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KARĀMA
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KARĀMA "(saintly) marvel, wonder, or miracle" in Arabic (pl. *karāmāt*). As a technical term in the Muslim religious sciences both its etymology and usage fall close to the Greek *charisma(ta)* in the sense of denoting the miraculous, wondrous, or preternatural feats which God freely grants certain elect individuals the capacity to perform through the munificent generosity (*karāma*) of his divine favor. It should be noted, however, that although both have typically been understood to involve oftentimes quite extraordinary 'breakings of the natural order of things' (*ḵawāreq al-ʿādāt*), classical theologians were quick to draw a sharp distinction between the notion of *karāma* and that of *moʿjeza*, or the 'evidentiary miracle' of a prophet. Typically, taking into account their respective Arabic roots, by *moʿjeza* was meant a miraculous deed, act, or sign intended to evince the veracity of a prophet's mission by publicly demonstrating the error of his opponents through exposing their 'impotence' (*ʿajz*) to effect or produce the same, an occurrence always preceded by a 'proclamation' (*daʿwā*), and a 'challenge' (*taḥaddi*) (Ebn Ḵaldun, I, pp. 188-91). By *karāma*, on the other hand, was meant simply any number of personal charismata that are neither indicative of prophetic appointment nor, although not always, intended for public view, as distinct from the effects of magic or from seemingly miraculous occurrences which actually result from the 'divine ruse' (*makr, estedrāj*) (Ebn Ḵaldun, III, pp. 167-8; Jorjāni, 192; Tahānawi, I, pp. 149-50, II, p. 1360).

As evinced by a wide divergence of opinion regarding the nature and significance of saintly and prophetic miracles in the classical Sunni theological

literature (overviews in Gardet, “Karāma,” and, Wensinck, “Muʿdjiza”), there was indeed early interest in the topic, and Sufism was no exception (overview in Gramlich, pp. 19-58). Almost all the Sufi systematizers and apologists of the 10th-11th centuries treat the subject to some degree, situated within the wider context of what had already become, by the second half of the 9th century, a vigorous debate over the respective status of the Friend of God (*wali*) and his *welāya*, and that of the prophet (*nabi*) and his *nobuwwa*. That issue was treated first by Abu Saʿid Ḵarrāz (d. 899) in his *Kašf al-bayān* and, in much greater detail, in the writings of Ḥakim Termeḏi (d. ca. 907-912), who also argued against denials of *karāma* (Radtke, pp. 290-99). The Sufis unanimously affirm the reality of saintly marvels, while at the same time being careful to preserve the distinction between the *karāmāt* of the *awliāʾ* and the *moʿjezāt* of the prophets. They add that *karāmāt* displayed by an individual whose adherence to the divine law is questionable are to be considered mere trickery, and that saintly charismata, contra Ḥallāj’s error in ‘publicizing saintly marvels’ (*efšāʾ-e karāmāt*, on which see Massignon, I, pp. 291-95; and as a literary topos, Hafez, no. 15, p. 51; tr., p. 98), are always best kept secret (Sarrāj, pp. 273-79; Kalābāḏi, pp. 71-79; Hojviri, pp. 276-82; Qošayri, II, pp. 660-64). At the same time, these authors make clear that the *wali* should not only feel all the more humbled and contemptuous of himself by being afforded such a grace, but that such divine favors should also be treated with great circumscription, because they also represent potential snares on the mystical path. An otherwise well-intentioned seeker might become, as Najm-al-Din Rāzi Dāya (d. 1256) later pointedly remarked, “irremediably drunk in the tavern of the spirit with the goblet of wondrous deeds. . . making those wondrous deeds their idol of the moment” (*Merṣād*, tr. Algar, p. 229).

Although certainly less prevalent than in Sufi hagiography of later periods, references to the *karāmāt al-awliāʾ* are readily found in early Arabic hagiographical compendia, such as Solami’s (d. 1021) *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣufiya*, and in parts of Abu Noʿaym al-Eṣfahāni’s (d. 1038) *Ḥelyat al-awliāʾ*. Such narratives also make an appearance in early Persian Sufi hagiology, mentioned, albeit sporadically, in the individual biographies of Sufi paragons comprising ʿAbd-Allāh Anṣāri’s (d. 1089) own *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣufiya* as well as, much more fully, in posthumously compiled hagiographies of near-contemporaries such as Abu Esḥāq Kāzaruni (d. 1033) in the *Ferdaws al-moršediya*, Abu Saʿid b. Abi’l-Ḵayr (d. 1049; q.v.) in the 12th-century *Ḥālāt o soḵanān-e šayḵ Abu Saʿid* and *Asrār al-tawḥid*, or Aḥmad-e Jām (d. 1141) in the *Maqāmāt-e ʿanda-pil* compiled by his disciple Moḥammad Ḡaznawi. Each of these also contains formal

discussions of the notion of *karāma* itself (e.g., ʿOṯmān, pp. 75, 336; Munawwar, pp. 61-62; Ḡaznawi, pp. 9-11). Motivated by a drive to establish and legitimize the sanctity of their subjects, in both thematic and rhetorical terms such works came to set the tone for accounts of the *karāmāt* of the *awliāʾ* in almost all later works of Persian Sufi hagiography, with the possible exception of Farid-al-Din ʿAṭṭār's (d. ca. 1220; q.v.) *Taḏkerat al-awliāʾ*, which is somewhat unique owing to the particular literary idiosyncrasies of its author (Paul, p. 536).

Sufis of the post-classical period normally upheld the authenticity and significance of saintly marvels as freely given signs of divine favor visited upon those who possess the honest capacity to receive them. But the attitudes towards the role, significance, and desirability of these differed widely. Whereas ʿAyn-al-Qożāt Hamadāni (d. 1131) audaciously claimed he possessed the ability to revivify the dead (*Tamhidāt*, pp. 250-52), a great spiritual figure like Ruzbehān Baqli (d. 1209) explicitly denied that he performed *karāmāt* at all (*Kašf al-asrār*, pp. 87-88); perhaps he was echoing the assertion of ʿOmar Sohrawardi (d. 1234)—later repeated by ʿEzz-al-Din Kāšāni (d. 1334) (*Meṣbāḥ al-hedāya*, p. 26)—that being favored with saintly marvels is actually a sign of spiritual immaturity (*Ketāb aʿlām al-hodā*, p. 278). For Ebn al-ʿArabi (d. 1240), who challenges the very notion of there being a 'natural order of things' for miracles to break in the first place (*Fotuḥāt* II, p. 372), genuine saintly marvels are divided into two types: a lesser, sensible (*ḥessiya*) miracle whose primary function is to attract the generality to God, and a greater, 'subtle' (*maʿnawiya*) miracle which is reserved solely for the elite (ibid., pp. 369-74).

Although attempts at enumerating and classifying the *karāmāt al-awliāʾ* are occasionally found (e.g., Yāfeʿi, *Našr al-maḥāsen*, pp. 17-36; Sobki, *Ṭabaqāt* II, pp. 338-44; Jāmi, *Nafaḥāt*, 22; lists in Gramlich, pp. 145-46), historically there has been little agreement regarding the exact range and scope of saintly marvels among those who have discussed the subject. Generally, however, there are certain *karāmāt* that recur with some regularity in the hagiographic literature. First, there are *karāmāt* with explicit social intent, such as miraculously effecting conversion to Islam or the materialization of food, water, and other necessities of life in times of need; safeguarding scrupulous adherence to the divine law through extraordinary awareness of the illicitness of apparently licit objects or situations; miraculously reprimanding reprobates and punishing detractors; healing the sick and raising the dead; and assisting wronged person or voyagers in peril. Second, there are *karāmāt* which display extraordinary mastery over the natural world, such as taming and/or

conversing with wild beasts or controlling the elements. Third, there are those *karāmāt* which evince the ability to transcend the limits of normal human capacity, such as being able to instantaneously traverse great distances, engage in bilocation, fly, levitate, walk on water, or be immune to fire and poison. Finally, there are those *karāmāt* connected with powers of extrasensory perception, such as mind reading and telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition, clairaudience, and spiritual discernment or 'cardiognosia' (*ferāsa*). An exhaustive inventory can be found in Gramlich (pp. 148-244 ff.).

Among Sufis of later generations, such ideas about the nature, role, and significance of saintly charismata were eagerly cultivated, increasingly amplified in the culture of both the Sufi cloister and the popular imagination through the circulation of embellished accounts of the *karāmāt al-awliāʾ* in hagiology as well as through popular stories connected with the ever-expanding cult of saints and practice of shrine visitation. The former include universal hagiographies, such as ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Jāmi's (d. 1492) *Nafaḥāt al-ons* and, with the rise of the Sufi brotherhoods, *ṭariqat*-based hagiographies, such as Aflāki's (d. 1360) *Manāqeb al-ʿārefin* on Rumi and his disciples or Ebn Bazzāz's account of Shaykh Ṣafi-al-Din Ardabili (d. 1334), the *Ṣafwat al-ṣafāʾ* (brief synopsis in Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* IV, pp. 38-39). The post-Mongol period also witnessed the continued production of hagiographies of individual saints and Sufi masters, such as those compiled by descendents of Ruzbehān Baqli almost a century after his death. These, perhaps contrary to their ancestor's aforementioned statement, are replete with accounts of *karāmāt* visited upon him over the course of his life (Šaraf-al-Din Ebrāhim, *Toḥfat ahl al-ʿerfān*, and, Šams-al-Din ʿAbd-al-Laṭif, *Ruḥ al-jenān*, in *Ruzbehān-nāma*, pp. 1-149, 152-370, passim). As for the popular stories, biographical anecdotes regarding local miracle-working *awliāʾ*, such as those found in the 14th-century pilgrim's guidebook to the tombs of the saints of Shiraz by Jonayd-e Širāzi (d. after 1389), the *Šadd al-ezār*, evince the popular attraction of the idea that a saint retains the power to work miracles *post mortem* and that this can be accessed through the *baraka* associated with his earthly tomb.

Despite the impact of rationalism and reform across the modern Muslim world, such attitudes concerning the *karāmāt* of the *awliāʾ* have continued to persist in popular religiosity, and while scholars have traditionally dismissed such materials as pious or quaint legend, a number of recent studies dealing with the history of Sufism in pre-modern Iran and Central Asia have shown that accounts of the *karāmāt* of the *awliāʾ* embedded in hagiographic and other

literatures constitute quite unique and valuable sources for the writing of the social and cultural history (e.g., Aigle, 1995a; idem, 1995b; idem, 1995c; DeWeese, 2000; idem, 1999; idem, 1993; and Gross, 1999).

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