



HAŠT BEHEŠT (2)

HAŠT BEHEŠT (lit: “the Eight Heavens, the Eight paradises”), a cosmological concept used on several occasions as the title of literary works, or as the name of a particular architectural form in Persian, Turkish, and Indian contexts.

The metaphorical use of this image appears early in New Persian poetry, as shown by some verses of Kāqāni Šarvāni/Šervāni, who mentions the image of the *Hašt behešt* as well as those of the *Hašt bāg*, the *Hašt kold*, and the *Hašt manzar*, which are similar (Kāqāni, p. 52; Khan, pp. 109-10). The first person who used this concept as a title for a literary work, and consequently as a frame for it, was Amir Kōsrow Dehlavi, who wrote his *Hašt behešt* (701/1301) in response to Neẓāmi Ganjavi’s *Haft peykar* (Şafā, *Adabiyāt* III, p. 778). This cosmological concept is closely connected to Islamic eschatology, in which paradise is conceived as having eight gates and eight spaces, each one decorated with a special precious stone or material. The description of paradise was further elaborated by the philosophers and Sufis who considered the eighth paradise to be the highest garden, that is, the Garden of Eden (Asín Palacios, p. 231; Qorṭobi, p. 455; Aš’ari, pp. 91-93). Amir Kōsrow’s description, however, refers also to an architectural typology, presumably still existing in the Sasanian period (Huff, p. 52) and, more generally, to the Av. *Vahišta*- (Mid. Pers. *wahišt*) represented in the eschatological Mazdean tradition as a building richly decorated by precious stones and linked to an astrological concept, where the eight planets correspond to the eight heavens (Söder-blom, pp. 98-100, 128-29). The description of a palace in the *Hašt behešt* of Amir Kōsrow (the eighth paradise, p. 286, vv. 2933-942), with four pavilions on the cardinal



points around an octagonal basin in a luxuriant garden, represents the clearest literary reconstruction of this model in Persian literature. Angelo M. Piemontese (1996, introd. to Amir Ƙosrow, pp. 161-64) noted that the building conceived by Amir Ƙosrow for the “therapy” of Bahrām was a reflection of the paradise on the earth, where the four earthly paradises, added to the four heavenly ones, make eight. As well as in Muslim eschatological tradition, Piemontese also found the origins of this kind of numerical models in a Christian symbolism linked to the concept of salvation; it reflects classic mathematics, in which the number seven was the first complete one and eight the first one that was “solid and plain,” “corporeal,” that is, three-dimensional (23; see the *Ogdoade*, in Valla, III, chap. XVIII, fol. 8r, and Quacquarelli; for architectural implications, see also Dölger).

The reference to the *Hašt behešt* reappears later in the Ottoman literature. The author of the earliest biographical dictionary (*taḏkera*) written under the Ottomans, the poet Sehi Beg, arranged his work in eight chapters, naming each one a *Behešt*. The title of his work, *Hašt behešt* (comp. 945/1538-39), was certainly taken after the Timurid and early Safavid models, such as the *Hašt behešt* of Ḥakim Šāh Moḥammad b. Mobārak Qazvini (927/1520-21), which is a Persian translation of ‘Ali-Šir Na-vā’i’s *Majāles al-nafā’es* (Riāḥi, pp. 171-72). Another book called *Hašt behešt* (comp. 908/1503) is the historical chronicle of [Ḥakim-al-Din Edris Bedlisi](#), arranged in eight chapters, each one devoted to the reign of one Ottoman sultan from ‘Oṭmān I to Bāyazid II.

As an architectural form, scholars use this term to refer to a particular kind of building, several of which date from the 15th century. The earliest examples, generally built in gardens, are identified in the Timurid period. Even without a direct evidence of a Timurid *Hašt behešt*, scholars, using both Western and Eastern sources, have identified pavilions such as the lost *Ṭarab-kāna* in the Bāḡ-e Safid at Herāt as a model for later such edifices (*Bābor-nāma*, tr. Beveridge, p. 302; Pope and Ackerman, p. 1148; Golombek, p. 47; Golombek and Wilber, I, p. 177). The best-known *Hašt behešt* of this period is the one built in Tabriz during the Aq Qoyunlu rule. According to the Italian author of the *Viaggio di un mercante*, pp. 447-51; tr. pp. 173-75), who called it “Astibisti” (see also Woods, p. 137 and pp. 272-73, n. 53), it was built by Uzun Ḥasan around 1460 in the middle of the ‘Ešratābād garden. The building was then completed by his son Ya‘qub in 892/1486. *Hašt Behešt* was overtaken by the Ottoman troops when Solaymān the Magnificent occupied the city, but he prevented them from destroying it (Kirzioglu, pp. 186-87). The same building



was reproduced by Nāṣuḥ-al-Şelāḥ Maṭrāqçı in a miniature (fol. 28a). The octagonal palace, with an interior cruciform plan, was built in the middle of a vast enclosed area on a marble terrace, where there was a water channel with great dragons spouting water at each of its corners (Go-lombek, I, pp. 178-79). In 993/1585, it was converted into a fortress after a further Ottoman occupation (Bedlisi, II, 275). This model was adopted by the Ottomans for the building of the *Çinili köşk* in Istanbul, using craftsmen from Khorasan (Necipoglu, pp. 213-17). Following Khorasan models (Zayn Kān, 160), Zāhir-al-Din Bābor built a garden in Agra called *Hašt behešt*, also known as *Čahār bāḡ* (see [ČAHĀR BĀḡ](#); [GARDENS](#)).

Evidence of the use of this term in the first Mughal period is given by K̄vāndamir (who uses the synonym *Hašt jannat*) in his *Qānun-e homāyun* (pp. 52-53). In the Mughal Empire, the diffusion of the *Hašt behešt* typology, especially for funerary architecture, was widespread and coincided with the diffusion of the so-called *Moṭamman baḡdādi* “*Baḡdādi* octagon” (i.e., the irregular octagon) for the building of several mausoleums, as in the tomb of Homāyun that was built by Akbar between 970-98/1562-71, where a *Hašt behešt* structure is inscribed in a *Mo-ṭamman baḡdādi*. Analogous typologies were used for the tomb of Anārkalī at Lahore (1024/1615) and for the Tāj Maḡal (1041-52/1632-43; Jairazbhoy, p. 72; Golombek; Koch, 1991, p. 45).

In Persia, the typology of the *Hašt behešt* is attested to by a famous building constructed in Isfahan during the reign of Shah Solaymān in 1080/1669-70 (see chronograms in Naşrābādi, pp. 487-90). This pavilion, erected in the Bāḡ-e bolbol, represents one of the main pieces of evidence for this typology, especially for its well preserved tile decoration cycle. Described by Jean Chardin (III, pp. 182-83) and studied by various scholars (Godard, pp. 147-48; Pope, III, p. 1196; Ferrante; Lushey-Schmeisser), the *Hašt behešt* of Isfahan is built on a slightly octagonal plan, with two main entrances on the east and west sides. An octagonal central hall is surrounded by four octagonal chamber on two floors, making a total of eight rooms hence the *Hašt behešt*.

Although specific research on the tile decoration has not found a coherent thematic relation with paradise, it is evident that all the ceramic decoration reflects in its totality a main decorative program. Nevertheless, specific paradisiacal themes were individuated by Lushey-Schmeisser (pp. 149-74), who defined a clear symbolic function in some zoomorphic and anthropomorphic scenes, tracing the history of this tradition from an earlier period. The *Hašt behešt* of Isfahan seems to represent the last piece of evidence



for this type of building, in which the relation between literary tradition and architectural concepts is clearly attested to.

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