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The Temple of Karakán

By

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Of the *Tlomítlanyal*, the five Gods of Stability, Lord Karakán appears to be something of a paradox: He is the “Lord of War, the Master of Heroes, and the Ultimate Warrior on the Final Day.” As the cult-deity of soldiers, His doctrines stress the power of the Imperial state, expansion through war, personal bravery, and the feats of arms. These tenets would seem to be closer to “Change” than to “Stability.” Yet the Engsvanyáli theologians and their modern counterparts do not perceive Him as such. Lord Karakán represents the physical force to maintain Stability, the development of organizations that guard and protect society and its governing forces (the state). He is the “muscle” behind Lord Hnálla’s quest for Supernal Light, Lady Avánne’s cyclical rounds of crops, seasons, fertility, and the family life, Lord Thúnis’ quest for wisdom, and Lord Belkhánu’s researches into the worlds of spirits and the Planes Beyond. Seen through Tsolyáni eyes, Lord Karakán is perhaps the ultimate pillar of Stability; any changes He brings about are intended to produce greater and more permanent structures in the future. His Cohort, Lord Chegárra, carries this further to emphasize the principles of rulership, political acumen, and governance.

Lord Karákan’s ponderous, colonnaded temples are hung with ancient banners, shields, and weapons; His priests wear ceremonial armour of scarlet and gold; and His rituals roar with trumpets and the thunder of the great *Korángkorèng*, the bronze wardrums that stand taller than a man. He is the patron of many of the legions and of the *Hirilákte* Arenas, the High General of the Gods and the Hero of the mythological Battle of Dórmoron Plain, wherein nine of the ten Gods defeated the tenth, Lord Ksárul, and imprisoned Him in the Blue Room. It is in the sanctuary of the Great temple of Karakán at Béy Sü that prayers are made for Imperial victory in time of war, and here also the losers of the *Kólumejàlim*, the “Rite of Choosing of Emperors,” are brought to be sacrificed whenever a new Emperor ascends the Petal Throne -- whatever the faith of the winner (or of the unlucky losers!).

Lord Karakán is depicted as a powerful, youthful human champion with a head of some predatory, hawk-like bird (the exact species is not known). The image is usually winged, the pinions outspread behind the statue against the far wall of the sanctuary. He is always shown armed with a lightning-bolt-like jagged sword attired in full armour of gold: a breastplate, tasses, vambraces, greaves, and a high-crested helmet. (Exact styles differ from one period to another.) Usually the statue bears a great oval shield, blazoned with Karakán's lightning-bolt symbol and with the emblems of the other Lords of Stability in small rosettes around the outer rim. In Bény Sü and at Avanthár, Lord Karakán's shields also display the Great Seal of the Imperium just below His own emblem. His images are richly draped with scarlet velvet, and their gems -- rubies, garnets, and other red jewels -- are worth an Emperor's ransom. The value of the ornaments of His statue in the Temple at Bény Sü, for example, is estimated to be worth almost a million *Káitars*.

Temples of Karakán are simple in design: within high outer walls, an outer courtyard-garden faces a porch, often colonnaded, beyond which is a vast, cavernous hall with mighty pillars holding up a domed, painted, and gilded ceiling. Behind this hall (usually on a south-to-north axis), a short passage leads to the inner shrine, where the chief image of the God stands high upon a dais and a series of pedestals. Altars for offerings and sacrifices are ranked before the image, and murals and bas-reliefs of the God's heroic deeds at Dórmoron Plain and other legends cover the walls. Further rooms open off from each side of the main hall; these are used for various rituals. Smaller passages lead away from these to robing rooms, shrines for certain ceremonies, and "Halls of Memory," in which the relics of the legions, gifts presented by the Imperium and the nobles, etc. are displayed. Some of Lord Karakán's temples, notably those at Bény Sü and Jakállá, have long corridor-like halls filled with ranked standards, suits of armour used by great soldiers of the past, racks of weapons, and golden *Ailúr* (votive statues presented by successful commanders in memory of battles won, vows fulfilled, and the like). In many temples there is also a room devoted to memorial inscriptions and elegies of military commanders, presented and paid for by their clans and relatives. Lord Karakán values heroism, and the preservation of the memories of brave deeds is much stressed. Many of His devotees cause their biographies to be written by professional elegists, to be kept for centuries in one of the library-like repositories of the temple.

A separate building, always located in the outer courtyard to the west of the main temple, houses the smaller shrines of Lord Karakán's 56 Greater Aspects. These Aspects are specific manifestations of the Deity -- perhaps the Hindu concept of *avatar* comes as close as any -- and each has a name, a place in the legends, and a specific purpose in the doctrines. For example, Órkutai the City-Destroyer (the 14th Aspect) is an abstract, squarish block of red sandstone; He sees to the entrance of warriors into Lord Karakán's Glorious Paradise, where each soul is seated according to its courage and its deeds while alive, and where

the blessed participate in endless battles and bouts of drinking until they are reborn to fight again in some later age. Such fortunate heroes are attended by Lord Karakán's special "Heroes of Glory," supernatural beings (or other planar creatures) who resemble human warriors encased entirely in steel armour. The legends speak also of female companions: the Miyusál, race of Amazon-like demi-goddesses who fought for Lord Karakán at Dórmoron Plain and still attend Him and His heroes in paradise. Nágotai the Upholder (the 18th Aspect) guides statesmen, plans strategy, and protects the worshippers against the powers of the Dark; His squat, dwarf-like images are often worn as good luck charms. Relief's of Nágotai line the lower panels of the walls of the Hall of the Petal Throne in Avanthár. Niyónu of the Hand of Gold (the 40th Aspect) guides the families of soldiers, oversees the education of their children, and searches amongst the living and dead for warriors missing in battle. As might be expected, Niyónu is popular with worshippers of Karakán who themselves cannot serve as soldiers. Jajkúru the Victor of Ships (the 19th Aspect) oversees naval matters, exploration of the oceans, and battles at sea. He also defends the faithful from storms, lightning, and thunder, of which Lord Karakán is the patron God.

Aside from His 56 Greater Aspects, almost every temple has some localized Lesser Aspects, worshipped only in some particular city or region. Most of the cults of the Five Empires exhibit a process of gradual change in the relationships between Greater and Lesser Aspects. Some of the Greater Aspects fall into disuse, for whatever reasons, and lesser Aspects take their place, keeping the number of the former always at 56. Thus, within the past millennium, Ajjón of the Silver Helm, a Lesser Aspect once limited to Thráya, has gained prominence in the southeastern Empire, and the priests of Thráya have recently petitioned the High Council of the Priesthood to have Ajjón admitted as a Greater Aspect. This will probably cause the displacement of Mikkáshu the Shield of Scarlet (the 3rd Aspect), whose worship and functions have been almost forgotten outside of His last remaining shrines near Mekú. This is a slow and complex matter, much tangled with politics, the clans, and various forces within the hierarchy.

The religions of Tsolyánu (as well as Yán Kór and the remaining three of the Five Empires to greater or lesser degrees) attempt to provide for everyone, and Lord Karakán's Temple is no exception. Those women who wish to remain "good clan-girls" usually worship Niyónu or one of the other "family" Aspects of the War-God; *Aridáni* women (those who have declared their legal independence and equality under Tsolyáni law) often prefer Faishán of the Pinnacle of Victory (the 19th Aspect), who is represented as an armoured warrior-woman carrying a spear and a sheaf of lightning bolts. Even nonhumans worshippers are served: Rayéshtu of the Many Swords (the 28th Aspect) is shown as a six-limbed, scaled, serpentine creature; His (Its?) shrine is frequented by Shén, Pé Chói, Páchi Léi, Hláka, and others of the Friendly Races. Lord Karakán thus possesses male, female, and even nonhuman attributes, none of which seem to bother the theologians.

Lord Karakán's rituals are ponderous, military, and glorious. Great pageantry attends the "Litany of Noble Deeds" on the 25th of the month Didóm; legions are consecrated, and ancient heroes are remembered with parades, incense, and chanting. This ritual is particularly splendid at Béy Sü and Avanthár. On the 18th of Trantór, the "Might of Heroes" is celebrated with music, drums, and massed choruses of singers; it is on this occasion that young men and women are inducted into the warrior societies with blood-letting, deeds of courage, and abstinence. The five intercalary days at the end of the year are also filled with ceremony: e.g. Lord Chegárra's "Commemoration of Ruling in Splendour" at the city of Hekéllu on the second day; Lord Karakán's "Celebration of Splendid Victories" at Jakálla on the third; the "Obeisance to the Lord of War" at Khirgár and also the "Propitiation of the Lords of Battle" at Ke'ér in Yán Kór on the fifth. Smaller, local ceremonies are held throughout the year at every temple in the Five Empires as well, most being accompanied by martial music, military panoply, and sacrifices.

Both Lord Karakán and His Cohort, Lord Chegárra, accept human sacrifices on specific, limited occasions: these should be warriors (war-captives) if possible, and slaves, criminals, and others are considered almost "ignoble," though acceptable if nothing else is available. Victims are dispatched with a silver knife in the form of a lightning bolt (called the Ri'inür). One stroke to the heart is most auspicious. Fire -- the province of Lord Vimúhla -- is not employed, although some sacrifices are indeed fastened to lightning rods on the roofs of the temples during storms, where Lord Karakán Himself may smite them! (If not struck, they are slain later with the knife -- not a particularly good omen.) Bravery is the paramount virtue, and a victim who sings his Death-Song and walks willingly and unbound to the altar is much praised.

Daily rituals consist of an "Adoration of Glory" at dawn, a noon prayer called "the Praise of Victory" before the midday meal, and an evening ritual entitled "the Sheathing of the Sword." Performed at home or at work, these ceremonies may consist of no more than a few muttered words, a drop or two of water or wine spattered upon the ground, and Lord Karakán's zigzag lightning gesture made in the air; at the temple they are considerably longer and more complex, taking perhaps 20 minutes apiece. Every temple also has several other regular rituals, but these depend upon local tradition. Some are dedicated to the Aspects as well, and the temples are thus full of priests and worshippers around the clock.

Lord Karakán and Lord Chegárra are not strong in the more recondite areas of magic. Their spells are usually meant to aid the warrior in some fashion, and many of Their devotees consider sorcery a bit "ignoble." Both Temples do have powerful contingents of military magicians, however, since battlefield magic is a recognized part of warfare on Tékumel. Within the Temples of Karakán and Chegárra there are several "warrior orders."

Within the Temples of Karakán and Chegárra there are several “warrior orders.” In other faiths these might be considered “secret societies,” but the War-Gods value *Khomoyi* -- “noble action” -- and believe that secrecy is “ignoble” -- for them, at least. Thus, the Clan of the Sword of Righteousness is an open group; members are proposed and elected by each temple’s “chapter,” with preferences being given to those who have done mighty deeds for the Empire. The exact rituals of initiation are not revealed, but it is certain that they are painful and take about six days. Membership and rank within this society are openly displayed in the form of amulets, ornaments upon one’s armour, and special helmet-crests. The benefits are considerable: recommendations for promotion, a voice in Temple politics, cooperation with members in different clans and legions, respect and social prominence. Unlike certain other Temples, the Clan of the Sword of Righteousness has no specific political axe to grind; it does contain many conservative aristocrats of the great old clans, and it is strongly allied with the army and with Prince Eselné, who is one of its chief members.

Other orders include the “Brethren of Scarlet,” the “Seekers of Foes,” the “Soldiers of the Dawning Sun,” and many others. Most of these are also non-political; they value heroism, stoic resistance to pain, and an almost foolhardy willingness to be foremost in a battle. The “Righteous Ones of the Arcing Shaft” inducts archers, crossbowmen, artillerymen, and, to some extent, slingers; otherwise these societies are not divided according to their members’ preferences with weapons.

The backers of the Temples of Karakán and Chegárra include some of the most ancient and noble clans of the Empire: various groups within the Sea Blue, Golden Sunburst, Golden Bough, and particularly Blade Raised High, a clan almost totally devoted to these two Deities. These, together with army officers from other clans, comprise the Military Party, which backs Prince Eselné in the coming contest for the Petal Throne. The Temples themselves own vast tracts of agricultural land in the heart of the Empire, along the Mssúma River from Avanthár down to Jakálla, and they use their great wealth to further the aims of the Military Party: constant warfare and expansion.

The High General of the Empire, Kéttukal hiMraktiné, a member of the Sea Blue clan and commander of the First Legion of Ever-Present Glory, is one of the principal followers of Lord Karakán. Other generals include: Burusháya hiKáikune of Thráya, a *Tsémel* (Patriarch) of Chegárra, of the Red Sword clan and General of the Cohorts of Lord Chegárra (12th Medium Infantry); Chulín the Foreigner of Púrdimal, General of the Legion of Chulín the Foreigner (33rd Medium Infantry) -- Chulín himself is originally from Háida Pakála; Ekuné hiBosúga of the Red Sun clan from Tumíssa, General of the Legion of Lord Khariháya (14th Crossbowmen); Giriktéshmu hiKoyúga of Jakálla, of the Red Sun clan, a follower of Chegárra, General of the Legion of Giriktéshmu (23rd Archers); Gúsha hiVordésa of Khirgár, of the Golden Sunburst clan, General of