



## ABU'L-ḤASAN KARAQĀNĪ

**ABU'L-ḤASAN KARAQĀNĪ**, 'ALĪ B. AḤMAD B. JA'FAR B. SALMĀN (352-425/963-1033), Sufi shaikh of Karaqān, some 20 km north of Baštām in Khorasan. His shrine, with a recent gravestone but ancient adjoining mosque, overlooks the present-day village. Already celebrated in his own lifetime, Karaqānī is said to receive illustrious visitors such as Sultan Maḥmūd of Ġazna and Ebn Sīnā. Although many traditions pointing to his greatness as a saint are clearly legendary, there can be no doubt he was a mystic of exceptional genius; his presence left a strong impression on such different Sufi personalities as Abū Sa'īd b. Abi'l-Ḳayr (d. 440/1049), Abu'l-Qāsem Qoṣayrī (d. 465/1072), and especially 'Abdallāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089). Anṣārī considered Karaqānī one of the greatest spiritual masters of the time, though he knew him as a man of little formal learning. His Arabic was reportedly poor, and his dicta are often quoted in his local Persian dialect. To call him an illiterate village saint is to overstate the point, but he was certainly of humble social origin. He was married to a woman who is traditionally portrayed as a quarrelsome Xanthippe. One of his sons seems to have been murdered under dubious circumstances; another one appears after Karaqānī's death among the followers of Abū Sa'īd b. Abi'l-Ḳayr.

Karaqānī's affiliation with organized Sufism remains somewhat obscure. Anṣārī intimates that Abu'l-Abbās Qaṣṣāb Āmolī, the great Sufi teacher of Ṭabarestān who is known as one of the masters of Abū Sa'īd, regarded Karaqānī as his real successor; but according to Abū Sa'īd's family tradition, Āmolī took a neutral position in a theoretical dispute between Karaqānī and



Abū 'Abdallāh Dāstānī of Baṣṭām (d. 417/1026). The latter appears also in Karāqānī legends as a sort of rival saint; since Dāstānī was well-known as *ṣayk al-mašāyek* and learned keeper of the traditions concerning [Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī](#), this rivalry may reflect the fact that Karāqānī regarded himself as the real disciple of Abū Yazīd, or rather, as an Abū Yazīd *redivivus*. Many of his sayings are indeed reminiscent of the great Baṣṭāmī, and Karāqānī biographies make it a point to show that his Sufi master was the “spirituality” of Abū Yazīd (the so-called *owaysī* relationship of a disciple to his immaterial master). By virtue of this relationship, Karāqānī figures in the spiritual genealogy of the Naqṣbandīya order as the link between Abū Yazīd (d. 261/874 or earlier) and Abū 'Alī Fārmadī (d. 477/1084-85). On the other hand, Yaḥyā Sohravardī traces Karāqānī's (and Āmolī's?) spiritual descent via Ḥallāj to Abū Yazīd, and from there to the esoteric *kosravānīyūn* of pre-Islamic Iran, which is of course not to be taken in the sense of an ordinary *ṭarīqa* line. The identification of any concrete disciple-master relationship was perhaps not as important to Karāqānī himself as it was to some of his followers. He seems to have tended toward the Malāmatīya tradition of Khorasan, and his habit of calling himself *ḵovānmard* rather than *ṣūfī* would seem to indicate that he had no great respect for institutionalized Sufism. In fact, he made it quite clear that he had no master (*ostād*) but God, and that for him to be a real Sufi meant to be free in the deepest sense, i.e., not to be attached to “being there” at all.

Basically, he followed the way of classical Islamic asceticism. He frequently called attention to the imminence of death and the Last Day, and he emphasized the virtue of weeping. His feeling for man's radical inadequacy vis-à-vis God is evident in the following saying: “The litany (*werd*, less likely *dard*) of the *ḵovānmardān* is a grief (*andūh*) greater than the two worlds; they want to think of God but are unable to do it adequately.” Yet this grief was compensated, for those able to bear it, by a moment of “joy with God (*šādī*, *nafas bā Ḥaqq*) more precious than all divine worship.” Thus the realization of inadequacy turned into its very opposite; and this is where Karāqānī meets his great model, Abū Yazīd. Recalling Abū Yazīd's *me'rāj* experience, he was certain that he had made the same ecstatic journey beyond the worlds “to the place where no creature could follow.” Though he was aware that to travel “with one step from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven” meant really nothing before God's infinity, the experience made him conscious of an extraordinary spiritual power of the *ḵovānmard*. Seeing himself as the *axis mundi*, he felt that his head was the heavenly throne, that his feet were beneath the earth, and that his two hands were East and West. He also said,



pointing to his particular kind of cosmic consciousness: “When my tongue was opened in the experience of God’s oneness (*tawḥīd*), I saw the skies and earth perform ritual circumambulation around me, but the people were unaware of it.” Most characteristically, however, he described himself in the following words: “I am neither worshipper, nor scholar, nor Sufi: My God, you are One, so by that Oneness of yours, I am One!”

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The oldest quotation of a Ẓarqānī saying occurs in Qoṣayrī’s *Resāla* (chapter on *ḡayra*, at end), a work written only twelve years after Ẓarqānī’s death. Other relatively early sources include Hojvīrī, *Kašf al-maḥjūb*; Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiya*; ‘Ayn-al-qoṣāt *Hamadānī*, *Tamhīdāt*; *idem*, *Nāmahā*; Sam‘ānī, *Ansāb*; anon., *Ḥālāt o soḡanān-e Šayḡ Abu Sa‘īd*; Moḡammad b. Monawwar, *Asrār al-tawḥīd*; Yaḡyā Sohravardī, *Ketāb al-mašāre’ wa’l-moṭārahāt*; *idem*, *Bostān al-qolūb*; Rūzbehān Baqlī, *Šarḡ-e šaṭḡiyāt*; Naǰm-al-dīn Kobrā, *Fawā’eḡ al-ǰamāl wa fawāteḡ al-ǰalāl*. The most important compilation of Ẓarqānī traditions, the *Ketāb nūr al-‘olūm*, is unfortunately known to us only through an extract made or copied in 689/1299 (ed. Bertels in *Iran* 3, 1929, pp. 155-224 with Russian tr., intro, and comm.; new ed. by M. Mīnovī, *Aḡwāl o aqwāl-e Šayḡ Abu’l-Ḥasan Ẓarqānī*, Tehran, 1354 Š./1975, pp. 107-46).

There exists, however, another important compilation, which agrees only in part with the *Nūr al-‘olūm* and goes back to another source. This compilation is conserved in the *Maǰmū’ a rasā’el K̄vāǰa ‘Abdallāh Anṣārī* (ms. Istanbul, Morād Mollā 1796, fols. 337b-52b, 9th/15th century) under the heading *Deḡr qoṭb al-sāleḡīn Abu’l-Ḥasan Ẓarqānī*. It was originally written some time after 566/1170-71 by someone who was still able to quote traditions directly from second generation disciples of Anṣārī and who lived in close contact with Ẓarqānī’s descendants (*awlād*) and *kānaqāh*. This text gives Ẓarqānī’s full name and introduces him with honorific titles such as *kātem al-awliā’*. From among its 118 traditions, about two-thirds are also found, with others, in the



beautiful sketch of Karaqānī in 'Aṭṭār's *Taḍkerat al-awliā'* (a section of this work which is of questionable authenticity). 'Aṭṭār mentions Karaqānī also in his *Elāhī-nāma* and *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, and so does Rūmī several times in the *Maṭnawī*. Najm-al-dīn Dāya Rāzī wrote a special treatise on the implications of Karaqānī's alleged saying *al-ṣūfī ḡayr maḵlūq*; he also refers to Karaqānī in his *Merṣād al-'ebād*. Quite generally, Karaqānī traditions are frequently quoted by other Kobrawī Sufīs such as Nūr-al-dīn Esfarā'īnī (d. 717/1317); and from the 9th/15th century onward, we find the figure of Karaqānī especially popular with the Naqšbandīs. Jāmī's article in the *Nafaḥāt* brings hardly anything new, but is worth mentioning for its conciseness.