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KEZR

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a prophet known to Islamic written tradition and folklore, whose worship in Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia is connected with local calendar beliefs and fertility cults.

KEZR (Ar. *Ḳeẓr*, *Ḳaẓer* “green,” “green herbs,” “verdure”; *Ḳeẓr nabi*, *Ḳʿāja Ḳeẓr*), a prophet known to Islamic written tradition and folklore, from the Balkans to India. His worship, widespread all over Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, is connected with local calendar beliefs and fertility cults.

The origins of the *Ḳeẓr* legend are obscure. No prophet of this name is known to the Old Testament, neither is he mentioned by name in the Koran. Yet, Islamic commentators (Boḳāri, see Vollers, pp. 240-45; Ṭabari, I, pp. 414-29; idem, *Tarjama-ye Tafsir-e Ṭabari* III/IV, pp. 931-34, 946-56; Nišāburi, pp. 239-40; Farisi, cf. Khoury, pp. 25-33; Ibn al-At̄ir, p. 62.) identify him with an anonymous spiritual guide to Moses (*Musā*) mentioned in the Koran (18:60-82). The passage in question consists of three distinct parts:

1. (vv 60-65). Moses, accompanied by a youth, sets out on a journey in search of the junction of the Two Seas (*majmaʿ al-baḥrayn*). On their way they forget about a dried fish under a rock. The fish gets into the water and miraculously revives. This is the sign that they have reached their goal.
2. (vv 66-82). Moses sets off on a sea travel with “one of God’s servant” met on his way, as a guide. By his consecutive shocking deeds the guide tests Moses’ patience three times and the prophet fails the tests.
3. (vv 83-97). *Ḍuʿl-Qarnayn*, “The Horned One” (identified with Alexander the Great) travels to a place in the extreme West where the sun sets in a pool of muddy water; then he constructs an iron wall against the barbarian people of Gog and Magog (*Yaʿjuj Maʿjuj*). No guide appears in this passage.

The three stories, though apparently inconsistent, contain a number of mythical motifs of diversified origins, which have contributed to the *Ḳeẓr* legend, the most important of them being the immortality issue. The scholars dealing with the topic point to the Sumerian epos of Gilgamesh as one of its possible sources. Gilgamesh travels to the “mouth of a river” where the mankind’s ancestor Utnapishtim lives, in order to learn the secret of immortality from him (Wensinck and Kramers, p. 286; Berthels, p. 290). On the other hand, the story of *Ḳeẓr*, as adapted to the Koranic tradition, has been connected with an apocryphal biography of [Alexander the Great](#). The motif of the Water of Life, and the miraculous revival of a dried fish comes from the romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes, in which Alexander’s cook, called Glaukos (the “Blue” or “Green” one; also known as Edris, i.e., Andreas), on the passage through the Land of Darkness, washes a salted fish in a pool, and the fish swims away. Then the cook himself drinks from that water and becomes immortal (Friedlaender, pp. 94-96; Berthels, pp. 286-87, 290-92; Frye, pp. 286-87; Wensinck and Kramers, pp. 286, 289). The motif of the test, as found in Jewish tradition (cf. Wensinck and Kramers, p. 287), has for its hero the Biblical prophet Elijah, with whom *Ḳeẓr* is generally identified or associated by Islamic authors, while some sources believe *Ḳeẓr* to be identical with Elias’s disciple Elisha (cf. d’Herbelot, p. 993; Friedlaender, pp. 96-99; Dehḳodā, XXI, pp. 607-8; Owrang; Franke, pp. 136-59).

Various aspects of *Ḳeẓr*’s personality in Islamic literature and ritual practice (the Hadith, gnostic, and sufi tradition; popular devotion and folklore) have been thoroughly investigated by Patrick Franke (2000). His

book includes a large collection of related passages in German translation (pp. 377-562). Iranian authors had a considerable role in shaping K̲ez̲r's image in religious writings and in poetry. The legend of K̲ez̲r became a regular element of the Alexander romance in Persian epics. It is found in Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* (VII, pp. 80-81) and Nezāmi's *Eskandar-nāma* (pp. 1149-151) as well as in its later imitations such as Amir K̲osrou Dehlavi's *Āyena-ye eskandari* (p. 117), anonymous *Eskandar-nāma* (tr. Southgate, pp. 159-60) in *Dārāb-nāma* by Ṭarsusi (pp. 584-60) and *Ḳerad-nāma* by Jāmi (p. 965). In the passages on the search for the Water of Life, K̲ez̲r (alone or together with Eliās) acts as Alexander's guide. On their way through the Land of Darkness they become separated from one another: K̲ez̲r reaches the spring of the Water of Life, drinks from it, and acquires immortality, while Eskandar, strained in the darkness, misses the goal. The legend includes the motif of the pebbles collected by Eskandar's soldiers and turning into precious stones, and that of the place where the sun hides in the water. Another constant element of Eskandar's story is his building of the wall against Gog and Magog. Some texts (Dehlavi, Jāmi) have K̲ez̲r and Eliās for Alexander's companions in his naval travels. The legend, together with other stories on K̲ez̲r, his miracles and his controversial behaviors, reiterates in historical, encyclopaedical and hagiographical works (e.g., Tabari, I, pp. 415, 429; idem, *Tafsir* pp. 494; 946-56; Bal'ami, pp. 322-34; Mas'udi, p. 26; Ṭa'ālebi, pp. 432-33; *Mojmal*, pp. 202-6, 434; Farisi, cf. Khoury, pp. 25-33; Hojviri, p. 130, 178-179, 302; Nišāburi, pp. 302, 331, 337-42; Ṭusi, pp. 103, 159-60, 212-13; 415-16; Zakariā' Qazvini, pp. 83-84; Mostawfi, pp. 37, 45, 97).

K̲ez̲r is a symbolical character of gnostic parables, as in *'Aql-e sorḳ* of Šehāb-al-Din Sohravardi (Sajjādi, pp. 52-53; Sohravardi, tr. pp. 111-12), or *'Abd-al-Karim Jili* (Corbin, 1977 p. 72; cf. Nicholson, pp. 82, 124). He is evoked by mystical poets: for Jalāl-al-Din Moḥammad Rumi the Musā-K̲ez̲r encounter is a model for the *morid-moršed* relations (*Matnawi* I. vv. 224, 235-36, 2969-971, II. vv. 436, 3262-264, 3515-517, III. vv. 1959-961, 2756-757, V. v. 714). In Farid-al-Din Aṭṭar's *Divān*, in which references to K̲ez̲r are numerous, his spring of the Water of Life is compared with the water of Kawṭ'ar and Rezwān, wine, Jamšid's goblet (*jām-e Jam*); sun in the darkness, clear mind, illumination, salvation, lover's lips etc., as contrasted with darkness, mirage (*sarāb*), thirst, infidelity (*kofr*), ignorance (Aṭṭar, pp. 13, 35, 57, 78, 81, 109, 121, 125, 164, 197, 213, 236, 257, 258, 263, 326, 343, 348, 371, 384, 539; cf. also Sanā'i, *Divān*, pp. 224, 278, 465, 572, 656; for more poetical examples, see Dehḳodā, XXI, pp. 607-8; Franke pp. 217-18, 222-24).

In Persian writings of all types, the most important features of K̲ez̲r are: 1) his role as a spiritual guide to Moses, Alexander, or to a Sufi adept in his journey of initiation; a guide to strained travelers on land and sea; 2) his rule over nature: vegetation, waters and deserts; everything becoming green and blossoming under his steps or touch (Dehḳodā, XXI, pp. 607-8; Franke, pp. 80-88; cf. a proverb quoted by Steingass, p. 465: *Ḳez̲r bahār dar qadam dārad* "Khizr has spring in his wake"); his patronage over the sea, navigation and the sailors (cf. Olearius, p. 622; Franke, pp. 88-101); 3) his immortality, usually connected with the spring of the Water of Life (cf. his eschatological functions in Franke, pp. 121-24), thus his extremely old age and knowledge of the past and future; 4) his affiliation to an intermediary sphere of reality, between the material and the spiritual worlds, symbolized by the "Junction of the Two Seas," the "Extreme North" or "Extreme West"; a remote sea island; a place where the sun hides in the water and strange astronomical phenomena occur, a paradise-like place, free from death and from the passage of time (see Jili, apud Corbin, 1977, p. 72; Franke, pp. 207-8), hence his connection with other immortals such as Edrīs, Eliās, Jesus, the Hidden Imam and the *Rejāl al-ḡayb* "Men of the Invisible" (Schimmel, 1975, p. 202; Corbin, 1977, pp. 156-58; Nicholson, p. 124); 5) his close relationship with Eliās, expressed as their being doubles of one another, twin brothers, or two friends closely bound together, with the respective spheres of interest (land and sea, plants and waters) divided among them, (cf. Franke, pp. 136-62).

K̲ez̲r is supposed to have taken on the features of ancient local divinities and heroes all over the Islamic world: of Adonis, Tammuz, and some pre-Islamic Arab fertility gods in the Near East (Vollers, pp. 279-80); of Soma, Gandharva, Varuna, and Vishnu in India (Coomaraswamy, p. 176; Wensinck and Kramers, p. 290); in transitory Christian-Islamic areas, K̲ez̲r has been assimilated to St. George, St. Nicolas and St. Sergius, all of whom are frequently coupled with St. Il'ia, that is, Elijah (d'Herbelot, p. 993; Ivanov and Toporov, pp.

209-216; Bayazidi, p. 32, n. 64; Makashina, p. 91; Enjavi, II, pp. 116-19; Uspienski, pp. 57-63; Georgeva, pp. 68-74; cf. Krasnowolska, 1995, pp. 169-72).

On Iranian ground *Kezr* is supposed to have overtaken the functions of Zoroastrian *Soruš*, Av. *Sraoša* (for *Soruš*'s shrines in Yazd rededicated to *Kezr* and / or *Eliās*, see Boyce, 1967, p. 31; *Soruš* is replaced by *Kezr* in ritual and literature, see Russel, pp. 529-33; Amir *Kosrow Dehlavi*, pp. 114, 117). In Iranian folklore *Kezr* shows the attributes typical of female goddesses of fertility and abundance (*Anāhitā*, *Esfandarmad*; see Boyce, 1967, p. 32; idem, 1977, pp. 255 ff.; *Bāstāni Pārizi* pp. 326-29; *Sorušiān*, p. 204; *Rāzi*, pp. 698-99; *Miršokrā'i*, p. 370), and shares some features with *Rapitwin*, a deity of summer, noon and crops (see Krasnowolska, 1998, pp. 151-52); there are many parallels between his cult and the cult of ancestral souls, *fravaši* (*Rāzi*, pp. 193-94; *Homāyuni* pp. 192-93; *Snesarev*, 1969, p. 218). Moreover, *Kezr* and *Eliās*, as two closely bound together patrons of plants and waters, show similarity to the *Haurvatāt-Ameretāt* couple in Zoroastrianism (Krasnowolska, 1998, pp. 150-151).

In Iranian popular beliefs *Kezr*, as a patron of vegetation, crops and abundance, is believed to secretly visit households and bless crops by leaving an offprint of his hand in sacrificial food (*qāvut*, *samanu*, a heap of threshed corn). He is venerated as a calendric patron, and the days dedicated to him fall at the crucial points of the year: 1) End of the Great or of the Small *Čella* in winter, corresponding to the Zoroastrian festivals of *Sada* and *Esfandagān* respectively (for Kurdish, Azeri-Turkish and Persian speakers of West Iran, see *Olearius*, pp. 821-22; *Jašn-e Sada*, pp. 89-90; Enjavi, II, pp. 38, 43, 118-24; *Sā'edi*, p. 130-31; *Rāzi*, p. 195; *Rāseḳ*, p. 229; cf. *Asatrian and Gevorgian*, pp. 503, 508 for the *Zāzā* of *Diārbakr*; for Transcaucasian Kurds, see *Aristova*, p. 177, and Bayazidi p. 34; for North Afghanistan, see *Hackin and Kohzad*, pp. 165-67); 2) beginning of spring, the days preceding *Nowruz* i.e. the former *Farvardagān* (All Souls) festival (*Shiraz and Tehran: Homāyuni*, p. 192-3; *Hedāyat*, p. 154; Kurds of *Mahābād* and Yazidi Kurds of Transcaucasia: Enjavi II, pp. 134-5; *Rudenko*, p. 121; *Bartang Valley, Pamir: Maiski*, p. 104; 3) mid-spring, *čehelom-e bahār*, corresponding to Zoroastrian *Maidōy*, *i-zarTMmaya Gāhānbār*, among the pastoralists of *Kermān* (*Miršokrā'i* 1982, pp. 367-69, 372-4); 4) harvest time, end of summer: South-east of Iran (*Miršokrā'i*, pp. 370-71), North Afghanistan and Central Asia, where *Kezr* is generally identified with *Bābā-ye Dehqān* (the Forefather-farmer), patron of farmers and of their professional brotherhoods (*Snesarev* 1969, pp. 218; 223; *Dzhahonov*, p. 116; *Mukhiddinov*, p. 88; *Kisliakov*, p. 82; *Zarubin*, p. 1169; *Karmysheva*, pp. 62-63).

In pastoral communities *Kezr* is in charge of herds and of milk products which usually are the domain of women (*Bāstāni Pārizi*, pp. 328-29, *Miršokrā'i*, pp. 370-71; *Rāzi*, p. 195; *Rāseḳ*, p. 229; for Tajikistan, see *Peshchereva*, 1927, pp. 52-56). In eastern *Tāleš*, he is identified with *Siāh Gāleš*, "Black Shepherd," a mythical protector of animals (*'Abdali*, p. 190; *Hedāyat*, p. 165; *Arakelova*, p. 173), hunters venerate him as the patron of game (*Hedāyat*, p. 165; *Andreev*, 1958, p. 226). He rules over waters (springs, wells and pools, rivers and streams, seas and oceans), thus his sanctuaries are often built at springs or underground pools, or at the islands. *Kezr* is venerated at tomb-like shrines (as an immortal, he is not supposed to have any "real" burial place); at *qadamgāhs*, where an imprint of his foot has been left in stone, at graveyards (*Boyce*, 1967, p. 31; *Miršokrā'i*, p. 370; *Sorušiān*, pp. 204-5; *Riāhi*, p. 39; *Afšār Sistāni*, p. 251; *Šakurzāda*, pp. 74-75). Some of his most important shrines are those of *Ābādān*, *Čāhbahār* (cf. *Franke*, pp. 104, 129, 150), *Āmol* (*Maqbara-ye Kezr*), *Samarqand* and *Kabul* (*Šohādā-ye Sālehin* cemetery).

In spite of being male, *Kezr* is considered a patron of women and their fertility, invoked at childbirth and implored for progeny. Omens are taken and fate-opening magic (*baḳt-gošā'i*) is performed in his name (*Enjavi*, II, pp. 40, 130, 131; *Bāstāni Pārizi*, pp. 326-27; *Katirā'i*, p. 25; *Miršokrā'i*, 1982, p. 370; *Šakurzāda*, pp. 74-75; *Aristova*, p. 177). In the *Matča* valley (Tajikistan) *Kezr* is reported to preside over an orgiastic women's fertility rite of *čel tan* (forty people, i.e., saints), also known as *Rejāl al-ḡayb* (*Andreev*, 1927, p.

341). In the cities *Kezr* is venerated as the patron of craftsmen guilds: calligraphers, potters, water-bearers, greengrocers etc. (Schimmel, 1984, pp. 47-48, 71; Peshchereva, 1959, p. 319; Mokri, pp. 141, 146-47, 155; Malov, p. 141); and a *pir* of Sufi brotherhoods or individual darvishes (Hojviri, pp. 128, 130, 193-94; Schimmel, 1975, pp. 102, 105-6, 427; Nicholson, pp. 13, 66; Corbin, 1971, pp. 25-27, 38; Riāḥi, pp. 39-40). According to popular beliefs, *Kezr* shows himself as a beggar, an old man, or a darvish, dressed in green (*sabzpuš*), to those lost in wilderness or needing help (Hedāyat, p. 53; Šakurzāda, pp. 273, 333-34; Mukhiddinov, p. 89); he also may take on the form of a snake or some other animal (in *Zāzā* rites: Asatrian and Gevorgian, p. 508; for Central Asia, see Snesev, 1972, p. 172; Karmysheva, pp. 62-23). His alter ego is the prophet Eliās, with whom he shares his functions in different ways, sometimes they are imagined to be one person named *Kezr-Eliās*.

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