

# Recognizing the Concept of "Threshold" in Persian Garden

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**Abstract** | In recent years, semantic and physical aspects are highly discussed, since the majority of experts believe ignoring these dimensions have resulted in reduced quality of living spaces. The concept of "threshold" is among these concepts, whose semantic aspects are frequently forgotten due to prevalence of the simplistic views. The "Threshold", as a concept or as an aspect, can cover a wide range of meanings associated with the meaning of space. This aspect can affect the presence and appearance of the space and it can bring quality to the space. Therefore, the current paper aims at recognizing the different physical and semantic aspects of "threshold" in Persian gardens by studying its features and characteristics. The research method in this paper is descriptive-analytical and the data is gathered through library and documentary research.

At the first glance, a threshold is considered as an identifiable concept that can be defined based on its physical elements and semantic layers. It can also be identified objectively and subjectively according to its function. In addition, this specific type of space has a different design and form that can offer different spatial qualities in different types of gardens and thus presenting features of the inside and outside.

**Keywords** | Persian garden, threshold, inside and outside, detachment, attachment.

**Introudction** | The extent of the carried out research on Persian gardens indicate the significance and attractiveness of this subject among other issues associated to the landscape architecture. Additionally, learning from the past successful examples of architecture offers solutions for the contemporary design. "Recognizing the ways in which the Iranians think about the space and its use and organization is so interesting and thought-provoking which can offer ambiguity and learnability"(Falamaki 2011: 6).

Scrutinizing the elements of a garden as in the construction and explaining its implications can be seen as the embodied concepts in the contemporary landscape architecture. In this regard, emphasizing on the concept of "threshold" as the first experienced space in architecture, and the necessity of studying this concept for further increasing of the quality of architectural spaces are proved to be highly important. In this regard, the current study aims at determining the meanings of threshold in the architecture of the gardens in order to answer the following question:

What is the threshold and how is it used in architecture? How is the threshold space defined in the architecture of a garden?

### Definition of the "threshold" and the associated concepts

Threshold", which is also referred to as the doorway, the verge, and the entrance, have many concepts and definitions which imply diverse features despite their similarity. Dehkhoda indicates that the term "threshold" is equivalent to the following words: the verge, the barracks, the entrance, the port, doorway, pathway, and the door (Dehkhoda, quoted by Beheshti and Qayoumi, Bidhendi, 2009). Also, Moeen defines it as 1- the verge. 2. The beneath part of the (door) frame 3. Beginning 4- The barracks of the kings (Moeen, 2002: 37).

The vocabulary definitions provided in the dictionaries can explain the meaning of threshold in a building while defining its function as an integral element (a physical element or a physical space) of the building. Since each architectural element indicate subordinate definitions that are defined according to its particular architectural style and the spatial and temporal features, relying on non-architectural meaning and definitions will drive the researcher away from a holistic view to the overall aspects of the subject. Therefore, the current study will define the concepts and meanings associated with the word "threshold" through discussing the prevailing theories and their interpretation after defining their definitions; so that, the qualities resulting from the embodiment of these concepts in the gardens can be analyzed.

In Deleuze's sense, the threshold in architecture is the place or instance of inter-incision and interaction of different levels from whose interface, the meanings and concepts are emerged. The process of "becoming" happens

in the threshold. At this interval, a process of zoning and realignment takes place, a process that is characterized by the escape from the space and its previous arrangements and the emergence of new games. So, the threshold can be defined as the change limit. The threshold is not necessarily a physical departure from a place and does not always occur in one part of a particular architecture. The threshold is the boundary of feelings or impression and, consequently, a subject's liberation from subjectivity and plurality (Pooralam, 2017). Louis Kahn also defines the threshold as a subtle phenomenon in the light of the forces of darkness and light, and an instant for inspiration; when the "boundless matter" carry "presence" and "the bounded matter" carry "emergence" while they are subtly gathered as an "inspiration" (Hojat, 2015: 94); (Diagram 1).

Louis Kahn combines the inspiration and the threshold and states that "inspiration" occurs at a specific point between the reality and the manifestation of reality. He believes inspiration has two bases; one in the reality, and another in the manifestation of reality. This point is a tow-sided doorway (ibid: 51-52). In the third century, Porphyry indicates that "the threshold is a holy phenomenon" (Bachelard, 2013: 269).

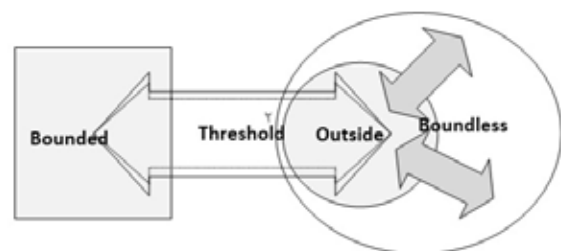


Diagram 1. The threshold tracks the inside and outside characteristics. Source: author

### Threshold in Architecture

Each entry or arrival is based on expectations and anticipations. A person who comes from a different place and a long distance prepares himself for experiencing a new place (Pic 1). The kind of entry that is known as "passing" occurs when a person crosses the threshold of a place. In this regard, the inside and outside relation is a reality that is fundamental in the identification of any place. Earlier, the city gate had a different function beyond being a defensive structure, representing the city enclosure, and confirming the expectations of a place (A point for confronting what was going to be opened up to a person); (Schulz, 43-40: 2008), (Pic2). Regarding the history<sup>1</sup>, the transitional space is probably related to the holding and presenting of some traditions. The first forms of worshipping the gods or the master evokes some assumptions that some preparations were devised for these



Pic 1: The miniature of Baber ordering for the Gardens, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Source: Khansari et al, 2004.

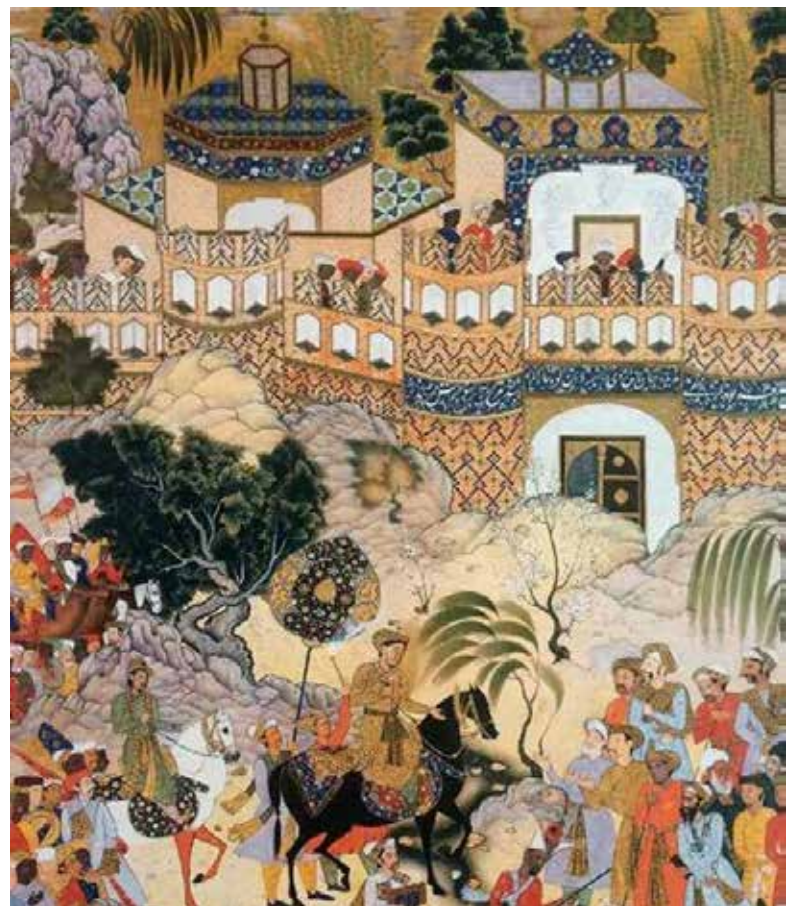
ceremonies. Mircea Eliadeh writes in his "Holy and Unholy"<sup>2</sup>: "The ceremonial application has also entered the thresholds of the human habitat, which is why the threshold is of great importance. As written by Mircha in "The Sacred and The Profane": "The ceremonial application has also entered the thresholds for human habitats, which is why the threshold is of great importance. Passing from the threshold is associated with many traditions and rituals- such as bending, prostration, ascetic touch of the hand, and so on. The "threshold" and the "door" indicate a way of blending with space. They are also highly significant in religion; because they are both considered as a symbol and a means to pass from one space to another." (Meiss, 2004:183). On the one hand, entrance to

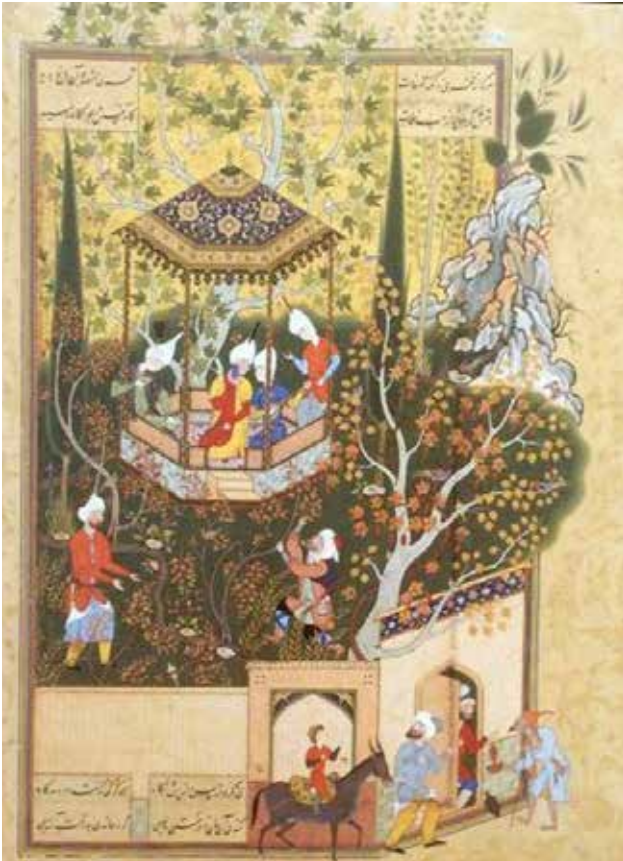
the temple is made with the consideration of the hierarchy of the sacred and unsacred world, and the entrance is adorned properly to repel evil spirits that may enter into this sacred place (Cooper, 85 :2000). On the other hand, the existence of a "door" makes the preservation of hierarchies possible and gives respect to the different positions (Pic3).

In religious thoughts, the concept of "door" indicates high value and spiritual meanings. Basically, the temple itself is a "door", through which one can symbolically pass from the material world to the holy and supernatural realm. A "door" is a license to enter a higher position (Naghizadeh, 210 :2013). The traditional term "door", regarding both architecture and literature, implies a transition from a certain space at a certain time. This subtle transference, which has a symbolic meaning, regardless of any scale, can also be observed in mountains where prominent figures indicate entering a distinct regional location (Ardalan & Bakhtiar 71 :2001); (Pic4).

Separating the outside from inside presents itself as a simple but basic dichotomy in what is fundamental in our experiences of the "lived space" and what is provided by the nature of the place (Ralph, 2011: 57). However, identifying the bound-

Pic 2: The city gate in the image depicting Shah Akbar's entrance to the city of Sourt- Victoria and Albert Museum, Source: Jodidio, 49 :2015.



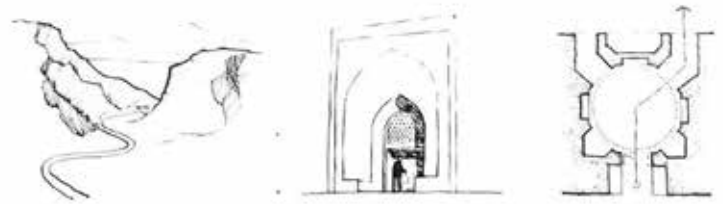


Pic 3: The garden threshold and entrance to the garden, Jami's Haft Orang, Source: Ruggles, 22:2007.

ary between the inside and outside is very easy and absurd, as it can be shown by building a platform, drawing a line, and so on. But if the space is specified in the sense of this term, it will deliver a meaning beyond the notion of a "physical separator" in the objective aspect. In this case, the "entrance space" or the "threshold space" or the "door" will acquire semantic qualities .with objective and subjective aspects

On the other hand, relations between the inside and outside can be examined from two aspects. This implies both detachment and attachment, or in other words, separation and transition, dissociation and continuity, boundary and interference. The thresholds and passing spaces are also considered as a "place": "the places in which they environment is displayed" (Meiss, 2004: 180). As Schulz suggests: "The threshold as the connector of the inside and outside leads to a conscious representation of an integrated and coherent understanding of the experience of entering the place" (Schulz, 2008: 40-43). The thresholds imply three roles in varying degrees:

- Functional role: indicates passing through the door, and offers lighting and ventilation from the window.
- Protective role: indicates controlled passing through the door, and offers a selected view and look, as well as the choice of being exposed, or not (Meiss, 2004: 181).



Pic 4: Examples of the gate or the threshold, Source: Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 71 :2001.

- The semantic role: indicates the symbol of each place corresponding to the common conventions and social traditions in the selected area that leads due specific behaviors (Meiss, 2004: 182).

### The threshold of Persian Garden

Enclosure is a feature of Persian gardens. Artists emphasize on enclosing the gardens by constructing and providing contemplation spaces and arranging the garden in reserved and ordered organization. (Mansouri, 2005: 63); (Pic 5).

Having placed in this enclosure, the "threshold" acquires a certain meaning. According to Alexander: "A boundary circulating around a center has a dual purpose; firstly, the boundary arrangement emphasizes the center and help the recreation of the center, secondly, it links the borders to center and integrates a whole. Hence, the boundaries are both attaching and detaching. In both cases, the bounded and limited center, is further intensified and strengthened" (Alexander, 2013: 127). In the definitions related to the meaning of threshold, the concept of attachment and detachment is always emphasized at the same time (Boettger, 2011:10). In Persian gardens, this detachment and continuity in the thresholds are embodied in some elements such as the garden gate<sup>3</sup> that offer functionality from the inside while providing an appropriate exterior structure as well as contributing to the coherence of urban bodies (Pic 6).

The Persian architects were familiar with these "detailed" roles and used the orderly transformation of the viewpoint as well as the role of the "threshold" in their gardens (Falamaki, 2010: 700). They used to increase the spiritual productivity of the architectural space by creating thresholds and spaces for gradual guidance on arrival in the minds of the addressees. "From the moment a visitor steps into the threshold of the building until the last moment where the inside landscape and viewpoint can be observed, architectural spaces are displayed in continuous and transformative forms; ... the continuity and transformation of the landscapes inside the garden could prepare the minds and the inner world of the visitors who are guided step by step along the garden..." (Falamaki, 1992: 306-307). Achieving such an aim for a Persian architect who has always sought to connect with the transcendental world is consid-



Pic 5: The enclosure and entrance of the garden in a miniature belonged to the handwriting of the late seventeenth century AD from Shahnameh. Source: Khansari et al., 153,2004.

ered to be a very serious and delicate task. Alexander in his "The Timeless Way of Building", defines the entrance pattern as an intermediate region for changing one's mental framework from the outside to the inside: "zoning changes the way that direction, height, surface, and landscape perform and so does the quality of light" (Alexander, 2002: 228). It occurs where the general ambiance is discontinued and acquires certain traits (Ibid: 230); (Pic 7). In this case, the more intense the change is and the more the subject (human) encounters more intense contrasts, the more the threshold is experienced.

The threshold is an integrative element which unites the surrounding environment, and thus establishes a sophisticated place. Its mission is to provide transitional space; passing from the boundless visual perception of the outside space to the bounded space inside the garden (Shirazi, 2012: 131). Thresholds and transitional spaces are the places where mutual and sometimes contradictory phenomena exchange (Meiss, 2004: 186). However, these concepts are complementary rather than contradictory. The Persian garden completes the peripheral nature. The Persian gardens can be considered as built environments, which represent (complete and symbolize) the human understanding from the environment and combines the meanings altogether. This means that the Iranian man adds the garden to the nature, according to the limitations of the surrounding environment, and demonstrates his understanding of the meaning of paradise and the universe in a symbolic way. Throughout the ages of history, these meanings have been identified as "Heaven" and "Paradise" in Islamic texts, becoming a cultural matter. Although there is no specific reference to the threshold and entrance space in the historical documentation, it is clear that

the connection between the inside and outside of the garden was made in varying degrees of space continuity and enclosure. Professor Pirnia states: "... each garden had an entrance, a building that was sometimes called the garden gate. This building was like the exterior of the traditional houses where guests were welcomed. To enter, one must first pass through an awning (Keneh<sup>4</sup>), then enter a vestibule and the corridor. The entrance door was closed and one or two corridors accessed the garden from the vestibule. Inside, the main viewpoint could be observed from the main path, and the other buildings were built in the corners. If the garden had no gate, a short wall (Pars<sup>5</sup>) would be constructed at the entrance" (Pirnia, 2008: 431-432).

In many residential, governmental and residential-governmental gardens, a building was built at the entrance, which was transformed into a rest and observing area for the guardians, gardeners and other staff in most cases. In a few of these gardens, the garden gate building was transformed into a large mansion for the residence of the main inhabitants of the garden. In some of these gardens, located in the capital or an important city, a court for holding ceremonies and parades and ritual and religious gatherings were made in front of the mansion or entrance hall. Occasionally, a columned porch was built on the upper floor in the side facing of the court so that the generals and governors could see the court. The Imperial Mansion of Aliqapou in Isfahan<sup>6</sup> is considered an example such gardens (Naeema, 2006: 26); (Pics 8 -11).

Pallasmaa recognizes two types of architecture: the architecture of the essence and the architecture of the form. The architecture of the essence perceives the metaphysical and existential issue of humanity and seeks to strengthen the human influence on



Pic 6: the relation between the interior and exterior and coherence of the Chaharbagh by the garden gates- Initial figure. Source: Shahrestani, 1987.

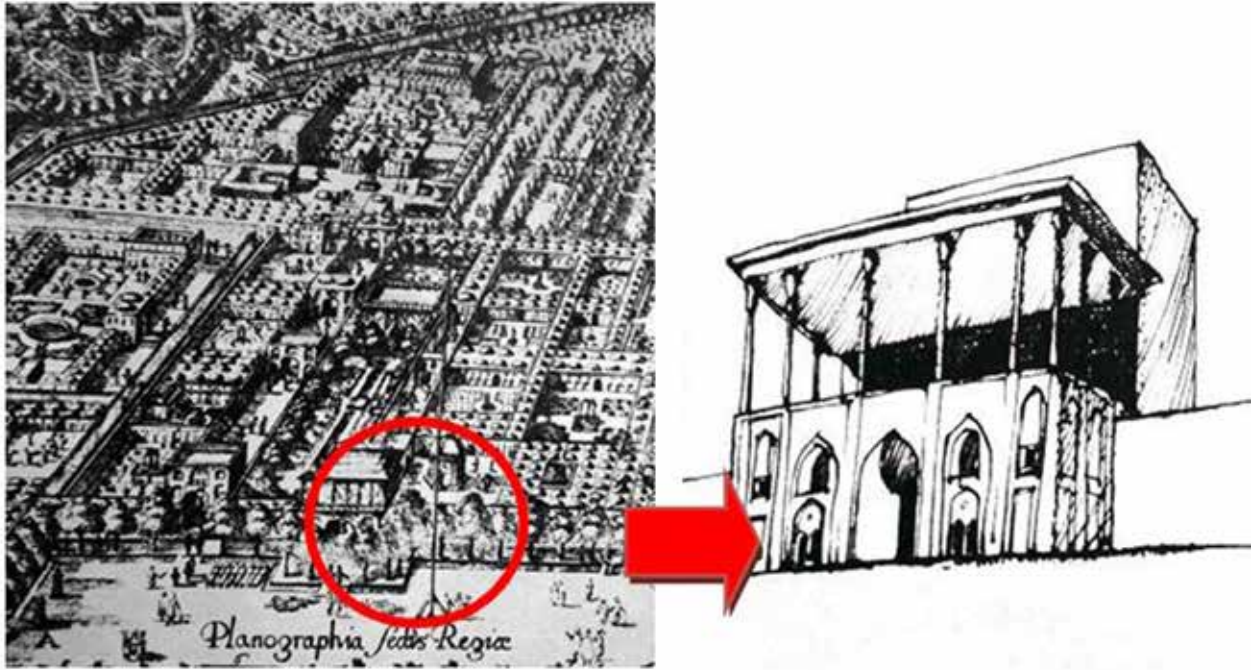
the earth, while the architecture of the form seeks to attract the attention of the viewer and his confirmation. The architecture of form is the same as the visual-based architecture purposed for the visual satisfaction of the addressees. Architecture of the essence is a multi-sensory architecture that has an existential entity and provokes existential experience (Shirazi, 2012: 55). Categorization of Pallasmaa can be considered in categorization of threshold due to its phenomenological look to architecture.

It seems that the Persian garden, which has been designed with regards to the semantic and functional dimensions and with the visual-based and a multidimensional aspects, has structural elements with similar goals. These elements can offer the architecture of the essence or architecture of form based on the level of interaction to the surrounding environment, the type of addressee and the functional goals. When

the Persian garden is designed to demonstrate the power and supremacy of the rulers, a visual-based threshold with functional goals was created (Pic12). When the garden is used as a tomb-garden, the designer ultimately tries to accompany semantic aspects with visual elements (Pics 13 & 14). And finally, when the garden is designed as an oasis in the desert and as a habitat for concentration and contemplation, the architect takes the architecture of the essence and form in all structural aspects including the threshold to attain the transcendental concepts (beyond the ideas of phenomenologists) and to impress the addressees furtherly (Pic 15). As the result of the space and time dependencies in architecture, the dialectics of the inside and outside, the material and the spiritual, the physical and the mental, and their interactions, influences the essence of architecture significantly (Pallasmaa, 2011: 27).

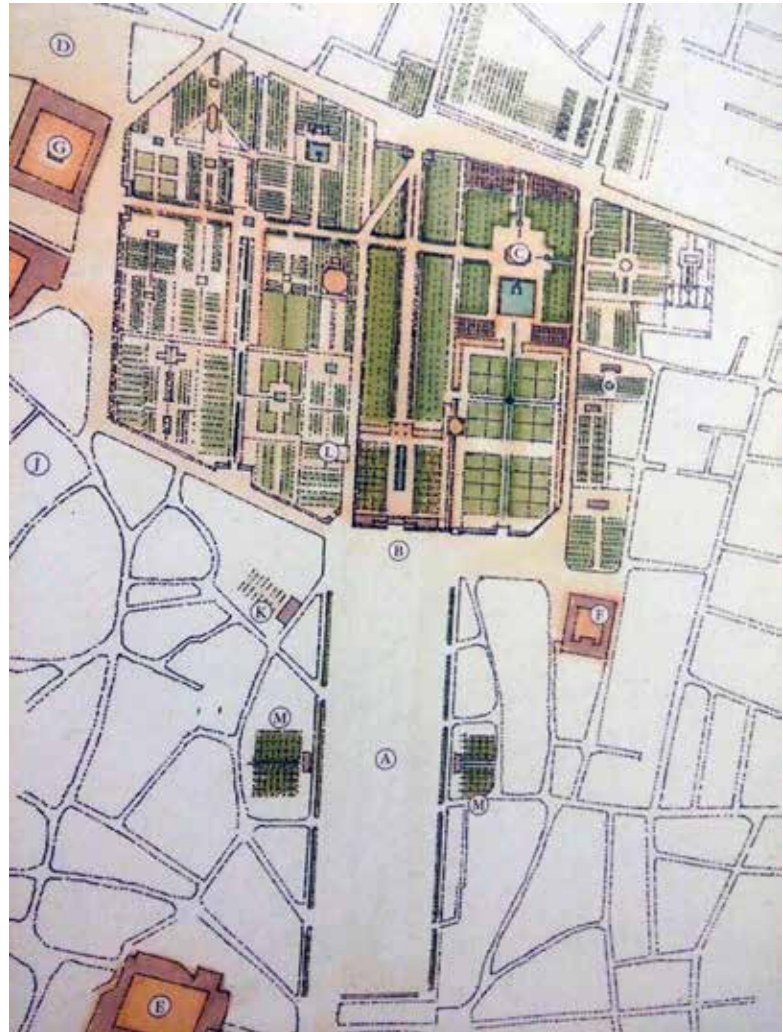


Pic 7 : right - Entrance of Fin Garden (Costa 110,2011)  
left- the garden gate and confrontation of the inside and outside, Source: Khansari et al, 80:2004.



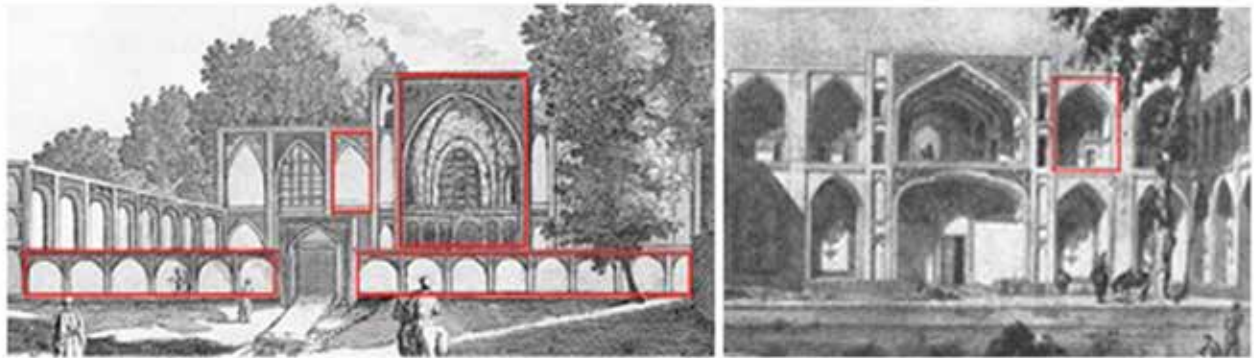
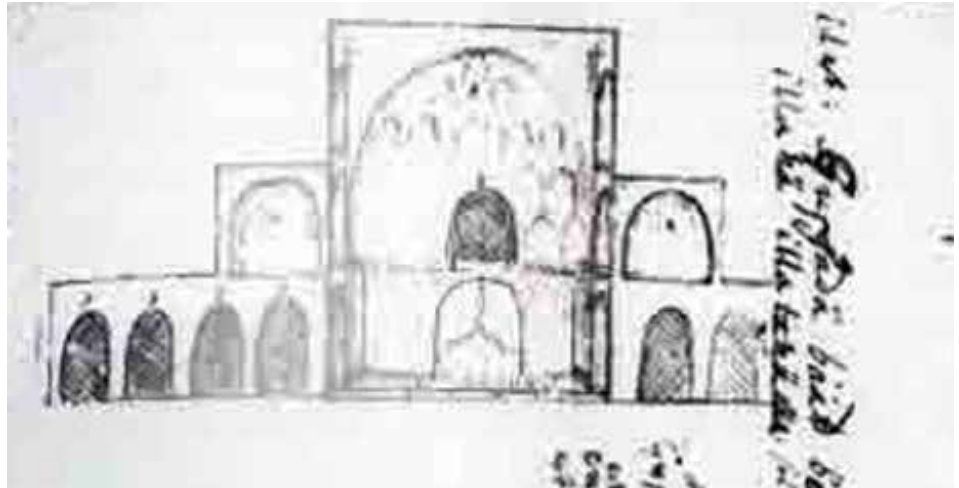
Pic 8: Ali Qapu mansion as the garden gate of Isfahan Safavid gardens. Source from left to right: Naema 62 :2006, quoted by Angelbart Camphor and Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 71 :2001.

Pic 9: Recreation of the Safavid Residential Gardens in Ghazvin. Aliqapu means the grand royal door causing that connects and detaches the garden spaces and the urban spaces. Source: Khansari et al. 76,2004.

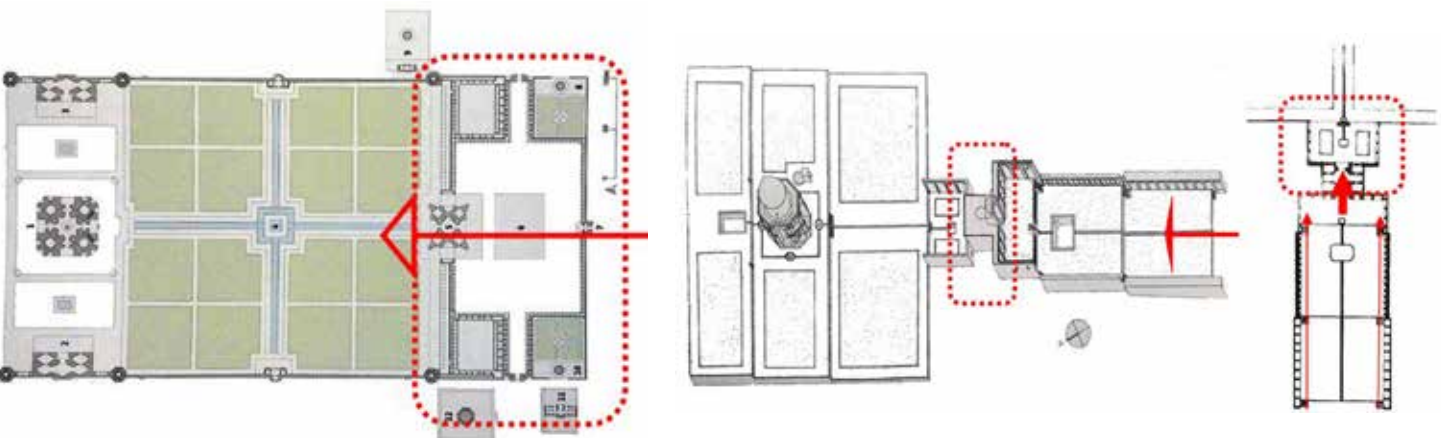


Pic10: Aliqapu's old image and its front space. Source: collection of the old city of Qazvin.

Pic 11: Ali Qapu in Camphor sketches.  
Source: Alami 2008.



Pic 12: Focusing on visual-based architecture using repetition and proportion in the facade of the Safavid garden gate in Isfahan . Source form left to right: Flandin & Coste, 183:1841 and Wilber, 109:2004.



Pic 13: Taj Mahal Tomb-garden –the threshold of the garden is defined with a hierarchy of entry. Source: Michell&Pasricha, 2011:168.

Pic 14: Threshold space has a hierarchy of entry designed to enhance the spiritual productivity of the architectural space. Here, the threshold is not merely an open door or an obstacle; but a spatial organization discipline that prepares the mind of the addressee with gradual guidance upon arrival. Source: Naeema 2006: 212.





Pic 15: Entrance of Shazdeh Mahan Garden. Source: Top: (Khansari et al. 2004), down: [http://cdn.tabnak.ir/files/fa/news/395\\_241360/28/12/1391.jpg](http://cdn.tabnak.ir/files/fa/news/395_241360/28/12/1391.jpg)  
 Threshold in Shazdeh Mahan Garden: Compilation of contradictory and complementary concepts such as (motion and stagnation, shadow and light, presence and emergence)  
 Connecting to the world inside and detachment from the boundless world outside. Preparation of the subject for realignment and identification within the bounded space inside.

### Conclusion

The garden gate acts as a joint between two different worlds inside and outside the garden. It leads to continuousness at the first encounter, and acts as a threshold for transferring semantic concepts between the addressee and the garden. In this situation, the observant person understands the space and what is presented in space, given the extent of his innate capacities which Louis Kahn calls human nature. With regards to the mentioned ideas about the threshold and the related concepts and its relation to gardens, one can conclude that the meaning of threshold has semantic distinctions and similarities. Therefore, it is designed and presented in

different shapes according to the addressees, the function and the extent of use. In spite of the physical changes to the entity of the thresholds in gardens, no major structural changes are observed and most changes are applied in visual-based architecture through concepts such as continuity, change, structural and symbolic detachment and structural attachment.

Table 1 is gives a summary of the concepts described about the threshold of the Persian Garden (regardless of the type of garden).

Table 1. The Functional and semantic role of the threshold in Persian garden. Source: author.

Functional features	Semantic features	Physical features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrance</li> <li>- Separator</li> <li>- Identifying place</li> <li>- changing place</li> <li>- Having a specific function (service for instance)</li> <li>- Used as a viewpoint</li> <li>- landmark in the semi-urban scale of security and control</li> <li>- Separation and composition of the public and the semi-public zone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The structural and symbolic relation and separation of the inside and the outside</li> <li>-Separation of moral and immoral</li> <li>-to become</li> <li>-expectation</li> <li>-Detachment of the subject from the outside in the instance of entry</li> <li>-Compilation of contradictory and complementary concepts such as (motion and stagnation, shadow and light, presence and emergence)</li> <li>-Connecting to the world inside and detachment from the boundless world outside</li> <li>Preparation of the subject for zoning and identification - within the bounded space inside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Order (regularity)</li> <li>-Hierarchy in constituent elements</li> <li>-Visual reception and attention</li> <li>- Corresponding to human/ symmetry and balance</li> <li>-Articulation</li> <li>-Compliance with the principle of continuity</li> <li>- gradually and contemplative entrance</li> <li>-Compliance with the principle of proportionality</li> <li>-Having features of the inside and outside</li> <li>pause while passing -</li> </ul>

## Footnotes

1. Perhaps the oldest examples of doors and windows in Iran can be found in the paintings of the fortresses of the Mades. Majorly, they have depicted gates made of two doors, which are believed to be made of wood and ironized since similar ones are seen in different gates, (Pirnia 2008, 558).
2. The threshold has always been a sign of transition and supremacy. In architecture, it is associated with the meaning of complexity and recognized by its structure. In the past, it was used to separate the two holy and unholy words. In this regard, the pictures of the gatekeepers of the gardens around the world as well as the garden protecting sculptures that are half human and half animal can be discussed (McIntosh 2005,7).
3. the garden gate building had several rooms in the first floor and several rooms above that opened up to the garden from one side and faced the

- outside from another. Outside the garden, in front of the courtyard, there is a square or a garden or a road. From the inside, there was a mezzanine (terrace) in which they sat (Pirnia 2008, 436).
4. Kenneh or canopy, i.e. an awning on top of the door or a house door (Beheshti and Qayoumi Bidhendi 2009, 210).
5. Pars was a short wall that blocked the view into the garden (Pirnia 2008).
6. The Islamic function of gate flourished both in appearance and in meaning. In appearance, it turned into a magnificent Safavid Aliqapou (the high threshold) whose construction showed the highest development of industries of the time. In meaning, it was a symbol of intrinsic needs and implied the concept of the passageway or the corridor (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2001, 73).

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