



‘ABD-AL-KARĪM K̲VĀRAZMĪ

‘**ABD-AL-KARĪM** B. ‘**ABD-AL-RAḤMĀN K̲VĀRAZMĪ**, a poet and calligrapher living in western Iran during the late 9th/15th century ([Plate III](#)). He is usually mentioned in relation to his brother, ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm, or his father, ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān. Various authors, including Sām Mīrzā, Qāzī Aḥmad, and Ḥakīm Shah Moḥammad Qazvīnī, speak of the great similarity between the handwriting of the two brothers. M. Bayānī has suggested that the calligraphic style of the brothers derives from that of their father and presumed teacher. Despite this similarity, the brothers’ personalities and lives appear to have been quite different. The well-known attachment of the Āq Qoyonlū ruler, Sultan Ya‘qūb (883-96/1478-90), to ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm suggests that he was a pleasant companion in addition to being a skilled calligrapher, but his brother appears to have been less well suited for court life. In his biographical sketch of ‘Abd-al-Karīm, Sām Mīrzā mentions ‘Abd-al-Karīm’s disdain for wealth and also stresses an element of mental instability in his personality which led him to adopt unusual epithets as pen names (*taḳallos*). Sometime he signed works as Pādešāh (“Sovereign”), Kōdā (“God”), or even Zorāfa (“Giraffe”). A few specimen of calligraphy now in Istanbul are signed with the epithet “al-Ya‘qūbī,” suggesting that he had some kind of affiliation with Ya‘qūb’s court. But he does not appear in the list of poets patronized by Ya‘qūb compiled by Ḥakīm Shah Moḥammad Qazvīnī, and most of his signed calligraphy bear only the epithet “al-K̲vārazmī.” One interesting indication of the different relation of the two brothers to Ya‘qūb is a page of calligraphy in Istanbul on which ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm signs as “al-Ya‘qūbī” and ‘Abd-al-Karīm as “al-K̲vārazmī.” Beyond his family ties, it is difficult to form a clear picture of the life of ‘Abd-al-Karīm. It is



probable that he was born in Šīrāz, and he may have spent most of his life there. If he was attached to the court of Ya‘qūb, he must have spent some years in Tabrīz. Specimens of calligraphy now in Leningrad and Istanbul are signed by him as written during his tenth, eleventh, and twelfth years, indicating that he was a skilled calligrapher at an early age. Unfortunately, none of these pages bear dates which would make it possible to determine the year of his birth. A manuscript now in Tehran is dated to 883/1478, and other information suggests that he lived until at least 893/1486-87.

The Royal Asiatic Society owns a manuscript of Qazvīnī’s *‘Ajā’eb al-maklūqāt* containing a colophon which states that it was copied by Moḥammad b. Moḥammad “Baqqāl” and illustrated by ‘al-Mawlā ‘Abd-al-Karīm.” Since no qualifying epithets are attached, it is difficult to decide whether this painter is to be identified with ‘Abd-al-Karīm K̲VĀRAZMĪ. From distinctive characteristics of the paintings themselves, it is possible to infer that the painter ‘Abd-al-Karīm also worked on another manuscript copied by Moḥammad “Baqqāl”—a copy of *Šāhnāma* of Ferdowsī dated to 868/1464 and presently in Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, Hazine 1496. Moḥammad “Baqqāl” was a well-known scribe active in Šīrāz in the second half of the 9th/15th century, so that the painter ‘Abd-al-Karīm was active in the same period and area as ‘Abd-al-Karīm K̲VĀRAZMĪ the calligrapher. It is at present impossible to decide whether the painter and the calligrapher are the same person. None of the sources discussing the life of the calligrapher makes any mention of his having been a painter, nor do the sources mention paintings prepared by either his father or brother. It is, however, of interest that paintings found in two manuscripts copied by the father, ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān, are closely related to those in Morley 178 (Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, Hazine 799 [857/1453] and Hazine 773 [856/1452]). Thus if ‘Abd-al-Karīm the calligrapher were identical with ‘Abd-al-Karīm the painter, then ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān might have been a painter as well, and the son may have emulated the father’s style in both calligraphy and painting. This possibility raises interesting questions on the nature of artistic education in 9th/15th century Iran. An additional problem concerning the colophon of Morley 178 is the significance of the term *a-mawlā* preceding the name of ‘Abd-al-Karīm. An artist’s normal appellation in colophons is either *ostād* or *k̲VĀĴA*; the term *mawlā* appears only in the form *mawlānā* with the apparent meaning “our teacher.” It is unclear whether *al-mawlā* is a general title of respect accorded a senior artist or whether it implies that ‘Abd-al-Karīm the painter was teacher and supervisor of the calligrapher Moḥammad “Baqqāl.” If the latter were intended, it might suggest that ‘Abd-al-Karīm was



director of the workshop where Morley 178 was produced. This title may also suggest that ‘Abd-al-Karīm was working under the financial protection of an important individual such as Ya‘qūb Āq Qoyonlū. Despite the meager evidence on ‘Abd-al-Karīm’s life, the ambiguity of his relationship to the court workshop of Ya‘qūb suggests that the boundaries between “court” and “commercial” artists may not be as precise as has been recently assumed.

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