



The Mantle of Elijah

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And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.

I Kings 19:11-13

You, Elijah, will precede all prophets in the generation of the Messiah. There are those to whom you will reveal yourself in future through an aspect of their soul, by their intellect, and there are those to whom you will reveal yourself in future through your wisdom, and there are those to whom you will reveal yourself in future face to face, in their physical aspect.

‘Zohar Chadash’, Tikkunim Chadashim LeRashbi¹

The prophetic mantle of the prophet Elijah exemplifies, in the Abrahamic traditions, the support of the divine *baraqah*, inaugurating the original ritual transmission of initiatic benediction from the master to the novice, conceived as the passing on of an efficacious spiritual influence capable of enabling interior realisation and the regaining of man’s original station at the Centre. This initiatic transmission emblemized by the mantle of the prophet Elijah more particularly pertains to the domain which can be properly termed esoteric for the prophet has a special function as the prototypal hidden Master whose role ultimately possesses an eschatological dimension as he recurrently descends through the cycles to transmit to the elect the initiation which realises the great liberation just as in Qur’anic and Sufic lore he guides Iskhandar *Dhu al-qarnayn* upon the alchemical quest through the Land of Darkness, the *nigredo* of the Hermetic opus, to the Hyperborean realm beneath the Pole-star where is situated the glittering well-spring of the waters of the Fountain of Immortal Life which marks the supreme Centre (and in this relationship between Ilyas/Al-Khizr and Iskhandar, the Prophet and the Emperor, the Inner Sage and the Outer King, we may see the right disposition obtaining between *Sacerdotium* and *Regnum*). Elijah is the pre-eminent prophetic guide in the Primordial Tradition, the invisible Prophet who appears mysteriously (from above) to initiate the solitary elect as a liberative manifestation of God’s mercy and to restore the world in readiness for the coming of the last times. We should

¹ Trans. Alan Unterman, p.87 ‘The Kabbalistic Tradition: An Anthology of Jewish Mysticism’ London 2008

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bear in mind however that, strictly speaking, Elijah is not identical with Al-Khizr but rather he belongs to the same ‘spiritual family’ as the ‘Green Prophet’². As was written in Malachi 4:4-5:

‘Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgements. Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the waters with a curse.’

For where the Mosaic revelation signifies exoterism and the outward Law which is indispensable and incumbent upon all, Elijah represents the spiritual waters of esoterism and the interior Gnosis, a veritable fountainhead of the verdancy-generating, crystalline waters of light and immortality. The 18th surah of the Holy Qur’an, *Surah al-Kahf* alludes to the seemingly strange paradoxes which the relations between the exterior Law and the interior Gnosis can on occasion display and beyond the veil of apparent transgressions (which are ultimately seen not to be anything of the kind) inculcates, not emulation thereof, but rather complete obedience to the Prophetic Master and serene submission to the will of God whose workings transcend the limitations of ordinary human understanding. The strange tale of Al-Khizr’s deeds and the consequent astonishment of Moses (which have sometimes been misinterpreted as a justification of transgressive negation of the Law by pseudo-esoteric adherents of heterodox delusion³) is in fact a model of absolute trust in the Divine Law whose workings transcend conventional appearances, conveyed in a startling *koan*-like manner, and this is the function of Elijah as Al-Khizr, the hidden guide upon the path of the initiates, the inner way of the pneumatics which transpires at the isthmus or meeting between two seas, the exoteric and esoteric spheres of prophetic revelation. Furthermore his presence and initiatic guidance may be made manifest in a subtle interior manner via what in Shia or Ismaili terminology might be called the ‘Elijah-of-one’s-being’. As Joseph Chaim of Baghdad said: *‘Sometimes the revelation of Elijah, may his memory be for a blessing, also comes to a righteous man (tzaddik) by enclothing himself in his intellect. He then says something true by himself, as if his intellect told him this thing.’*⁴ According to the Kabbalist Joseph Caro in the treatise ‘Maggid Mesharim’ the prophet Elijah was in reality the angel Metatron, the ‘author of theophanies’, and he comes into this world to reveal the divine mysteries of the Holy One to blessed souls and so as Rene Guenon tells us, he would be a manifestation of the ‘Angel of the Face’ as the ‘Celestial Pole’ and thus a hypostasis of the ‘King of the World’. As the ‘Pardes Rimmonim’ states Elijah descends as an initiatic stream of liberating knowledge and mercy *‘...sometimes in the form of an Arabian merchant, sometimes like a horseman, sometimes like one of the great sages of the generation. His figure and appearance take many forms.’* Likewise in the esoteric traditions of Shia Islam the Hidden Imam explicitly asserts: *‘I am he whose name in the Gospel is Elijah.’* Elijah is the invisible one who is without father or mother and in whom is revealed the transmission of the Primordial Gnosis in paradoxical ways which seem to transcend the serial sequence of historical lineage and

² In this ‘spiritual family’ we should also include St George, the figure of Glaukos (also associated with the colour green) as well as Enoch and Hermes.

³ The great 9th century Sufi master Dhu’l-Nun al-Misri reiterated the correct esoteric perspective, for the benefit of those misled by heterodox views: *‘It is incumbent upon the gnostic that the light of his gnosis not put out the light of his piety, that he not believe that inner knowledge abolishes for him outward legal injunctions, and that the many charismatic gifts given by Allah not incite him to rend the veils of what God has forbidden.’*

⁴ Trans. Alan Unterman, p. 93 ‘The Kabbalistic Tradition: An Anthology of Jewish Mysticism’ London 2008.

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who appears at the apocalyptic close of the cycle of the ages, as Christ says in Matthew 17:11: *‘Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.’*

Elijah’s mission is that of revealing the esoteric ‘knowledge of the heart’ and as the intra-kardial cavity or ‘heart-space’ of the Logos, the Divine Principle, is symbolized by a cavern in the interior of the sacred mountain we should not be too surprised to see the prophet’s intimate association with the locus of the cave as is described in the 19th chapter of the First Book of Kings and in Kabbalistic lore such as in the teachings of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague who said that amongst the many sites especially suited for the ‘divine holy word’ in the world, the cave in which Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai was concealed was the sacred place where the presence and manifestation of Elijah has been experienced throughout the ages and the illumination of his secret wisdom received.⁵

‘Greenness’⁶ is the hieratic signature of Elijah and the hue of his mantle, mirroring the emerald verdancy of eternal life and the shimmering of sacred waters springing up in miraculous vitality from the realm of the Unseen, reminding one of the ‘great green’ (*wadi*) of ancient Egyptian symbolism, denoting herbage⁷ and water, the ‘field of malachite’ which was the abode of blessed souls. It is he, whom Ibn ‘Arabi beheld walking upon the moonlit waves of the ocean’s surface in the port of Tunis, who is the guide to the paradisaical ‘green island’ (*el jezirah el-khadrah*) upon which rises the ‘white mountain’ (*el jabal et abiody*), imaging the spiritual Centre.⁸ This is co-identical with the ‘Mount of Salvation’ (Monsalvat) wherein is the citadel of the Holy Grail and we are perhaps justified in symbolically linking the colour of the green mantle of Al-Khezr with the green silk upon which Wolfram von Eschenbach tells us the Holy Grail was borne by the Queen Repanse de Schoye in the procession in the Grail-Castle : *‘Upon a green achmardi she bore the consummation of heart’s desire, it’s root and it’s blossoming – a thing called “The Grail”, paradisaical, transcending all earthly perfection.’*⁹ Paralleling the quest for the ‘Sanct Grail’ the Green One as Hidden Prophet leads the initiate beyond darkness to the axial ‘abode of immortality’ in Hyperborea, in the quest for the Centre emblemized by the *fons vitae*, well-spring of eternal life. As the initiator of the Solitary Ones (*Afrad*) Al-Khizr renews the primordial state, restoring man to his paradisaical station via an esoteric benediction which is signified by the investiture of the mantle.

⁵ Kabbalistic sages intoned the words *Eliyahu Hanavi* (‘Elijah the Prophet’ whose Hebraic gematria is 72), seventy two times before going to sleep to invoke the *berakah* of the Prophet and to see him in dreams just as Al-Khizr sometimes bestows the *khirqah* in the dream-state in esoteric Islam.

⁶ In Western esoterism green is the colour of truth as we see in the Latin words *viridis* and *veritas* and the English word *veridical*.

⁷ In certain survivals of the folk-rites of old England (formerly called Albion, the ‘White Land’ concerning which the 6th century cleric Gildas wrote that this land is *‘poised in the Divine Balance which sustains the whole earth’* having represented at one time a secondary image of the supreme Centre), which preserve archaic traces and eroded remnants of the Primordial Tradition, the ‘Green Man’ is called ‘Green George’ in ancient mumming rites. Al-Khizr in the orient is also identified with St George as well as Elijah. In one of the tales of *Alif Laylah wa Laylah*, (‘Coelebs the Droll and his Wife and Her Four Lovers’), an episode occurs in which a man disguises himself with fragrant herbs *‘till such a time as all his face was hidden in green’* and declares to one who meets him *‘I am Al-Khidir, the Green Prophet (upon whom be the Peace).’*

⁸ Cf. Rene Guenon, *Le Roi du Monde*, ch.10, n.10.

⁹ Wolfram Von Eschenbach, *Parzival* ch. V 189-90

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In Judaeo-Christian tradition the exemplary pattern of this initiatic transmission is described in the episode recounted in the Second Book of Kings ch.2 v.8-15 in which the spiritual ‘translation’ of the prophet is described, which took place beside the river Jordan:

And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

In Islamic esoterism, the Hidden Master, Ilyas/Al-Khezr, similarly invests the chosen initiates, in certain extraordinary circumstances and by Divine Grace, with the supernatural numen whose symbol is the mantle, the *khirqa khadiriyya*. The ‘greatest shaykh’ Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi himself encountered Al-Khizr on several occasions and received¹⁰ the transmission of the *khirqa* from the Sufi master ‘Ali ibn Jami who had received it directly from the ‘Green One’ in a garden on the outskirts of the city of Mosul. In the ‘Meccan Revelations’ the ‘Doctor Maximus’ recounts: ‘*And it was in that very spot, in the garden where Khizr had invested him with it that the shaykh invested me with it in turn, observing the same ceremonial as Khizr himself had observed in conferring the investiture upon him.*’ Furthermore Ibn ‘Arabi makes it clear that investiture with the mantle of Khizr is no mere formality or token but the outward symbol of a real transference of a spiritual state of initiatic Grace¹¹. The original initiatic transmission which Elijah bestowed upon Elisha is explicated in Ibn ‘Arabi’s own description of the true nature of the *khirqa khadiriyya*: ‘*...when the masters of spiritual states perceive some imperfection in one of their companions and wish to perfect that person’s state they resort to the custom of meeting the person alone. The master then takes the piece of clothing he is wearing in the spiritual state he is in at that particular moment, removes it and puts it on the man whom he wishes to guide to perfection. He then holds the man closely to him – and the master’s state spreads to his disciple*

¹⁰ In fact Ibn ‘Arabi received two lineages of Eliatic initiation, the other originating through Taqiuddin ibn ‘Abdirrahman whose grandfather was invested with the *khirqa* by Al-Khizr.

¹¹ Let us say here that attempts by non-Islamic pseudo-Sufis and occultists in our own day to claim such an Uwaysi initiation from Khizr are very likely deceptions of the Adversary and their false teachings should be rejected as such. The requisite spiritual qualifications and the conditions of Grace under which such an investiture can take place were exceptionally rare in Ibn ‘Arabi’s epoch and are more so than ever in our own degenerate age. Regular initiatic filiation within an orthodox spiritual and esoteric form cannot be circumvented.

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who thereby attains to the desired perfection. This is the “clothing” as I understand it and as it has been transmitted by our masters.’¹²

The ritual transmission of the *khirqā*¹³ in Tasawwuf occurs in the form of the bestowal of the mantle, a scarf, a turban or even as in the Qadiriyya tradition a piece of fabric bearing the 18-petalled *gul* (‘rose’) emblem which is placed on top of the initiates head beneath his skullcap. Always it denotes the outward transference of an interior state of gnosis and initiatic benediction (*baraqah*).

Another facet of the initiatic transmission of the mantle of Elijah is resumed in the symbolism of the water of eternal life in its baptismal aspect and this mystery is encountered in the mission of St John the Baptist (who was identified with Elias and concerning whom Christ says in Matthew 11:14 ‘*And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.*’) and in the Johannite dimension of Christian esoterism. The waters of immortality which Al-Khizr/Ilyas partakes of and grants to the elect correspond with the waters of the Jordan in which Christ was baptised by St John when the dove of the Paraclete descended upon him.

Furthermore the baptismal mystery is complemented and perfected in the irradiation of ‘Taboric light’ at the Transfiguration of the Messiah upon the mountain which according to the Gospel illuminates the vision of Jesus Christ robed in radiant white vestments (white being the colour of spiritual authority) who is beheld by the three apostles in the company of Moses and Elijah.

If the prophetic gnosis of Elijah which is conveyed via the investiture with the mantle pertains to the spiritual domain of the Greater Mysteries, properly speaking, by transposition onto a lower level his initiatic function as bestower of spiritual regeneration in the *Tikkun ha-Olahm* at the end of time also obtains in the realm of the Lesser Mysteries, refracted into the scope of the Magnum Opus, in which context the advent of ‘Elias Artista’ is adumbrated who will unseal the secrets of the cosmological sciences of Hermetism and the *Ars Regia* of alchemy, for example by Theophrastus Paracelsus who predicts thus: ‘*With this art, the Lord bestows the wisdom to keep it secret until the advent of Elias Artist. Then shall be revealed what has been concealed.*’ John Frederick Helvetius in his work *The Golden Calf* in which that alchemist states: ‘*...I have determined to reveal this grand Arcanum to you, my beloved friends; and I will now gird myself to tell you all that I know and have heard of the sayings and doings of the Great Artist Elias.*’¹⁴ In the context of the Royal Mysteries, the Artist Elias opens up the secrets which reveal the pathway to the ‘Gold of the Wise’ and initiates the alchemist into the mysteries of the ‘Hidden Stone of the Philosophers’. On the 27th December 1666, Helvetius records that he directly encountered Elias Artista who visited him at his house and was given some of the Red Tincture by him. In a detail which is pregnant with symbolic import the Artist Elias took from his breast pocket a piece of green silk in which were wrapped five medals of alchemical gold. Helvetius says of this mysterious encounter: ‘*...I cannot tell you what has become of the Artist Elias. Before he left me, on that last day of our friendly intercourse, he told me that he was on the point of undertaking a journey to the Holy Land. May the Holy Angels of God watch over him wherever he is, and long preserve him as a source of blessing to Christendom.*’

¹² *Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, cited in Claude Addas, ‘Quest for the Red Sulphur’, p.146 Lahore 2000.

¹³ Regarding the ritual transmission of the *khirqā*, in the Greek-Orthodox Church, the confession, which is a very important mystery, takes place under the cover of the priest's mantle.

¹⁴ ‘Concerning the Secrets of Alchemy & other tracts from the Hermetic Museum’, p 9. Lampeter 1989

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But the greater arcana of Elijah pertain to his spiritual function as the Restorer at the end of the cycles of time wherein his role is mirrored in that of the Mahdi in Islamic eschatology who comes forth from his celestial cavern and descends to reveal the ultimate mysteries of the Divine Word at the last Hour. Elijah and Enoch are the two prophetic figures who never physically died but were instead wrapped up into the divine world, translated into the spiritual sphere of the Presence of God. As Rene Guenon tells us it is of Elijah and Enoch as the divine witnesses that the Apocalypse of St John chapter 11:4 speaks: *'These are the two olive trees¹⁵, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth'*.

¹⁵ The olive is symbolic of light and wisdom, its igneous oil epitomising spiritual illumination as we see in the Qur'anic 'Surah of Light' where is described the *'blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow (of itself) though no fire touched it.'* (Surah 24: An-Nur).