



KARAKI

KARAKI, Nur-al-Din Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Ali b. Ḥosayn b. 'Abd-al-'Āli, known as Moḥaqqueq al-Tāni or Moḥaqqueq 'Ali (1464-1533), a major Imamite jurist.

Karaki belonged to a family of legal scholars from Karak-Nuḥ in Baalbek (Ba'labakk). Scores of scholars—referred to collectively as 'Āmeli—emerged from the towns of [Jabal 'Āmel](#) and Ba'labakk al-Hermel, where relatively autonomous, non-endowed madrasas had formed around family-based traditions of learning and regional scholarly networks. The madrasas were sustained through the ulama's collective but modest contributions and through sporadic funding from local benefactors. The distinct size of trained 'Āmeli jurists was comparable to earlier clusters of Shi'ite ulama in Aleppo, Hilla (Ḥella), and Najaf, and warranted the production of the first region-based biographical dictionary by Moḥammad al-Ḥorr al-'Āmeli (d. 1699).

Karaki studied the religious-legal sciences with scholars like Šams-al-Din Moḥammad b. Kātun al-'Āmeli in 'Aynātā, Moḥammad b. Dāwud b. Mo'addēn in Jezzīn, and Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Šohyuni in a certain 'Āmeli locality (Moḥaqqueq al-Tāni, 1988, pp. 27-40; cf. Afandi, III, pp. 441-60, Moḥammad Bāqer, IV, pp. 346-60). In Egypt, Karaki studied the legal foundations of the four Sunnite schools of law (sing. *madḥab*), and in Syria he received further training in Sunnite fiqh (see [FEQH](#)) and [hadith](#). He also studied with 'Ali b. Helāl Jazā'eri (d. after 1504), a major jurist, originally from Khuzestan, who spent a good part of his life in Najaf and possibly some time in Karak-Nuḥ (Šobḥāni, X, pp. 162-66, 191). Karaki left Jabal 'Āmel for Najaf around 1504 to become the first major 'Āmeli jurist in the service of Shah Esmā'il (r. 1501-24)

in Iran. The urban legal and doctrinal changes which high-ranking ‘Āmeli jurists and shaykhs (sing. *šayḵ-al-Eslām*) like Karaki proposed found resonance among the Safavid sovereigns and particular sectors of the Iranian military and administrative elites. Juridical rationalism (*oṣūliya*) and a marked expertise in fiqh aided the ‘Āmeli scholars in standardizing enactments of worship (*‘ebādāt*) and developing new regulations in the area of social contracts (*mo‘āmalāt*). These efforts created new forms of social discipline and supplied the young empire with political legitimacy. The assertion of Imami doctrine also fulfilled Safavid aims of religious conversion from Sunnism to Shi‘ism and helped homogenize the cultural landscape of the major cities through common belief and rituals. Ultimately, these developments strengthened the Safavids and vindicated them against Ottoman accusations of heresy and un-Islamicness. The building of a Shi‘ite state needed the type of doctrinal validation and legal coherence which clerical Shi‘ism under mojtaheds (see [EJTEHĀD](#)) like Karaki could effectively deliver. The expression of folk and heterodox religious beliefs in Iran changed partly through suppression and partly through an engagement with the Sharia (*šari‘a*) itself. A Sharia-centered discourse about ‘sound’ belief was demanded by Iranians from below. Karaki’s clerical career is vital for understanding these complex social processes in Safavid Iran during the 16th century.

Around 1510 Shah Esmā‘il officially honored Karaki, who was residing in Najaf (Moḥaqqueq al-Tāni, 1988, p. 237). Karaki’s acceptance of the shah’s land grants as a hereditary endowment, including the land tax (*karāj*) revenues, became a source of contention between him and major Shi‘ite scholars like Ebrāhim b. Solaymān Qaṭifi (d. after 1539; Modarressi, pp. 47, 54, 56-8). During one of his stays at the Safavid court, Karaki witnessed the military preparations for the battle of Chaldiran (see [ČĀLDERĀN](#)) against the Ottomans in 1514 (Afandi, III, pp. 441-60). During the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb (r. 1524-76), Karaki achieved considerable power, causing, for example, the dismissal of two administrators of religious endowments (see [ŞADR](#), online; Ḥasan Rumlu, p. 254; Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 231-32; tr. pp. 362-63). He developed strong ties with a few Iranian families through teaching, scholarly exchange, and social alliances, such as the marriage of his daughter with Mir Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Astarābādi, the father of the renowned theologian and jurist, Mir Dāmād (d. 1631; see [DĀMĀD](#)). In a decree (see [FARMĀN](#)) of 1532, Shah Ṭahmāsb honored Karaki by conferring on him the titles of *nā‘eb al-Emām* and *kātam al-mojtahedin* (Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 229-31; Ḥosayni Kātunābādi, p. 360; Moḥammad Bāqer, VII, pp. 168-69; cf. Arjomand, 1984, pp. 133-34; Madelung). The decree



triggered disputes, particularly among Arab and Iranian ulama, notables, and landed elites. The title *kātam-al-mojtahedin* was also held for some time by Karaki's son 'Abd-al-Āli (d. 1585), but most notably by his maternal grandson Ḥosayn Mojtahed (d. 1593). Ḥosayn b. 'Abd-al-Šamad Ḥāreṭi (d. 1576), another émigré 'Āmeli scholar who served as šayḵ-al-Eslām in Qazvin, Mashad, and [Herat](#) successively, found these honorific titles presumptuous, declaring that, "no mojtahed has been saved from a critic, nor a person from a deficiency" (Ḥāreṭi, fol. 3a). Ḥāreṭi argued, on the basis of juridical rationalism, that no scholar can hold an exclusive or ultimate legal-religious authority. He insisted on the renewal of legal rulings and warned against emulating the opinions of dead mojtaheds.

Karaki was called Moḥaqqueq al-Ṭāni in connection to Ja'far b. Ḥasan Ḥelli, known as Moḥaqqueq al-Awwal (d. 1277, see [HELLI, NAJM AL-DIN](#)). But inasmuch as Karaki became associated with worldly rulers, produced simplified legal manuals and commentaries, elucidated Shi'ite doctrine, and sifted hadith, he resembled 'Allāma Ḥelli (d. 1325; see [HELLI, HASAN](#)). Karaki's scholarly contribution was evident primarily in the fields of fiqh, doctrine (*aqida*), and polemics (*monāẓarāt*) against Sunnism and Sufism, as well as partly in jurisprudence (*oṣul al-feqh*; Abisaab, 2004, pp. 156-73). He was recognized for his commentaries on the fiqh works of Moḥaqqueq al-Awwal, 'Allāma Ḥelli, and Moḥammad b. Makki Šahid al-Awwal (d. 1384). His inferential legal activity and wide coverage of positive law (*foru'*) is reflected in the various collections of legal inquiries (*masā'el*) and injunctions (sing. [fatwā](#)). He wrote commentaries on 'Allāma's *Eršād al-aḏān*, *Muḵtalaf al-šī'a*, and *Taḥrir al-aḥkām*. Karaki's *Jāme' al-maqāṣed* became the most useful and lucid commentary on 'Allāma Ḥelli's *Qawā'id al-aḥkām* at the time (Āgā Bozorg, pp. 55-56; Ḥosayni Kātunabādi, p. 458). Karaki's treatise on worship and ablution, known as *al-Resāla al-ja'fariya*, and his commentary on the *al-Alfiya* of Šāhed al-Awwal circulated widely among Iranians (Abisaab, 2004, p. 157); Kāndamir, III, pp. 114). He also wrote commentaries on two other works by Šahid al-Awwal: *al-Deḡrā* and *al-Dorus al-šar'iyya fī feqh al-emāmiya*. In the field of jurisprudence, Karaki discussed the conditions of *ejtehād* in *Resāla fī al-man' 'an taqlid al-mayt* and *Resāla fī al-oṣul*, which reflected his adoption of the methods of Zayn-al-Din b. 'Ali Šahid al-Ṭāni (d. 1558).

Karaki traveled considerably in Iran to disseminate the Shi'ite creed and ensure the application of legal rulings on the basis of the Ja'fari legal school (Moḥammad Bāqer, IV, p. 358; Vāleh Eṣfahāni, pp. 429-30). He worked closely

with a network of scholars and judges who applied his rulings in Safavid provinces like Herat, Kashan, and Tabriz. Karaki, for instance, provided governors with a manual (*dastur al-'amal*; see [DASTUR](#)) elucidating the legal basis for the collection and administration of land tax. He set the legal punishments (*ḥodud*) and encouraged the performance of Friday prayer (see [EMĀM-E JOM'Ā](#); Moḥammad Bāqer, IV, pp. 354-60; Moḥaqqueq al-Tāni, 1988, I, p. 139). He ordered the appointment of prayer leaders in Iranian cities and villages, though he considered the observation of Friday prayer optional (*wājeb takyiri*) rather than obligatory (*wājeb 'ayni*) in the absence of the Imam. Congregational prayer, he argued, must be held by a designated mojtahed, qualified to act as deputy of the Hidden Imam. Only in the presence of such a mojtahed or the Imam himself is it obligatory for Shi'ites to perform Friday prayers (Karaki, fol. 31b). Kamāl-al-Din Ḥosayn Elāhi Ardabili (d. 1543), a student of Jalāl-al-Din Dawāni (d. 1502), however, disagreed with Karaki. He issued an injunction that the observance of Friday prayer was unlawful during the occultation of the Imam (Āfušta'i Naṭanzi, p. 183). In Najaf, Qaṭifi also refuted Karaki's position on Friday prayer, land tax, and the lawfulness of accepting the gifts of worldly rulers (Moḥammad Bāqer, IV, p. 356).

A diverse group of landed notables, sayyeds, and ulama tried to bring Karaki into disrepute (Moḥammad Bāqer, IV, p. 357; Vāleh Esfahāni, p. 428; cf. Sarwar, p. 102). The ṣadr Mir Jamāl-al-Din Moḥammad Astarābādi had an altercation with Karaki over the latter's commentary on 'Allāma Ḥelli's *Al-Qawā'id* and afterwards avoided contact with Karaki, claiming that an illness prevented him from attending Karaki's lectures. The opposition to Karaki was strong enough to cause the forging of a letter attributing to Karaki insults and slurs against Shah Ṭahmāsb (Ḥasan Rumlu, pp. 254-57). The letter circulated at the Safavid court in Tabriz, so that the shah himself investigated the matter and implicated Amir Ne'mat-Allāh Ḥelli (d. 1533) in the affair. Ne'mat-Allāh was an Iraqi scholar and notable who had studied with Karaki for some time but then had turned against him in support of Qaṭifi. Shah Esmā'il had appointed Ne'mat-Allāh as joint ṣadr with Mir Ġiāt-al-Din Maṣṣur Daštaki Širāzi (d. 1540), and because of the letter Shah Ṭahmāsb banished Ne'mat-Allāh from Iran. After Ne'mat-Allāh's departure to Baghdad, the relationship between Ġiāt-al-Din and Karaki evolved into open discord (Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 229-30; tr., I, p. 231; cf. Pourjavady, pp. 13-14, 22).

The Ottoman Sultan Solaymān the Magnificent (r. 1520-66) criticized Shah Ṭahmāsb for having his courtiers and subjects prostrate to him, arguing that



in Islam prostration is permissible only to God (Moḥammad Bāqer, VII, p. 182). Ġiāṭ-al-Din defended prostration only to be refuted by Karaki, who agreed with the Ottoman criticism that it has no Islamic basis. Karaki feared that such a practice would encourage the Sunnite Ottomans to consider the Shi'ite character of the Safavid empire non-Islamic and, by implication, heretical. The shah seemed to have adopted Karaki's position. The disagreement between Karaki and Ġiāṭ-al-Din, however, extended to other issues, such as the direction of prayer (*qebḷa*), which Karaki altered in south-central Iraq (al-'Erāq al-'Arab) and Khorasan (Navidi, p. 193; cf. Moḥammad Bāqer, IV, pp. 357-508, VII, pp. 168-69; Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 229-30;). Ġiāṭ-al-Din maintained that mathematicians, and not jurists, should designate the *qebḷa*, because they know how to apply geometry to various regions (Navidi, pp. 66-67; cf. Ḥasan, pp. 190-91). Shah Ṭahmāsb, however, dismissed Ġiāṭ-al-Din from office in 1532 (Ḥosayni Kātunābādi, p. 360; Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 229-31; Moḥammad Bāqer, VII, pp. 168-69).

A more comprehensive criticism of Karaki's legal methods emerged from within the ranks of jurists. Mollā Moḥammad Amin Astarābādi (d. 1624 or 1627), who articulated the first comprehensive theory of juridical traditionism (*akbāriya*), debunked the methods and inferential legal apparatus of mojtaheds like Karaki. Astarabādi, writing around half a century after Karaki's death, evoked the debate on the *qebḷa* and expressed support for Ġiāṭ-al-Din's arguments. Among "the many errors" Karaki committed, Astarābādi (pp. 364-65) stated, was his "destruction of the *qebḷas* which existed in the land of the Persians since the time of the Companions of the Imams by pious scholars who were experts in mathematical sciences like Ibn Šāḍān." Indeed, Astarābādi rejected the reliance on logic (*kalām*) to furnish rationalist procedures for legal inference characteristic of the scholarship of 'Allāma Ḥelli and major 'Āmeli jurists.

Karaki devoted much energy to the explication of Imami beliefs, rejecting particular folk and heterodox delineations, as well as publicizing the arguments of the ulama against Sunnism. He redrew the normative boundaries of Imami Shi'ism in Iran textually through the ulama's verified sources, excluding oral Persian traditions, Sufi trends, and the Sunnite interpretation of *Ahl al-Bayt* whenever they contradicted these sources. In his treatise *Nafaḥāt al-lāhut fī la'n al-jeḥt wa'l-ṭāḡut* (Breath of divinity concerning the cursing of witchcraft and idolatry), composed in 1511, Karaki contested the doctrinal and legal foundations of Sunnism (fols. 4b-5a, 6b). He tried to

provide the Safavid sovereigns with an ideological defense against the Ottomans by verifying the religious ‘authenticity’ of the Safavids. He also buttressed anti-Sunnite rituals, especially the public cursing of the first two caliphs Abu Bakr (d. 634) and ‘Omar I (r. 634-44) by religious propagandists (*tabarrā’iyyān*) roaming the streets (Abisaab, 1994, pp. 108-20). In his famous treatise *Maṭa’en al-mojremiya fi radd al-ṣufiya* (Invectives of criminals regarding the refutation of Sufis), composed around 1530, Karaki contended that several Sufi traditions contradicted Shi’ite tenets, lacking the kind of scriptural and legal accountability possessed by the clerics (Šahid al-Tāni, fols. 10a, 16b; cf. Ḥamawī, pp. 145, 188-89). For instance, Karaki condemned the deification of Abu Moslem Ḳorasāni (d. 755) by his followers, as well as by the *Ḳorrāmīs* and the *Jermāniya* (Ḥamawī, pp. 147, 175).

Among Karaki’s sons ‘Abd-al-‘Āli had close ties to the court in Qazvin, and at the time of Shah Esmā’il II (r. 1576-78), he moved to Kashan. The aforementioned grandson Ḥosayn Mojtahed became šayḵ-al-Eslām and received special honors (Aḥmad, pp. 6, 13, 17, 93; Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 214-15; Mar’aši Najafi, p. 335; cf. Dānešpažuh, pp. 80-82). Two of Karaki’s maternal grandsons were, however, more eminent polymaths: the aforementioned Mir Dāmād and Aḥmad b. Zayn-al-‘Ābedin ‘Alawi ‘Āmeli (d. 1644). Aḥmad’s son ‘Abd-al-Ḥasib (d. 1709) served as prayer leader (*piš-namāz*) in *Isfahan* and was a distinguished author of exegetical and philosophical works. Aḥmad’s grandson Moḥammad Ašraf b. ‘Abd-al-Ḥasib Musawi Karaki (d. 1732) wrote *Faṣāḥ al-sādāt*, a treatise about statecraft (*siāda*), and a polemical work against Sunnism, known as *Maṣa’eb al-nawāṣeb* (Abisaab, 2004, p. 124).

Several of Karaki’s descendants became qadi (*qāzi*) and šayḵ-al-Eslām, and a few served as ṣadr and vizier (Moḥammad Bāqer, IV, pp. 362-63; Ṣadr, pp. 95-96, 137, 224, 265, 291-93). Ḥabib-Allāh, who was married to a daughter of the ‘Āmeli scholar Loṭf-Allāh Maysi (d. 1623), was ṣadr and vizier during the reign of Shah ‘Abbās II (r. 1642-66). His son Moḥammad Mahdi b. Ḥabib-Allāh (d. 1669) also became ṣadr and grand vizier in Isfahan, while his brother ‘Ali-Rezā acted as šayḵ-al-Eslām in Isfahan for 30 years. Ḥabib-Allāh’s grandsons Ebrāhim b. Moḥammad and Ja’far b. Ebrāhim became šayḵ-al-Eslām in Tehran, and the former also served as qadi (Ḥosayni Astarabādi, pp. 66, 244). Moḥammad b. ‘Ali b. Maḥmud Mašğari (d. after 1679) acted as vizier at one of the provincial Safavid courts. ‘Ali b. Moḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Zayn-al-Din Jobbā’i (d. 1691), known as ‘Ali Šahidi, was a descendant of Karaki and Šahid al-Tāni (Abisaab, 2004, pp. 95-96). Kamāl-al-Din, Bahā’-al-Din (d. 1621 or 1622;



q.v.), and Moḥammad Šafi' b. Bahā'-al-Din (d. 1713), who wrote *Maḥāfel al-mo'menin*, all were šayḵ-al-Eslām in Qazvin (Abisaab, 2004, p.167). Ja'far 'Āmeli Reżawi (fl. 1735) became grand ṣadr in Isfahan.

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