

Khidr

Khidr or **al-Khidr** (Arabic: الخصر *al-Khiḍr*; also transcribed as *al-Khadir*, **Khader**/**Khadr**; **Khidr**; **Khizr**; **Khizir**; **Khyzer**; **Qeezr**; **Qhezr**; **Qhizyer**; **Qhezar**; **Khizar**; **Xizir**; **Hizir**) is a figure ascribed to a figure in the Quran^{[2][3]} as a righteous servant of God possessing great wisdom or mystic knowledge. In various Islamic and non-Islamic traditions, Khidr is described as a messenger, prophet, wali, slave^[4] and angel^[5], who guards the sea and teaches secret knowledge.^[6] The figure of al-Khidr has been syncretized over time with various other figures including but not limited to Sorūsh in Iran,^{[7][8][9][10]} Saint Sarkis the Warrior,^{[11][12]} Saint George in Asia Minor and the Levant, and John the Baptist in Armenia.^{[13][14][15][16][17]}

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al-Khiḍr



17th-century Mughal painting of al-Khidr

Mystic, Green One, *The Verdant One, Teacher of the Prophets* "Sayyidina"

Venerated in	Islamic and Islamicate area
Major shrine	Countless Shrines across the Muslim World ^[1]
Influenced	Countless future Sufi saints and mystics

Etymology

Because of the linguistic similarities and shared etymology between the name "al-Khiḍr" and the Arabic word for green ("al-akhḍar" or "al-khaḍra" as in *Gubbat al-khaḍra* or the Green Dome), and the fact that the name "al-Khiḍr" shares exactly the same trilateral root as the word "al-khaḍra" - a root found in multiple Semitic languages meaning "green" or "verdant", the meaning of the name has traditionally usually been taken colloquially and academically to be "the Green One" or "the Verdant One." Some contemporary scholars have disagreed with this assessment,^[18] however some others point to a possible reference to the Mesopotamian figure Utnapishtum from the Epic of Gilgamesh through the Arabization of his nickname, "Hasisatra".^[19] According to one recent view the name Khidr is not an Arabic variant or an abbreviation of Hasisatra, it directly comes from the name of the Canaanite god ḫtḥar-wa-Khasis^{[20][21]} and it may be later assimilated to Arabic term "al-akhḍar".^[22]

Quranic narrative

In Sura 18, ayat (verses) 65–82 *Al Kahf*, Moses meets the Servant of God, referred in the Quran as "one of our slaves whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Ourselves".^[23] Muslim scholars identify him as Nabi Khadra, although he is not explicitly named in the Quran and there is no reference to him being immortal or being especially associated with esoteric knowledge or fertility.^[24] These associations come in later scholarship on al-Khidr.^[25]

The Quran states that they meet at the junction of the two seas (which can be a river-tributary) and Moses asks for permission to accompany the Servant of God so Moses can learn "right knowledge of what [he has] been taught".^[26] The Servant informs him in a stern manner that their knowledge is of different nature and that "Surely you [Moses] cannot have patience with me. And how canst thou have patience about things about which thy understanding is not complete?"^[27] Moses promises to be patient and obey him unquestioningly, and they set out together. After they board a ship, the Servant of God damages the vessel. Forgetting his oath, Moses says, "Have you made a hole in it to drown its inmates? Certainly you have done a grievous thing." The Servant reminds Moses of his warning, "Did I not say that you will not be able to have patience with me?" and Moses pleads not to be rebuked.

Next, the Servant of God kills a young man. Moses again cries out in astonishment and dismay, and again the Servant reminds Moses of his warning, and Moses promises that he will not violate his oath again, and that if he does he will excuse himself from the Servant's presence. They then proceed to a town where they are denied hospitality. This time, instead of harming anyone or anything, the Servant of God restores a decrepit wall in the village. Yet again Moses is amazed and violates his oath for the third and last time, asking why the Servant did not at least exact "some recompense for it."

The Servant of God replies, "This shall be separation between me and you; now I will inform you of the significance of that with which you could not have patience. Many acts which seem to be evil, malicious or somber, actually are merciful. The boat was damaged to prevent its owners from falling into the hands of a king who seized every boat by force. And as for the boy, his parents were believers and we feared lest he should make disobedience and ingratitude to come upon them. God will replace the child with one better in purity, affection and obedience. As for the restored wall, the Servant explained that underneath the wall was a treasure belonging to two helpless orphans whose father was a righteous man. As God's envoy, the Servant restored the wall, showing God's kindness by rewarding the piety of the orphans' father, and so that when the wall becomes weak again and collapses, the orphans will be older and stronger and will take the treasure that belongs to them."

Reports in the Hadith

Among the strongest transmitted proofs about the life of al-Khidr are two reports, one narrated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in *Al-Zuhd* whereby Muhammad is said to have stated that Elijah and al-Khidr meet every year and spend the month of Ramadan in Jerusalem and the other narrated by Ya'qub ibn Sufyan from Umar II whereby a man he was seen walking with was actually al-Khidr. Ibn Hajar declared the claim of the first fair and that of the second sound in *Fath al-Bari* (1959 ed. 6:435). He goes on to cite another sound report narrated by Ibn 'Asakir from Abu Zur'a al-Razi whereby the latter met al-Khidr twice, once in his youth, the other in old age, but al-Khidr himself had not changed. Islamic scholar Bediuzzaman Said Nursi also contends that Khidr is alive, but that there are five degrees of life; Khidr is at the second degree of life, thus some religious scholars have been doubtful about it. Khidr and Ilyas (May God grant them peace), are free to an extent. That is to say, they can be present in numerous places at the same time. They are not permanently restricted by the requirements of humanity like us. They can eat and drink like us when they want to, but are not compelled to be like we are. The saints are those who uncover and witness the realities of creation, and the reports of their adventures



Dome of Al-Khidr, Temple Mount, Old City of Jerusalem

with Khidr are unanimous and elucidate and point to this level of life. There is even one degree of sainthood which is called 'the degree of Khidr.' A saint who reaches this degree receives instruction from Khidr and meets with him. But sometimes the one at that degree is mistaken to be Khidr himself.^[28]

al-Khidr is believed to be a man who has the appearance of a young adult but a long, white beard. According to some authors like Abdul Haq Vidhyarthi, al-Khidr is Xerxes (a 6th-century Sasanian prince, not to be confused with Xerxes I), who disappeared after being in the lake regions of Sistan that comprise the wetlands of the Irano-Afghan border today, and after finding the fountain of life, sought to live his entire remaining life in service of God and to help those in their path/journey to Him.

Muhammad al-Bukhari reports that al-Khidr got his name after he was present over the surface of some ground that became green as a result of his presence there. There are reports from al-Bayhaqi that al-Khidr was present at the funeral of Muhammad and was recognized only by Ali from amongst the rest of the companions, and where he came to show his grief and sadness at the death of Muhammad. Al-Khidr's appearance at Muhammad's funeral is related as follows: *A powerful-looking, fine-featured, handsome man with a white beard came leaping over the backs of the people till he reached where the sacred body lay. Weeping bitterly, he turned toward the Companions and paid his condolences. Ali said that he was Khidr.*^[29]

In another narration al-Khidr met with Ali by the Kaaba and instructed him about a supplication that is very meritorious when recited after the obligatory prayers. It is reported by Imam Muslim that during the time when the false Messiah appears and as he approaches at the outskirts of the city of Medina, a believer would challenge him, whom the false Messiah will slice into two pieces and rejoin, making it appear that he caused him to die and be resurrected, to which this man would proclaim the falsehood of the Dajjal who would try again to kill him (or make show of it) but would fail and thus his weakness and inability being made revealed. According to the commentators and transmitters of this narration the person who will challenge the Antichrist and humiliate him will be al-Khidr.

Islamic perspectives

In Shia Islam

Many Shia Muslims believe al-Khidr accompanied the Mahdi, in meeting one Sheikh Hassan ibn Muthlih Jamkarani, on 22 February 984 CE (17 Ramadan 373 A.H.) and instructing him to build a mosque at that site of their meeting, known as Jamkaran.^[30] The site, six kilometers east of Qom, Iran, has been a pilgrimage destination for the Shia for some time. In the last few years, however, it has become very popular particularly with young people, and drawn crowds of tens of thousands.^[31]

In Ismailism, al-Khidr considered as one of the 'permanent Imams'; that is, those who have guided people throughout history.^[32]

In Sufism

To Sufis, al-Khidr holds a distinguished position. Although amongst the Sunni scholars there is a difference of opinion about him being still alive, amongst Sunni Sufis there is almost a consensus that al-Khidr is still alive, with many respected figures and shaykhs, and prominent leaders claiming having had personal encounters with him. Examples of those who have claimed this are Abdul-Qadir Gilani, al-Nawawi, Ibn Arabi, Sidi Abdul Aziz ad-Dabbagh and Ahmad ibn Idris al-Fasi. Ibn Ata Allah's Lata'if al-Minan (1:84-98) states that there is consensus among the Sufis that al-Khidr is alive. In fact there are orders that claim origin with al-



A Persian manuscript depicting Elijah and al-Khidr praying together from an illuminated manuscript version of Stories of the Prophets

Khiḍr himself, or that al-Khiḍr was part of their chain, for example some of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order, the Muhammadiyah, the Idrisiyya, and the Senussi are tariqat that had al-Khiḍr as one of the central figures connecting them to the spiritual outflow of Muhammad.

In Sufi tradition, al-Khiḍr has come to be known as one of those who receive illumination direct from God without human mediation. He is the hidden initiator of those who walk the mystical path, like some of those from the Uwaisi tariqa. Uwaisis are those who enter the mystical path without being initiated by a living master. Instead they begin their mystical journey either by following the guiding light of the teachings of the earlier masters or by being initiated by the mysterious prophet-saint al-Khiḍr.

Al-Khiḍr has thus gained enormous reputation and popularity in the Sufi tradition due to his role as an initiator. Through this way come several Sufi orders which claim initiation through al-Khiḍr and consider him their master. Al-Khiḍr had thus come to symbolize access to the divine mystery (*ghayb*) itself. In the writings of Abd al-Karim al-Jili, al-Khiḍr rules over 'the Men of the Unseen' (*rijalu'l-ghayb*)— the exalted saints and angels. Al-Khiḍr is also included among what in classical Sufism are called the "abdāl" ("those who take turns"). In Sufi hierarchy, "abdāl" is a mysterious rank. It is thought in Sufism that God decides who will be abdal for a decade before an abdal is born. Abdals are thought as the gainers of mysterious power that is knowing the future also called *ilm-e-ladunni*. They are deployed to protect Islam from some unwanted evil activities that threaten the existence of Islam. In a divinely-instituted hierarchy of such saints, al-Khiḍr holds the rank of their spiritual head.

The Sri Lankan Sufi Bawa Muhaiyaddeeng gives a unique account of al-Khiḍr. Al-Khiḍr was on a long search for God, until God, out of his mercy, sends the Archangel Gabriel to guide him. Gabriel appears to al-Khiḍr as a wise human sage, and al-Khiḍr accepts him as his teacher. Gabriel teaches al-Khiḍr much in the same way as al-Khiḍr later teaches Moses in the Quran, by carrying out seemingly unjust actions. Al-Khiḍr repeatedly breaks his oath not to speak out against Gabriel's actions, and is still unaware that the human teacher is actually Gabriel. Gabriel then explains his actions, and reveals his true angelic form to al-Khiḍr. Al-Khiḍr recognises him as the Archangel Gabriel, and then Gabriel bestows a spiritual title upon al-Khiḍr, by calling him *Hayat Nabi*, the Eternal Life Prophet.

The French scholar of Sufism, Henry Corbin, interprets al-Khiḍr as the mysterious prophet, the eternal wanderer. The function of al-Khiḍr as a 'person-archetype' is to reveal each disciple to himself, to lead each disciple to his own theophany, because that theophany corresponds to his own 'inner heaven,' to the form of his own being, to his eternal individuality. Accordingly, al-Khiḍr is Moses' spiritual guide, who initiates Moses into the divine sciences, and reveals to him the secret mystic truth.

In Ahmadiyya

Ahmadiyya identifies al-Khiḍr to be the symbolic representation of Muhammad himself. Ahmadis believe that the Quranic passage of Moses' encounter with the "Servant of God" is closely linked, contextually to the subject matter of surah Al Kahf in which his story or parable is cited. According to Ahmadi exegesis on al-Kahf, which draws upon external and internal, religious and historical evidence to show that Moses' journey towards, and his experience with the "servant of God" was not physical but by way of vision, similar to the Mi'raj (ascension) of Muhammad.

The righteous 'servant of God' otherwise known as al-Khiḍr is not believed to be a historical figure but rather a symbolic figure who signifies the person of Muhammad whom Moses had desired to see and whom he saw in this vision. Muhammad has been called the 'servant of God' in many places within the Quran and is believed to be the servant of God par excellence who has been called a mercy to the whole world,^[33] he is also believed to have been vouchsafed divine knowledge in a very large measure.

The place of the meeting of the two seas signifies the time when the Mosaic dispensation meets the Islamic dispensation, i.e. when the Judaic dispensation will be superseded by the Islamic one.^[34]

The first action of "the servant of God" of making a hole in the boat is interpreted as signifying the commandments laid down by Muhammad which would, as it were make a hole in the boat, which in spiritual terms denotes worldly riches, i.e. he would see to it that wealth is fairly distributed and does not accumulate in the hands of a few. The "poor people" to whom the boat belonged

represent the Muslims, and making a hole in it means that Islam would exhort its followers to spend in the way of God by way of Zakat and charity that would seem to be a source of economic weakness, but in fact would be one of economic strength and prosperity.

The tyrant king who confiscates the boats were the Byzantine and Persian Empires who would have seized Arabia had it not seemed to them a poor and barren land not worth conquering. Thus the Arabian land in which Muhammad was to appear, represented as the damaged boat had been safeguarded from being conquered or "taken by force".

The youth, is interpreted as ignorance, strength and wild impulses, thus the second action of the "servant of God", the killing of the youth signifies that the teachings of his religion would require its followers to bring about a veritable death over their carnal desires and passions. The source of these carnal desires, impulses and passions is the human body and soul combined, from which all moral qualities spring. Islamic theology holds that every human is born virtuous, thus because his parents have been called "believers", this means that the believers may be dragged into vice by the impulses represented as the "youth". Islam seeks to eradicate these impulses and leaves man with the soul and body combined to develop along beneficent lines to achieve the high purpose of human life.

Then Moses and the "servant of God" approach a town, ask its people for food and are refused to be accepted as guests. This signifies that both Moses and Muhammad would seek co-operation from Jews and Christians but it would be denied. The two orphan boys to whom the wall belonged are Moses and Jesus and their 'righteous' father is Abraham. Their treasure was the true teaching bequeathed by them to their peoples, which was in danger of being lost due to the latter's irreligiousness. Thus the third act of the 'servant of God' (Muhammad) of rebuilding the wall signifies that the treasure or true teachings were to be safeguarded in the Quran, so that they (the people of Moses and Jesus) may accept it after having awakened to a realization of the truth of the Quranic teaching^[35]

In Zoroastrianism

There are many figures in Iran whose place Khidr took by the Islamization process. One of them is paradoxically a female figure Anahita. The most popular shrine in Yazd is dedicated to Anahita. Among the Zoroastrians, for the pilgrims to Yazd, the most important of the six pirs is Pir-e Sabz. It is still a functional temple and the holiest site for present-day Zoroastrians living in Iran.^[36]

Each year from 14–18 June, many thousands of Zoroastrians from Iran, India and other countries make a pilgrimage to Yazd in Iran to worship at a hillside grotto containing the sacred spring dedicated to Pir e Sabz. Here the worshippers pray for the fertilising rain and celebrate the greening of nature and the renewal of life. It generally refers to the sacred meal made from wheat, barley or lentil sprouts ceremoniously consumed in honour of Pir e Sabz.

In Persian the term sabz means 'green' and pir means 'shrine' among the Zoroastrians of Iran. The name of the shrine derives from the greenness of the foliage growing around the sanctuary.^[37] It is actually known Pir-e Sabz Banu 'the old woman in the mountain' or Chek Chek, but also Pir-e Sabz 'the green saint'. Because pir means also 'elder' in Persian.^[38] As Babayan says, "*Khizr is related to the Zoroastrian water goddess Anahita, and some of her former sanctuaries in Iran were rededicated to him (Pir-e Sabz)*".^[39]

Al-Khidr in "The History of al-Tabari"

Persian scholar, historian and exegete of the Qur'an Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, writes about Khidr in a chapter of his *The History of al-Tabari*, called "The Tale of al-Khidr and His History; and the History of Moses and His Servant Joshua." Al-Tabari describes several versions of the traditional story surrounding al-Khidr. At the beginning of the chapter, al-Tabari explains that in some variations, al-Khidr is a contemporary of the mythical Persian king Afridun, who was a contemporary of Abraham, and lived before the days of Moses.^[40] Al-Khidr is also said to have been appointed to be over the vanguard of the king Dhul-Qarnayn the Elder, who in this version is identified as the king Afridun.^[41] In this specific version, al-Khidr comes across the River of Life and, unaware of its properties, drinks from it and becomes immortal.^[42] Al-Tabari also recounts that al-Khidr is said to have been the son of a man who believed in Abraham, and who emigrated with Abraham when he left Babylon.^[43]

Al-Khidr is also commonly associated with Elijah, even equated with him, and al-Tabari makes a distinction in the next account in which al-Khidr is Persian and Elijah is an Israelite. According to this version of al-Khidr's story, al-Khidr and Elijah meet every year during the annual festival season.^[43]

Al-Tabari seems more inclined to believe that al-Khiḍr lived during the time of Afridun before Moses, rather than traveled as Abraham's companion and drank the water of life.^[44] He does not state clearly why he has this preference, but rather seems to prefer the chain of sources (the *isnad*) of the former story rather than the latter

The various versions in al-Tabari's *History* more or less parallel each other and the account in the Quran. However, in the stories al-Tabari recounts, Moses claims to be the most knowledgeable man on earth, and God corrects him by telling him to seek out al-Khiḍr. Moses is told to bring a salted fish, and once he found the fish to be missing, he would then find al-Khiḍr. Moses sets out with a travel companion, and once they reach a certain rock, the fish comes to life, jumps into the water, and swims away. It is at this point that Moses and his companion meet al-Khiḍr.

Al-Tabari also adds to lore surrounding the origins of al-Khiḍr's name. He refers to a saying of Muhammad that al-Khiḍr ("the Green" or "the Verdant") was named because he sat on a white fur and it shimmered green with him.^[45]

Contemporary theories on the origins of Khidr

A contemporary hypothesis on Khidr's prototype compares him with the Ugaritic god Kothar-wa-Khasis.^[46] First of all, both figures possess wisdom and secret knowledge. According to the Quran, "Khidr" (although not named directly) has a special wisdom and esoteric knowledge (**hikmah** and **ilm al-ladun**). Kothar has also special wisdom and his name means "Skillful and Wise" or "Adroit and Perceptive" or "Deft and Clever".^[47] **Hasisu** means wisdom, intelligence in Babylonian, also in some ancient Near Eastern languages.^[48] Not only his name, but according to some scholars Kothar's epithet **hyn** also means wise or clever (Syrian *hawna*: intelligence or ability).^[49] Kothar is a craftsman god and almost all blacksmiths and craftsmen are wise, clever and skillful figures in the mythology. Because people believed that they have some secret powers and wisdom to work metals;^[50] for example in Greek epic, Hephaistos is praised not only for his craftsmanship, but with intellectual epithets appropriate to Odysseus.^[51] He is described as *klytomētis* (renowned for mind) and *klytotechnēs* (renowned for skill) by Homeros.^[52] Blacksmiths and craftsmen played a central role in ancient society. They made many tools that people needed, from agricultural tools like the reaping-hook (the sickle or scythe) to weapons like arrows, spears, axes and swords. They made musical instruments, too.^[53] Therefore, the metalworkers or craftsmen were considered the lords of many social inventions like agriculture, music, writing, fire, etc.^[54] As a direct result of their social status, they were seen as wise, intelligent figures in mythology Kothar too.

Secondly, Kothar and Khidr are dragon slayers or they help some figures to kill a dragon. Kothar helps Baal to kill Yam-Nahar by making weapons for him.^[55] Khidr helps Sufis or *wali's* like Sarı Saltuk to struggle with a dragon.^{[56][57]} According to some other stories he plays a central role, not that of a helper, and slays the dragon himself.^{[58][59]} For example, the people who live in Antakya (Turkey) tell a story about this feature of Khidr^[60] and it originates from the story of Baal and Ym Nahar. Strabo tells the same story but his characters are different; Zeus and Typhon.^[61] Another one which mentioned Khidr himself as a dragon slayer, quoted by Flemish ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (16th century).^{[62][63]} In some regions, especially in the frontiers of Asia Minor, Khidr is seen as a dragon slayer, because he took the place of Saint George or other warrior saints like Saint Theodore (Theodore of Amasea) who fights against the dragons.^[64] However, it can't be explained only by this continuity. The myth of the dragon slayer was very popular in the ancient Near East and the divine smiths were usually assistant figures to make weapons for the chief gods of this mythological scenario, but they were also seen as a dragon slayer in some myths. In Kurdish mythology Kaveh the blacksmith (*Kawa*) kills an evil king Zahhak who was only a personification of the Avestan dragon Azhi Dahaka. According to a Scottish tale, from another side of the world, the blacksmith of Kirkcudbright defeated the White Snake of Mote Hill. Moreover, Kothar has fought against Behemoth and some other monstrous beings in Ugaritic mythology.^[65] A Ugaritic text tells it: *In the sea are Arshu and the dragon, May Kothar and Hasis drive (them) away May Kothar-and-Hasis cut (them) off*^[66]

Kothar and Khidr are known as "sailor" figures who are symbolically associated with sea, lake and rivers.^[67] **Chusor** is an inventor of the boat and he saves sailors.^[68] It believed that he was the first voyager on a boat. Khidr helps people when they need help and the most of these dangerous conditions are about seas, lakes and rivers, etc. For example, he sometimes helps children when they are drowning in the water or he helps boatmen during stormy weather. The Alevi Kurds of Dersim saw him as a savior and describe him as a "sovereign of the seas".^[69] He is a patron "saint" of the rivers in India.^[70] This characteristic feature of Khidr is not only from new syncretisms, it is basically connected with Kothar's characteristic features. Because Chusor (*Kothar*) was inventor of the boat and sailors believe that he protects them when they voyage. One of his epithets was **bn ym** (son of the sea).^[71] Khidr often has some

characteristics of a sailor, even in cultural areas which are not directly linked to the sea, like mountainous Dersim. It may be evident that Khidr originally comes from the culture of a people who inhabited the seashore. He has transformed to a wanderer by the cultural effects of darwishes and wanderer Sufis!^[72]

Above their all characteristics, the status of Kothar can't be denied to show this continuity. Kothar is an assistant or "*a servant god*" in Ugaritic mythology. He helps Baal and builds a palace for him, but he is actually a "*servant of supreme god EL*".^[73] Thus, he is accepted as one of the divine servants in Ugarit, because Keret, son of El, is also called a "*servant of El*".^[74] According to the Quran, Khidr is "a servant of Allah" ("**abd min 'ibādīnā**").^[75] Besides, the names of *Allah* and *El* are very similar to each other. It is known that they come from a common root. By the similar or common elements, it can be seen as part of their continuity.^[76]

Kothar and Khidr bring fertility. Kothar controls and customizes the seasons. Like some craftsmen or blacksmiths, Kothar is associated with agriculture. Among the Dogon people of Mali the heavenly smith has a role of civilizing hero; he brings down grain from heaven and reveals agriculture to mankind.^[77] In the Bible **Cain** (meaning perhaps *smith*) was a farmer and 'blacksmith', although he was not the inventor of agriculture. The Welsh smith *Govannon* had agricultural powers as well, for it was he who cleaned the plows at the end of planting, to ensure that the tools abundance would serve another year.^[78] Evidently, Kothar's profession, which is associated with agriculture among some cultures, has a good reason for him to get a new position in time. Some peoples of the Levant, especially the people of ancient Cyprus, believed that **Kautar** (that is Kothar) was father of **Tamoza/Tammuz (deity)**, the god of fertility.^[79] Thus, Khidr became a special figure of new syncretisms in late periods. Because Kautar (later Khidr) and his son Tamoza (Adonis)^[80] have been compared with Ali^[81] and his son Hussein (Husayn). In some contexts they identified with each other. Khidr and Ali have almost the same position in Islamic mystic thought and some Shiite beliefs and they can take the place of each other. In some contexts Khidr is identified with Husayn, sometimes with the last imam or **Mahdi**. The mythological scene show very strong syncretisms. It can be described like this: El (deity) and his son Baal,^[82] Kautar (Kothar) and his son Tamoza (Adonis), Ali and his son Hussein.^[83] The names of El (deity) and Ali are similar to each other and it was an onomastic invitation for some new beliefs about Ali, Husayn and Khidr. There are many other connection points like their abodes. El's abode is at the source of two rivers. According to the Quran "Khidr's" abode is **majma-ul bahrayn**; that is, the junction of two seas. In ancient texts El's abode is described as *the stream of two seas*. Kothar constructs a house from Lebanon trees for El and then burns a fire in the house for seven days. After the fire has transformed and refined the form of the palace, it is mimetically identical with its archetype on the axis mundi, where El resides.^[84] Majma-ul bahrayn is also on axis mundi and may be therefore some scholars like Du Buisson pointed to parallelism between El's abode and *majma-ul bahrayn*.^[85] Arabic *al-Kawthar*, which means a river of the paradise, is etymologically connected with the name of the Ugaritic divine craftsman, Kothar.^[86] Moreover like Ea and El, Kothar's dwelling is also associated with waters.^[87]

Kothar was the lord of wise words and good speech. According to Phoenician tradition, Kothar was also inventor of magical incantations; in addition, he was believed to have been the first poet.^[88] He is a soothsayer and magician, creating sacred words and spells, in part because there is an association in many cultures of metalworking deities with magic. Sanchuniathon says that Chusor invented the art of composing chants and incantations.^[89] In Ugaritic texts **kotharat** means singer women.^{[90][91][92][93][94]} In mythology the blacksmiths and craftsmen play an important role as a poet, musician and magician. The same associations are to be found among the Turco-Tartars and Mongols, where the smith is linked with heroes, singers and poets.^[95] Like them, Khidr teaches a kind of dhikr (Arabisch ذكْر; "*remembrance (of God)*", "*pronouncement*", "*invocation*") to some Sufis like Abdulhalik Gucduvani. But it seems that it was not only an echo of Kothar, it is also a strong effect of Surush (or *Surosh*) who was originally a Zoroastrian divinity *Sraosha* and Khidr took his place when Islam was introduced to Iran and became the dominant religion there.^[96] By the Islamisation process in Iran, *Surush* (*Sraosha*) was accepted as a messenger angel and also identified with Jibrail (Gabriel). Because at the same time *Surush* was an inspirational figure to poets.^[97] According to a rumor the Islamic prophet Muhammad has learned a devotion by Khidr.^[98] It's more interesting that Khidr is seen as their ancestral master or pir (Sufism) among the ashiks. According to the ashiks' tradition, Khidr gives to apprentices the art of poetry and he helps them for their initiation.^[99] The continuity is comprehensible, because in mythic mentality the eloquence and especially the poem is associated with the rhythm and melody of craftsmen's work. Its echo can be understood with the origins of the English word *poem* (and poetry). It comes from Latin *poēma*, from Ancient Greek ποίημα (*poiēma*), from ποιέω (*poiēō*, "I make").

On the other hand, the craftsmen or blacksmiths were seen the lord of writing and it is interesting that the master calligraphers of Ottoman Turkey were sure that their talent was the gift of otherworldly powers; they were initiated by Khidr or Hazret 'Ali.^[100] In ancient times the people thoughts that the writing was a magic work and it's often regarded at first as an instrument of the secret and magic power. Therefore, it might be created by craftsmen and blacksmiths who have same power. Besides, the cuneiform was a craft. First of all; it was not easy to write on a clay tablet and to produce a good clay tablet must have been one of the first tasks of an apprentice scribe.^{[101][102]} Kothar were indirectly associated with the art of writing. Although Kothar was not a patron of scribes, it is very important that Nabu [grandchild of Babylonian god Ea (god)] was known as a patron of the scribes, because some scholars think that Ea is a prototype of Kothar. According to another opinion, Kothar's prototype is Egyptian god Ptah. Ptah's son Imhotep was known as a patron of the scribes.^[103] It points that the divine craftsmen and blacksmiths who were also gods of good speech or wise words in mythology, have been transformed to lords of the writing in time. It can be seen in some mythologies that the lord of eloquence is inventor of the writing, too. For example, Irish god Ogma was the lord of eloquence, poetry, and rhetoric. But he had a truly remarkable skill as a poet and he invented the earliest system of writing used in Ireland: Ogham.^[104] Another one, Sigurd who was one of the most famous mythological German heroes, had learned the skill of the rune writing by the smith Regnir.^[105]

The another characteristic continuity between Kothar and Khidr is their soft and skilled hands. In Ugaritic texts, Kothar is mentioned as a skilled hand (*hrsh yd*).^[106] Actually, most blacksmiths in mythology were described with such attributions. One of the epithets of the Greek blacksmith Hephaistos, which was used less frequently, was "*skilled with both hands*" or "*all-skilled hands*".^[107] There are many linguistic remainders which show a symbolic connection between the smithy, skillfulness and hand. For example, in the Ethiopian language, äḡāma or äḡamma means blacksmith, skillful and it comes from äḡ which means hand. In Ethiopian language, äḡä wāxe and äḡä wārḡ means also blacksmith, but literally of good or golden hand.^[108] In Igbo language the word for arts and craft is nka which derives from another Igbo word daka and aka means hand.^[109] In this context it is very important that Khidr can be recognize by his soft hands among the people. Because the people of Levant and Asia Minor believe that he has boneless hands. Some Sufis teach that we will all meet Khidr at least once in our lifetime, that you will recognize him when you shake hands with a white bearded man with no bone in his thumb.^[110] Actually hand or soft hands metaphorically refers skillfulness, generosity and abundance. There is a term in Arabic for skilled men and women which derived from Arabic hand (*yad*).^{[111][112]} On the other hand, Arabic **semahat** used in Islamic mysticism for to be generous and to be soft.

Like some blacksmiths and craftsmen, Kothar indirectly, Khidr is directly associated with immortality. In mythology blacksmiths and craftsmen have secret power to get immortality and the healing powers were often attributed to them.^[113] In many countries the smith is seen as a medicine man. Vedic craftsman Tvastar is the former of the bodies of men and animals and invoked when desiring offspring, called **garbha-pati** or *the lord of the womb*. He is also the guardian of Soma that conveys the experience of immortality, is a healer and gives absolution. He made of the goblet for Soma drink.^{[114][115]} In Welsh beliefs Govannon (Gofannon) yeasted a kind of immortality beer. In Yakut mythology **K'daai Maksin** (Kıdaai) is the divine blacksmith and he repairs the broken or amputated limbs of heroes. According to another Yakut belief their ancestor Elliei was the first blacksmith and he has been seen as a healer. Because they believe that smiths have the power to cure by natural means without the assistance of spirits, as do the Shamans. According to an Acanti myth a blacksmith sent by the God to Earth to make a dozen men and animals. Mircea Eliade shows in his work *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy* that the divine blacksmith of mythology makes elixir of immortality as an alchemist. In Irish mythology, Cú Chulainn (Culain) made a new dog for himself after his savior dog was dead. Mcleish thinks that Ugaritic craftsman Kothar has also same feature. Khidr is described as a holding a cup/goblet in some Alevi divine songs. The cup or goblet symbolize the immortality. On the other hand, the Nusayris of Antakya (*Turkey*) believe that Khidr can operate men like a surgeon.^[116] According to some Islamic epic romances he repairs the broken limbs of warriors. It's told in *Danishmendname* that Khidr has repaired the broken hand of Artuhi who was a friend of Melik Danishmend Gazi.^[117] He heals also mental illness. For example, the shrine of Beit Jala (near Bethlehem) is associated with Khidr by Muslims who believe it's miraculous cures of mental illness. Even more importantly Khidr known everywhere as an immortal figure, from Balkans to India.

Hıdırellez and Khidr

A new hypothesis about the cultural origins of the figure of Khidr points to another common element relating to a religious tradition in Near East, the traditional celebration of Hıdırellez.^[46] Like Alevi, people make flour of roasted wheat on the day before the festival for Khidr. They keep it somewhere in the kitchen to see later for Khidr's traces. Next day in the morning if they see some

signs on the flour, it means that Khidr came there to bring abundance and blessing for them. Later they bake some kind of cake which is called *Qāvut*, *Kavut*, *Köme* or *Göme*.^{[8][118]} Thus, it takes different names among variously ethnic groups.^[119]

The tradition for Khidr originated from the mythico-rituals of Ancient Near Eastern dying gods like Osiris, Adonis (also Dionysos, Melqart and Mithra) and the process which shows the transformation of the grain to flour symbolizes cremation (*death*) of the god.^[120] Frazer's opinion about Adonis and Osiris rites indirectly clarifies this ritualistic acts. He writes: "The women bewail him (Adonis), because his lord slew him so cruelly, ground his bones in a mill, and then scattered them to the wind. The women (during this festival) eat nothing which has been ground in a mill, but limit their diet to steeped wheat, sweet vetches, dates, raisins, and the like".^[121] It is actually associated with shamanistic initiations and also with smith's world. Eliade completes this analogy in his important work *The Forge and the Crucible*: "*The identification of shamanism with the art of smith likewise appears in the ceremonial spectacles of certain shamanic initiations. In their dreams or initiatory hallucinations the future shamans watch themselves being torn to pieces by the 'demon'-masters of the initiation. Now these traditional spectacles entail, directly or otherwise, gestures, tools and symbols belonging to the sphere of the smith.*"^[122]

In the last analysis the roasting of the grain and making flour of it by the hand mill symbolizes the process of the and resurrection of the god. It means the beginning of a new period. The mill as a cosmic machine produces periods of time.^[123] Thus, the mill doesn't mean only worldly, also cosmic and it is often made by a mythological smith like Finnish blacksmith Ilmarinen. He makes a mill which is called Sampo. In Serbian tradition the blacksmith gives the water mill to people.^[124] This symbolic and cultural association between the smith and mill is remarkable for the continuity between Kothar and Khidr

Khidr in astrology

Astrologically, the planet Mercury represents the principals of communication, intelligence and elegance. Therefore, Khidr refers directly to Mercury in astrology.^{[125][126]} He is a typical Mercurial character, like Kothar wa Hasis, Nabu, Hermes, Odin etc. Firstly, he is lord of wisdom, he has **hikmah** and also knows **ilm al-ladunni** (a kind of esoteric knowledge).^[127] According to the Quran, he is more intelligent than Moses (18: 65-82). In ancient Greece, Hermes was Mercurial type and he has capacity to explain (**hermeneus**) the secret (sacred) doctrines. He inspires the poets as **oneiropompos** (the guide of dreams). Same function is familiar among the other Mercurial divinities. Like them, Khidr inspires the poets (for example Hafez Shirazi) and teaches dhikr to some Sufis.^[128] In the Quran, he explains (**tavil**) his behaviors to Moses which are exotically opposite to sharia. Khidr who is different in folk religions than the Quran, moves very fast, like other Mercurial types; Nabu, Hermes, Odin and even Zoroastrian *yazata* Sraosha. This feature is originated from the rhythm of the planet Mercury. Because Mercury is known with his swiftness. In mythology, Mercury is the messenger of the gods, noted for his speed and swiftness. It symbolizes the conjunction between the material and spiritual world. Therefore, Mercurial gods are psychopomp, like Hermes. They bring some messages also in dreams. The position of Khidr is same in the folk beliefs. For example, according two different stories from Dersim Alevis, he introduces to dream of hero and says to the person what he must do.^[129] Mercurial type of mythology is regarded as guide of travelers and the souls, like Hermes. Khidr is also known as a guide (murshid) among the Sufis and he saves the travelers in danger. Like Hermes, Khidr is mostly described with his staff. In some cultures, the people believes that his staff can sometimes turn to a snake, specially during the ritual. Caduceus is Hermes's staff and it's always described with two snakes. They are symbols of the healthy and the medicine.^[130] Mercurial gods fight to dragons or evil spirits. They use their staff as a weapon. In some religious contexts, Khidr fights also to dragons or helps some Sufis for their struggle with the dragons. The most of the gods which symbolize Mercury, are not only lords of the sacred or magic words, they are also related with the writing. This feature corresponds to the belief of Islamic calligraphers that Khidr is their patron. Khidr brings luck to the people, like Hermes as Mercurial.^[130]

The story of Quran over Moses and Khidr has some astrological representations. The fish which has been lost on a rock is symbol of the Pisces (astrology) Pisces which twelfth sign of zodiac is described with two fish. One of them symbolizes the mortality and the other one, the immortality. Therefore, Pisces is not only the heavenly sign of dead, it is also the sign of resurrection. Thus it refers to the place of immortal Khidr. Besides Mercury is the ruler of third and twelfth house in astrology. Twelfth house is disappearance region and it can be its mythological echo's in the myths of twelve (*gayb*) imam of Shiites and the twelve (*lost*) tribe of Jews.^[129] The story of Dhul-Qarnayn in the Quran refers also astral beings and movements. In this point, Solomon Gadz as a follower of R.N. Nicholson suggested in his article '*The Zodiacal Light in Semitic Mythology*' (1943) that Dhul' Qarnayn is personification of the

zodiacal light and he is no one than the old Semitic deity Athtar.^[131] According to the some scholars, the myths of Heracles and Gilgamesh is astral model of the story of Dhul Qarnayn and there are some common elements between these myths and Quranic story; like two mountain and darkness land Zulumat.^[129]

Comparative mythology

There are several versions of the Alexander romance in which al-Khiḍr figures as a servant of Alexander the Great in one version, al-Khiḍr and Alexander — identified with Dhul-Qarnayn — cross the Land of Darkness to find the Water of Life. Dhul-Qarnayn gets lost looking for the spring but al-Khiḍr finds it and gains eternal life. In the *Iskandarnamah* by an anonymous author, al-Khiḍr is asked by Dhul-Qarnayn to lead him and his armies to the Water of Life.^[132] Al-Khiḍr agrees, and eventually stumbles upon the Water of Life on his own!^[133]

Some scholars suggest that al-Khiḍr is also represented in the Arthurian tale Sir Gawain and the Green Knight as the Green Knight.^[134] In the story, the Green Knight tempts the faith of Sir Gawain three times. The character of al-Khiḍr may have come into European literature through the mixing of cultures during the Crusades.^[135] It is also possible that the story derives from an Irish myth which predates the Crusades in which Cú Chulainn and two other heroes compete for the curadmír, the select portion given to champions, at feasts; ultimately, Cú Chulainn is the only one willing to let a giant — actually a king who has magically disguised himself — cut off his head, as per their agreement.

The story is also similar to one told by Rabbi Nissim ben Jacob in the eleventh century of a journey made by Elijah and Rabbi Joshua ben Levi.^{[136][137]} The first house where they stay the night belongs to a pious old couple who give the prophet and the rabbi the best of their food and beds. However, the couple's cow dies in the night. Elijah later explains that the Angel of Death came and he persuaded the angel to take the cow instead of the wife. The next house, as in the al-Khiḍr story, is that of a rich miser, and Elijah repairs his wall so that he will not, in having it repaired, find the treasure hidden under it.

A third potential parallel to the legend surrounding al-Khiḍr is the Epic of Gilgamesh.^[138] The episode in question takes place after the death of king Gilgamesh's closest friend Enkidu. Gilgamesh goes on a journey to find his ancestor Utnapishtim, a wise figure who was granted immortal life and who lives at the mouth of rivers.^[138] Ultimately, although Gilgamesh finds Utnapishtim, he is not able to attain immortality. Although the parallel is not exact, the story shares several major themes with both Surah 18 in the Quran and the Alexander romance, namely, the presence of a wise figure in all three stories, and the quest and ultimate failure to attain immortality in the epic of Gilgamesh and the Alexander romance.^[139]

In certain parts of India, al-Khiḍr is also known as Khawaja Khidr, a river spirit of wells and streams.^[140] He is mentioned in the *Sikandar-nama* as the saint who presides over the well of immortality, and is revered by both Hindus and Muslims.^[140] He is sometimes pictured as an old man dressed in green, and is believed to ride upon a fish.^[140] His principal shrine is on an island of the Indus River by Bhakkar in Punjab, Pakistan.^[140]

In *The Unreasoning Mask* by famed science fiction writer Philip José Farmer, while Ramstan, captain of the al-Buraq, a rare model spaceship capable of instantaneous travel between two points, attempts to stop an unidentified creature that is annihilating intelligent life on planets throughout the universe, he is haunted by repeating vision of meeting al-Khiḍr.

In popular culture

Hızır is revered as helper among some Muslims, vehicles of emergency such as *Hızır Acil* named after it (Turkey).



al-Khiḍr and Alexander the Great in front of the Fountain of Life

See also

- [The righteous Dūraoša](#)
- [Mount Qaf](#)
- [Malamatiyya](#)
- [Muslim views on the intercession of saints](#)
- [Saint George#Interfaith shrine](#)
- [Mahis](#)
- [Jamkaran](#)

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82. *Baal* means lord like *adon*.
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