



BESTĀMĪ, BĀYAZĪD

BESTĀMĪ (Baṣṭāmī), **BĀYAZĪD** (Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr b. ʿĪsā b. Sorūšān; d. 234/848 or 261/875), early Muslim mystic of Iran. A descendant of a Zoroastrian family converted to Islam during the life of his grandfather Sorūšān, Bāyazīd spent most of his active life in his native town of Beṣṭām (Baṣṭām) in the province of Qūmes, except for short periods when the hostility of the *ʿolamā* drove him into exile. Historical evidence for his life is sparse. He was born in the quarter of Beṣṭām known as Moʿbedān but moved to an Arab quarter called Wāfedān, which was later named Būyadān in his honor (Sahlajī, p. 47). He studied Hanafite law and made at least one pilgrimage to Mecca. It appears that he spent much of his life as a recluse, in his home, the mosque, and an isolated cell (*ṣawmaʿa*) in Beṣṭām, yet he is also known to have held teaching sessions and received visitors who wished to discuss Sufī topics.

Two divergent dates for Bāyazīd's death are given in the sources. The later one, 261/875, recorded by Solamī and many later sources, is based on a family *esnād* (chain of authority) that is commonly accepted by scholars as accurate. Nevertheless Sahlajī (p. 63) mentions 234/848, as does Abū ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Solamī (d. 412/1021; p. 60), on the authority of Ḥosayn b. Yaḥyā Šāfeʿī, a transmitter of Jaʿfar Ḳoldī (d. 348/959). There is also considerable circumstantial evidence for the earlier date: 1. Bāyazīd is said to have met Šaqīq Balkī (d. 194/810) in his youth, received him in the company of Abū Torāb Naḳšabī (d. 245/859), and corresponded with him by messenger (Sahlajī, pp. 91, 95; Sebṭ b. al-Jawzī, p. 163; Aṭṭār, I, p. 147). 2. Bāyazīd responded to an emissary of Duʿl-Nūn Meṣrī (d. 245/860; Qoṣayrī, p. 38; Hojvīrī, pp. 322, 331-32;



Sahlajī, pp. 65, 73, 117, 131; ‘Aṭṭār, I, p. 156), gave expert advice by correspondence to Yaḥyā b. Mo‘ād Rāzī (d. 258/872; Sahlajī, p. 136; Eṣfahānī, X, p. 40; ‘Aṭṭār, I, pp. 143-44), and was visited by Aḥmad b. Kezrūya Balkī (d. 240/854) on his pilgrimage. 3. “Satanba” or “Estanba” (i.e., Abū Eshāq Ebrāhīm Heravī), said to have been a disciple of Ebrāhīm b. Adham (d. 160/776), transmitted some of Bāyazīd’s sayings (Eṣfahānī, X, pp. 43-44; Sahlajī, p. 56). 4. There is no record that Bāyazīd ever met Jonayd (d. 298/910), the principal interpreter of his sayings, though he was on familiar terms with Jonayd’s uncle and teacher, Sarī Saqaṭī (d. 251/865; Sahlajī, p. 81).

Many visitors, including Abū Naṣr Sarrāj (d. 378/988), Abū Sa‘īd b. Abī’l-Ḳayr (q.v.), ‘Alī b. ‘Oṭmān Hojvīrī, Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, and Yāqūt, were attracted to Bāyazīd’s tomb at Bestām. The Il-khanid Öljeitü (Ūljāytü) Moḥammad Ḳodābanda erected a dome over it in 713/1313.

Bāyazīd wrote nothing, but about five hundred of his sayings were collected and handed down through two major lines of transmission. One group of his sayings is supported by the family *esnād*, beginning with Bāyazīd’s nephew, disciple, and attendant, Abū Mūsā ‘Īsā b. Ādam, on whose authority and that of his two sons, “Omayy” (i.e., Abū ‘Emrān Mūsā b. ‘Īsā) and “Bāyazīd the lesser” or “the second” (i.e., Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr b. ‘Īsā) Jonayd is expressly stated to have translated the bulk of Bāyazīd’s sayings from Persian into Arabic (cf. Sahlajī, pp. 108, 109, 122-23). The other was handed down through the circle of those who visited Bāyazīd: Abū Eshāq Ebrāhīm Heravī, Aḥmad b. Kezrūya, and especially ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm b. Yaḥyā Dabīlī’s disciple Abū Mūsā Dabīlī, whom Bāyazīd sent to propagate Sufism in his native Armenia (Sam‘ānī, ed. Yamānī, V, p. 313; Sahlajī, pp. 54-55). Substantial portions of Bāyazīd’s sayings are preserved in five principal sources: *Ketāb al-loma‘* by Sarrāj, which includes extracts from Jonayd’s commentary on Bāyazīd’s utterances; the corpus of Solamī’s works (see Sezgin, *GAS* I, pp. 671-74), through which they are scattered; *Ketāb al-nūr men kalemāt Abī Ṭayfūr* by Abu’l-Faḍl Moḥammad b. ‘Alī Sahlajī (389-476/998-1084), the most circumstantial source on Bāyazīd’s life and teaching, drawing heavily on Moḥammad b. ‘Alī Dāstānī (d. 417/1026) and on the biographer of Ḥallāj, Ebn Bābūya Šīrāzī (d. 442/1050; whether or not Sahlajī also relied on the lost *Manāqeb-e Bāyazīd Bestāmī*, a Persian hagiographical work ascribed by Ḥājī Ḳalīfa to a certain Yūsuf b. Moḥammad, remains obscure; *Kašf at-zonūn* II, p. 1841; cf. Sahlajī, pp. 44, 78, 141); *Šarḥ-e šaḥīyāt* by Rūzbehān Baqlī Šīrāzī (d. 606/1209), in which samples of Bāyazīd’s ecstatic utterances are gathered and interpreted and the chapter on Bāyazīd in



Tadkerat al-awlīā', I, p. 134-79) by Shaikh Farīd-al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. 626/1229), which includes much anecdotal material. A highly embellished version of Bāyazīd's *me'rāj* (ascension) is found in *Resālat al-qaṣd ela'llāh*, said to have been compiled in 395/1005 by a certain Abu'l-Qāsem and erroneously attributed to Jonayd (Nicholson, pp. 402-15).

Bāyazīd was introduced to “the experience of divine oneness and the mystical realities in pure form” (*al-tawḥīd wa'l-ḥaqā'eq ṣerfan*; Sarrāj, p. 177) by a certain Abū 'Alī Sendī, his Sufi teacher (p. 325), to whom Bāyazīd in turn taught the religious duties of Islam. On the assumption that this teacher hailed from India and that some of Bāyazīd's utterances can be compared with Hindu and Buddhist notions, a considerable controversy has developed whether possible Hindu and Buddhist influences on Sufism can be discovered in Bāyazīd's case. In 1821 F. A. D. Tholuck proposed such influences, and his hypothesis was reaffirmed by a variety of 19th-century orientalist; it was stated categorically by R. A. Nicholson in 1916 and M. Horten in 1927 and cautiously accepted by H. Ritter in 1954. On the other hand, L. Massignon questioned this conclusion in 1922 and A. J. Arberry in 1957. In 1957 and 1960 R. C. Zaehner made an unconvincing attempt to demonstrate in detail that Bāyazīd had indeed drawn on Indian mysticism. The Sufi theory of *fanā'* (supposedly influenced by the Buddhist idea of *nirvāṇa*) is wrongly attributed to Bāyazīd since it was actually first advanced by Abū Sa'īd Ḳarrāz (see *baqā' wa fanā'*). As Arberry has shown, Bāyazīd's notions of “the tree of oneness” and “deceit” hardly have their origin in the ideas of the cosmic tree and illusion (*māyā*) found in the Upanishads and in Vedantic philosophy but can be explained on the basis of Koranic imagery and Sufi language (1957, pp. 89-104). Zaehner's attempt to link Bāyazīd's ecstatic utterance “Glory be to me!” (*Sobḥānī*) and his phrase “and you shall be that” (*fa-takūna anta dāka*) respectively with “Homage, homage, to me!” (*mahyam eva namo namah*) and “Thou art That” (*tat tvam asi*) in the Upanishads rests on questionable arguments (cf. 'Abdur Rabb, pp. 185-211).

Much of Bāyazīd's fame is owing to his ecstatic utterances (*ṣaṭḥ*, *ṣaṭḥa*, plur. *ṣaṭaḥāt*; also *ṣaṭḥīyāt*), which he was the first to employ consistently as expressions of Sufi experience. The most frequently cited examples are “Glory be to Me! How great is My majesty!” (*Sobḥānī! Mā a'zama ṣa'nī*) and “I am He” (*anā howa*). Rather than the babbling of one possessed or blasphemy intended to scandalize others, such utterances are in fact vividly phrased expressions of the experience of consciousness merging with the divine. Bāyazīd compares



himself to God, claims the praise of angels in God's stead, turns the direction of prayer (*qebła*) from God to himself, and declares that the Ka'ba walks around him (Sahlajī, pp. 88, 108; Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 332; 'Aṭṭār, I, p. 161). He is no longer creature and servant of God: "They are all my creatures except you" (Sahlajī, p. 119); "All humans are my servants except you" (p. 102). Instead he becomes God's rival, finding God's throne empty and ascending it in recognition of his own true being: "I am I and thus am "I"" (p. 128), Bāyazīd claims to be without beginning or end (Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 332), without morning or evening (Sahlajī, p. 70). God takes second place to him: He replies to the muezzin's call "God is great!" with the words "I am greater!" (Rūzbehān Baqlī, p. 101), turning the Koranic words "Surely, thy Lord's grasp is firm" (85:12) into "By my life, my grasp is firmer than His" (Sahlajī, p. 111) and exclaiming "Moses desired to see God; I do not desire to see God; He desires to see me" (Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 333). With his claim "I am I; there is no God but I; so worship me!" (Sahlajī, p. 122) the monotheist Bāyazīd has reached a stage of mystical self-consciousness so thoroughly infused with the divine that there is room neither for the human self nor for God but only for the ultimate and absolute "I," called God as the object of faith but "I" as the subject of mystical experience.

Although Bāyazīd's approach to prayer and Sufi *dekr* is rarely mentioned, sparse references do provide a glimpse of the circumstances that generated his mystical experiences and shaped his ecstatic utterances. He always rinsed his mouth and washed his tongue before uttering God's name in *dekr* exercise (Sahlajī, p. 106; Eṣfahānī, X, p. 35). He insisted on painstaking ablutions before prayer and once ejected from the mosque a man who was improperly purified (Solamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, pp. 62-63). In reciting the Islamic profession of monotheism, he was aware that he had to abandon human self-consciousness ("There is no god but God while you are not there") and to assimilate divine consciousness ("There is no god but God while you are there"; Sahlajī, p. 84). When Bāyazīd went into seclusion to meditate, he closed every opening in his apartment so that no noise would disturb him ('Aṭṭār, I, p. 140). While meditating he would sometimes stand on tiptoe (pp. 143, 157) or rest his head on his knees without reciting any words, only occasionally lifting his head to utter a sigh (p. 140). When a visitor failed to notice Bāyazīd praying with his head on his knees, it was explained that the depth of his prayer had made him invisible to outsiders (p. 154).

Bāyazīd insisted that the ascetic (*zāhed*) renounce this world by rejecting it three times, so that he could not lawfully attach himself to it again (Eṣfahānī,



X, p. 36). He also belittled renunciation of this world with the rhetorical question “This world is nothing; how can one renounce it?” preferring inner detachment to actual poverty: “One who does not possess a thing is not *zāhed*; whom nothing takes possession of is” (Makkī, II, p. 198). This detachment did not prevent him from claiming to be the seven *abdāl* of his time united in one person (Sahlajī, p. 111; Eṣfahānī, X, p. 37; Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 333), the tablet kept in heaven (Sahlajī, pp. 80, 113), the limitless ocean (Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 332), or the divine throne (‘Aṭṭār, I, p. 171). Bāyazīd also expressed the wish to be condemned to hell, because that as much as reaching paradise would ensure him of God’s favor (Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 329), and to be so enlarged that no one else would find space in hell (Sahlajī, p. 115; Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 334). He believed that hell would be extinguished by his glance (Sahlajī, p. 114; Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 329) or that he would smother hellfire with the hem of his coat (Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 331).

Although Bāyazīd is said to have cautioned against miracle workers (Eṣfahānī, X, p. 40; Sahlajī, pp. 69,126) and maintained that he was in need of God the giver of gifts, not of miracles (‘Aṭṭār, I, p. 153), various miracles (*karāmāt*) are ascribed to him in Sufi literature. Food is said to have appeared before him whenever he desired it (p. 142), and once rain was sent in answer to his prayer (Sahlajī, p. 112; ‘Aṭṭār, I, p. 150). The burden was lifted mysteriously from his camel on the way to Mecca (Sahlajī, pp. 89-90; ‘Aṭṭār, I, p. 137). On one occasion he moved the mountain Abū Qobays (Sahlajī, p. 106); at another, however, he paid for a ferry across the Tigris, even though the river had become narrow enough to let him step across (‘Aṭṭār, I, p. 153; cf. Rosenthal, II, pp. 179-80). Although he was believed to have walked on water, traveled through the air, and made the journey to Mecca in a single night, he himself minimized these *karāmāt*, on the grounds that a piece of wood can float on water, a fish can swim in water, birds can fly through the air, and demons move from east to west in a split second (Sarrāj, p. 324; Qoṣayrī, p. 164; ‘Aṭṭār, I, pp. 169-70).

Bāyazīd employed the term *‘eṣq* for love of God and insisted that divine love precedes man’s love of God. “In the beginning I was in error about four things: I imagined that I recollected God, knew Him, loved Him, and searched for Him. At the end I realized, however, that His recollection preceded mine, His knowledge was prior to mine, His love came before my own, and His search was there before I sought Him” (Solamī, pp. 64-65; Sahlajī, p. 96; Eṣfahānī, X, p. 34; ‘Aṭṭār, I, p. 170). Bāyazīd defended the mystic’s love of God as mutual love between God and man (Eṣfahānī, X, p. 242) and maintained that “love consists



in regarding your own much as little and your Beloved's little as much" (Hojvīrī, p. 402, tr. p. 311). When Yaḥyā b. Mo'āḍ confessed that he had become intoxicated in drinking from the cup of love of God, Bāyazīd replied that he had drunk empty the oceans of the heavens and the earth and still his thirst was not quenched and his tongue was hanging out for more (Sahlajī, p. 136; Hojvīrī, p. 233; 'Aṭṭār, I, p. 143).

In the 4th-5th/10th-11th centuries Bāyazīd's followers appear to have had sufficient cohesion to perpetuate a small Sufi group at the shaikh's tomb in Beṣṭām. Indeed, one of them, Sahlajī, compiled *Ketāb al-nūr*, in which he mentions Bāyazīd's honorific "Lord of the mystics" (*solṭān al-'ārefīn*), first attested in a statement by a certain Abu'l-'Alā' b. Abi'l-Faḏl Šāwarābādī (cf. Sahlajī, p. 147), repeated by 'Aṭṭār (I, p. 134), and popularized by Šams-al-Dīn Aflākī in the 8th/14th century (I, p. 259). Next to Abū 'Abd-Allāh Moḥammad b. 'Alī Dāstānī (d. 417/1026), one of the authorities cited in the *Ketāb al-nūr* (cf. Hojvīrī, pp. 205-06), Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Aḥmad Ḳaraḳānī (d. 425/1033; cf. 'Aṭṭār, II, pp. 201-55) appears to have been Bāyazīd's principal spiritual heir in Iran and a frequent visitor to his tomb at Beṣṭām (cf. Mīnovī, pp. 29-30). Ḳaraḳānī, who had met Abū Sa'īd b. Abi'l-Ḳayr (q.v.; d. 440/1049; Mīnovī, pp. 11, 15, 17-26, 34-36), thus became the link between Bāyazīd and Abū 'Alī Fārmaḍī (d. 477/1084) in the Sufi line of the Naqšbandīya. Hojvīrī (pp. 228-35) classified Bāyazīd's followers as Ṭayfūrīya and observed that their ideal of love of God (*'ešq*) was characterized by spiritual intoxication (*sokr*), in contrast to the mystical sobriety (*ṣaḥw*) professed by the Jonaydīya of Baghdad. In the 9th/15th century spiritual descent from the Ṭayfūrī tradition was claimed, without apparent historical connection, by the Šaṭṭārīya of India (cf. Ġawṭī, pp. 284-88); such a descent was also ascribed to two obscure Sufi "orders," the 'Ešqīya of Transoxiana and the Beṣṭāmīya in Ottoman Turkey (cf. Trimmingham, pp. 97-98). Today a popular form of Indian Sufism lives on at Bāyazīd's memorial in Našīrābād outside Chittagong, in Bangladesh (cf. 'Abdur Rabb, p. 79).



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