. “In the urban caravanserais, which have rooms equipped with locks and keys and are mostly used for storing commercial goods, only a small fee is charged for protection services” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 108). “All of them are large, relatively well-built, and suitably ornamented, and it seems that, in addition to the king, other individuals also devote their efforts to improve the condition of these buildings” (ibid., 30). In the Isfahan bazaar, there is “a very luxurious caravanserai with a gold-plated dome. Several corridors containing many rooms, and a large number of travelers, especially merchants who frequently travel to Isfahan, who can

easily reside there, and it is truly a majestic building” (Silva Figueroa, 1931, 214). Regarding the founders of these buildings, “after Iranians built a house for their residence, they proceeded to build a bazaar, bathhouse, and coffeehouse. After completing these, they would begin building caravanserais, and sometimes, instead of renting them out, they would dedicate them to public use” (Chardin, 1957/ 1643, 1402).

• **Bridge and coffeehouse**

Two types of bridges and coffeehouses were examples of accommodation buildings specifically for the lower classes, where foreign travelers were reluctant to lodge, except in emergency cases. Bridges, besides serving as connections for crossing and sometimes as water barriers, occasionally included a mosque, caravanserai, road guardhouse, kitchen, and bathhouse as well (Pope, 1939, 237). For example, “in a place where the entire road is a swampy and muddy, Iranians built long, wide, and straight stone-paved roads that are truly very interesting... and one of these bridges has small rooms so that travelers can rest inside them” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 125). He also refers to another bridge, which has a “beautiful new white clean room that the king ordered to be built for travelers’ rest for a while above the water below the bridge” (ibid., 232). Also, in another example “there is a beautiful stone bridge between two high mountains... large and sturdy, stands on nine great pillars. Under the bridge and inside the pillars, small rooms with domed roofs have been built, and there is also a kitchen there, which can be reached down by a small staircase to the water’s edge, that practically turns it into a suitable caravanserai under the bridge, where travelers can stop and rest” (Olearius, 1991, 343).

Among other accommodation buildings, coffeehouses should be mentioned, which were abundant in cities, and travelers spoke of them as “notorious” places. The coffeehouses were not only places for “meeting and entertainment but also for short residency” (Chardin, 1957/ 1643). A number of them were located in Naqsh-e-Jahān Square, and Kaempfer

points out the upper-floor rooms of the square, which, like today’s cheap motels, poor people could rent sleeping areas that were separated by “curtains” (Kaempfer, 2022).

Roadside coffeehouses had a similar quality status and were often built near bridges, mountain passes, and springs, where travelers were served food and drink, similar to today’s roadside complexes (Farshchi & Hajizamani, 2019). Travelers rarely mentioned staying overnight in roadside coffeehouses, and only visited them briefly when they passed by. This might be because “most coffeehouses along the way do not have adequate facilities” (Chardin, 1957/ 1643, 514) or due to the low quality of services that were beneath the dignity of ambassadors and high-ranking merchants. Only in special cases might they rest briefly in a “coffeehouse that had a garden and a clear water fountain” (Gemelli Careri, 2011/ 1969, 45).

• **Skare and royal residences**

In Iran, many houses with vast gardens were built by kings in the outskirts of cities, staffed with guards, gardeners, and attendants, and used by the king for leisure, travel, and hunting, while at other times hosting his special guests. The layout of these royal residences generally took two main forms. The more elaborate type included one or two central courtyards, sometimes with a Howz in the middle and halls on either side of the courtyard, an Iwan at the center of the hall facades, and Ancillary spaces on the secondary sides of the courtyard (Kleiss, 1995, 85). “So far, wherever I have seen the royal Residences, they have all been identical, meaning that all of them have numerous rooms connected to each other by small doors. The walls are gilded everywhere and decorated with frames containing beautiful and delicate colors... In the garden, there are abundant fruit trees and... a straight paved street extending from the mansion to the end of the garden wall, shaded on both sides by cypress trees. In the middle of the pavement, a stream flows into multiple pools... Fountains have been installed in these pools, from which water gushes” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 109).

The simpler type, where the building at the center of the garden is in the form of a pavilion or Kušk, is called a “Daskareh” (Pimia & Afsar, 1971), and includes “a central Kušk, a Hows, and geometric gardens that sometimes served as royal hunting grounds” (Gemelli Careri, 2011/ 1969). One of these royal gardens contained a building that, though small, yet so delightful that we had never seen the like before. The building’s floor area was no more than twenty-five square feet and included thick and sturdy brick walls. The best room in the pavilion was a hall measuring ten feet long and eight feet wide, whose walls were decorated with golden designs from the floor to a height of ten feet, and stuccoes were seen all around them... depicting images of women and celebrations and goblets of wine and scenes of Persian dancers... The rest of the walls of the hall and even its ceiling arch were adorned with beautiful gilding and lapis lazuli designs. The pure golden color of these designs had such luster and brilliance that it dazzled the eyes. Around the hall, there were four corridors and the same number of small rooms, all decorated with paintings and gilding in the same style as the hall... It had a very large garden with various fruit trees and numerous trees that created a lush, pleasant, and refreshing environment. Also, in every corner of the garden, there were springs and small pools” (Silva Figueroa, 1931, 235-237). Because these residences were often the last stop before entering the city, the king’s guests would “stay there to rest, change clothes, and prepare to be honored by the king” or the city’s ruler, until permission to enter the city was granted (Herbert & Stodart, 2022, 62)

Within large cities, especially the capital, high-ranking guests were accommodated in mansions belonging to the king, which had a different status. “The king has three hundred houses in different parts of the capital. Some have been inherited, some purchased, and some confiscated. All these large and magnificent mansions are empty and... often allocated as residences for foreign ambassadors and envoys” (Chardin, 1957/ 1643, 600). Confiscated houses constituted the majority of these residences and originally belonged to dignitaries with

whom the king was displeased, and their properties had been seized. The owner of one of these houses was «one of the king’s female relatives, whose husband had incurred the king’s wrath and had fled, and as a result, her house was confiscated... and was allocated to the king’s guests” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 292).

• Residential villages and private houses

In Šāh Abbās era, when the policy of forced migration frequently recurred, villages of migrant populations were established along the roads to provide services to travelers. Tavernier mentions “small villages with clay houses and dense gardens”. Villagers “warmly welcomed travelers, provided them with food, and offered them places to sleep in their homes” (Tavernier, 1957). Della Valle called these villages “natural caravanserais,” writing: “Countless other villages have been recently built by the order of the king along the road so that travelers could be comfortable in terms of accommodation” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 133). Some villages privilege a caravanseraï or guesthouse, and the villagers earned income by selling supplies to travelers (Amirhajloo et al., 2012). “We entered the houses of the locals, and the homeowners welcomed us warmly” (Olearius, 1991, 44). Due to the king’s emphasis on the cooperation of the people with merchants and foreign guests, these services were supposed to be provided free of charge; however, in practice, the guest was expected to present a suitable gift to the homeowner in exchange for their hospitality and services rendered. “At night, we reached a small village that had recently been built. There are many such villages along the way, so that travelers can rest in one of them whenever they wish. The stay takes place in the private homes of the people, whose owners neither ask for money nor accept any fare if given, but they must be given a gift or tip, which they then accept (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 135). Some people, in addition to providing all or part of their house to travelers, would entertain them with food, and sometimes music and performances. “Until midnight, music, singing, dancing, and interesting performances... kept me awake, and I can truly say that I had never seen dancing so good and delightful before” (ibid., 24).

• Religious sites

Accommodation and even the entry of non-Muslims into religious buildings often faced resistance from the people; however, there was no prohibition for Muslim travelers. Pope says: “The door of the mosque is always open to everyone and... caravans immediately head to the mosque without anyone questioning them, and every refugee is free to sleep there” (Pope, 1939, 77). During the Safavid era, due to governmental pressure, non-Muslims could also stay in religious buildings such as mosques and holy shrines, and no one dared to interfere with them. Figueroa mentions staying in religious buildings several times in his travelogue and writes: “At the entrance of the city, there is a large mosque where pilgrims and travelers... can stay” (Silva Figueroa, 1931, 283). Near Shiraz, “the ambassador and his entourage comfortably stayed in a mosque” (ibid., 166). On the way to another village, “the ambassador took up residence in a room built near a shrine... As soon as the ambassador arrived, a pious man who was the custodian of the tomb came to visit him” (ibid., 196).

• Tents and mobile structures

Tents and marquees were among the necessities of travel that travelers used when they had no access to accommodation buildings. One such situation was when the capacity of accommodation buildings was full during busy times. “Since there were many of us and we had to stay there for several weeks, and the village did not meet our needs in many ways, and they did not receive any order to host us, we set up a tent near the residence of the ambassador at our own expense” (Olearius, 1991, 45). These tents could have as much spatial variety and multiplicity as a royal building. “For other companions to settle in the same place... they set up nine or ten tents in the king’s garden. One of these tents, which was larger and carpeted, was used as a hall, and there was a prayer hall next to it where they prayed, and the other tents were for the servants to rest” (Silva Figueroa, 1931, 204).

Another type of temporary accommodation building is mobile huts, which Olearius describes their construction and transport: “At night, round huts carried on the backs of oxen by the host arrived, and we stayed in them. These

huts were made with several long and curved sticks connected at the top by a plate, and when necessary, they could be separated and reassembled... During the journey, we spent another night in the same huts that the host had dismantled and sent ahead” (Olearius, 1991, 97 - 99).

• Temporary stations

In emergencies and in places where construction is not possible, any shelter or refuge is valuable. Sometimes, ordinary people or philanthropists employ simple measures to make use of the shade of trees, the coolness of rivers, and turn them into simple accommodation stations, some of which have become famous over time. Among them is the 900-year-old plane tree of Natanz, which “nothing in the world is older than that... a very large and interesting plane tree that shelters all caravans. This plane tree is so gigantic and thick that many people, horses, and camels can rest in its shade without one group inconveniencing another.

Around its trunk, there is a walled area paved nicely with bricks. The distance from the tree to the wall, which is built in a semicircle, is twelve feet, so that caravans can place their loads and spread their bedding there. Since the area of this brick-paved circle is large, travelers can rest there and enjoy the cool breeze that blows throughout the summer. The large and thick branches of the plane tree cover a large area; at noon, the shade around the enclosure is about thirty feet, and all the mules, horses, and camels of a caravan can eat and sleep protected from the sunlight in the tree’s shade. The stalls are built into the wall that many animals use, so that when the ambassador’s caravan arrived here, all the camels, horses, and other pack animals, numbering over two hundred, were placed around the wall” (Silva Figueroa, 1931, 284). Another example of these temporary stations was in difficult-to-pass spots, which crossed the harsh deserts and made the construction of a caravanserai impossible. “In the middle of this vast salt plain, we found a piece of land with good and dry soil because on a trip that the king was making, since he could not cross the entire five Farsangs of desert in one day, he ordered soil to be brought from elsewhere and placed there so that he could rest on it overnight, and

from then on, this piece of land was used by caravans in winter” (Della Valle, 1987/ 1991, 125).

Discussion

There are many typological components shaping accommodation buildings (Fig. 2). Among these criteria, the main function, location, spatial organization, level of services, and scale are the selected indicators for typology, which have been used to classify the ten types of accommodation buildings and are compiled in Table 3.

Conclusion

In response to the research questions, based on information derived from reports of non-Iranian travelers, nine main types and one sub-type of accommodation buildings have been identified. Each includes various types and subtypes selected based on criteria such as the main function of the building, location, spatial organization, level of services, and scale. Among these, spatial organization provides the most essential boundaries for typology. Among these ten types of residential buildings, Sābāt and Langar are semi-temporary accommodations built for short rests along the way, not using a complex architecture, and do not have the capacity to host large populations, with a

bazaar-like form and rooms and an underground cistern. Rebāt, Xān, and Xāneqāh, which evolved from military buildings and transformed into Sufi gathering places and then into accommodation buildings, are the next types. They include a main hall, several rooms, and service spaces, and later reached their ultimate evolution as Karbāt and Caravanserai. Caravanserai is the most well-known type, often organized around a covered or enclosed courtyard with rooms and stables in subsequent layers. Inside cities, Mehmān-xāne was similar to modern hotels, and the king also provided confiscated or personal mansions to prominent political and commercial groups. There was also another urban caravanserais whose spatial organization included various rooms, iwans, and service spaces. Among the known buildings, residential bridges are a type not mentioned in any reference sources, consisting of a combination of small rooms above or below the bridge structure. Royal residences or Daskares were built as small palaces or pavilions combined with gardens, mostly near important cities or hunting grounds, where the king’s guests would stay to receive permission to enter the city. Residential villages were another Safavid innovation, consisting of two types: existing villages along roads and villages formed by the forced relocation of people to serve travelers. The people of these villages

Table 3. Main indicators determining the typology of Safavid-era accommodation buildings. Source: Authors.

Building Type	Main Function	Location	Spatial Organization	Service Level	Scale
Sābāt Langar	Temporary Resort	Outside the City	Underground Cisterns, Blind Niches, and Plinths	Public	Micro
Rebāt Xān Xāneqāh	Residential Religious	Near the City	Rooms, Stables, and Small Central Courtyards	Semi-Formal	Medium
Karbāt Caravanserai	Residential	Outside the City	Rooms, Stables, and Central Courtyards	Public	Macro
Mehmān-xāne Urban Caravanserai	Residential Commercial	Inside the Entrance to the City	Rooms, Stables, and Central Courtyards	Formal	Macro
Bridges Qahve-xāne	Service	Outside the City	Chambers, and Public Halls	Public	Micro
Royal Residences Daskare	Residential Recreational	Outside the City	Gardens, Pavilions, and Palaces	High Level	Macro
Residential Villages Private Houses	Residential	Outside the City	Rooms, Stables, and Central Courtyards	Public	Macro Micro
Religious Sites	Religious	Outside the City	Prayer rooms, Rooms, and Central Courtyards	Public	Micro Medium
Tents Mobile Structures	Recreational Military	Outside the City	Flexible spaces	Private	Micro

would offer their private houses to travelers and host them with food and music. Religious places, despite the inner reluctance of the people and religious injunctions against mixing with followers of other religions, were open to non-Iranian travelers by royal decree, and there are reports of foreigners staying in the courtyards and chambers of mosques and shrines. Temporary structures were another well-known type of roadside accommodation, consisting of wooden houses and tents, which, in addition to being quickly erected and dismantled, had a unified and flexible space capable of providing necessary services for temporary stays. At last, Oases, trees, and springs, without any architectural space, were also considered sub-types of emergency accommodations by adding a few elements such as feeding troughs, brick walls, and paved ground.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct of this research.

Endnotes

1. A famous story states that the king decided to build a thousand caravanserais across Iran, but his minister suggested that instead of a thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine caravanserais should be built, because the number one thousand is easy to pronounce and diminishes the importance of this great undertaking.
2. Farsang was historically a unit of measurement for length in Muslim countries and is equal to 5400 meters.

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