

## Book Review

# PROPHET AL-KHIDR: BETWEEN THE QUR'ANIC TEXT AND ISLAMIC CONTEXTS

**Arnav Khobragade**•

Irfan A Omar. *Prophet al-Khidr: Between the Qur'anic Text and Islamic Contexts*. Lexington Books, 2022. Pp. 141 ISBN 978-1-4985-9591-9.

**Abstract:** *Al-Khidr* is the legendary figure mentioned in the Holy Qur'an (18:60-82) as a "servant of God." Later Islamic scholars identify him as *al-Khidr*, "the Green One," implying that he brings vitality and growth to his surroundings, both metaphorically and literally. Irfan Omar's book, *Prophet al-Khidr* aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the legacy of the *Quranic al-Khidr*, exploring the versatile roles he has assumed as his narrative evolved and intertwined with other legends, touching the hearts of millions throughout history.

**Keywords:** *Al-Khidr*, Divine Knowledge, the Green One, Prophet, Mysticism, Immortality, Master-teacher, Sufism.

The book, structured in five chapters, offers a refreshing perspective on *Khidr's* role and symbolism, contrasting with the more constricted theological and orthodox interpretations typically based on Qur'an commentaries. The author refers to *Al-Khidr* as the master-teacher, often seen as a conduit for divine light (*al-nur*), introducing new ways of interpreting divine justice,

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divine presence, and the will of God. In the first chapter, the author provides an overview of sources and narratives about Al-Khiḍr, aiming to present his story from a broader perspective by incorporating textual, literary, symbolic, and legendary representations. The second chapter explores Khidr's relationship with Moses in the Qur'an, depicting him as an embodiment of divine mercy and examining his symbolic representations in Islamic sources.

The third chapter delves into Khidr's role in Sufi tradition, describing him as a master and instructor who guides disciples invisibly and ignites an "inward illumination" in them through divine knowledge. The fourth chapter highlights how folklore across various subcultures has preserved and reshaped Khidr's story, portraying him with multiple titles and roles, and tracing this evolution in West Asian, South, and Southeast Asian Islamic cultures. Through extensive research, the author reveals the evolution of the Khidr narrative and how it has transformed our perception of him (p. 79). Readers will encounter multiple fascinating insights, such as the fact that while the epithet "al-Khiḍr" first appeared in Islamic *tafsir* literature, fundamental themes associated with him, like "immortality" and "regeneration," have pre-Islamic origins. These themes, along with others, eventually culminated in the archetype of the "Green Man" (p. 85). The final chapter examines Khidr through the lens of poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal, who sees Khidr as a symbol of immortality and a guide toward self-perfection and social reform. Iqbal emphasizes that personal effort is non-negotiable for spiritual realization, cautioning against spiritual dependence on others, including saviours, for one's salvation.

The author also emphasizes Khidr's ongoing impact both within and outside Islamic contexts, highlighting his multifaceted personality as a friend, helper, spiritual master, guide and saviour. Khidr is portrayed as accessible to all, bridging ideas and stories across time and space, and profoundly influencing believers despite the challenge of proving his existence. Thus the author skillfully navigates the complexity of appropriating Khidr's background across various contexts and cultures.