

PADMANABHAPURAM · PALACE

By Raj Rewal, K.T. Ravindran and the Architectural Research Cell

This is the second portfolio of drawings to be published by MIMAR in the series devoted to important architectural complexes in ancient India.

The Architectural Research Cell (see list of members in MIMAR 20) has produced scale drawings of hitherto undocumented historical buildings, or has corrected and completed earlier studies. Such material, depicting the richness of spatial arrangements, ornamental detailing, and structural solutions of the past adds immensely to the fund of resource information for architects as well as historians.

*Padmanabhapuram, presented here, is a 15th century complex located in the southern state of Kerala in India. The text is an edited version by Mr. K.T. Ravindran, first published in *Architecture in India*, (Paris, 1985).*

— Editors

The Padmanabhapuram Palace is located close to the sea in southern India, a region with high rainfall and a tropical climate. Founded by the royal family of Travancore, adjoining the State of Kerala, the initial structures date from the period 1400-1500, with other buildings added incrementally over time. The palace's present name was given to it in 1744 by Marthanda Verma Maharaja, who was a devotee of Padmanabhan.

Comprised of edifices reflecting a variety of styles, the complex bears witness to the socio-political influences prevalent at different moments in its history.

Entry to the palace compound is from the west, through a high door with a pitched roof structure abutting it, typical of the Kerala region. A succession of courtyards formed by buildings or simply walls becomes progressively more private in character until one reaches the core of the complex, termed *thai kottaram* (literally, the generic mother), reputedly the oldest building of the palace. It forms the centrepiece or focus of the entire palace compound, corresponding in pattern to a *mandala*, the ancient Indian diagram of the cosmos. It is the basic reference point in relation to which the location and openings of the other buildings have been determined. Although the palace may seem to be without any rationale in the layout and disposition, one comprehends its organisation the moment the esoteric rules governing its design have been revealed. Thus, successive generations of builders in the palace complex adhered to the rules laid down at the start.



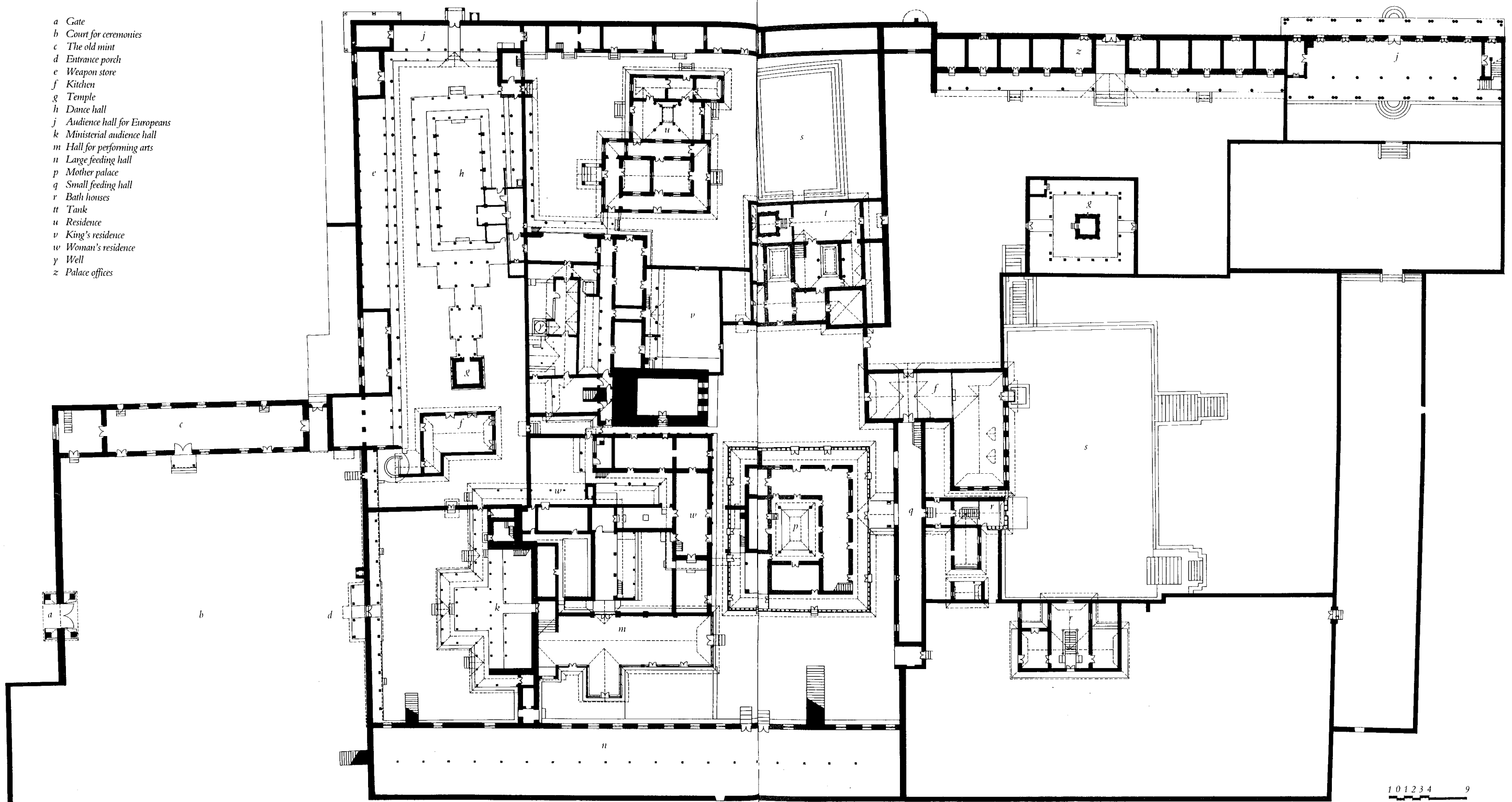
Building sciences applied in the achievement of Padmanabhapuram involved a combination of astronomy, astrology, mathematics, religious values, social mores, building technology and magic. Such traditional building codes account for the overall cohesion in the design.

Kerala is a region with abundant timber and excellent clay, used for tiles and bricks, as well as laterite stone, granite and shell lime. While strict rules also existed for the utilisation of various materials and structural solutions, it was by far carpentry that was the most highly developed building art. Types of wood, their relative positions to one another, kinds of functions to be served, and the types of wood determined by the user's place in the social hierarchy were all specified in the traditional codes. Hence, one of the outstanding features of this palace is that these principles were faithfully followed over centuries.

Another significant quality of the buildings at Padmanabhapuram is the sensitive handling of light and atmosphere of repose created throughout. The aesthetic importance of the palace might well be described as a subtle combination of sophisticated understatement in design and a tactile celebration of the material employed.

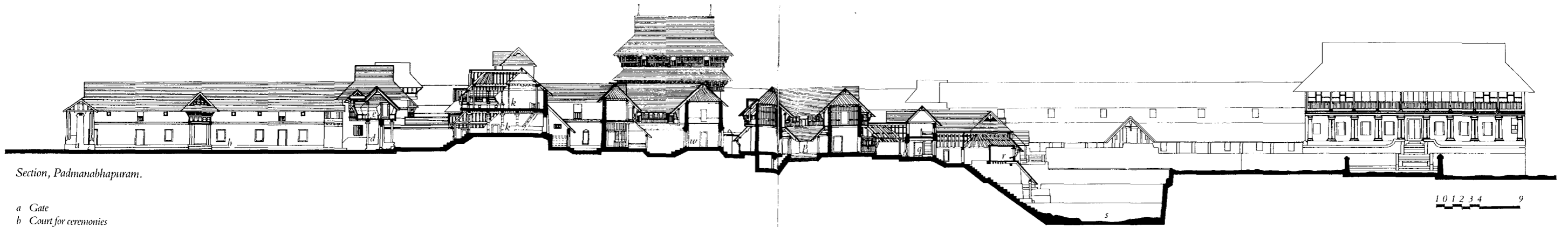
PADMANABHAPURAM · PALACE

- a Gate
- b Court for ceremonies
- c The old mint
- d Entrance porch
- e Weapon store
- f Kitchen
- g Temple
- h Dance hall
- j Audience hall for Europeans
- k Ministerial audience hall
- m Hall for performing arts
- n Large feeding hall
- p Mother palace
- q Small feeding hall
- r Bath houses
- tt Tank
- u Residence
- v King's residence
- w Woman's residence
- y Well
- z Palace offices



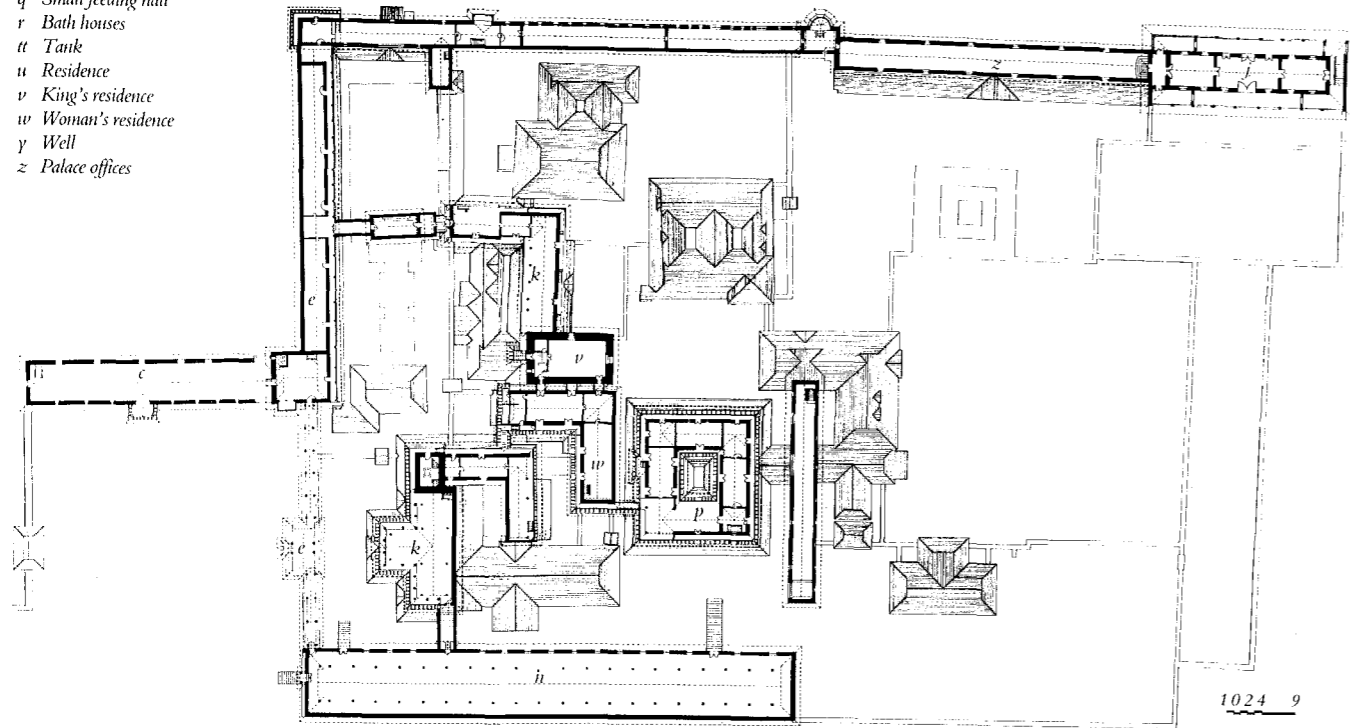
Ground floor plan, Padmanabhapuram.

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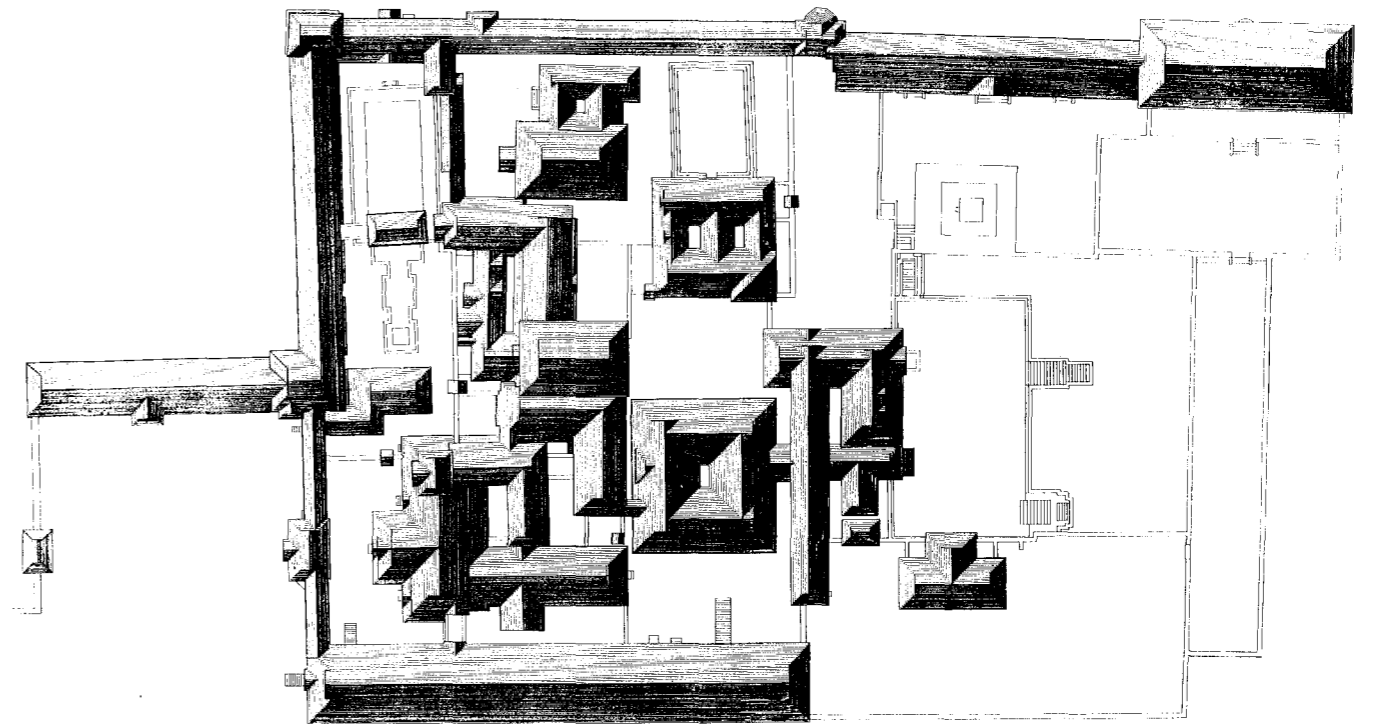


Section, Padmanabhapuram.

- a Gate
- b Court for ceremonies
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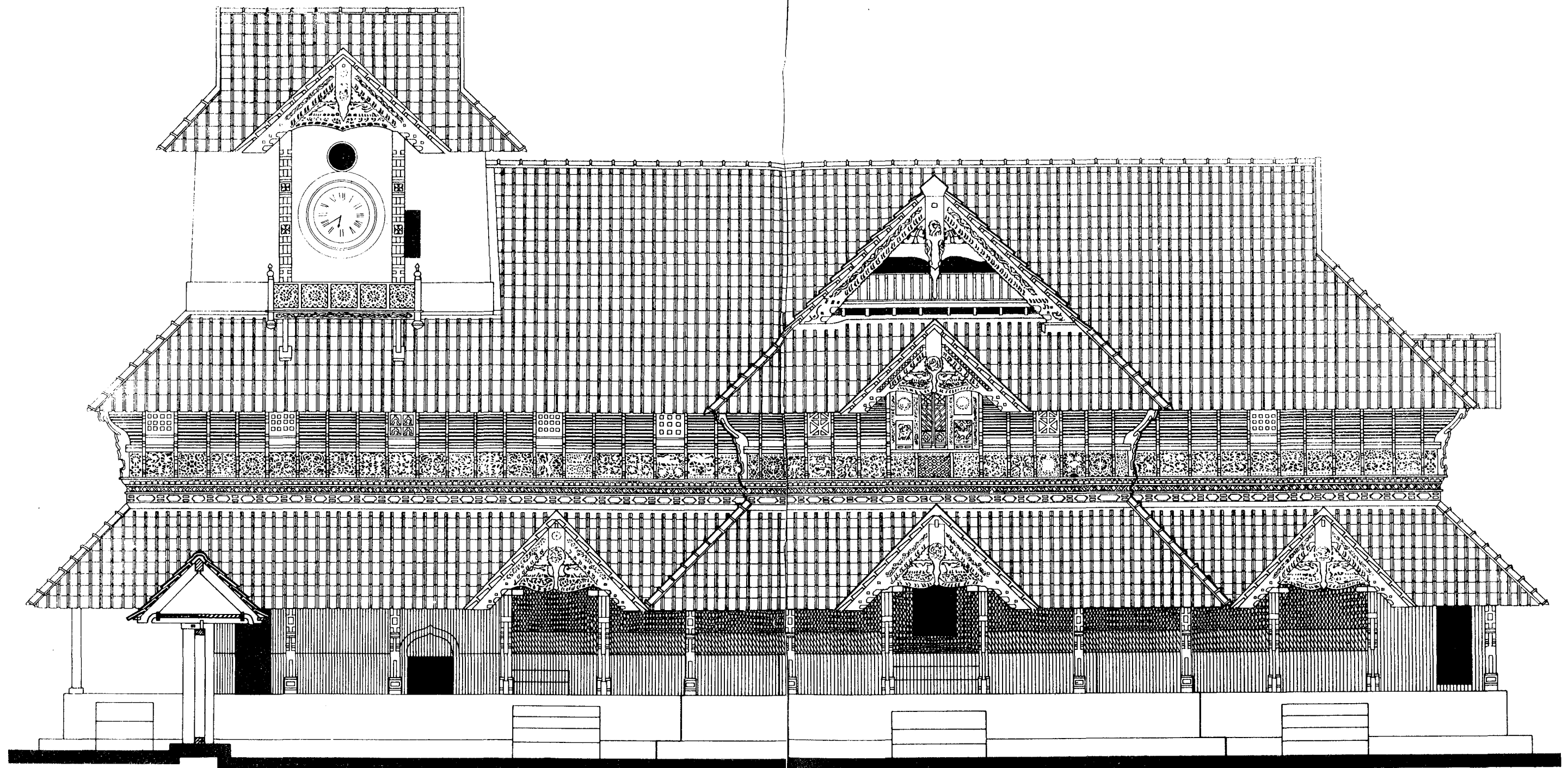


First floor plan, Padmanabhapuram.

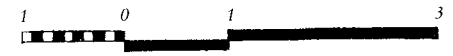


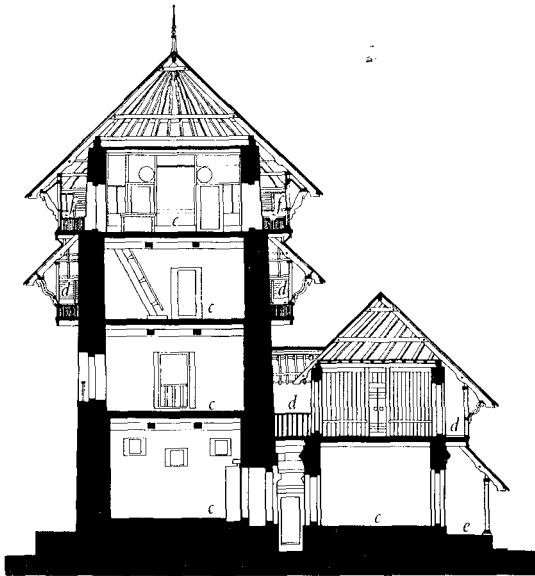
Roof plan, Padmanabhapuram.

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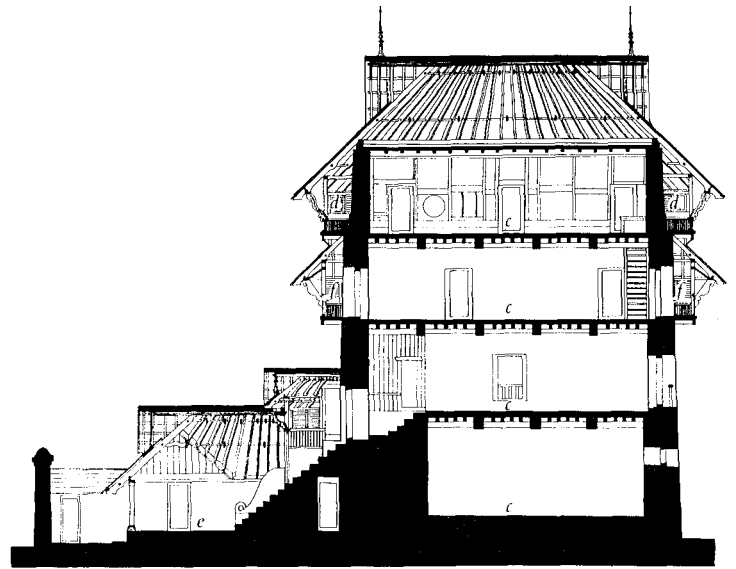


Elevation, clock tower.



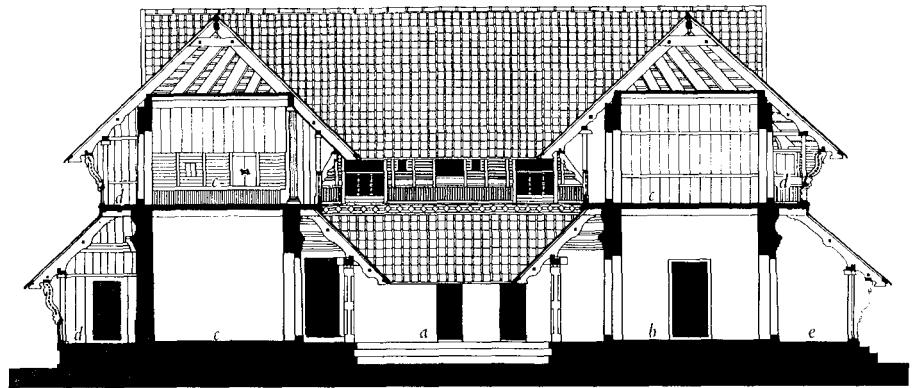


Section 1, King's residence.



Section 2, King's residence.

- a Courtyard
- b Store
- c Room
- d Passage
- e Verandah
- f Balcony



Section, mother palace.

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