



# Shaykh Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī<sup>1</sup>

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## A Great Scholar of Afghanistan - Shaykh Mullā ‘Alī ‘the Reciter’

He is the Imām, the Erudite Scholar, the Shaykh, Light of the Dīn, Abul Hassan, ‘Alī (the son of Sultan Muhammad) the Reciter the Hirawī (later the Makkan) the Hanafite, renowned as Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī.

The meaning of *al-Qārī* (the Reciter) is derived from *qa-ra-’a* (to recite). He was given this appellation due to his mastery of the science of Qur’ānic readings, and his vast knowledge and expertise in this field.

It is possible that he became particularly famous as ‘the Reciter’ because he memorized the Qur’ān so well in his home town and used to lead the tarawīh prayers there in a most excellent manner.

‘Hirawī’ refers to the famous city, Herāt (Hirāh), one of the greatest cities of the land of Khorasān, and now the second city of Afghanistan. The Shaykh is called ‘the Hirawī’ as he was born and brought up there.

He is called ‘the Makkan’ because he traveled to the Venerated City, Makkah, and made it his home. He was blessed with remaining in the neighborhood of the Glorious Ka’bah for over forty years, before passing away in its radiant precincts.

As for the title ‘*Mullā*’, some of the scholars write it as ‘*Munlā*’ and some as ‘*al-Mawlā*’, regarding it as being originally an Arabic word. However it has become a part of the Persian language, and is widely used by the people of Iran, Turkistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan.

The *Hāfidh*, Murtadā al-Zabīdī, believes that ‘*Mullā*’ is derived from the Arabic word ‘*al-mawlā*’. He mentions in the dictionary, *Tāj al-‘Urūs*: ‘the adjective from *al-mawlā*’

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<sup>1</sup> From the introduction to Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī’s fatwa on ‘*Al-Samā’ wa al-Ghinā*’ by ‘Uthmān Muhammad Na’urah [published by Dar al-Furfūr, Damascus] previously posted on the now defunct ‘Lightstudy’ website.

is *mawlawī*. This is used by the non-Arabs as a title for a great scholar, but they pronounce it *Mullā*.’

The historians do not record the precise date of his birth [but it was sometime in the 15th century CE].

His seeking of sacred knowledge can be divided into two main stages:

The first stage was in Herāt, his town of birth, where he studied the recitation and pronunciation of the Noble Qur’ān, and memorized it cover to cover. He also studied the elementary disciplines, and attended the circles of sacred knowledge there.

The second stage begins with his journey to the Sanctuary (Makkah), where he gained in knowledge and understanding, and increased in his humility and sincerity towards Allah ‘azza wa jall. He persevered in seeking sacred knowledge, and accompanied the distinguished scholars of the blessed land.

In Herat, he studied *tajwīd* and the science of Qur’ānic readings with his Shaykh, the Qur’ān teacher, Mu’īn al-Dīn the Hirawī (the son of the *Hāfidh*, Zayn al-Dīn). He studied with the scholars of his city that were renowned for their learning. During that time Herat had become an important centre of Islamic civilization in Central Asia, and a city in which the sciences and arts flourished.

Shaykh ‘Alī the Reciter was born at a time when the fluorescence of learning in Herat was beginning its decline. When the Sultan, Isma’īl ibn Ḥaydar the Safawid (known as Shah Isma’īl), the first of the Shiite Safawids, conquered Herat, he oppressed and massacred the Muslims, and commanded that Shiite practices be instituted in the city. He even ordered that all Imāms must curse and insult the Pious Caliphs (*al-Khulafā al-Rashidūn*) in their Friday speeches. This led to the emigration of a large number of scholars, seeking to leave behind a land of Innovation for a land of Islam. Amongst them was the Erudite Shaykh, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Abharī (d. 928H). Also amongst those leaving behind their native land was Shaykh ‘Alī the Reciter. He made intention to go to the Venerated City, Makkah, and to take up residence there, and to benefit from its learned men and women.

The conquest of Herat by Shah Isma’īl was in the year 916 H [approx. 1515 CE], and was followed by long years of oppression and tribulation. Shaykh ‘Alī left Herat soon after this period, but is known to have arrived in Makkah after an extended period of time. Surely, the Venerated City picks for herself the choicest of fruits! From these fruits are the great scholars who, within her precincts, teach students from all over the world the various sciences of the sacred Law.

Thus begins the second stage of Shaykh ‘Alī’s journey of knowledge. He travels this Golden Path of sacred knowledge which winds through the Venerated City, and Allah opens his heart and desires good for him, so he assiduously accompanies the people of knowledge in the city for many long years, devoting himself to study and teaching.

The Shaykh lived a simple, humble life, eating from the fruit of his own labor in accordance with the prophetic saying:

‘No-one ever ate any food better than that which their own hands earned. Surely, the prophet of Allah, Dawūd (*peace be upon him*), ate from the earning of his own hands.’

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Halīm al-Nu‘mānī said: al-Mawlā ‘Alī the Reciter remained satisfied with what he earned from selling books which he wrote with his hands i.e. he worked as a scribe. His predominant state was one of indifference to material riches, gentleness, and being pleased with sufficiency. He mixed little with others, and was strong in worship and piety (*taqwa*). He was earnest in his drawing closer to the Knower of the secret and the manifest.

The Shaykh was deeply religious, God-fearing, scrupulous in religious affairs, indifferent to the lower world (*dunya*), gentle, and dignified. He was of the opinion that flattering rulers, accepting salaries from them, and seeking official positions was detrimental to one’s piety and sincerity. He wrote an epistle on this matter which he called ‘Distancing the Scholars from Approaching the Rulers’. He often used to say:

‘May Allah have mercy on my father who used to tell me he wished I did not become a scholar, as he feared that I may end up at the doors of the rulers.’

The Shaykh emphasized strongly the seeking of knowledge for the sake of Allah, and was particularly strict against those who studied for worldly ends, like seeking careers, that would soon perish. He said:

‘This is how we find students nowadays. They are confused about what they are doing and why. Sometimes they are studying knowledge that has no benefit in this world or the Next, just so that they can attain certain spurious objectives, such as getting in with oppressive rulers, gaining high position in society, using flattery to attain ranks, or even just to get food for their bellies.’

He also said:

‘The scholars of the early generations (*may Allah have mercy on them*) used always to examine closely those who sought to keep their company. If they saw them to be deficient in observing *nafl* (supererogatory) acts of worship, they would rebuke them and cease to respect them. If they found any evil in them, such as making the forbidden permissible, they would dispel them, and banish them from their gatherings, leaving off even conversation with them, let alone teaching!’

For some time, Shaykh ‘Alī held the opinion that the parents of the Messenger of Allah (*may mercy of Allah and peace be upon him*) will be in the Fire. He even wrote an epistle to back this view. However, he changed his opinion later on in life, *al hamdo lillah*, as we find unequivocally stated in his commentary on *al-Shifā* of Qādi ‘Iyādh, which he wrote just three years before his demise. In it he states:

‘Abū Tālib’s embracing Islam is incorrect. As for the Islam of [the Prophet’s (*may mercy of Allah and peace be upon him*)] parents, there are

several opinions. The most correct is that they both had Islam, according to the consensus of the greatest of the ummah.'

Shaykh 'Alī used to challenge all innovations and wrong beliefs and actions that prevailed at his time, and used to condemn them with a strong voice. He condemned the masses for their deviations and faced the scholars with reminders and good counsel.

**His Books include:**

*Fath al-'Ināyah*, commentary on *al-Niqāyah*  
Commentary on the Commentary of *Nukhbat al-Fīkr*  
*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh*, commentary on *Mishkāt al-Masābih*  
*Jam' al-Wasāil*, commentary on *al-Shamā'il*  
Commentary on *al-Shifā*  
Commentary on the *Muwatta*  
Epistle called 'Distancing the Scholars from Approaching the Rulers'  
Commentary on *al-Shātibiyyah*  
Commentary on *al-Jazariyyah*  
*Al-Athār al-Janiyyah*, on the Hanafite scholars  
Biography of Shaykh 'Abdul-Qādir

...and many others on a variety of disciplines.

**His teachers include:**

Shaykh Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī  
Shaykh 'Alī the Pious the Indian  
Shaykh Mair Kelan  
Shaykh 'Atiyyah al-Sullāmī  
Shaykh 'Abdullah the Sindī  
Shaykh Qutb al-Dīn the Makkan  
Shaykh Ahmad ibn al-Dīn the Egyptian

His students were extremely numerous as he was the Imām of his age, and the Unique of his time. He was a glorious scholar, a jurisprudent, a hadīth-specialist, a Qur'ānic exegete, and specialist in Qur'ānic readings. Indeed, his mastery extended to many disciplines.

**His main students include:**

Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Tabarī  
Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Murshidī  
Shaykh Muhammad ibn Furukh al-Mawrubī

...and many others.

The biographers mention that Shaykh Mullā 'Alī the Reciter died in the Venerated City, Makkah, in the year 1014 after the Hijrah.

Some mention that he died in Shawwal of that year and was buried in al-Ma'lāh

graveyard in the Venerated City. Shaykh Ahmad al-Qittān delineates the precise location of his grave in his book ‘*Tanzīl al-Rahamāt*’.

It is said that he died in 1010H. Hāji Khalifa mentions this in ‘*Kashf al-Dhunūn*’, but it is incorrect.

It is said that when the news of his death reached the scholars of Egypt, they prayed the funeral prayer for him in al-Azhar University. It was attended by over four thousand people.

