

## An inquiry in historical evolution and retrieval of the process of formation and transformation of Shah Wali complex, Taft, Iran

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### Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate and shed light on the complex theoretical concept of place, as a continuing dynamic phenomenon, in architecture. To this end, it has looked into the historical evolutions and retrieval of the Shah Wali complex in Taft. Considering the topic and the goal of this research paper, the morphological analysis as a tool used in the interpretive-historical research the method and the process of change and continuity of form was selected. The findings of this study indicate that this place, as a form, has always been subject to change. These changes could be categorized into two groups: (a) the changes which have been gradual and have taken place over a long period and (b) those which have taken place over a short period. The gradual changes have taken place starting from the Timurid to the Safavid era, at which point the complex has reached completion and evolved as a complex. After the initial developments of the complex, the complex underwent some short period changes in its components and spatio-temporal structure. These short period changes coincides with the demolition of the old Takiya and construction of the new Takiya. Following these short period changes, the gradual changes of the second stage starts. As an implication of this research, it is suggested that urban designers and conservationists in particular revisit the theoretical underpinnings of the terms and concepts in the process of continuity and change of the historic dynamic complex, in order to fully understand and apply appropriate strategies in the design and the conservation.

**Keywords:** Urban morphology, Process of formation, Change, Continuity, Shah Wali complex.

### 1. Introduction

In order to specify and have a better understanding of the process involved in the formation of historic city centers, as a whole in middle- scale, in which common values of citizens are kept and consist of public buildings, as parts [1], it seems necessary to consider the historical evolution of the relationship between “human and town” and “urban complex”. That’s why “urban morphology” is an appropriate method for analyzing the form of such places as a continuing dynamic [2, 3] that includes foundation, development, change, and transformation. The primary assumption of urban morphology recognition is that form, as a whole, is the result of the process of formation. Thus, the foundation of a research based on urban morphology approach is to analyze three basic elements of form, time, and scale [4].

The process of formation of historic complexes of city centers

can be analyzed from different aspects. The most important aspect in analyzing the process of formation and transformation of an urban complex seems to be temporal where the most important issue is perception of time as uni-directional element. Explaining form from temporal perspective is based on chronology and evolution. These two are in relation with continuity and change of the form in different time sequences of building acts and ideas in which forms have been developed and changed [5]. Such an approach is a logical method which looks for the hidden process of formation of forms [6]. In addition, parallel to analysis of the spatial sequences in the process of formation, it investigates development of the ideas and concepts as effective factors on form [5].

The historic complex of Shah Wali in the town of Taft, Iran is made of a set of forms and components in a process of formation that was founded, developed and changed in six centuries. Due to its close interaction with its natural and social environment, Shah Wali complex has been well known as an active town center for a very long time. The parts and parcels of such stability in time are appropriate responses to concepts, needs, desires, governmental policies and requirements of each era. The dynamic nature of the present town center is the result of adaptability and interaction with the cultural, historical, and physical properties of the context. Therefore, to carry out a research

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on this particular process of formation, it should be done considering the temporal aspect and chronological method should be used. Then, the results should be presented from different historical eras in classified way in the framework of some plans. The results should include special formation of the constituent components of the Shah Wali complex. Such a thought based historical analysis introduces history as the system of spatio-temporal sequences through the process of formation [7].

Although few studies have been conducted which have considered the history of some parts of Shah Wali complex, the present study differs in the fact that it uses the morphological analysis as a tool to describe and find the process of change and continuity of Shah Wali complex in order to recognize its form. Thus, this study seeks to provide an answer to the following question: How is it possible for place to continuously undergo changes and continue to exist as the result of these changes? Due to its dynamic characteristics, the Shah Wali complex of Taft is a prime and ideal case for conducting a study using the morphologic analysis to get the answer to this question.

In this study, the Shah Wali complex is introduced as a whole and as the result of a form. Whereas, only some parts of the complex were considered in the previous studies leading to defective results. In the present study, the Shah Wali complex is introduced as a scenario which is presented in different sequences.

## 2. Evaluation of Morphological Analysis as a Methodology

As an applied technique in this paper, morphological analysis has two outcomes: a very detailed description of the Shah Wali complex at several different scales; and an overview of the processes of change. It is argued that both types of information are essential for interpretive-historical research. The need for morphological analysis is not just at the building level, it exists at the scale of the urban plan and complexes. While land-use plans and traffic schemes are necessary tools, they are too broad in scale and too

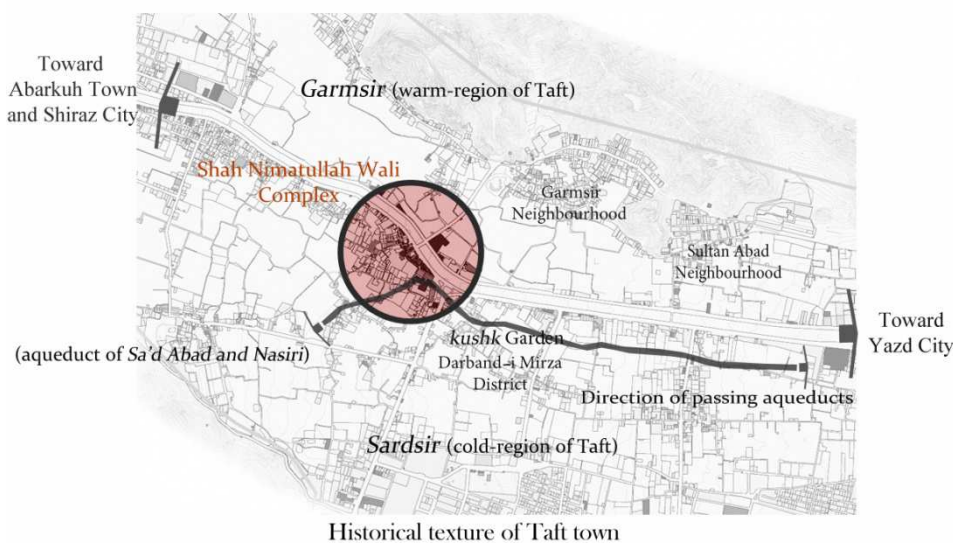
limited in application to be helpful in the designing of urban form [8].

Morphological analysis, as used in this paper, is intended to be used in studying the form of a historical dynamic complex as it exists. The method is concern not only in physical form but also an analysis of social and economic factors, or documentary history. It is concern about the interpretive-historical and also chronological process of change and continuity [9]. As in this paper, for the case of Shah Wali complex, a preliminary review of the written history is needed to inform and guide the process of analysis. Similarly, parallel reviews of economic and social factors are needed to analyze the reasons behind morphological change.

## 3. The Town of Taft and the Process of Formation of Shah Wali Complex

The accurate date of establishment and socioeconomic spatial investigations of Taft is unknown prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Among the history books, Taft is introduced at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by *Shah Nimatullah Wali*, the supreme mystic of Timurid period. Presence of this religious icon as well as the initiatives and developments implemented by him and his descendants, placed Taft at the turning point and the beginning of new developments [10].

Morphologically, Taft's longitudinal form may seem parallel to the floodway which divides the town into two parts or micro-climates namely "*Garmsir*" (The northern side and the warm-region) and "*Sardsir*" (its southern side and the cold-region). In this structure, neighborhoods are constructed gradually within the alluvial bed along the floodway, which is extended up to the rocky-cliffy hillsides on both sides of the town. Thus, Taft reveals a linear structure in which the floodway shows a growing path of neighborhoods and temporal development of the town as its main form. The Shah Wali complex on the alluvial bed has been constructed at the center of the old town next to the floodway. It has been developed in coordination with the longitudinal structure of Taft [11] (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Formation of Taft along the floodway with Shah Wali complex in the center of town (present time)

Therefore, it can be presumed that “all the constituent components and parts of Shah Wali complex, including components related to Khanqah (Sufi hospice), Husayniyya<sup>1</sup> and bazaar are formed in a linear structure parallel to the floodway and next to it. These constituent components

follow the dominant general principle of the town and the complex”. Based on this statement, only new Takiya<sup>2</sup> of Husayniyya, as a linear component, does not follow the longitudinal form of the town for its elongation is perpendicular to the longitudinal form of the town (Fig. 2).

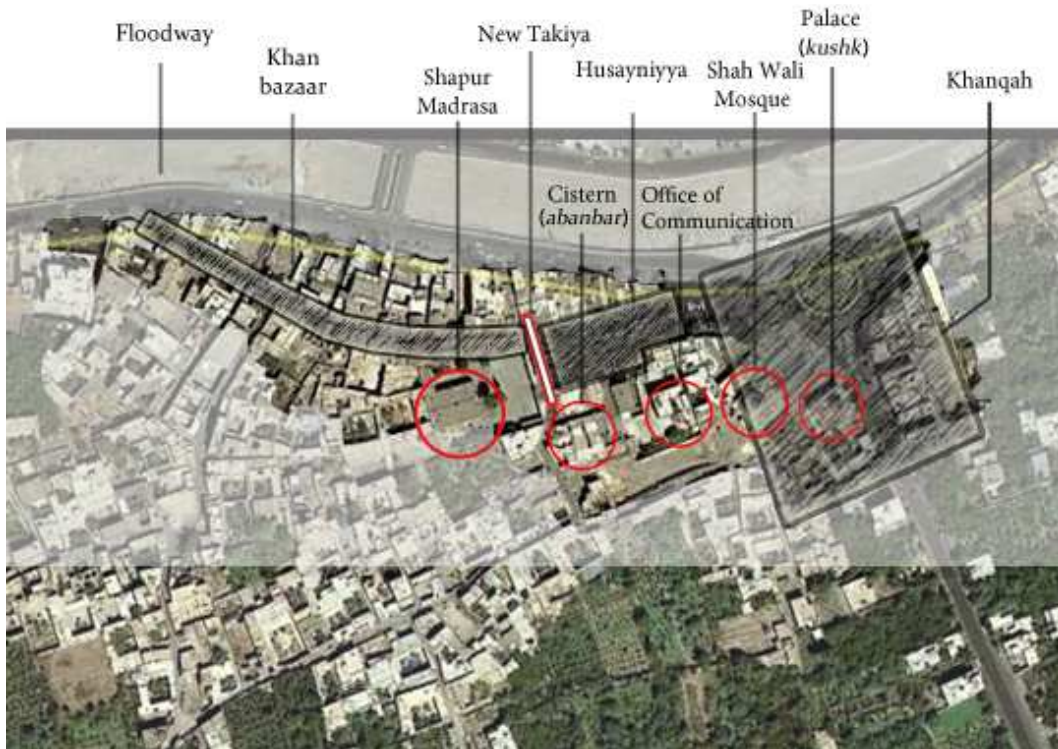


Fig. 2. All constituent components of Shah Wali complex except *Takiya* of *Husayniyya* are located on floodway path which follows longitudinal structure of the town (present time) [12]

#### 4. The Chronology and Historical Evolution of Shah Wali Complex

##### 4.1. Timurid and Qara Qoyunlu era (1370-1506)

Beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (1409-1414) can be considered as the introduction of Shah Wali *Khanqah*. Basic cores of this square *Khanqah* were the palace and *A'li* ivan, the domed structure of the sepulcher, the underground crypts, the chambers, the bath, and the big kitchens for the traveler or resident dervishes [13]. Establishment of the *Khanqah* and the residences of some of his descendants in Taft rendered it as one of the most important religious-political bases for the *Nimatullahi* dynasty [10]. As this *Khanqah* gained more fame, following structures were gradually built in the region during the years 1457-1514 A.D:

- Mosque of the *Khanqah* (Shah Wali mosque);

Different dates have been reported for the construction of mosque of the *Khanqah*. “Encyclopedia of Mofidi (Jame-e Mofidi)” has attributed construction of the mosque to Shah Na‘im al-Din Nimatullah Baghi (Fig.3)<sup>3</sup>

and his wife Khanesh Beygom (sister of Shah Tahmasb 1 Safavid<sup>4</sup>) [15]. Based on this claim, the date of its construction would be in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, while the mihrab inscription (1468) and the inscription around the wooden grid door (1484) are indicative of its construction in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century.

- Safa ivan;

It was built by Amir Nezam al-Din Abdul Baghi<sup>3</sup> during his chancellery in the government of Shah Ismail 1 Safavid<sup>5</sup> at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century [15] in the *Khanqah* facing the Shah Wali mosque [16].

- The old Takiyya<sup>6</sup> with its facing square;

Approximately at the same time as the construction of the mosque and completion of the *Khanqah*, Takiyya was being formed behind the mosque parallel to the floodway and facing it. This Takiyya was most likely a *Khanqah* in hosting the ceremonies and ethics of the Sufis and dervishes and was located at the southern side of the current Husayniyya and perpendicular to the current Takiya. This Takiyya was demolished years later when Shi'a became the formal sect in the country [11] (Fig.4).

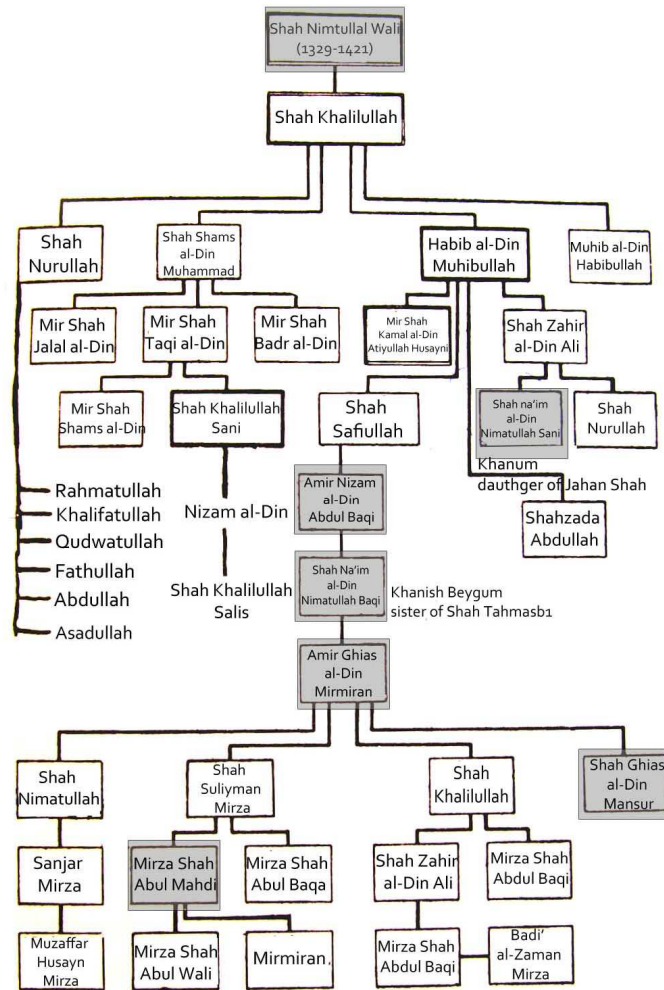


Fig. 3. The pedigree of Shah Nimatullah Wali family [14].

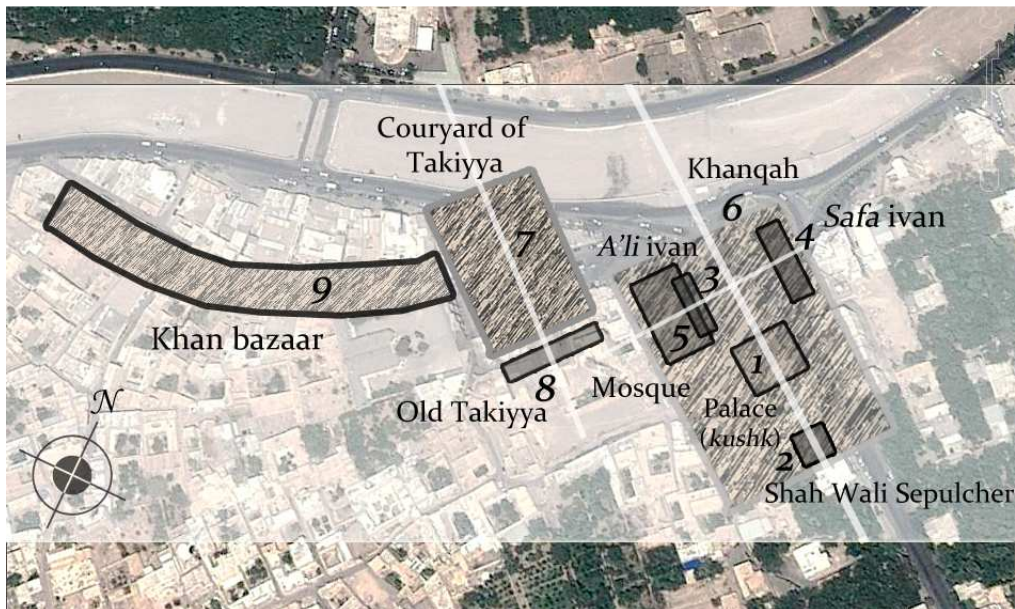


Fig. 4. Initial cores of Shah Wali complex (Khanqah and old Takiyya)

- |                                     |                |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1- Palace                           | 6- Khanqah     |
| 2- Shah Wali sepulcher (holy shrin) | 7- Takiyya     |
| 3- A'li ivan                        | 8- Old Takiyya |
| 4- Safa ivan                        | 9- Khan bazaar |
| 5- Shah Wali mosque                 |                |

#### 4.2. Safavid era (1501-1722)

At the beginning of the Safavid era and the presence of “Shah Na’im al-Din Nimatullah Baghi”<sup>3</sup> and his wife (Khanesh Beygom, sister of Shah Tahmasb I) [15], the conditions were set for development of the Shah Wali complex (Takiyya and Khanqah) as a landmark for evolution of Taft and the present complex.

- Mansuriya mansion;

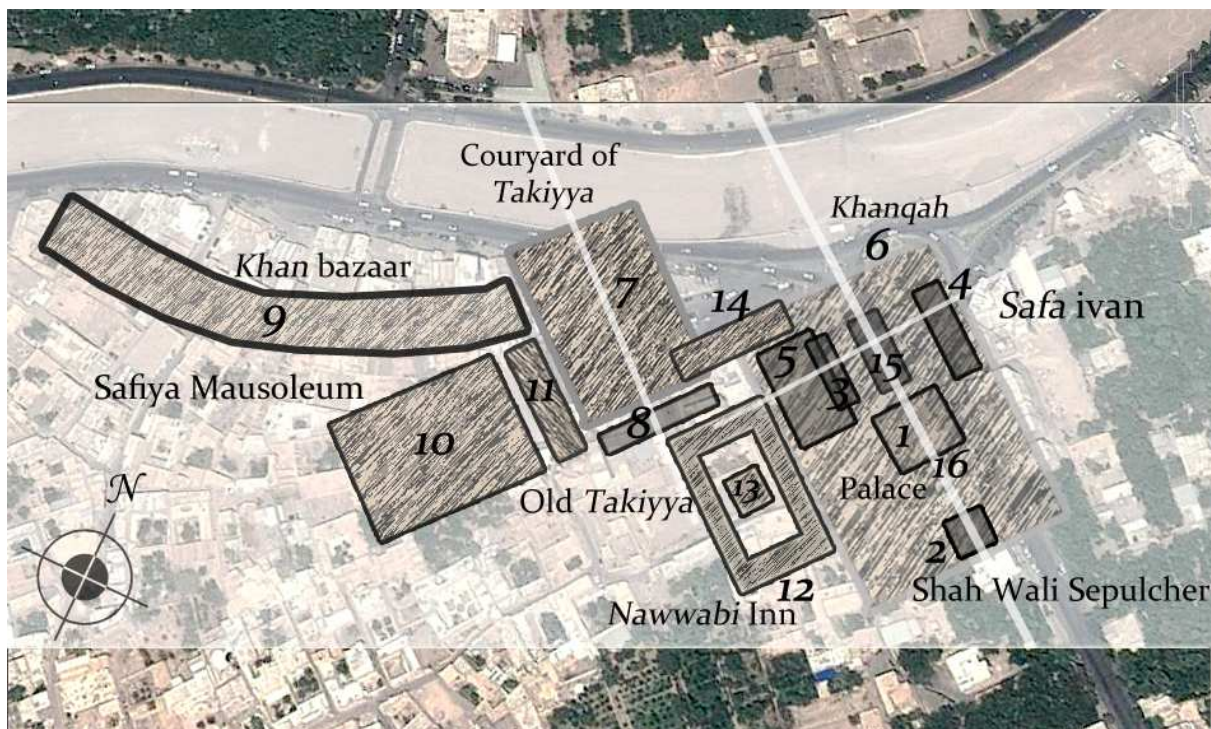
At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Mansuriya mansion was built in the Khanqah [15] so that the architectural components of the palace, the Safa ivan, the Mansuriya, the mosque, and the garden of the Khanqah,

confined a square of a large area proportionate with the town.

- The Nawwabi complex and the Safi Qoli Beyg mausoleum;

The constituent components such as the Nawwabi bazaar, the Nawwabi caravansary, and the Nawwabi water mill gradually took the role of a connection and filler of the space between the Khanqah and the Takiyya.

Moreover, the Sufi governor of Yazd, “Safi Qoli Beyg”, reserved a tomb for himself next to the old Takiyya before his death. Another initiative of Safi Qoli Beyg in Taft was the endowment of the gardens and a bazaar called Agha bazaar [15] (Fig.5).



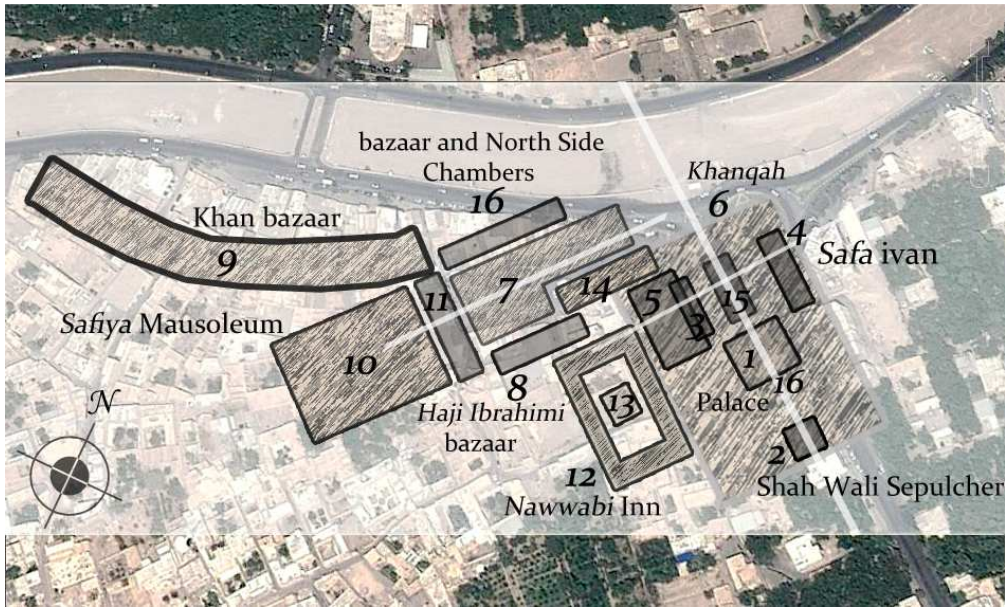
**Fig. 5.** Khanqah and Takiyya were completed at the end of Safavid era along the extension of Taft and its floodway, and on the other side of it. Afterwards, Nawwabi bazaar, water mill, and caravansary were constructed as the connecting elements between these two parts

- |                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1- Palace              | 9- Khan bazaar          |
| 2- Shah Wali sepulcher | 10- Safiya mausoleum    |
| 3- A'li ivan           | 11- Agha bazaar         |
| 4- Safa ivan           | 12- Nawwabi caravansary |
| 5- Shah Wali mosque    | 13- Nawwabi water mill  |
| 6- Khanqah             | 14- Nawwabi bazaar      |
| 7- Takiyya             | 15- Pool                |
| 8- Old Takiyya         | 16- Mansuriya mansion   |

#### 4.3. Qajar era (1794-1925)

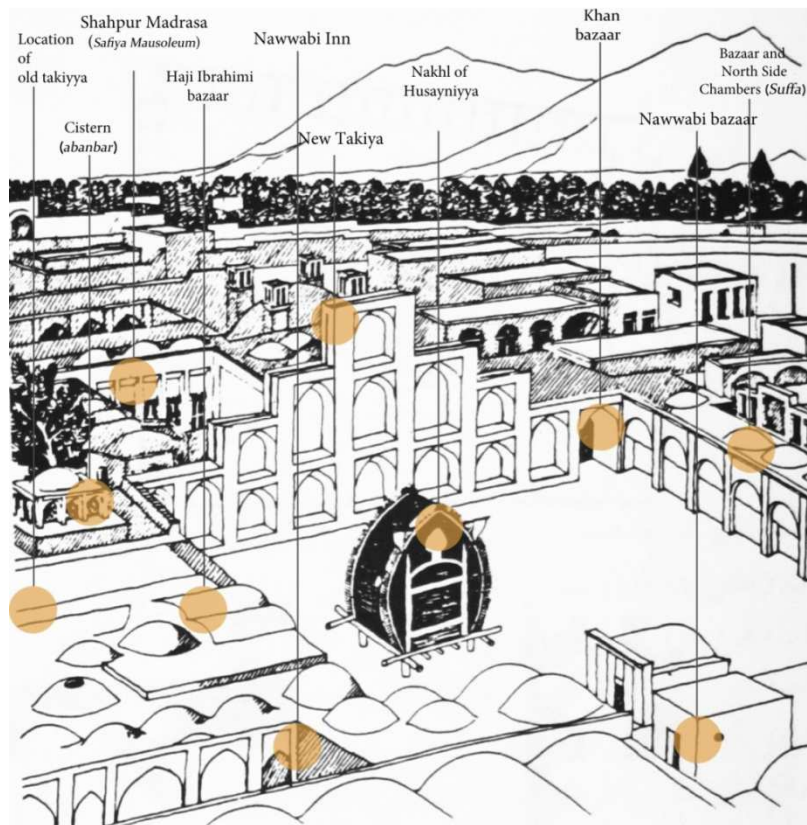
The most important historical transformation and change in the Shah Wali complex and Taft were the demolition of the Takiyya from Timurid dynasty located in the southern side and the construction of the new Takiyya in the western side of current Husayniyya. It seems that the event was occurred due to dissensions between Nemati

and Heydari<sup>7</sup> and even, opposition of Qajar Shi'a clergymen against Sufism. These oppositions demolished many Takiyya as and clubs of Sufism and they were common from Safavid era until the end of Qajar era [17]. By construction of the new Takiyya, linear structure and development of the complex was altered which caused several changes in the body of Husayniyya (Figs. 6, 7).



**Fig. 6.** Demolishing old *Takiyya* of Timurid era located in the southern side; construction of new *Takiyya* in the western side; and organization of the *Husayniyya* with the new structure is among the changes created during Qajar era

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1- Palace                                   | 9- Khan bazaar                     |
| 2- Shah Wali sepulcher                      | 10- Safiya mausoleum               |
| 3- A'li ivan                                | 11- Agha bazaar                    |
| 4- Safa ivan                                | 12- Nawwabi caravansary            |
| 5- Shah Wali mosque                         | 13- Nawwabi water mill             |
| 6- Khanqah                                  | 14- Nawwabi bazaar                 |
| 7- Husayniyya                               | 15- Pool                           |
| 8- Haji Ebrahimi bazaar (Deed of Endowment) | 16- bazaar and North Side Chambers |



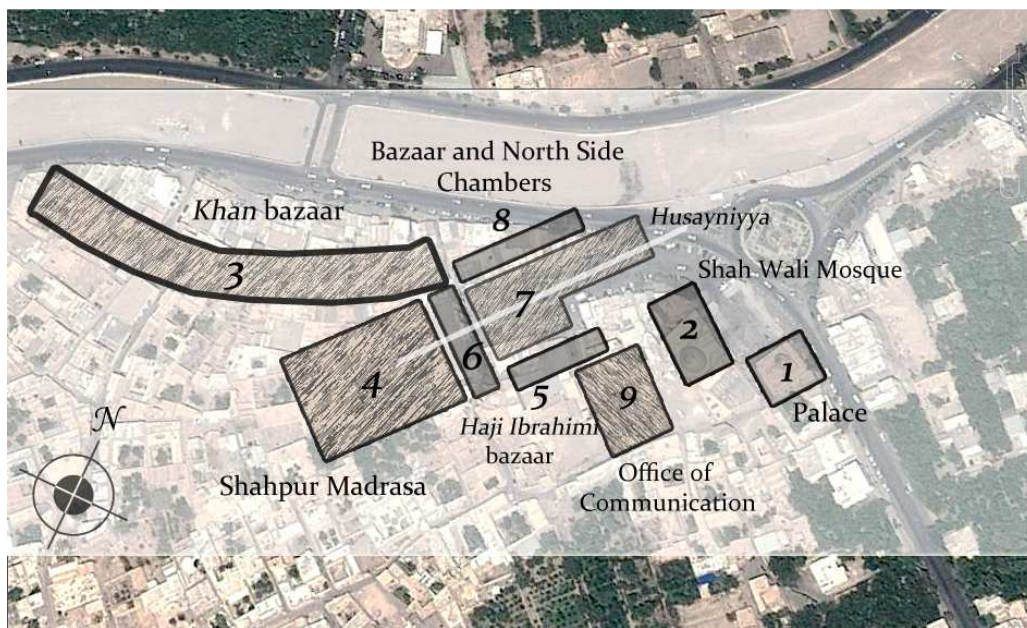
**Fig. 7.** Structures in the *Husayniyya* in Pahlavi era (bazaar and northern chambers, *Nawwabi* bazaar, Khan bazaar, *Nakhl*, new *Takiya* of *Husayniyya*, *Nawwabi* caravansary, *Haji Ebrahimi* bazaar, *Shahpur* madrasa, Qajar's cistern, and demolished old *Takiyya*) [18]

#### 4.4. Pahlavi (1925-1979) and current era

Mausoleum of Safi Qoli Beyg behind the current Takiya was demolished as a result of cultural changes in Pahlavi era with Shahpour madrasa being replaced using Pahlavi styles. Part of the Nawwabi bazaar, which was placed in the southern side (on front of Nawwabi caravansary and water mill), and also Kalak<sup>8</sup>, which was located in the symmetrical axis of the old Takiyya, were demolished in order to make Husayniyya more consistent with the new Takiya and structure, and “Nakhl-Gardani”<sup>9</sup> ceremony during Muharram. Nawwabi caravansary and

water mill were also demolished in recent years for building “Office of Communication”. Some parts of Khanqah such as pool and side opposite mosque within the Khanqah have been demolished by presence of two streets beside the floodway and behind the complex so that the Khanqah has lost its previous coherence (Fig. 8).

As previously discussed in this section, historical evolution of Shah Wali complex from Timurid era up to current era can be investigated in four distinct historical periods in terms of their political, cultural, social, and economic conditions (Table. 1) (Fig.9).



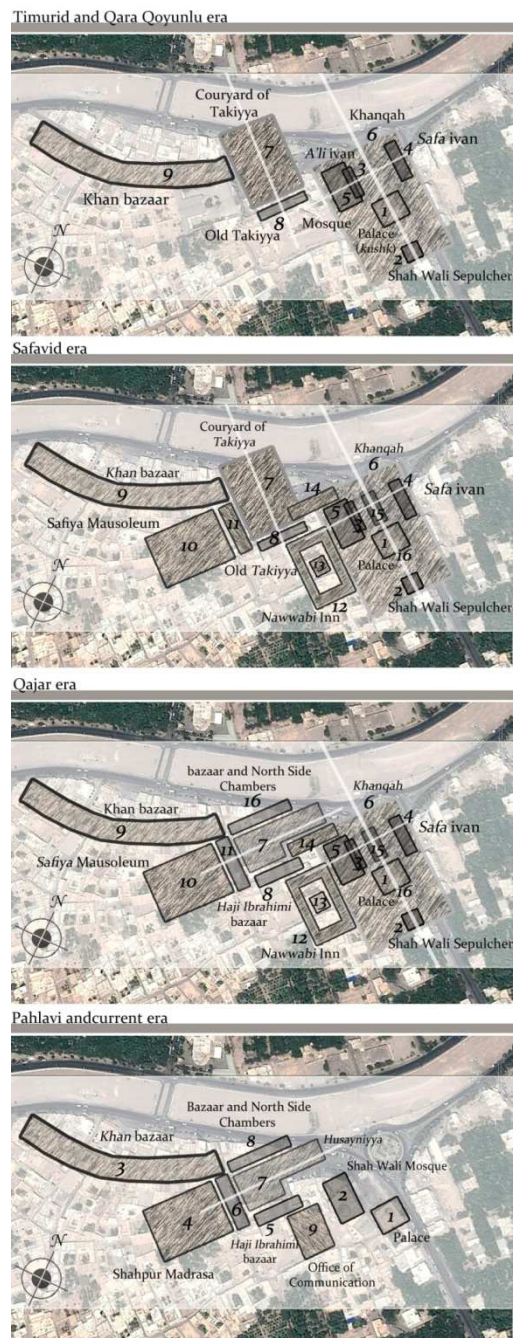
**Fig. 8.** Demolition of sepulcher, pool, and *Safa* ivan in the present streets of the town has *Khanqah* to lose its original structure while demolishing *Safi Quli Biyg* mausoleum, *Nawwabi* bazaar, *Nawwabi* caravansary, and *Nawwabi* water mill as the results of changing cultural and historical structure of *Takiyya* for coordination with the new structure (*Husayniyya*).

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1- Palace                      | 6- New <i>Takiya</i> of <i>Husayniyya</i> |
| 2- Shah Wali mosque            | 7- <i>Husayniyya</i>                      |
| 3- <i>Khan</i> bazaar          | 8- Bazaar and North side Chambers         |
| 4- <i>Shahpur</i> madrasa      | 9- Office Of Communication                |
| 5- <i>Haji Ebrahimi</i> bazaar |   |

**Table 1** Chronology of architectural constituent parts and components of Shah Wali complex in the four historical sequences

Historical period	Constituent parts	Construction and demolition date of architecture constituent components
Timurid and Qara Qoyunlu (1370-1506)	Khanqah	1- Palace, A'li ivan, Shah Wali sepulcher, underground crypts, Chambers, Bath, Big kitchens (Beginning of the 15 <sup>th</sup> century). 2- Mosque of the Khanqah (Mid-15 <sup>th</sup> century). 3- <i>Safa</i> ivan (Beginning of the 16 <sup>th</sup> century).
	Old Takiyya	1-Takiyya (Approximately at the same time as the construction of the mosque).
	Khanqah	1-Mansuriya mansion (Beginning of the 17 <sup>th</sup> century). 2- Pool (1664 A.D.).
Safavid (1501-1722)	Old Takiyya	1- Safi Qoli Beyg mausoleum (1654 A.D.). 2-Agha bazaar (1654 A.D.).
	Nawwabi complex	1- Nawwabi bazaar, water mill and caravansary (Beginning of the 17 <sup>th</sup> century).

Qajar (1794-1925)	Khanqah	-----
	Husayniyya	1-Demolition of the Takiyya 2- New Takiya in the western side of current Husayniyya. 3-Haji Ebrahimi bazaar.
	Nawwabi complex	-----
Pahlavi (1925-1979) and Current era	Khanqah	1-Demolition of Safa ivan and pool. 2- Demolition of Shah Wali sepulcher, chambers, bath, big kitchens and courtyard of Khanqah.
	Husayniyya	1-Demolition of Safi Qoli Beyg mausoleum. 2- Shahpour madrasa.
	Nawwabi complex	1-Demolition of Nawwabi caravansary, water mill and some parts of bazaar. 2-Office of Communication.



**Fig. 9.**Chronology of Shah Wali complex from Timurid era to the current era



## 5. Discussion and Results

In this article, it has been tried to chronologically study the retrieval the process of formation of Shah Wali complex in Taft. This process includes the construction, changes, and continuity which originate from morphological point of view and the goals of a society through six centuries. The chronological study of the complex is indicative of spatio-temporal organization and changes in different dimensions throughout different eras. The study of the complex shows that forming phenomenon of any architectural structure and city complex could face two overall types of changes. These two types of changes are the gradual changes and the short period ones. The gradual changes have taken place with the passage of time and for strengthening and completion of the complex. These changes were spatially associated with the complex. The second type of the changes, the short period ones, refers to the set of changes which have taken place within a short period of time rather than in a long span and have led to the developmental changes, changes in the form and architectural functions of the structures.

The phrase, "continuing dynamic of place" is interpretable within the frameworks of these two types of changes. It is obvious that these two types of changes in the Shah Wali complex (as a form which has a structure) bring about changes in the wholeness and the constituent components and parts. As, these two types of the changes to the Shah Wali complex were influenced by the transformation in the way of thinking and the needs of the new residents of the town of Taft. Following and chronological analysis of the Shah Wali complex at different historical periods in time makes it possible to identify both types of the spatio-temporal changes taken place in it.

The first type of the changes, the gradual ones, show that the complex is found according to the Sufi-style thinking of Nimatullahi in Timurid era and it has taken till the end of the Safavid era to reach its near completion. Sufism was the dominant school of thought in that time period. The inception and the growth of the complex in these time periods has made its functions, usage and elements to not only fit and accommodate the daily needs of the town residents but also provide an ideal ground for the expansion of Nimatullahi philosophy and providing the needed services for the resident and visiting dervishes. Thus, in this period, the architectural parts and components were built to accommodate the daily needs of the residents and the travelers. In the architecture of this complex all the functional uses of the facilities are centered on the Nimatullahi Sufism.

Morphological analysis of the complex in those periods shows a total coordination between site selecting and its form. This coordination had been based on the order and the direction that the water flowed in the water passages, longitudinal stretch of the town and the floodway in the middle, the terrain placement of the site, and the access

system and adjacency. Therefore, the gradual changes of the first stage of the development of the complex included establishing its initial core and the addition of the other architectural elements and structures.

The second type of the changes, the short period ones, which were mainly caused by the major changes in the society's way of thinking, religion and culture, the life style of the residents, and even a governmental decree which could make a sudden change in the infrastructure of the society by changing the architectural style. Therefore, the architectural elements could be in a new spatio-temporal relation suitable with the changes made to the wholeness and structure. In the Shah Wali complex, it seems, as the result of the opposition of the top brass Shia clerics and the Qajar rulers with the Sufism philosophy, and even, because of the disagreements between the two schools of thought in Heydari and Nemati Sufism, certain parts of the complex such as the Khanqah and the Takiyya lose their importance and become abandoned. In this period of time, the more important need, the need for mourning during the month of Muharam, finds importance and requires new spatio-temporal elements in the structure of the complex. Therefore, the building of the new Takiya takes place on the western side and perpendicular to the longitudinal stretch of the town and the floodway of Taft.

The Takiya, as a large segment of the complex, which was stretched farther than the other parts, changes the structure and the linear growth of the complex in a very short period of time. The other architectural components, following the pattern of organization, fill the space all around the Takiya. This change takes place to create an orderly form in the space in front of the Husayniyya and the Takiya. These changes were made by building new structures such as the Haji Ebrahimi bazaar and the northern platforms next to the floodway, the water reservoir, and demolishing and eliminating other structures such as the Nawwabi and Agha bazaar. During the Qajar era and with making sudden changes and transformation, the complex enters a new phase of development with more gradual changes based on the newly created needs. The gradual changes during the Qajar and Pahlavi era in the second stage of the development leads to construction of new streets, demolishing major parts of the Khanqah, complete demolition of the caravansary and the mill and the change in the function of the Safiya mausoleum to Shahpour Madrasa. The contemporary changes and demolishing activities took place despite the fact that they were illogical and against the spirit and the character of the location and the complex (Fig.10).

Considering these transformation and changes, the time-location changes of any architectural complex or city could be summed up, which is the indication of its continuing dynamism of the location or its change and connectedness. In other words, the philosophical concept of instantaneous newness of existence and location could be demonstrated in this complex. The Shah Wali Complex, as a dynamic place, is a very suitable case for understanding this concept.

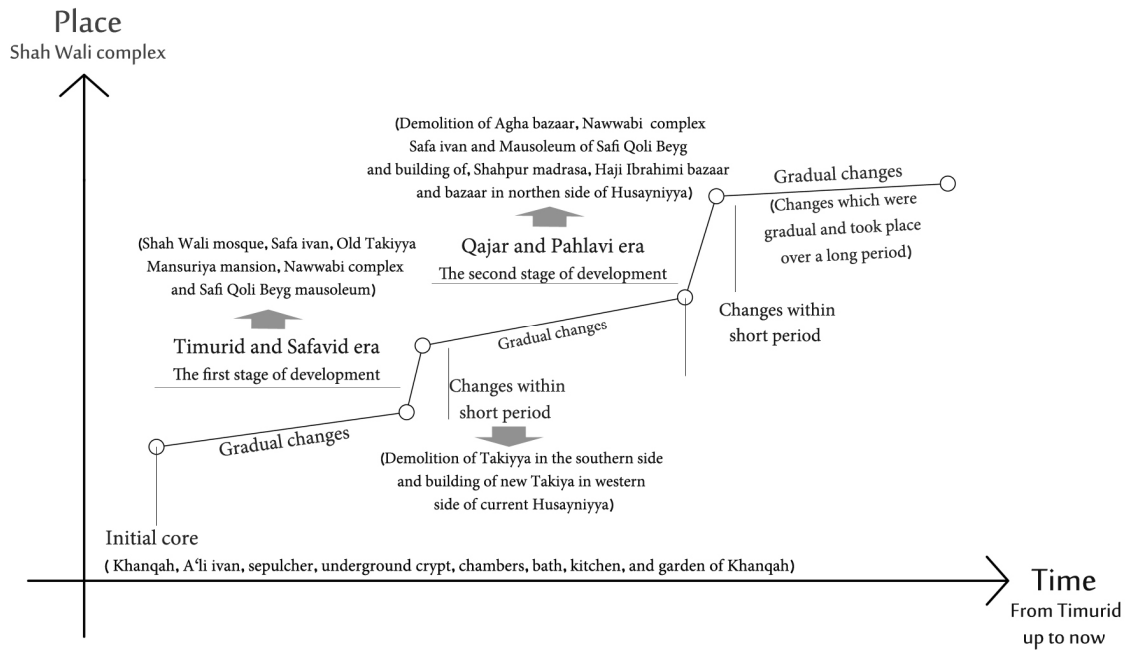


Fig. 10. Process of change and continuity in the “place-time” diagram of Shah Wali complex from Timurid era up to now

## 6. Conclusion

The benefits of this historical study could be considered from two aspects: content-wise, which is based on a series of historical evidence pointed at shedding light on the concept of place as a dynamic continuing phenomenon; and determining the methodology for dealing with a historical monument which has undergone constant changes throughout its existence.

In the first part, the Shah Wali complex, in the present era, as a historical case which has been subject to changes for various reasons, is studied. Therefore, this complex was considered as a system that has structure like any other existing systems in the universe; and the changes were studied from two different aspects. The first aspect includes the changes which are gradual and do not lead to changes in its structure. This type of changes continues as far as the system can tolerate them. However, for a system which is at an evolved stage, a series of immediate and fundamental changes are needed. These changes bestow importance to the system and take it to a higher level. However, throughout all the stages of change, their type follows certain principles. Perhaps, one could interpret these principles in architecture, in a way, call the ‘spirit of place or Genius Loci’. This perspective of the historical buildings and monuments could be effective in the structural and maintenance intervention of the conservationists and urban designers.

In the second part, from the methodological aspect and the techniques used in dealing with the architectural structures, urban morphology offers a path and procedure that leads to establishing link with a phenomenological and comprehensive approach. This method, with an interactive perspective between the whole and the part in various scales (component architecture, urban complex and city), categorizes the information and provides a suitable background for later analysis.

## Notes

1- A Husayniyya is a ritual hall, room or public open space where the Shi'a gather to commemorate the martyrdom of the third Imam, Husayn Ibn Ali (d.680).

2- Takiya is a linear element in ziggurat shape in relation with mourning ceremony of Imam Husayn Ibn Ali in Muharram. The public open space in front of Takiya is called Husayniyya. Takiya does not resemble the Takiyya or Tekke and Khanqah (Sufi hospice), where Sufis gather at appointed times to remember God and honor the memories of Muhammad and the Sufi saints and spiritual masters.

3- For additional introduction of Nimatullahi dynasty one can refer to the pedigree of this family in each case (Fig.3).

4- Tahmasb I (1514 –1576) was an influential Shah of Iran, who enjoyed the longest reign of any member of the Safavid dynasty. He was the son of Ismail I.

5- Shah Ismail was a Shah of Iran (1502) and the founder of the Safavid dynasty which survived until 1736. He converted Iran from Sunni and Ismaili Shi'i Islam.

6- Dervishes lodge or meeting place for dervishes.

7- Branches of Sufism belonging to Shah Nimatulla Wali and Sultan Heydar.

8- Kalak is the structure built in the middle of Husayniyya and on the axis of Takiyas. It was used as a place for putting lamps and light in the past.

The symbolic ceremony in the Ashura (10<sup>th</sup> day of the first Islamic month, Muharram). Nakhl is a wooden structure as the symbol for coffin of Imam Husayn Ibn Ali which is trolled during Nakhl-Gardani ceremony by residents of Taft in the Husayniyya.

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