



## QODSI MAŠHADI

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**QODSI MAŠHADI**, ḤĀJĪ MOḤAMMAD JĀN (b. Mashad, ca. 1582; d. Lahore, 1646), Persian poet of the first half of the 17th century. The earliest biographical notices depict Qodsi as a prosperous and prominent community leader in Mashad, the city of his birth (*Karvān-e Hend* II, p. 1096). By his mid-thirties, he had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and had come to be regarded as the leading grocer in the city. His cordial relations with local civic authorities led to his appointment as the treasurer of the shrine of Imam Reżā (*Mey-kāna*, pp. 821-22). Qodsi's piety is evident in more than forty long praise poems (*qaṣidas* and *tarkib-bands*) that he dedicated to the eighth Imam, but the administrative appointment proved a dubious honor; in one poem, he complains that "this year's income does not equal last year's unpaid expenses," resulting in a cash shortage that made it impossible to manage the daily finances of the vast shrine complex (*Divān*, p. 111). During this time, Qodsi was also gaining a reputation for his literary talent; his work eventually attracted the attention of the most powerful literary patron in Khorasan, Ḥasan Khan Šāmlu, whose court in Herat was graced by such native poets as [Faṣiḥi](#) (d. 1639-40), and Nāẓem (d. ca. 1670). At the request of Ḥasan Khan, Qodsi assembled his collected works (*divān*) and delivered them to Herat in person. But this honor, too, came at a cost: during his absence from Mashad, Qodsi's son, Moḥammad-Bāqer, died at the age of twenty.

After years of frustrating service at the shrine, the death of his son finally led Qodsi to carry out a decision he had long contemplated. In 1632, at the age of fifty, he left Mashad and followed the well-trodden path from Iran to the



wealth and opulence of Mughal India. He was warmly received at the imperial court and almost immediately became one of the elite members of Šāh Jahān's cultural entourage, holding a position second only to the poet laureate, Kalim of Kāšān (q.v., d. 1651). Qodsi's principal duty at the court was to write a versified history of Šāh Jahān's reign on the model of Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*, and he was called on to commemorate various royal celebrations. On the occasion of the installation of the famous Peacock Throne in 1635, for example, Qodsi composed a dedicatory chronogram that was cast in glazed tile and inserted inside the throne canopy (*Divān*, pp. 812-15; Rāšedi, III, pp. 1233-36). For his labors, the poet enjoyed Šāh Jahān's often ostentatious largesse and is said to have been awarded his own weight in gold (Rāšedi, III, p. 1237). Qodsi traveled with the court on its frequent excursions throughout the kingdom, most notably to the royal gardens in Kashmir. Returning to India from one of these journeys, Qodsi succumbed to dysentery and died in Lahore in May 1646. His colleague at Šāh Jahān's court, Kalim of Kāšān, mourned the passing of this "sultan of poetry" in a moving and generous elegy (*Divān-e Kalim*, pp. 86-90).

Containing some 7000 rhymed couplets, *Zafar-nāma-ye Šāh Jahān* is a verse chronicle covering the first fourteen years of Šāh Jahān's reign and is by far Qodsi's longest work. It has received, perhaps deservedly, little critical attention, but final judgment of its value must await a fuller understanding of the long and widespread tradition of writing the history of contemporary rulers in the epic mode (*šāh-nāma-nevisi*). Qodsi's shorter poems in the mathnawi (*maṭnawī*) form, however, are considered to be among his finest work. These are also products of his service to the Mughal emperor and include a number of dedicatory poems on luxury objects: in addition to the verses written for the Peacock Throne, we find descriptions of a jewel-encrusted bookbinding, and the newly constructed royal bedchamber. Qodsi wrote several topographical poems as well, the most famous of which is his description of the journey to Kashmir, a theme that was treated by almost all the poets of Šāh Jahān's court, including Kalim of Kāšān, and Salim of Tehran (d. 1647). Qodsi's *sāqi-nāma* (wine-server's song) is thematically heterogeneous, but consists largely of descriptive passages linked by panegyrics to Šāh Jahān.

These shorter mathnawis are collected together with Qodsi's poems in other genres to make up a substantial *divān*. Qodsi devoted relatively little creative energy to the preeminent genre of the age, the lyric ghazal (*ghazal*). Like other



poets of the period, Qodsi responded to ghazals by recent predecessors such as [Bābā Faḡāni](#), [‘Orfi of Shiraz](#) (d. 1591), [Naḡiri of Nišāpur](#) (q.v., d. 1612-14), and [Ṭāleb of Āmol](#) (d. 1626-27), but his work in this genre shows little of the innovative inspiration found in the work of his contemporaries [Kalim](#) or [Salim](#). Qodsi concentrated instead on the longer ode *qasida* (*qaṣida*). He dedicated a few of these poems to temporal rulers—[Manučehr Khan](#), the chief magistrate of Mashad, [Ḥasan Khan Šāmlu](#), the governor of Khorasan, and [Šāh Jahān](#)—but most are devoted to the Shi‘ite imams, and above all, [Imam Reżā](#). During his long service at the shrine, Qodsi appealed to the Imam whenever he faced hardship or uncertainty, and his *qasidas* thus contain long autobiographical passages that trace his long and agonizing decision to leave the city of his birth. His stanzaic poems (*tarkib-* and *tarji‘-band*) generally have a similar thematic content, but also include two elegies on the death of his son and another *sāqi-nāma*.

Qodsi is generally considered a practitioner of the conceptualist “fresh style” (*šiva-ye tāza*, see Losensky, pp. 195-207) that was coming to dominate Persian poetry in the 17th century. One of Qodsi’s *qasidas* (*Divān*, pp. 89-92) became the site of an important critical battle between classicists and modernists. A contemporary poet of Indian origin, [Šeydā of Faḡpur](#) (d. 1632-33), registered his objections to Qodsi’s language and rhetoric in a poem using the same meter and rhyme scheme as Qodsi’s *qasida*; this inspired a similar poem by [Monir of Lahore](#) (d. 1644), in which he evaluated both Qodsi’s poem and [Šeydā’s](#) criticisms. A century later, [‘Ali Khan Ārzu](#) (d. 1756), included all three poems with his own prose commentary in *Dād-e soḡan*, ‘The equitable judgment of poetry.’ This work not only provides one of the most extensive examples of “practical criticism” in Persian from the early modern period, but also foreshadows the controversy that dogs the “fresh style” even today. In retrospect, however, Qodsi’s departures from classical standards seem mild. As [Ḍakāwati Qarāgozlu](#) remarks, his work shows “few signs of the power and conceptual flights” (p. 151) of poets such as [Kalim](#) or [Šā‘eb of Tabriz](#) (q.v., d. 1676), and modern readers are likely to be drawn to Qodsi’s work mostly for its portrayal of social life and material culture in the Persianate world of the baroque period.



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