Publication Data:

Kançal-Ferrari, Nicole, 'The Art of the Khans of Crimea and its relation to Ottoman Art: The Cemetery of the Khan's Palace in Bahçesaray', *EJOS*, IV (2001) (= M. Kiel, N. Landman & H. Theunissen (eds.), *Proceedings of the 11th International Congress of Turkish Art, Utrecht - The Netherlands, August 23-28, 1999*), No. 24, 1-22.

ISSN 0928-6802

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The Art of the Khans of Crimea and its relation to Ottoman Art:

The Cemetery of the Khan's Palace in Bahçesaray

Nicole Kançal-Ferrari*

The Khan's Palace in Bahçesaray[1]

There is only little information on the founding but according to sources Khan Mengli Giray I started with the construction of a palace in Bahçesaray. The entry, known as the iron gate, is believed to be the oldest part of the palace. It dates from 1503/1504. It opened probably on several separate buildings spread over a wide area. Later, the living spaces were organized around different courtyards. It is also known that the palace included a mint.

The palace was completely destroyed and burnt down in 1736 by the Russian General Munich. The *divanhane* and other important parts of the *saray*, including the palace walls, were destroyed. The mosque and the rich library also were burnt down. From 1740 till 1743 the city and palace were rebuilt with the support of the Ottoman court. Sultan Mahmud I supported the rebuilding effort financially and by sending books for the library. He also sent craft men to work there. The architecture of the palace of this period shows a strong Ottoman influence, which it did not lose despite of

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* Mrs. Nicole Kançal-Ferrari, doctoral student at the University of Istanbul. She prepares a thesis, entitled *Bahçesaray'deki Hansaray'ın Yerleşim Düzeni ve Mimarisi*, to be published in 2004.

[1] An enlarged version of this article containing all the inscriptions at the cemetery will appear as "Saraya Bağlı Bir Cami ve Haziresi: Kırım Hanlığı'nın Payitahtı Bahçesaray'daki Hansaray'ın Haziresi", in the August 2002 issue of *Belletin* (Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara).
For general information concerning the Khan's Palace in Bahçesaray, see Oktay ASLANAPA, *Kırım ve Kuzey Azerbaycan'da Türk Eserleri*, İstanbul 1979. A. L. JACOBSON, *Srednevekoviy Krim.* Moskau 1964. Nicole KANÇAL-FERRARİ, "Hansaray", *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul 1997, s. 521-524 with a selection of publications in Russian and other languages.

the numerous alterations. The palace with its many small buildings and separate gardens almost seems like a miniature copy of the Topkapı Palace. It is one of the rare palace complexes still standing today.[2]

In 1783, with the final fall of the Khanate of Crimea, the palace was reconstructed and converted into a museum. It was also used by the Czars for government receptions.

With the submission of the Khanate of Crimea under the Ottoman protectorate during the rule of Khan Mengli Giray I at the beginning of the 16th century, a strong Ottoman influence in all areas of public life was already noticeable. The government (*divan*) and the land distribution policy (*timar*) were formed similarly to the Ottoman laws[3]. The Khan's family had close ties to the Ottoman court. One son of the Khan used to live in Istanbul, where he was educated at the Ottoman court. This son, being a hostage and potential future Khan, was an insurance against the Khan in Bahçesaray. Khans who were not elected, or were replaced, were settled in Rumeli (Thrace and Bulgaria) with their families. They had farms and also were owners of religious foundations (*vakıfs*) there. If the Khan committed more serious violations, they were exiled to the Aegean islands. These members of the Khan dynasty could always be reinstated in Crimea[4].

Even though the heritage of the Golden Horde was present everywhere, especially in the legislation and the tribe aristocracy, the cultural live moved parallel to the Ottoman court. Even the official language shifted from Kıpçak to Ottoman. The arts and architecture became nearly identical. Art that was created for the Giray or with support of the Giray oriented itself towards the Ottoman court (e.g. the water architecture and fountains, so called *sebils* in the Khan's palace from the 18th century are the same as those in Istanbul from the same period).

The opening towards Europe and the increasing influence of European Art and Culture, which was noticeable in the Ottoman Empire was also reflected in the Crimean area. This happened not only indirectly through the Ottoman court but also directly through European couriers.

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[2] Also still standing today: Topkapı Palace in İstanbul, Shirvanshah Saray in Baku, İshakpaşa Sarayı in Doğu Beyazıt.

[3] Muzaffer ÜREKLİ, *Kırım Hanlığın Kuruluşu ve Osmanlı Himayesinde Yükselişi (1441-1569)*, Ankara 1989, contains information about the organisation of the Khanate and also shows its relations to the Ottoman state. Condensed information also can be found in Halil İNALCIK, "Kırım Hanlığı", *Türk Dünyası El Kitabı*, Ankara 1976, s. 943-954, and also in his article "Giray", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 4, İstanbul 1948.

[4] For the exiling of the Khans and their families see HALİM Giray Sultan, *Gülbün-i Hanan*, İstanbul 1327. I used the edition prepared by Doç. Dr. Sadi Cöğenli, and Doç. Dr. Recep Toparlı, Erzurum 1990. The BOA (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi) in İstanbul also contains an immense number of documents dealing with this subject. I used for my research in general the *Cevdet Dahiliye* catalogues, but important information can also be found in the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* and the *Mühimme Defterleri*, as the article of Ali KARACA shows: "Giraylar (1440-1840)", *Bir*, volume 7, İstanbul 1997, p. 87-118.

During the rule of Kırım Giray (1758-1764) pictures were gathered for an art gallery and the Khan founded an orchestra and a theater was placed in the palace. (The Khan knew the plays of Molière.) All these new influences were restricted to the court[5].

The Cemetery

The cemetery, being the *hazire* of the Palace mosque and, therefore also of the Palace, is an exceptional site, unique in the Turco-Islamic palace and sepulchral architecture. This site demands an art historical and a sociologic-historical analysis.

During my visit in 1996 I had the opportunity to examine the cemetery in great detail and to take pictures and make copies of the tombstones[6]. In addition to my own research I also used the Dombrovskiy, Borzenko and Negri inventory of tombstones and inscriptions of Bahçesaray published in 1850 in Odessa.[7] By comparing my own research with this inventory I could determine which tombstones were lost since 1850 or have not been seen in 1996[8].

On the cemetery of the palace, which is located towards the *kıble* (south east) of the mosque (**Figure 13**) are two domed and one open *türbe* (**Figure 1**). At the end of the garden is another beautiful *türbe* which is said to belong to Dilara Bikeç, the young deceased wife of Khan Kırım Giray.

In Bahçesaray there is also a domed *türbe* outside of the palace. An enclosed nice little cemetery (*hazire*) belongs to this interesting building. Unfortunately, the monument is in a lamentable state. Following Halim Giray Sultan, who notes the *türbe* of Khan Selamet Giray I (1019/1610) and his son Khan Resmi Bahadır Giray (1050/1640) at Bahçesaray, but not inside of the palace area, we can suppose that this monument belongs to

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[5] For the social life at the court during the reign of Khan Kırım Giray see Baron François DE TOTT, *Memoires sur les Turcs et les Tatars*. 3. vols., Amsterdam 1875.

[6] The examination of this cemetery is part of a larger research project, being my Master Thesis: Nicole Kançal-Ferrari. *Kırım Hanların İmar Faaliyeti ve Mezar Taşları*. İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sanat Tarihi Bölümü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul 1997. The part dealing with monuments in Ottoman Lands (Anatolia, European Thrace, Bulgaria, Rhodes) will be published soon by the autor.

[7] F. DOMBROVSKİY-A. BORZENKO-A. NEGRİ, "Bahçisarayskaya arabskaya i turetskaya natpisi hanskogo dvortsa meçeti klatbişça", *Zapiski odesskago obşçestva istorii i drevnostey*, Odessa 1850. This article contains all inscriptions in the palace and in Bahçesaray town, also in Cufut Kale. Even if it contains some mistakes, it is the most important source for historical research of the inscriptions.

[8] The results presented have been elaborated from the 1996 examinations. In fall 1999 after the congress, during a new visit, I observed some changes. Especially broken marble and stone pieces have not been seen anymore. During the same visit in 1999, I had the occasion to visit the large storage places of the museum. There, a lot of stones have been put at random. As a future project, I will try to make an inventory of these depots.

these two Khans. In absence of any inscription or further source found until now, this can only be an learned guess.

But the actual burial site was situated in Eski Yurt, an area slightly outside Bahçesaray. There you will still find three *türbes* and a *kümbet* today. Evliya Çelebi also speaks of Eski Yurt as a burial site and a place of pilgrimage[9]. According to historic sources the *türbe* of Khan Mehmed Giray II (died 1584) is located in Eski Yurt. Today, except the *türbe*, no burial monuments are left in this area.

The *türbes* in the Khan's palace are probably both from the 16th century (or one from the beginning of the 17th century). They have octagonal structures with a dome, following Ottoman style, but, unfortunately, both have no inscriptions left. But we know from sources that one of the *türbes* belongs to Khan Devlet Giray I (died 980/1572-73). According to historic sources, there were four Khans buried in the two *türbes*. (Khan Devlet Giray I, Khan Gazi Giray II, 1016/1607, Khan Islam Giray III, 1064/1654, Khan Mehmed Giray IV, 1080/1669)[10]. Today the interior of the *türbes* is in a desolate state. All graves have been destroyed, except six marble graves that have been preserved. The wooden coffins and cloths, which covered the graves are lost and broken pieces of wood from the coffins are lying on the floor. The tombstones of the Khans who according to sources were buried in the *türbes*, if there were any, have been lost. It is not exactly clear when the *türbes* have been emptied; most probably it was at the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century. We do not know what the original arrangement in the *türbes* was and what the Khans' graves looked like. I only found an old photo dating probably to the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century showing the inside of the *türbes* at this time. On the photo, there are the marble graves still existing today are visible. Besides them, there were wooden coffins covered with cloth and a head cover on each coffin. On the other hand, in the report of Dombrovskiy, dating in its original form from 1839, the graves cited in elder sources were already non-existing. There were some wooden panels with the names and dates of the (probably) earlier graves written on them. Today, these panels do not exist. This would show that the *türbes* have been emptied much earlier.

Next to these two *türbes* there is also an open *türbe* on the cemetery; it is the tomb of Khan Mengli Giray II (died 1152/1739). According to the legend, the tomb of the Khan who died of pestilence (plague), was kept away from the other graves. Another peculiarity of this grave is the inscription, being the only one in Persian.

Certain events have made the analysis of the graves or tombstones on the cemetery today difficult: During archeological activities in the

[9] EVLİYA ÇELEBİ, *Seyahatname*, VII-VIII. Evliya Çelebi makes also some interesting remarks concerning the older and the actual palaces of the Khans.
[10] HALİM Giray Sultan, *op. cit*., p. 52, 63, 97, 105.

1920's, gravestones from the whole Crimea, mainly from Eski Kırım (Solhat)[11] and Eski Yurt were brought to Bahçesaray and exhibited in a type of open-air museum in front of the *türbe* or put in the storage places[12]. To protect the tombstones against destruction during Stalin's times some stones were probably put in the cemetery at random. And in the 70s Russian tourists with iron rods destroyed most of the tombs remaining intact. After this event the tombstones were reassembled but unfortunately in an unprofessional manner. Many stones have been reassembled incorrectly and this has made it more difficult to create a scientific inventory.

Some of the data where analysis was possible are the following: Earliest tombstone: 1001 (1592/93) Ferah Giray Sultan (according to the report of 1850). Today existing: 1109 (1697/98) Maksud Giray Sultan, Nureddin. Latest tombstone: 1220 (1805/1806) El-Hac Muhammed Şah Beğ. The time span of the tombstones therefore reaches from the end of the 17th to the beginning of the 19th century. We can assume that only at the end of the 17th century burial outside of the *türbes* on the cemetery was practiced or that older tombs in site have been taken off to give place to new tombs. In Ottoman regions, especially in Istanbul, similar observations can be made. Presumably the burial areas of Bahçesaray were in Eski Yurt and Salacak, two areas near Bahçesaray where there are still *türbes* today. Today, except the *hazire* inside the palace area, there are no cemeteries left in whole Crimea.

Of the 93 tombstones listed in the 19th century inventory, I was able to find only 59 in 1996. Ten tombstones, which I catalogued were not listed in the 19th century inventory, of them only one with name and date. So, 34 tombstones were lost since the 19th century. The number of tombstones of the Giray family was reduced from 49 (including those in the *türbe*) to 38. One stone I found is not listed in the 1850 inventory. The number of tombstones of people who are not positively members of the Khan's family was reduced from 44 to 20.

We can suppose that the cemetery was used for members of the Khan's family and for high-ranking persons of the court.

There was a increase in the elevation of the cemetery. Some of the sarcophagus are now buried in the ground. With an excavation or careful surface analysis it would be possible to reveal more tombstones. Localization of tombs is extremely difficult, since many stones are not at their original location, as mentioned before.

Some stones were positively localized. For example: Between the mosque and the first *türbe*, right next to the wall of the *türbe* are the tombstones of Khan Arslan Giray (1181/1767), Khan Kırım Giray

[11] The stones from Eski Kırım are the oldest ones. They closely resemble stones from Ahlat and Gevaş in Anatolia.

[12] There exist excavacation reports of these activities. An analysis of them surely will give some answers to open questions.

(1182/1769), some *Nureddin* and *Kalgay*[13]. Along the wall of the mosque (facing kıble) are members of the Giray dynasty, mostly Khan Selim Giray II (1161/1748) and his children (**Figure 2**). We can also find tombs of the Khan's family in the middle of the cemetery and against the eastern wall.

The group of tombs belonging to Ali Pasha (1146/1733-34) and his two sons Selamet Beg and Islam Beg was easily identifiable (**Figure 3**). Both his sons died during a Russian attack around 1150/1737 as *şehid*, one of them in Ferah Kerman. These three tombs form a group, they can serve as a sample for the original arrangement of tombs at this cemetery.

The largest number of tombstones is from the year 1150/1737-38, with a total of seven deaths. Another cluster of deaths occurred 1153/1740-41 and 1154/1741-42 with four deaths each and 1170/1756-57 with five death in the Giray family. Otherwise, the death occurrences are equally distributed over the years with an average of two tombstones per year.

Stylistic Analysis: non-Ottoman style

Regarding style there are large differences between the tombstones. Even tombstones from the Giray dynasty show qualitatively and stylistically varying elements. It is possible to roughly differentiate between tombstones that were created in Ottoman tradition and others.

There is a group of tombstones not in Ottoman style, which are from the same period, but look completely different[14]. They are individual tombstones, not sarcophagi. There is only one tombstone in this second group that belongs to the Khan's family. This is the stone of Mübarek Giray Sultan, Son of Khan Devlet Giray (1135/1723-24) (**Figure 4**). Mostly they belong to people who were only indirectly involved with the court: Osman Mirza, (1138/ 1725-1726), Urukoglu, (1153/1740-41). They have immense head covers as characteristics, are not very tall and are in a rough style. Some of these tombstones are labeled on several sides, but name and date is not always fully identifiable. Some of these stones were probably brought from elsewhere. But the fact that one of these stones belongs to a Giray is raising a lot of questions. Comparing these stones and others that are not in Ottoman tradition with the older stones brought from elsewhere on this cemetery, we can perhaps assume that they belong to an older form that was used on Crimea. Those stones, although they appear simple and crude in comparison with the other stones show an intricate form and appear to follow a tradition. They might form a transition from the older stones and

[13] The title “Kalgay” and “Nureddin” designate a kind of prince, having some power. The title does not give any right to succeed the Khan. If necessary, for example during a war, the *Kalgay* can take the place of the absent Khan. The *Nureddin* can replace the *Kalgay*.

[14] During the conference, Hedda Reindl-Kiel told me that there are tomb stones in a similar style in Bulgaria.

sarcophagi which were brought from elsewhere and the stones which were carved in Ottoman tradition.

A few of the older stones were also created in the form of a octagon column. We find a very similar form at the footstone of the grave of Khan Selim Giray II.

There is another type of grave that is very different from the older graves and does not follow Ottoman tradition either. These graves are sarcophagi without head and foot stone and they seem to have no inscriptions on them. The front and the back of these sarcophagi has a triangular upper part that recalls some classical form. We do not know if these graves were covered with some stone plate. They have on the two side panels rosette decorations or simple borders on the upper rim.

We can also suppose that the different stones were manufactured in different shops, each one having its own unique style. It would explain the large variation in one time period. There might have been separate artists working on the stones for the court and the others.

Stylistic Analysis: the tombstones in Ottoman tradition:

The tombs in Ottoman tradition also show some difference. The graves belonging to the Khan's families are of very high quality. We find the oldest samples in the *türbes*. Those are sarcophagi with head- and footstones. The inscriptions show traces of coloration. We find rosettes and panels with flower ornaments on all four sides of the sarcophagi. The head cover on the tomb is a *kavuk* in old shape on one and a *mücevveze* on two others. Outside of the *türbe* we find a single stone with a *mücevveze*. This is the stone of Nureddin Tohtamis Giray Sultan (1154/1741-42).

On the cemetery, some stones are simple without many decorations. They are characterized only by their head covers (**Figure 5**). On the male tombs this is a turban of the *katibi* type with one exception. The stones of the persons who belonged to the court, but were not a member of the Giray family, also have a tombstone with this type of head cover. The most important are Hacı Ali Pasha, Ağa-yı Azam Divan-ı Han-ı Alişan (1146/1733-34), Osman bin Hacı Bekir, Serhazinedar-ı Hazreti Han-ı Kırım, (Chief treasurer) 1156/1743-44, Bahadır Ağa, (1188/1774-75) and many other people with the title of "*Ağa*". There is also a turban of the *selimi* or *yusufi* type with beautiful *sorguc* and *tüylük*. Unfortunately we don't know to whom this beautiful headstone belongs[15] (**Figure 7**).

For female tombs, long and slender forms of stones were used with a high and narrow head cover. The same form was also common in Istanbul. The stones are sometimes inscribed on several sides. One of the stones even

[15] In 1999, I could not find this headcover anymore in the cemetery.

has a necklace and flowers on the head cover: Ferah Giray Sultan, the daughter of Khan Selim Giray II (1167/1753-54).

The headstones are simple having often only a plant above the inscription as the only decorative element. The rosette, which is a symbol of eternity, was also very popular. The sarcophagi show richer decoration. The front and back are often decorated with rosettes, sometimes they also decorate the sides. Beautiful flower motives are also used. Roses or *çelebi* tulips are often depicted in vases. Along the upper rim of the sarcophagi run stylized bands of flowers consisting of *lotus* or *rumis* and palm leaves. There are also examples of beautiful representations, realistic and stylized in one, as the stone with a date-tree with falling dates shows (**Figure 8**).

On some sarcophagi there are also images of the sword (*kılıç*) and the Dagger (*hancer*). In the *türbes* each sarcophagus has one sword (Mengli Giray Sultan, 1067/1656-57) or a dagger (Devlet Giray Sultan, 1041/1631-32) (**Figure 6**).

The two tombs which show the richest decoration are those of Khan Selim Giray II (1161/1748) (**Figure 9** and **10**) and Khan Kırım Giray (1183/1770). Khan Selim Giray's sarcophagus shows Arabic inscriptions instead of decorative borders on the side panels. Under these inscriptions, between rosettes, beautiful flowers in vases take place. On the headstone above the inscription, some kind of *mukarnas* border is decorating the stone right next to flower motives. The footstone has an octagonal form with long rims running on the sides. The upper side is decorated with a band of lotus and the stone is topped by a ball. All the motifs, especially the flowers worked in high relief, show an excellent quality.

The tomb of Khan Kırım Giray who died 22 years later is more exotic and mirrors the new spirit at that time, which was characteristic for this Khan (**Figures 11** and **12**). The part of the head stone becomes a shield, with three attachment holes. A scarf is pulled through these three holes, which is used as a fruit bowl and contains pears. This beautiful stone mirrors the fancy for the arts that was typical for Kırım Giray. The sarcophagus of this tomb is also decorated with very plastic and rich flower ornamentation. It closely resembles tombs of the Khans in Thrace with the most beautiful ones still existing in the town of Çatalca.

Conclusion

The close ties of the Crimean Khans to the Ottoman family were discussed in the beginning of this paper. These ties are reflected in art and culture in general and can be traced very closely in the tomb stones belonging to the Giray family. These marvelous marble stones were manufactured by artisans who were educated in Istanbul or who were sent from Istanbul. Another possibility to explain the high quality of the stones is that these stones were shipped from Istanbul to Crimea. The periods from

which the most beautiful stones stem were very tough and harsh on Crimea. The tombstones also have to be looked at in conjunction with the garden architecture and the fountains (*sebil*), since they show the same mastery in art.

The art in the Khan's palace and in general produced during the Giray dynasty was not at all inferior to the Ottoman arts. This cannot be explained only by the sheer dependency of the Khanate from the Ottoman court. To my opinion it is more of an attempt to acquire and maintain a strong identity, which would prevail against the ever present danger from the Russian empire and spirit (culture). Ottoman art and culture were much more suited for this purpose than a local provincial art would have. Furthermore, the Khan's family was living the Ottoman spirit, as pieces of art from Rumeli and Rodos show also.



Figure 1: The open and one of the octagonal *türbe* in the cemetery of the Khans palace in Bahçesaray.



Figure 2: The "*kıble*" wall of the mosque with the tombs of Khan Selim Giray II and his family. First tomb on the left: Ferah Giray Sultan.



Figure 3: A group of tombs showing the original arrangement of the cemetery: Ali Paşa and his two sons. Here, the increase of the elevation of the cemetery can be seen.



Figure 4: Stone of Mübarek Giray Sultan (1135/1723-24) with its enormous head cover and the inscriptions on two sides. Only stone of the Khan's family not in Ottoman tradition.



Figure 5: An example of the strange mix of styles; the headstone with a simple head cover has an inscription of an excellent quality. The sarcophagus seems to be a simple imitation of the Ottoman graves.



Figure 6: One of the graves inside the *türbe* showing rich decoration with some coloration: Mengli Giray Sultan (1067/1656-57). The sword is often represented on tomb stones.



Figure 7: A beautiful head cover showing a realistic approach and much love for details.



Figure 8: Realistic stylisation on a footstone; a date tree.



Figure 9: The tomb of Khan Selim Giray II.



Figure 10: Detail of Figure 9 showing the decorations on the side panels.



Figure 11: Tomb of Khan Kırım Giray.



Figure 12: Detail of Figure 11.

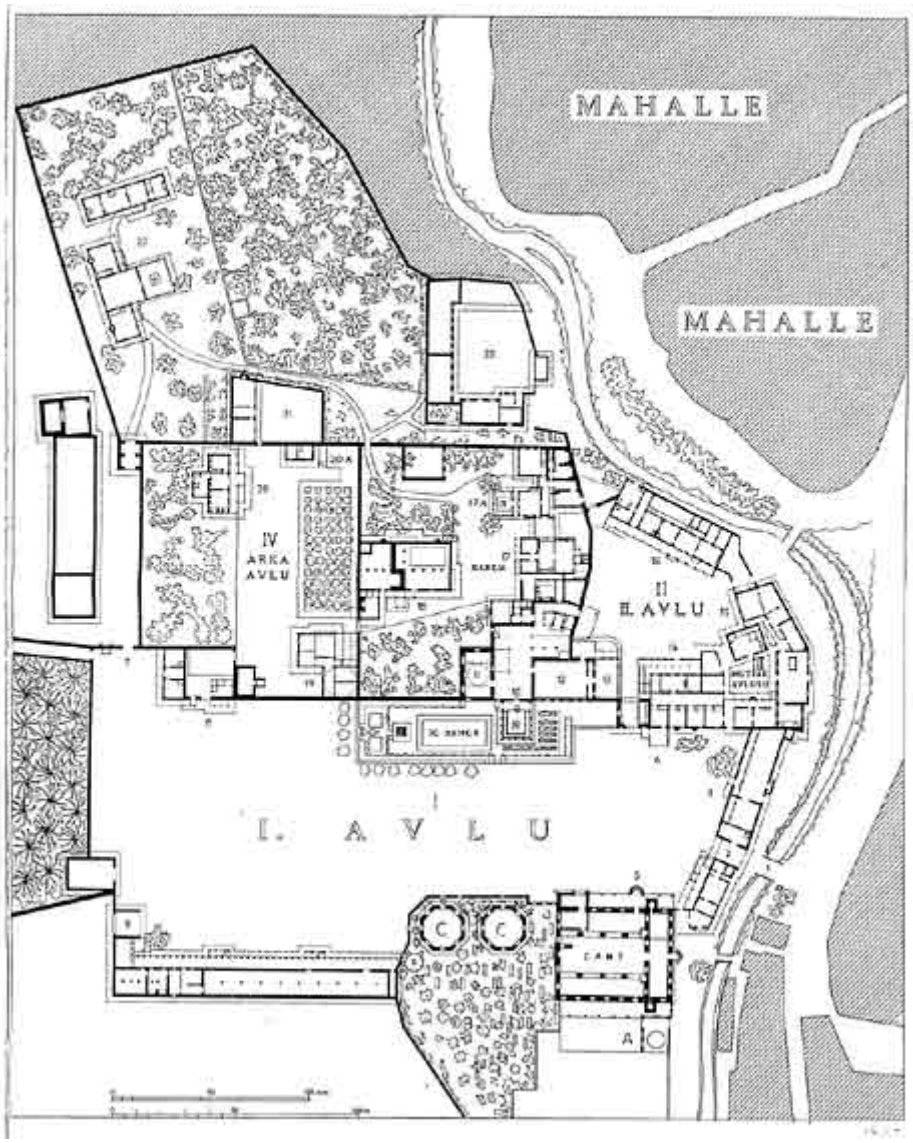


Figure 13: The plan of the Khan's palace with its cemetery.