

# AL-SHAJARAH

ISTAC Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization

Published by IIUM Press

2022 Volume 27 Number 2

# AL-SHAJARAH

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## *Manuscript Studies*

### **Devotional Poetry, Exceptional Calligraphy, Charming Manuscript: Expression of Religious Emotion in Ḥassan Kāshī's *Haft-Band***

Amir H. Zekrgoo<sup>1</sup>

#### **Abstract**

*The Middle Eastern manuscript collection of Baillieu Library, the University of Melbourne, is custodian to a very fine 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of Haft-Band (Seven Strophes) by the 14<sup>th</sup> century devotional poet Mullā Ḥassan Kāshī. This illuminated manuscript is most probably of Indian origin. It is penned in superb Nasta'liq script by Muḥammad Amir Razavi/Rizvi in the age of 95. The volume begins with an attractive sarlowḥ, and concludes with a beautiful colophon and an additional interesting page at the end of the manuscript.*

*Subjects discussed in this paper are arranged under nine headings. After a brief 'Introduction,' a short passage is allocated to the significance of number seven under 'Symbolism of Seven and the Haft-Band Genre.' A concise biography of the poet, his beautiful mausoleum, and the importance of his Haft-Band are discussed under 'Ḥassan Kāshī'. 'A Mystical Dream' provides an insight into a chain of historical events that were inspired and initiated by the poet's stunning dream, which eventually led to the wide acceptance of the Haft-Band. Before Kāshī, the genre of madḥ (praise) was almost exclusively dedicated to kings and rulers for a reward. Kāshī transformed the trend of praise poetry*

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*by shifting the focus of the praise. This matter is discussed under 'From Praising Kings to Religious Devotion.' A glimpse of Kāshī's genius mind and poetic mastery is presented under 'Seven Openings & Seven Closings'. The next heading, 'About the Manuscript' provides an analytical study of the manuscript, from codicological perspectives. 'Scribe and Colophon' and 'A Stunning Ending' are titles of passages dedicated to introducing the old scribe's world and his personal poetic taste.*

**Keywords:** *Haft-band, Ḥassan Kāshī, Persian poetry, Imām Alī, Madh, Praise, Calligraphy, Manuscript, Melbourne University.*

## **Introduction**

Mullā Ḥassan Kāshī, a 12-13 century Iranian poet, is known for his *Haft-Band* (Seven Strophes), a famous book of poems in praise of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. As Sufīs trace their spiritual lineage to Imām 'Alī, the *Haft-Band* of Kāshī is favored by them. Ḥassan Kāshī revolutionized the trend of 'praise poetry' by shifting the focus of the praise. He departed from praise of kings and committed himself entirely to devotional poetry of religious nature. Due to its religious theme and fluent mode of expression, the *Haft-Band* gained much popularity among masses in Khurasan and Iraq. People memorized the *Haft-Band* even during the poet's lifetime. Numerous hand-written copies of the *Haft-Band* have also been produced in Iran, India and Pakistan. The manuscript soon became a standard text for calligraphy practice, both because of its subject matter and due to its concise volume. Kāshī's *Haft-Band* contains seven sections of 13 couplets each, making it a total of 91 verses. Haft-Band is also a general name for a distinct compositional arrangement in Persian poetry. With Kāshī's poems the haft-band genre gained special attention, so much that many poets after Kāshī composed their own Haft-Bands.

## **Symbolism of Seven and the Haft-Band Genre**

Seven is perhaps the most significant number in the realm of mythology and religion. Seven days of creation, seven levels of

the upper world and that of the underworld in Indian religious traditions,<sup>2</sup> seven levels of heaven in the Abrahamic religious traditions, 'seven virtues' and 'seven deadly sins' in Christianity,<sup>3</sup> Japanese seven lucky gods,<sup>4</sup> are just to name a few! The Islamic Hajj pilgrimage requires seven times circumambulation around the Ka'ba, and seven time walking between Şafā and Marwah in Mecca. There are seven days in a week, seven colors in a rainbow, and a constellation with seven stars known as the Seven Sisters.

In Persian literature, the number seven is treated special. The Seven Thrones (*Haft-Awrang*) by 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, the Seven Domes (*Haft-Gunbad*) and the Seven Portraits (*Haft-Peykar*) by Neẓāmī Ganjavi are among the famous books of poetry that have 'seven' as part of their names. There are seven realms in 'Aṭṭār's *Conference of the Birds* (*Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*). Rostam, the renowned hero of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, had undergone Seven Challenging Tasks (*Haft-Khān*). Aḥmad Rāzi, in his *Seven Climes* (*Haft Iqlim*) divides the world into seven geographical territories. And in our study of Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, we have identified seven personifications of love.<sup>5</sup> There is no ending to the list.

'Haft-Band' is a general name for a distinct compositional arrangement in Persian poetry. 'Haft' means 'seven', while 'band' means 'string' or 'section.' 'Haft-Band' or 'Seven Sections', is referred to a '*Tarkib-Band*' composition that constitutes seven parts. '*Tarkib-Band*' is a technical name for a certain style of Persian poetry that comprises several distinct sections. While each couplet within a section (*band*) has its independent rhyme (*qāfīa*), they maintain identical weight – equal number of beats (*wazn*). Moreover, each section (*band*) concludes with a different couplet that does not

<sup>2</sup> Roshan Dalal, *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide* (Penguin Books, 2010), p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> Shawn Tucker, *The Virtues and Vices in the Arts: A Sourcebook*, (Cascade, 2015), gathers significant religious, literary and art-historical works on the subject and present them in a classified manner.

<sup>4</sup> Reiko Chiba's *The Seven Lucky Gods of Japan*, (Tuttle Publishers, 1995) provides a concise and clear introductions to the Gods along with selected images of artworks. See [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Seven\\_Lucky\\_Gods](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Seven_Lucky_Gods)

<sup>5</sup> Amir H. Zekrgoo and Leyla H. Tajer, "The Seven Avatars of Love: Deliberations of Rūmī's *Mathnawī*," *Mawlana Rumi Review*, 9 (Brill, 2018, [brill.com/mrrr](http://brill.com/mrrr)), pp. 67-90.

follow the previous couplets' rhyming (*qāfīa*) but keeps the same tempo (*wazn*). 'Haft-Band' is therefore a 'Tarkib-Band' of seven sections. 'Tarkib-Band' became popular during 13th century. Mullā Ḥassan Kāshī was among the leading poets who formulated his own *Haft-Band* composition, an inspiring work for the masses as well as the poets that followed him.<sup>6</sup>

### Ḥassan Kāshī

Mawlānā Ḥassan ibn Maḥmūd Kāshāni Amolī, better known as Mullā Ḥassan Kāshī, was born in Amol in northern Iran around 648 AH/ 1250 CE.<sup>7</sup> His ancestors were from Kashan where the name Kāshī originates. His name has also been recorded as Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥassan Kāshī<sup>8</sup> and Mullā Ḥassan ibn Kāshī.<sup>9</sup> While his date of demise has not been accurately recorded<sup>10</sup>, there are reliable references that confirm that he was alive at least until 738/1337.<sup>11</sup> Some two centuries after Kāshī's demise, a mausoleum was erected during the reign Shah Tahmasp I. Ḥassan Kāshī's mausoleum is a well-known structure near the Soltaniyeh, a UNESCO World Heritage site near Zanjan, Iran. (Fig. 1) Kāshī's major works include the *Divan*, *Haft-Band*, *Kitāb al-'Inshā'*, *Tārīkh-i Muḥammadi* (also known as *Tārīkh-i Rashīdī*), and *Ma'rifat Nameh*.

<sup>6</sup> *Haft-Band Haftād-Band* (ed. Sa'īd Hendī), Tehran: Ketabkhaneh, Muzeh va Markaz e Asnad-e Majles Shawra-ye Eslami (Tehran, Library, Museum, and Central Archives of the Islamic Parliament, 1388 Sh/2009), p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Roqīyyeh Rasouli & others, "Ḥassan Kāshī", in *Dāneshnāme-ye Jahān-e Eslām* (Encyclopedia of the World of Islam), Vol. 13, (Tehran, Encyclopedia Islamica Foundation 2009), p. 353.

<sup>8</sup> *Mūnis al-Ahrār fī Daqāyiq al-Ash'ār*, Vol. 1 (Tehran, Published by Moḥammad Reza Ṭāherī, 1337-1350 Sh. 1958-1972), p. 360.

<sup>9</sup> Mawlawī Muḥammad Muzaffar Ḥossein Sabā, *Tadhkirah Rūz Rawshan*, (Razi Library Publication, 1343 Sh./1965), p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> Hūshang Thubūti (Houshang Sobooti), *Tomb Buildings in Zanjan Province* (Banāhāy-e Ārāmgāhī-e Ostān-e Zanjān), 1377 Sh. /1998), Vol. 1, pp. 54-56

<sup>11</sup> *Haft-Band Haftād Band* (ed. Sa'īd Hendī), Preface, page seventeen.





Figure 1. *Ḥassan Kāshī's Mausoleum*. This 16<sup>th</sup> century octagonal structure was built during the reign of the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-1576) in honor of the 14<sup>th</sup> century poet. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century another Persian monarch, Fath-‘Alī Shah (r. 1789-1934) of the Qajar dynasty, contributed to the interior decorations.<sup>12</sup>

## A Mystical Dream

It all began with a dream! After performing the Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, Kāshī visited Medina, and from there traveled to Najaf (in the modern Iraq) to pay respect to Imām ‘Alī’s shrine.<sup>13</sup> Upon visiting the tomb he composed and recited a *qaṣīdah* in praise of the Imām.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Image from <https://www.tripadvisor.in/> retrieved 7 August 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Shi’ites regard the shrine as the fourth holiest site, following the Ka’ba in Mecca, Prophet Muḥammad’s tomb in Medina, and the al-‘Aqṣā Mosque of Jerusalem in Palestine. The shrine was first built in 786 under ‘Abbāsids, expanded in 979-80 during Buyid dynasty, developed in 1086 by a Seljuk sultan, and facilities were added to it in 1267 and 1303 under Ilkhanate. In 1354, during the rule of the Jalayirid Sultanate the shrine was destroyed in a fire, but was rebuilt in 1358. Under the Safavid kings, major rebuilding and restoration of the shrine, addition of hospital, kitchen and other facilities, took place in different years – 1623, 1632, 1713 and 1716. Qajar dynasty contributed to the shrine’s development in the form of gilding of the dome and the minaret, restoring walls and courtyard, and adding architectural decorations in various phases in the years 1742, 1745 and 1791.

For a detailed account of the architectural features of Imām ‘Alī’s shrine see: *Najaf, The Gateway of Wisdom* (UNESCO, 2014), p. 32, pp. 73-81

<sup>14</sup> *Qaṣīdah* is a lengthy poem composed of a minimum of 35 couplets of equal

Following the event Kāshī has a vision of the Imām in his dream, addressing him pleasantly: “O Kāshī! You have traveled a long distance to visit us and have composed a sincere poem for us, for which you need to be rewarded.” In the dream there was a hint that directed Kāshī to Mas‘ūd ibn Aflah, a wealthy merchant from Basra who had devotional sincerity towards ‘Alī. Kāshī was advised to visit the man. The poet leaves Najaf for Basra immediately.

In Basra, upon finding the merchant, Kāshī discusses the strange dream with him. In the dream, there was also mention of a certain event in the merchant’s life that, according to him, was not known by anyone! Hearing about Kāshī’s mystical experience, Mas‘ūd ibn Aflah was moved and burst into tears. He rewarded Kāshī handsomely for his wonderful poetic contribution. Upon receiving the reward, Kāshī prepared a large feast and fed the poor people of Basra.<sup>15</sup> The story traveled fast, and in no time the news about the *Haft-Band*, Kāshī’s devotional poetry, was spread like bushfire.<sup>16</sup>

The *Haft-Band* inspired a number of poets during Kāshī’s lifetime, as well as those who lived after him, some of whom composed their own Haft-Bands. Mohtasham Kashani (1500-1588), the renowned poet of the Safavid era, was among the poets who received inspiration from Hassan Kāshī. At least thirteen Haft-Band compositions by thirteen different poets that followed Kāshī’s lead have been recorded.<sup>17</sup>

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weight (tempo/beats). The first two parts (hemistiches) of the first line are rhymed. In the remaining couplets, only the second hemistiches follow the rhyme of the first couplet. Qaṣīdah genre is typically adopted for praising or criticizing a certain individual.

<sup>15</sup> Amin Aḥmad Rāzi, *Tadhkira Haft Eqlīm*, Vol. II, (Tehran, Published by Moḥammad Reżā Ṭaherī (Hasrat), 1378 Sh. /1999), p. 231.

<sup>16</sup> Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirah al-Shu‘arā*, Edward Brow Press, Leiden, 1901. p. 297, quoted by Roqayyah Rasouli & others in “Hassan Kāshī”, *Dāneshnāme-ye Jahān-e Eslām* (Encyclopedia of the World of Islam), Vol. 13, (Tehran: Encyclopedia Islamica Foundation 2009) 353; See also Sa‘īd Hendī, Preface, page eleven.

<sup>17</sup> See Sa‘īd Hendī’s *Haft-Band Haftād-Band (The Seven-Band of the Seventy-Bands)*.

## From Praising Kings to Religious Devotion

Devotional poetry is a significant trait in Persian literature. Due to its appeal to the heart of the devoted, and the power of evoking religious emotions, this genre has gained widespread popularity. *Madh* (praise) was a common trend in poetry that was addressed mainly to kings and rulers. Kāshī was against the trend. His poems were entirely of devotional nature, praising the Prophet, his household, and the Imāms.<sup>18</sup> He never praised kings and rulers in the hope for monetary reward. Perhaps this is why he lived most of his life in poverty. The following couplets are proof of his awareness about the consequences of the path he had chosen, and that he willingly did it ‘to maintain his dignity.’

گرچه اندر شاعری همتا ندارم در زمین  
نیست اندر نامرادی نیز کس همتای من  
ور ز بی قوتی فرو ماندم، ز قوتِ پاک نیست  
قوتِ دل ها فزاید شعر جان افزای من  
آن توانگر همتم در دین که با افراط فقر  
ظاهر است از خلق عالم، فرط استغنائی من  
تا نریزد آبرویم پیش دونان بهر نان  
قفل خاموشی است دایم بر لبِ گویای من<sup>19</sup>

*In the arena of poetry, no one on earth equals me,  
In the realm of poverty too, none is as ill-fated as me!  
I may not have much to eat, yet have no lack of strength,  
The power of the hearts empowers my life-giving poetry!*

<sup>18</sup> Najib Mayel Heravi, “The Complete Text of Hassan Kashi’s *Haft-Band* in Praise of Ali, the Lord of the Righteous”, in *Majmū’eh Rasā’el Fārsi* (Collection of Persian Treatises), Book 5 (Tehran, Specialized Library of the History of Islam and Iran, 1374 Sh./1995), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Haft-Band Haftād Band* (ed. Sa’id Hendī), Preface, page thirteen.

*My faith is so strong that despite extreme poverty,  
I appear to the masses as being extremely wealthy!*

*Sealed are my chatting lips, with a permanent lock of silence,  
For a loaf of bread from the wicked, I won't spill my dignity!*<sup>20</sup>

In the first 15 couplet of his *Divan*, Kāshī speaks of his love and devotion for the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) and Imām 'Alī . He soon became famous for his devotional poems. In his *Divan* he describes, in a poetic manner, his love for the Prophet and 'Alī , and explains how this devotional love had saved him from going astray.

مرا که اول حالت بدان صفت بودم  
که از خجالت آن شرح نیستم به حضور  
شده به فرط معاصی چنان که گویی نیست  
مقام معصیت الا ز نفس من معمور....  
اگر نه مهر نبی بودی و ولای علی  
مرا خلاص که دادی از آن بلای شرور  
چنانکه پیشه پیشینیان شد اندر داد  
ندای آیت «توبوا الی الله...» از لب حور  
چه گفت؟ گفت به مدح علی گرای که نیست  
فزون از این به در عالم سعادت موفور<sup>21</sup>

*At first, a sense of disgrace had overwhelmed me,  
That I'm ashamed to express, at any degree!*

*Submerged in sinful deeds, I would feel as if,  
The Kingdom of Sins can't survive without me!*

<sup>20</sup> Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo.

<sup>21</sup> *Haft-Band Haftād Band* (ed. Sa'īd Hendī), Preface, page eight.

*Except for the love of the Prophet, and devotion to Ali,  
Who could have saved me from my sinister misery!?*

*Following the tradition of the forefathers, I listened –  
To a fairy who recited the “Repentance verse”<sup>22</sup> to me.*

*She said: “stay with the praise, for nothing in this world –  
Can bring a pleasure beyond that of the praise of Ali.”<sup>23</sup>*

The treatment of ‘Alī’s character in the *Haft-Band* is quite different than the known forms of praise. The typical praises of Alī usually involve his heroism in battlefields, his pious character, or his unique relation to the Prophet – his devoted friend, cousin, and son-in-law. His position as a political or religious leader – caliph or Imām – has also been mentioned. It is therefore important to learn that Alī’s character – as expressed in the *Haft-Band* – is none of the above. Kāshī’s introduction of Alī is not a historical one. While discussing about him, he uses such expressions that the general audience may feel he is referring to a transcendental entity of a cosmic scale! This line of thought may have some relevance to the term ‘Alī – one of the 99 names of Allah – that means Exalted, Sublime, or Eminent! Being the first person who embraced Islam, the first Shi’a Imām, and other highlights of Alī’s life, seem to be less remarkable in the *Haft-Band*.

In addition to the transcendental position, Kāshī’s view of Alī is also inclined towards Sufis who trace their lineage to him. It is believed that the esoteric wisdom that was carried by Prophet Muḥammad, was transmitted to Alī and through him it was handed over to Sufi orders.<sup>24</sup> Kāshī’s respect for Alī is rooted in the belief that he was a personification of perfection. Such a person, according to perennial cosmology, carries the essence of universal wisdom within, and in this sense the universe becomes an extension of him.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Reference to the Qur’an 11:90 (وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيمٌ وَدُودٌ): “And ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn towards Him in repentance, indeed my Lord is Merciful and Affectionate.”

<sup>23</sup> Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo.

<sup>24</sup> See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina 1975), p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> In many spiritual traditions, the existence of a ‘superior man’ is part of the general belief. In Indian tradition, for instance, this idealization appears in different names:

While any individual is a tiny part of the universe at the phenomenon level, a superior man represents eternal values of perfection. He stands on the confluence of heaven and earth, where the *axis-mundi* of the universe stands.<sup>26</sup> Reading through the *Haft-Band's* mystical poems, one can sense that the flow of thought behind the composition is of a transcendental nature, rather than a historical one.

### Seven Openings & Seven Closings

The *Haft-Band* has been initially appreciated for its significance as a work of poetic expression of devotion. Because of its subject matter and the concise volume of only 91 couplets – seven sections of 13 couplets each – the book soon became popular with scribes who used the poems to create beautiful calligraphic compositions.<sup>27</sup>

Beautiful manuscripts of the Haft-Band are preserved in various collections around the world.<sup>28</sup>

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“he is the *Arhat* (adept), Buddha (enlightened), *Jina* (conqueror), *Trithankara* (finder of the ford), the Bodhisattva (incarnation of the bestowing virtue), and above all Jivan-mukta (freed in this life).” See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New Delhi, 1982) p. 146.

<sup>26</sup> Amir H. Zekrgoo, “From Superman to Superior Man: Anthropology of Perfection in Traditional Cosmology,” *Kanz Philosophy*, A journal for Philosophy, Mysticism and Religious Studies, I (2), August-December (Jakarta: Sadra International Institute in Affiliation with Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS)- PARAMADINA, 2011), pp. 51-75.

<sup>27</sup> A few calligraphic specimens have been introduced in Ehsanullah Shokrollahi Taleqani, “Hasht Behesht az Haft-Band-e Kāshī: Muraqqa‘ Hasht Qit‘ah Chalipa-ye Nasta‘liq Mansūb be Fath‘ali Shirazi,” (Eight Paradises from the Haft-Band of Kashi: Eight Pieces in Nasta‘liq Chalipa composition attributed to Fath‘ali Shirazi), *Payām-e Bahārestān*, No. 1&2, Autumn and Winter (Tehran, 1387 Sh./2008), pp. 311-328.

<sup>28</sup> In the consulted sources I have come across mention of three manuscripts and calligraphic specimens from the Library of the Islamic Parliament, Tehran, listed with Accession Numbers 7594, 4992, and 9467-69 in *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Library of the Islamic Parliament*, Vol 14, pp. 283-284; and Vol. 26, pp. 94-95. Also, *Divan-e Hassan Kashi* (Sayyed Abbas Rastakhiz ed.), (Tehran: Library, Museum and the Centre of Archives of the Islamic Parliament, 1388 Sh. 2009) 17-18. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery is custodian to an exquisite 16<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of *Haft-Band*. A facsimile edition of a beautiful 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscript with an introduction by Arif Nawshahi, (Makhad: Maulana Muḥammad ‘Ali Makhadi Library, 2022).

The pioneering status of the *Haft-Band* in the category of Persian devotional poetry on the one hand, and the aesthetic charm of the manuscripts and individual calligraphic specimens on the other hand, have left little space for a technical study of its poetic composition – a subject that deserves due attention. In this passage I shall refer to a couple of points that fascinated me!

As stated earlier, each of the seven sections of the *Haft-Band* include 13 rhymed couplets – each couplet comprising two hemistiches. The two hemistiches of the first line, as well as the second hemistiches of the following couplets follow the same rhyming pattern; this is only until couplet number 12. In other words, the first 12 lines of the 13 lines of each ‘band’ display the structure of a ghazal composition; a ghazal usually consists of not less than five couplets and not more than 15. The couplets follow the same rhyming pattern and the same meter. The last couplet (line number 13) in terms of rhyming is an independent version of couplet number 1. Figure 2 provides a schematic presentation of rhyming pattern of the Haft-Band. (See figure 2)

1. ----- boom	----- boom
2. ----- deam	----- boom
3. ----- tiss	----- boom
4. ----- kal	----- boom
5. ----- shas	----- boom
6. ----- zoop	----- boom
7. ----- rish	----- boom
8. ----- lat	----- boom
9. ----- pun	----- boom
10. ----- chal	----- boom
11. ----- vach	----- boom
12. ----- lood	----- boom
13. ----- wees	----- wees

*Figure 2. Schematic Display of the Rhyming Pattern of 13 couplets within each section of the Haft-Band*

Another point is that each of the seven sections has a different rhyming pattern. So, we have seven opening, and closing couplets that each have their own independent rhymes. This gives us a total of 14 independently rhymed couplets.

Now, I did an interesting experiment with these formalistically independent couplets, which led to fascinating results. This experiment involved a ‘deconstruction’ and a ‘reconstruction.’ I separated all the first couplets from their relevant passages, grouped them together, and rearranged them in the same order of progression in the *Haft-Band*, i.e. placing the couplet from the first *band* on the top and the one from the last *band* on the bottom. The result is a seven-couplet poem in Mathnawi style.<sup>29</sup> Now what is remarkable is that the new arrangement works cohesively. It would appear as if the poet had initially composed the seven couplets together, and the reader will feel a perfectly sound progression of the subject. What follows is the reconstruction of the first lines from the seven sections of the *Haft-Band*.

السلام ای سایه ات خورشید رب العالمین  
 آسمان عز و تمکین، آفتاب داد و دین  
 ای به غیر از مصطفی نابوده همتای تو کس  
 بسته بر مهر تو ایزد مهر حور العین و بس  
 ای سپهر عصمت از فر تو زیور یافته  
 آفتاب از سایه ی چتر تو افسر یافته  
 ای معظم کعبه ی اصل از بیان مصطفی  
 قبله ی دنیا و دین، جان و جهان مصطفی  
 ای ستوده مر خدایت یا امیر المومنین  
 خوانده نفس مصطفایت یا امیرالمومنین

<sup>29</sup> In Mathnawi style of poetry, the two hemistiches within every couplet are rhymed and have the same meter. The various couplets within a Mathnawi composition follow the same meter, but in terms of rhyming they function independently.



ای که فرمان قضا موقوف فرمان شماست  
دورِ دورانِ فلک دوری ز دوران شماست  
تا نجف شد آفتاب دین و دولت را مقام  
خاک او دارد شرف بر زمزم بیت الحرام

*Your shadow is the bright sun of the Lord of all realms – I salute you!*

*You're the sky of honor and obedience, the sun of justice and faith – I salute you!*

*Except for the holy Prophet, none has been equal to you,  
The Lord has tied the love of the Ḥūr al-'Ayn, only to you!*

*The vast heaven of purity owes its majesty to your serenity,  
Your canopy's shadow gave the sun its crown of beauty.*

*'You are the origin of the exalted Ka'ba,' announced Mustafa!<sup>30</sup>  
Focal point of world and faith - the soul and the world of Mustafa.*

*The Lord has Himself praised you, O 'king of the faithful',  
He called you 'the soul of Mustafa', O 'king of the faithful'*

*Your command can alter the mandate of destiny,  
Each cycle of revolving heavens is a spin of your destiny.*

*Najaf<sup>31</sup> has become the shining sun of the faith and state,  
Its dust is as noble as Zam-Zam of al-Ḥarām Bait<sup>32</sup>*

The same experiment was done with the ending couplets of the seven sections, with similar results.

<sup>30</sup> Reference to 'Ali's birth place inside the Ka'ba sanctuary.

<sup>31</sup> Reference to Imam 'Ali's mausoleum in the city of Najaf, Iraq.

<sup>32</sup> Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo.

آن که مداحش خدا، همدم رسول الله بود  
 گر کسی همتاش باشد<sup>33</sup>، هم رسول الله بود  
 صورتی گردد مجسم فتح، گوید آشکار:  
 لا فتی الا علی، لا سیف الا ذو الفقار  
 گر نبودی ذات پاکت آفرینش را سبب  
 تا ابد حوا سترون بودی و آدم عزب  
 روی رحمت بر متاب ای کام جان از روی من  
 حرمتِ جانِ پیمبر،<sup>34</sup> یک نظر کن سوی من  
 فهم<sup>35</sup> انسانی چه داند رتبه ی کار<sup>36</sup> تو را؟  
 کافرینش بر نتابد بارِ مقدار<sup>37</sup> تو را  
 درد، پنهان پیش درمان چند بتوان داشتن؟  
 عاقلی نبود زِ درمان، درد پنهان داشتن  
 زائرانِ حضرتت را بر در خلد برین  
 می رسد آوازِ طِبُّمُ فَدْخَلُواها خالدين

*Praised by God, and the intimate friend of His Prophet,  
 The person who matches him, would be none but the Prophet.  
 If victory had a body, it would announce loud and far,  
 "There's no brave man like 'Alī, and no sword like Zulfīqār."*

<sup>33</sup> Slight variation of recording (همتاش جويد) in another manuscript. See Sa'īd Hendī, p. 2

<sup>34</sup> Slight variation of recording (حرمت جان محمد را) in another manuscript. See Sa'īd Hendī, p. 4

<sup>35</sup> Slight variation of recording (عقل) in another manuscript. See Sa'īd Hendī, p. 5

<sup>36</sup> Slight variation of recording (عزت بار or قیمت کار) in another manuscript. See Sa'īd Hendī, p. 5

<sup>37</sup> Slight variation of recording (قدر مقدار) in another manuscript. See Sa'īd Hendī, p. 5

*If it weren't for your pure essence, in the stream of creation –  
Adam had remained impotent, and Eve would stay barren.*

*O my soul's desire! Turn not away your kind face,  
For the sake of Prophet's soul, share a glimpse of your gaze.*

*How could human intellect grasp the greatness of your work?  
When the entire creation can't bear the gravity of such work!*

*When remedy is available, how can one hide the pain?  
From the cure, a wise man will never hide his pain.*

*When your pilgrims arrive at the gate of the eternal heaven,  
They'll hear: "Enter! In here you shall forever remain." <sup>38</sup>*

### About the Manuscript

In 2013, I spent some two months in Melbourne to conduct a research on the Middle Eastern manuscript collection, preserved in the Baillieu Library.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of this visit was taking the research one step further, by preparing a basic catalogue of the Persian manuscripts in the collection, which was accomplished.<sup>40</sup> (Figure 3) During this period a few charming manuscripts caught my eyes; and among them was an illuminated manuscript of Kāshī's *Haft-band*. I undertook a detailed study of the manuscript, the outcome of which was a joint effort for a presentation at a Symposium in Melbourne in 2018.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo.

<sup>39</sup> The travel was facilitated by the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC), under the University of Melbourne's MacGeorge Fellowship program.

<sup>40</sup> A group of researchers approached the study of the manuscripts from different disciplines. While I was focusing on the codicological aspects of the manuscripts, Dr. Mandana Barkeshli, a conservation scientist, focused on the material technology by analyzing pigments and dyes. Dr. Sadra Zekrgoo, who was then a Phd candidate working on Persian inks, assisted both of us while having his eyes mainly on the inks.

<sup>41</sup> The Symposium "From Melancholy to Euphoria: The Materialisation of Emotion in the Middle Eastern Manuscripts" was co-organized with The Centre for Cultural Material Conservation (CCMC), of the University of Melbourne on 27-28 June 2018. The presentation was jointly prepared with Dr. Leyla H. Tajer.

This fine 19th century manuscript is kept under accession number MUL 78. The first 2 opposite pages carry the most decoration. By using gold in a free moving manner following the negative spaces between the couplets, cloud-shaped spaces were created to accommodate each hemistich. The opening page of the manuscript is the most decorated one. It is adorned with a beautiful *sarlowh* (headpiece) – the ornamentation on top of the page. (Figure 3, 4 and 5)



*Figure 3. The author studying Kashi's Haft-Band manuscript. Centre for Cultural Material Conservation (CCMC), University of Melbourne, 2013*

The main body of the manuscript is composed within 12 pages, beige in color. The text area of each page is framed with 5 delicate border lines in gold, black, red, and blue. Pages are gold sprinkled throughout the manuscript. Each page is set to carry an average of 9 couplets of two hemistiches each, arranged in two columns. The opening page (*iftitāh*) is attractively decorated with a colorful *sarlowh* with intricate designs. At the center of the *sarlowh* is a gold elongated escutcheon that was meant for the book title. On either side are placed two eight-pointed stars – a widely used decorative pattern in Islamic art and architecture. At the center of each star a green

*toranj* motif with an orange outline can be seen. The stars, which have gold as their background, have been decorated with floral designs. The opposite pages at the beginning of the book display a beautiful layout luxuriously painted with gold, lapis-lazuli, cinnabar, green and white. (Figures 4 & 5).



Figure 4. The main sarlowh is framed with a gold border decorated with a geometric pattern drawn in fine black lines. A faded reddish line defines the edges of the sarlowh and the frame around it, as well as the outlines of the escutcheon and the pair of eight-pointed stars.



Figure 5: The opening pages of the manuscript

As mentioned, each of the seven sections of the Haft-Band is separated by an independent couplet of different rhyming that concludes the respective section. These appear on pages 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 11. They are penned in red, surrounded the cloud-shaped outlines against gold background. (Figure 6.)

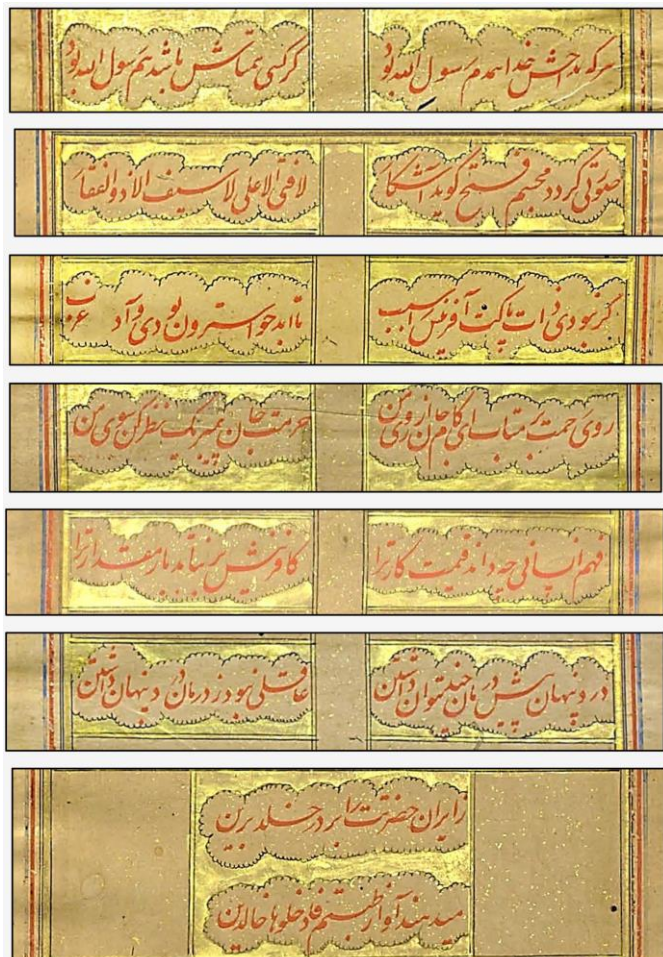


Figure 6. The seven concluding couplets of each section are penned in red ink, surrounded by cloud-shaped outlines against gold background. They appear on pages 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 11.



In this manuscript, like most old Persian manuscripts, a traditional system of pagination known as *rekābeh* (رکابه), referred to in English as “catch word”, is adopted to maintain the order of pages. (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Each page's text area is framed with five delicate border lines in gold, black, blue and red. The background of the text area throughout the manuscript is gold-sprinkled.

*Rekābeh* system is adopted for pagination: the first word(s) of the first line of the left-hand page is recorded on the bottom left-hand corner of the right-hand page's margin.

### A Stunning Ending

The actual text of the manuscript ends in the middle of the 11th page, the colophon, that records the name of the scribe and the date of its completion. Interestingly the calligrapher has added a personal touch to this section. He has proudly recorded his age of 95, complemented with a ‘prayer for the writer, the reader, and those who view’ the attractive volume. (Figure 8).

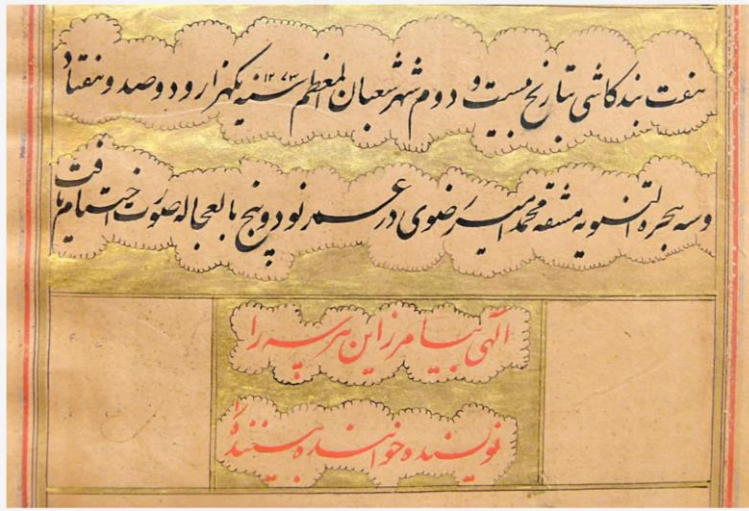


Figure 8: The colophon, page 11, indicates that the manuscript was penned by 'Mohammad Amir Rizvi' at the age of 95, on the 2nd of Sha'ban 1273 AH (27 March 1857). A couplet of prayer in red ink follows:

الهی بیامرز این هر سه را  
نویسنده، خواننده، بیننده را

*O-God! Please bless all the three  
The writer, the reader, and those who see*

There is yet an additional page to the manuscript (page 12) that is very eye-catching and different! Highly gilded and aesthetically appealing, this page stands out in every respect. Page 12, together with the second half of page 11 (the colophon) open a window to the scribe's mindset and aesthetic taste. The informal and very personal visual composition and layout are very different than the other pages. Choice of couplets, selected divine names that are complemented by humble attributes with whom the scribe introduces himself, gives the page an altogether independent identity. A study of form and content of this page can help us establish a more direct connection with the aged artist. For this purpose, I felt it would be justified to allocate a detailed assessment of page 12. (Figure 9)





**Figure 9:** Page 12, the last page of the manuscript, has the most creative composition. It contains five couplets (10 hemistiches) by the poet Sa'di, organized in a charming organic manner. Texts are mostly displayed diagonally within cloud-shaped outlines, against a shiny gilded background. Name of scribe, his age of 95, and date (1273 AH. /1857) appears on the lower left-hand corner.

The poems that are gathered in this page are unrelated to Kāshī's Haft-Band. They are couplets composed by the renowned Iranian poet, Sa'di Shirazi (1291), a contemporary of Ḥassan Kāshī. The following verses that are recorded in page 12, were carefully handpicked by the scribe from Sa'di's *Būstān*. They carrying valuable words of wisdom:

ز خدمت مکن یک زمان غافل	الا گر طلبکار اهل دلی
که روزی همایت افتد به دام <sup>42</sup>	خورش ده به گنجشک و کبک و حمام
امید است روزی که صیدی زنی <sup>43</sup>	چو هر گوشه تیر نیاز افکنی
بکار آیدت گر شوی سودمند <sup>44</sup>	سخن های سعدی مثال است و پند
کزین روی دولت توان یافتن <sup>46</sup>	دریغ است از او روی بر تافتن <sup>45</sup>

*The company of the pure-hearted if you seek,*

*Waste not a moment to serve the weak.*

*Sparrows, partridges and pigeons – you must feed,*

*Then Homā<sup>47</sup> will serve you when you're in need.*

*Shoot from every corner, an arrow of desire,*

*And one day you'll hit your prey of desire.*

*The sayings of Sa'di are mandates of advice,*

*They'll benefit you when you follow them precise.*

*You'll be regretful; turn not your face away!*

*This path will lead you to glory one day.<sup>48</sup>*

<sup>42</sup> The four couplets are the concluding verses of *Būstān*, Chapter 2: Section 24

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, Chapter 2, Section 27. An edited version that I have consulted, has recorded the second hemistich slightly different: بکار آیدت گر شوی کاربند

<sup>45</sup> An edited version that I have consulted, has recorded this hemistich slightly different: دریغ است ازین روی بر تافتن

<sup>46</sup> The four couplets are the concluding verses of *Būstān*, Chapter 2, Section 27.

<sup>47</sup> Homā (هما) is the name of a mythical bird of fortune in ancient Iranian tales. Homa is said to live its entire life flying invisibly above the earth, never touching the ground. Sufis have used Homā symbolically for the spirit that belongs to the realm of heavens. See Inayat Khan, *Mysticism of Music, Sound and Word* (1923). Online version at [https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/II/II\\_8.htm](https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/II/II_8.htm), accessed 29 Aug. 2022.

The five couplets are arranged in a somewhat spontaneous and creative, yet well-balanced setting that is very different from the formal layout composition of the other pages. Figure 10 provides a schematic layout composition of page 12, plus some explanatory remarks.

Three distinct poems are featured here. Each poem begins with a devotional expression (Divine name/attribute) that is placed on the top of the couplet. The three divine attributes are carefully arranged in a column (visually unrecognizable at first glance) on the right-hand-side, close to the edge of the text block.

On the opposite side, on the left-hand-edge of the text block, below the three poems, three humble expressions, associated with the calligrapher, are arranged. The contrast between sublime attributes of the Almighty on the one hand (right side of the page), and the feeble features of the aged calligrapher on the other hand (left side of the page) are intentional and intelligent artistic choice made by the 95-year-old Mohammad Amir Rizvi. Moreover, he has arranged the opposite attributes in such a manner that the three divine names on the right are stationed a level above their counterparts on the left.

Two out of the three poems – on the top and the at the middle of the page – each comprise two couplets or four hemistiches. Three hemistiches are composed diagonally in *Chalīpā* setting,<sup>49</sup> while the last hemistich is set horizontally. The poem on the bottom has only one couplet of two hemistiches composed diagonally; yet the calligrapher has treated his signature compositionally as a third hemistich, to get the same 3-diagonal-line composition as the above couplets. Page 12 also acts as a second colophon. One more time it records the name and age of the scribe, in addition to the date. It reads:

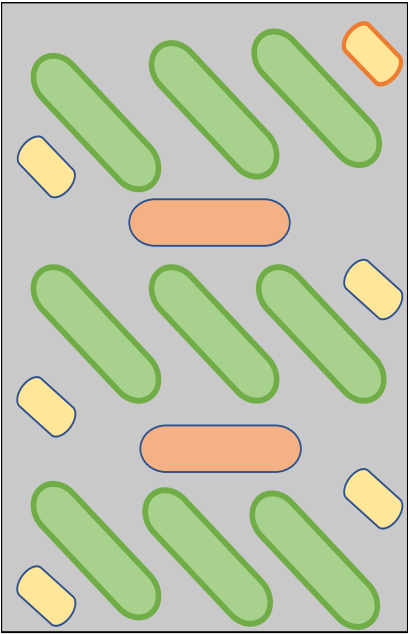
*Penned by this poor servant (of God) Muḥammad Amir, may he be forgiven, 1273 AH, at the age of ninety-five.*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo.

<sup>49</sup> The Persian term *Chalīpā* (چلیپا) literally means ‘cross’. In Nasta’liq style of calligraphy, *chalipa* refers to a diagonal composition of hemistiches of a poem. Poems composed in *chalipa* setting are of moral, spiritual, or mystical nature, and are usually limited to 2 to three couplets – 4 to 6 hemistiches in a single composition.

<sup>50</sup> I find the scribe’s boasting about his old age both interesting and justifiable.



There is a strong logic and calculated geometric structure beneath the wavy appearance of page 12.

3 diagonal hemistiches within couplets (of 4 hemistiches) are marked in green. The 4th one that is set horizontally appears in orange. The last couplet (lowest green row) contains only 2 hemistiches. The calligrapher has added a sentence of the same length as a hemistich, to balance the composition. This extra line contains the scribe's name and the year of completion.

3 yellow boxes on the right indicate the location of divine names/ attributes.

3 yellow boxes on the left contain the humble expressions of the scribe about himself. (See table below for text and meaning.)

Yellow Boxes on Left	Yellow Boxes on Right
<i>In old age</i> = در پیری	الله اکبر = God is Great
<i>And in weakness</i> = و ناتوانی	هو العزیز = HE is Most Honored
<i>In the age of 95</i> = در عمر نود و پنج	هو الغفور = HE is the All-Forgiving

Figure 10: Schematic Layout Composition of Page 12.

### Appreciation

This research could not have been completed without the kind support of a few fellow scholars to whom I owe my sincere vote of appreciation. A special vote of thanks goes to Dr. Leyla H. Tajer who

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Being a calligrapher myself, I must admit that at the age of 65 my writing hand is no longer functioning as it did. I can only imagine what the condition of my hand will be thirty years from now – that is IF I'll be around then!

provided her sincere help and support at the initial stage of this research. Dr. Fariba Afkari provided me with copies of *Haft-Band Haftad Band and Haft-Bande-e Kāshī*. Dr. Ehsanollah Shokrollahi was kind and supportive by making available his valuable paper and introducing a recent facsimile edition of another manuscript of the Haft-Band. Dr. Sadra Zekrgoo went through the final draft of the article and made some editorial remarks for which I am thankful. Finally, I should also express my gratitude to Professor Robyn Joyce Sloggett and the staff of CCMC, the University of Melbourne, for extending their kind assistance during my number of visits.

## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

### CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	‘	‘	‘	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ř	ل	l	l	l
پ	—	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n
ٹ	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h <sup>1</sup>
ث	th	th	th	ص	ş	ş	ş	و	w	v/u	v
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḍ	ḍ	ḍ	ی	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	-a <sup>2</sup>
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al <sup>3</sup>	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	<sup>1</sup> – when not final <sup>2</sup> – at in construct state <sup>3</sup> – (article) al - or l-			
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh				
ڈ	—	—	—	ف	f	f	f				
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	q				
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	k			

### VOWELS

		Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iiy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	iiy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uv	uvv
		uvv (for Persian)		
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	au	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a	a or e
	u	u	u	u or ū
	ی	i	i	o or ö
	ی	i	i	ī

### URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. چھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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WoS-Indexed under Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Current Contents/Arts and Humanities and Scopus

ISSN 1394-6870



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