

ELIAS (IX Cent. B.C.) Saint, prophet

1. The Figure of Elias. II. Elias in Jewish Tradition. III. Elias in the Fathers. IV. Elias in Islam. V. Elias and the Monastic Ideal. VI. Elias and the Carmelites. VII. Cult. VIII. Iconography. IX. Folklore.

I. THE FIGURE OF ELIAS. The prophet rose as a champion of the monotheism of Jahweh; his very name («Jahweh is God» or «Jahweh is my God») expresses his character and his function in the story of the Bible. He strenuously defended the rights of God and preserved faith in Him among the people. His struggle to the bitter end against any religious syncretism makes of this prophet, who «seemed a fire and whose words a burning furnace» (see Eccli. 48: 1), a figure of prime importance in the succession of the two Alliances. While his praise is celebrated in Eccli. 48: 1-11, his life is largely described in the Books of Kings, in which it is customary to distinguish a «cycle of Elias» (I Kg. 17-21; II Kg. 1) and a «cycle of Eliseus» (II Kg. 2-13). While the account of the activity of Elias belongs to the first cycle, the description of his assumption into heaven is found in the cycle of Eliseus, who succeeded Elias at that precise moment.

Originally of Tisbe (el-Istib), Elias exercised his ministry in the northern kingdom, during the IX century before Christ and in the times of Achab and Ochozia.

Achab, first descendant of the Omrite family, ascended to the throne in the year 874 B. C. He had married Jezabel, a daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and high priest of Astarte (I Kg. 16: 31). The political advantages of such a union were paid for by submission on the part of Achab to the will of Jezabel, who showed her dominion over her husband by the violent imposition of the cult of Baal and the execution of Naboth and his sons, who hindered her from prevailing in the region of Israel (I Kg. 21: 1-16).

In this circumstance Elias is invited by the Lord to announce to Achab the law of retaliation (I Kg. 21: 21-24), which was afterwards limited to his wife and sons because of the public penance of the king (I Kg. 21: 29, II Kg. 9: 7-10; 26; 36 ff.). The anger of Jezabel against Elias was vented in the massacre of the prophets of Jahweh (I Kg. 18: 4, 13; 19: 10); and Elias answered with the announcement of a drought of three years, during which he took refuge, first, in the «torrent of Carith» (Wadi Yabis), in Transjordan, where he was fed by crows. Then he went to Sareptha (Sarafand), about nine miles south of Sidon, where he was maintained by a widow, for whom he miraculously multiplied her oil and meal and raised her son to life (I Kg. 17).

The incontrovertible proof that «the Lord is the true God» was had in the confrontation that Elias arranged with the Baal of Jezabel, in a place that an ancient tradition locates at El-Muhraqah, to the southeast of Carmel. While, at the prayer of Elias, a stroke of lightning consumed his holocaust to Jahweh by fire, the shouts, the dances, and the mutilations of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal did not bring any result; and thus they were killed near the torrent of Cison (I Kg. 18). In order to avoid the revenge of Jezabel, Elias had to flee to the south, where he was miraculously reinvigorated and

so came to Mount Horeb. On the summit of Gebel Musa, in a theophany, he received a triple mission aimed at the investiture of Hazael as king of Damascus, of Jehu as king of Israel, and of Eliseus as prophet (I Kg. 19). After Achab's death (852 B. C.) in a battle at Ramith Galaad (I Kg. 22: 1-40), Achab's son Ochozias succeeded him. When Ochozias found himself seriously ill, he sent to consult Beelzebub, god of Accaron (II Kg. 1:2); Elias again intervened, and announced the king's death. As the end of his life approached, Elias left Ghilgal and, followed by Eliseus and a group of the prophets, made his way to the Jordan, with stops at Bethel and Jericho. At the Jordan, he made a way for

himself through the waters with his mantle; and only Eliseus, destined to be his successor, followed him. The mysterious end of Elias is described as a taking up by means of a fiery chariot (II Kg. 2: 2-13); from this description derived the ancient Jewish belief that the prophet would return before the «great day of Jahweh», that is, before the parusia /appearance/ of the Messiah. This belief was echoed by the Fathers of the Church and the ecclesiastical writers (Mk. 6: 15; 9: 10-11; Lk. 9: 8; Jn. 1: 21 ff.; the Ethiopian Henoch 89, 52; 90, 31; IV Esd. 6: 26; Justin, Dial. 8, 4; 49, 1).

The prudent judgment already expressed by Joseph Flavius (Ant. IX, 2, 2: «Elias disappeared from among men and no one up to the present day knows anything of his death»), but, above all, the attitude of Christ reported in the Gospels, invite us to consider the description of the taking up of Elias as a case of prophetic ecstasy on the part of Eliseus, which had as its object a special divine assistance on the occasion of the death of the prophet. In reality, the last moments of Elias are described as they appeared to Eliseus (see I Mac. 2: 58), who was the only one present; Elias disappeared in a whirlwind. The same word *laqah* (i. e., take), used to indicate the taking up of Elias, elsewhere expresses the intervention of God in the serene death of a just man. (Gen. 5: 24; Ps. 49: 16; Is. 53: 8). The other elements are symbolic. Let us think, for instance, of the vision in which St. Benedict saw the soul of his sister, St. Scholastica, flying like a dove to heaven, on the very day of her death.

In Mal. 3: 1; 4: 5 ff. (Mt. 17: 10 ff.) it is said that Elias will come as the precursor of the Messiah — a prophecy fulfilled in John the Baptist (Lk. 1: 17), who is the foretold precursor (Mt. 11: 14; 17: 10-13). John embodied the «strong character» of Elias, who preceded him only as a type, just as Jeremias (23: 5) and Ezechiel (34: 23) foretold the Messiah and called Him «My /Jahweh's/ servant, David».

Together with Moses, Elias was on Tabor, at the transfiguration of Jesus (Mk. 9: 2-8; Mt. 17: 1-8; Lk. 9: 28-36). Like Moses, Elias had been favored with a vision of God on Sinai and was considered as working hand in hand with Moses in regard to the Old Alliance: Moses was the legislator, who concluded the Alliance; Elias was the prophet, who preserved it pure and intact. The presence of both on Tabor was meant to attest, in anticipation of the exaltation of Jesus, that the New Alliance is the crowning of the Old.

Finally, Elias is also presented in the New Testament as a model of efficacious prayer (Jas. 5: 27).

BIBLIOGRAPHY: *Acta SS. Iulii V*, Venice 1748, pp. 4-22; E. Mangenot, in *DB*, II, coll. 1670-76; Synax. Constantinop., coll. 831-C2; G Meignan, *Les prophètes d'Israël*. Quatre siècles de lutte contra Pïdolâtrie, Paris 1903 pp. 17S-248; Wilpert, *Pitture*, pp. 384 sgg.; H. Leclerq, in *DACL*, IV, 2, coll. 2670-74; J. Hastings, *The greater Men and Women of the Bible* III, Edinburg 1914, pp. 359-407; A. Sanda, E. und *die religiosen Verhältnisse seiner Zeit*, Münster 1914; H. Gunkel, E., *Jahve und, Baal*, Tübingen 1916; A. Cohen, *Elias*, Paderborn 1920; E. Magennis *The Life and Times of the Prophet of Carmel*, Dublin 1925; C. Kopp, E. und *Christentum auf dem Carmel*, Paderborn 1929; E. Tobac-J. Coppens, *Les prophètes d'Israël*, I, Malines 1932, pp. 172-77; A. Pohl *Historia populi Israel*, Rome 1933, pp. 64-70; J. A. Jaussen, *La fete de Saint Élie au mont Carmel*, in *Revue Biblique*, XXX (1934), pp. 249-59; P. Jotüon. *Le costume d'Élie et celui de Jean-Baptiste*. in *Biblica*, XVI (1935) pp. 74-81; .J. Jeremias, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch sum Neuen Testament*, II, Stuttgart 1935, pp. 930-43; H. Michaud, *Le cas d'Henoch et d'Élie*, in *Revue Apologetique* DXII (1936), pp. 249-50; G. Perrella, *Num Henoch et Elias a morte immunes?*, in *Divus Thomas*, XXXIX (1906), pp. 395-98; A. De Guglielmo, *De reditu Eliae* Jerusalem 1938; S. Grill, *Die Himmelfahrt des Elias*, in *Biblische Zeitschrift*, XXIV (1939) pp. 242-48; *Comm. Martyr. Rom.*, p. 297; R. Breuil, *La puissance d'Élie*, Neuchatel 1945; A. Lucas, *The miracle on Mount Carmel*, in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, LXX (1945) pp. 49-50; C. Spicq, *L'Ecclesiastique*, in *La Ste Bible*, ed. Pirot, Paris 1946 pp. 820-23; R. De Vaux, *Les prophètes de Baal sur le Mont Carmel*, in *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, V (1947), pp. 7-20; F. Spadafora, in *Enc. Catt.*, V, coll. 232-33; E. Josi *ibid.*, coll. 2C3-34; H. Cazelles, in *Catholicisme*, IV, coll. 8-9; G. Jacquemet, *ibid.*, coll. 10-11; Vies des Saints VII, pp. 487-91; D. Baldi. *Enchiridion locorum sanctorum*. Jerusalem 1955; (Various authors), *Élie le prophete*, in *Mudes carmelitaines*, I-II, Paris 1956; S. Garofalo, *Il libro dei Re (La Sacra Biblia)*, Turin 1956, pp. 173-75; G. Fohrer, *Elia* Zurich 1957; BHG, I, pp. 573-77, nn. 572x-577m; C. Kopp, *Il sacrificio di Elia sul Carmelo*, in *Bibbia e Oriente*, I (1959). pp. 11-14; *id.*, *Elia, il Carmelo e i Carmelitani* *ibid.*, III (1961), pp. 53-57.

Tarcisius Stramare

II. ELIAS IN JEWISH TRADITION. The important place that the prophet «taken» into heaven holds in the *Haggada* /pious traditions/ is well known. The *Haggada* illustrates and amplifies with sometimes simplistic legendary elements and with theological considerations the biblical texts concerning the earthly life of Elias. But it particularly dwells on his being taken up and his heavenly activity, on his apparitions on the earth, as a benefactor of the poor and a friend of the humble, as a helper and liberator of the faithful from every inextricable situation, as a friend of the wise and of experts on the *Torah*, for which he was so zealous, and, finally, as a precursor of the Messiah.

When the angel of death appeared to take him away, Elias was speaking with Eliseus about the *Torah*. And since it was not granted to the devil to interrupt this dialogue, Satan lay in wait; but then the chariot of fire with horses of fire came between Elias and his disciple. Elias mounted the chariot and was transferred into heaven in a whirlwind. Satan then went before God to protest that Elias had not died; but before he could

begin to speak, God said: «I have created the heavens precisely so that Elias could come up to them.» The fallen angel insisted and so the Eternal God permitted a struggle between Satan and Elias. But the prophet came out the victor and asked God for permission to destroy his adversary. But permission was not granted him, inasmuch as the final victory over Satan was to come at the end of time (*Zohar Hadash Ruth*, 1, 1; *Sepher Elijahu*, p. 19).

This idea of the bodily transference of Elias remained the more common one (see Pesiq, 9 /II cent./). Rabbi Jehuda b. Hai asks himself: «If Adam had not sinned, would he have always remained alive?» He answers: «That is exactly what happened to Elias because he did not sin.»

Yet in other texts (see *Zohar Bresit*, 137; *Sepher Ha-purdes*, 24, 4) it is affirmed that Elias left his corporal body in order to assume a luminous one: «How was Elias able to ascend and dwell in the heavens, which cannot support even a grain of wheat?» Rabbi Simeon b. Jochai replies: «I have found it written: Among those who will be born in this world there will be one spirit who will descend to the earth and be clothed in a body. His name is Elias. He will return to heaven, and his body will remain in the whirlwind while his spirit will be clothed with a luminous body, so that he can dwell among the angels.»

In this matter there is the confutation attempted by St. Epiphanius exactly against the idea commonly diffused among the Jews that Elias was an angel (PG, XLI, col. 976). Nor are witnesses wanting who deny any kind of transference of Elias into heaven: «During the second year of Ochozias,» said Rabbi Joseph b. Halaphta, a disciple of Rabbi Aqiba, «Elias was hidden (nignaz) and will appear again at the coming of the Messiah king» (*Seder Olam Rabba*). With the verb nignaz the II cent. Rabbi insinuates that Elias continues to live on earth, but in a hidden manner. Such seems to be also the idea of Joseph Flavius (Ant. IX, 2, 2), of the Septuagint translators and of the Targum (II Kg. 2: 1) and, probably, of the Hebrew text of Eccli. 48: 9. The common opinion, however, places Elias with the angels in heaven or in paradise, where various duties are assigned to him: that of a heavenly scribe (he records the names of the just and of their good actions in the Book of Life), of a guide of souls (he stands on the path that leads to paradise, waiting for the souls of the just, whom he accompanies to their place), and of intercessor in favor of Israel.

Moreover, Elias frequently descends to earth: «The dogs bark joyfully, Elias is not far away; the dogs lament, the angel of death is approaching» (*Bab. Kam.* 60 b). Accounts of his apparitions among men provide instructive, sometimes light-hearted legends, which inculcate a love of justice and faith in providence.

Rabbi Kahana (III cent.) gained his livelihood by selling baskets to the womenfolk. One day, having entered a house, he was solicited to sin; in order to escape, he fled up the stairs and threw himself down from a terrace. But Elias intervened to save him. «You have made me come from a distance of four hundred leagues!» he said. And the Rabbi

answered him: «What has brought me to this point, if not my poverty?» Then the prophet gave him a vessel filled with gold coins (*Midr. Prov. 9, 62*).

However, the essential function of Elias is that of precursor of the Messiah. This belief is based on the prophecy of Malachias (3: 23-4), which had long been understood in this sense. This belief, in fact, was common among the people at the time of Jesus, as the numerous questions on the return of Elias show (Mt. 17: 10 ff., and parallel passages; Lk. 1: 17; Jn. 1: 21, 25). It is strange that the Apocrypha do not contain any prediction of the activity of the precursor; they merely relate that at the return of Elias persons who have died will appear (IV Esd. 4: 26; II Bar. 13: 3). The rabbinical tradition, on the other hand, attributes to Elias, as precursor, a considerable activity in the first moments of the restoration (see, in this regard, the numerous texts cited by H. Strack — P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, aus Talmud und Midrash*, IV, Munich, 1928, pp. 779-98; J. Bonsirven, *Le judaïsme palestinien...*, I, Paris, 1935, pp. 357-59; M. — J. Strassny, see Bibliography below).

For the Jews, Elias is not a personage of the past. He is present and accompanies Israel on its long and sorrowful pilgrimage; he is alive in the piety of the individual Jew, as the closest and most familiar of heavenly protectors. At the rite of circumcision a place is still always left vacant; it is the place of Elias.

III. ELIAS IN THE FATHERS. The place of the prophet Elias, not only in the Old Testament and in Jewish tradition, but also in the New Testament, has caused him to appear in the works of the Fathers many times.

Some insist on the relationship between Elias and St. John the Baptist (see St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, VI, in PG, XLVI, coll. 349-52); others fix their attention on the taking up of Elias and on his return at the end of the world. (In this matter, the concise affirmation of Origen is noteworthy; contrary to the common opinion, he affirms the death of Elias and denies that he was taken into heaven in the flesh. In Ps., 15, 9 in PG, XII, col. 1216) Others (St. Justin, St. Irenaeus, etc.) place the personality of the prophet in relief and present him as a model of the perfect life.

Origen calls attention to the example of Elias for the confidence to be placed in prayer (In Ps. 37; Horn. 2, 3, in PG, XII, col. 1384) and for the certainty in its efficacy (*De oratione*, 13, in PG, XI, coll. 458 ff.). St. Athanasius, in his *Life of Anthony*, recalls the maxim of Anthony: «All those who make profession of the solitary life must take the great Elias as their rule and as their patron and see in his actions, as in a mirror, what their conduct should be» (in PG, XXVI, col. 752). Finally, St. John Chrysostom exalts the poverty of Elias (*Horn in S. Eliam*, 3, in PG, LXIII, col. 464): «Elias had nothing; and still nothing hindered him from reaching the peak of virtue. He is an ocean without limits» (see Bardy, *Le souvenir d'Elie chez les Peres Grecs*, in *Élie*, I, pp. 131-58).

The texts of the Latin Fathers on St. Elias are numerous. St. Isidore (*De ortu et obitu patrum*, 25, in PL, LXXXII, col. 140) calls him «a great priest and a prophet.» He deduces the priesthood of Elias from the sacrifice that he offered to Jahweh on

Horeb. St. Ambrose writes of him: «*The most outstanding leader from among the prophets*» (De viduis, 1, 3, in PL, XVI, col. 235). What is stressed about his mission, i.e., his denunciation of sin and invitation to penance, is, above all, his first task, his *inrepatio* /rebuking/, together with his strict way of life and his burning zeal for the glory of God (see St. Jerome, *Contra Joan. Hieros.*, 2; *Comm. in Ez.*, 11, 35, in PL, XXIII, col. 356; XXV, coll. 334 ff.).

The belief that Elias is not dead is a common one; however, he will die, together with Henoch, at the end of time, in the struggle with the anti-Christ (see St. Augustine, *Ep.* 193, 3, 5; *De Genesi ad litt.*, 9, 5 in CSEL, XVII, p. 170; XXVIII, pp. 274 ff.). The concept of the return of Elias as the precursor of the second coming of Christ, just as John the Baptist was the precursor of the first, «*is widely diffused in the words and hearts of the faithful.*» St. Augustine attests (De civ. Dei, 20, 29, in CSEL, XL, 2, p. 503). In Apoc. 11 the Fathers have searched out the details of this prophetic mission, which would be far more important than his mission in life. In the two witnesses of the Apocalypse they see Henoch and Elias (Tertullian, Ambrosiaster, St. Gregory the Great). «*He who is to come at the second advent of the Savior in the reality of his body has now come in virtue and spirit through John,*» wrote St. Jerome (Comm. in Ev. Mt., 3: 57, in PL, XXVI, col. 124).

The monastic movement in the fourth century took Elias as its model, emphasizing his continence, his poverty, his dwelling in the desert, his fasting, his prayer: Our leader is Elias! (see Cassian, *Conlatio*, 14, 4, in CSEL, XIII, p. 400.) The same characteristics are found in the Syrian Fathers (see M. Hayek, in the Bibliography).

IV. ELIAS IN ISLAM. Numerous Jewish and Christian legends formed about the figure of Elias and were broadly reflected in Islam as well. The *Koran* (VI, 85, and XXXVII, 123-30) makes mention of the «prophet» Ilyas (see Y. Moubarac, *Le prophete E. dans le Goran, in Elie*, II, pp. 256-68). Then the commentators and Moslem historians satisfied their whims about him. Moreover, some traits of the legendary figure of Elias were attributed, in Islam, to the mythical personage al-Khadir or al-Khidr (see L. Massignon, *Elie et son role transhistorique, Khadiriya, en Islam, in Mie*, II, pp. 269-90).

Mount Carmel has places venerated at the same time by Christians, Jews and Mohammedans. In Arabic the mountain itself is called *Gebel Mar Ilyas* or «the mountain of St. Elias.» (For the Moslem legends, see A. J. Wensinck, under *Ilyas*, in *Encyclopedic de l'Islam*, II, Leiden-Paris, 1927, with the bibliography there indicated /J. Ricciotti/.)

Francis Spadafora

V. ELIAS AND THE MONASTIC IDEAL. 1. For the monks, the theme of the prophetic aspect of their life has always inspired the liveliest interest (see John Leclercq, *La vie parfaite. Points de vue sur Vessence de Vetat religieux*, Turnhout-Paris, 1948, cap. 2, *La vie prophetique*, pp. 57-81). Actually, the spirituality of a life of perfection was already prepared in the Old Testament (see Sister Joan of Arc, *Les preparations bibliques de la vie religieuse*, VS, XCIV /1956/, pp. 474-94). The great prophets Elias, Eliseus, John the Baptist and others were considered types of the religious life.

Before the beginning of monasticism, the Fathers did not particularly present the prophet Elias as an example of the contemplative life or as a model of the perfect life. Gustave Bardy concludes a very conscientious study of the Greek Fathers with these words: «Perhaps for the readers who have had this idea, it will be a surprise to ascertain how rarely the Greek Fathers of the IV cent, propose Elias as a model to follow» (*Le Souvenir d'Elie chez les Peres grecs*, in *Élie*, I, p. 137). The same happened among the Latins (see Herve de l'Incarnation, *Élie chez les Peres Latins*, ib., pp. 206-07).

The Fathers of the desert willingly harked back to the example of our forefathers in the faith, especially of Elias as the epistle to the Hebrews (11: 37-38) presents him; he is an exemplar who inspires their spiritual life. A first and quite explicit testimony of the imitation of the prophetic ideal is found in the life of St. Anthony, patriarch of the anchorites. Anthony resolved on constant progress in the way of perfection:

«He frequently repeated to himself the saying of the apostle: 'Forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forth myself to those that are before' (Phil. 3: 13). He also used to recall the motto of the prophet Elias: 'The Lord lives, and today I must appear before His face' (before Whose face I stand this day) (see I Kg. 18: 15 and passim). He underscored the use of the word today, because he counted past time as nothing. He believed that he had scarcely begun to serve God, and endeavored every day to become what he should be if he were to present himself before God, namely, with a pure conscience and a great preparation of heart, in order to obey His every wish and serve only Him. Furthermore, he told himself that an ascetic must daily (i. e., always) relate his own life, as if in a mirror, to the manner of life of the great Elias» (PG. 26, col. 854 b).

The continual presence of God is precisely that which Anthony proposed to himself as the ideal. The young Onufrius, who lived in a cenobitic community of the Thebaid, heard the older members praise the hermitical life of Elias: *«I often heard my venerable Brothers praise the life of our blessed Father Elias, who endeavored to mortify himself in the desert with so much abstinence and prayer that he merited to receive the height of virtue from the Lord» (PL, 73, col. 213). Hermits fled from the easy life in the world, in order to become citizens of heaven (see *Vita Antonii*, PG, 26, col. 865 b) and to form, «as it were, a sort of segregated region of piety and justice» (col. 907 b). St. Ambrose affirms that the prophets Elias, Eliseus and John the Baptist engaged in this blessed flight from the world towards the desert:*

«Elias fled from the woman Jezabel, that is, from the abundance of vanity, and fled to Mount Horeb, which signifies a «drying up», so that the course of carnal vanity would be dried up in him and he could know God more fully. In fact, he found himself near the torrent Carith, which means «of knowledge», where he could drink from the abundance of divine knowledge. He fled from the world to such an extent that he sought for no other nourishment for this body than that brought to him by the birds, although ordinarily his nourishment was not earthly. Finally, he walked for forty days, sustained by the food that he had received. ... Certainly it was not a woman, but the world, that

such a great prophet was fleeing ... What he was fleeing was the seduction of the world, the contagion of its besotted company, the sacrileges of a rebellious and impious nation» (*De fuga saeculi*, 6, 34, PL, 14, col. 614 bc).

Herve de l'Incarnation observes: «To flee from the world in order to drink at the fountains of the knowledge of God: Elias could be a wonderful example and guide for the program which was that of Ambrose, that of the monastic movement of the IV cent.» (1. c, p. 193).

To live in activity and in contemplation, to live in the very difficult efforts of body and of heart, breathing Christ continuously – this for a hermit was the extremely simple method of acquiring heavenly peace. Ammonas, the first successor of St. Anthony, writes to his monks: «Such was the case of Elias!» (Letter 8, PO, X, p. 587; cited by Michel Hayek, *Elie dans la tradition syriaque*, in *Elie*, I, p. 165). «It was a common belief among the Syriac authors to see in Elias the perfect realization of the monastic idea» (p. 164). Thus it is not strange that there were soon hermits who venerated and imitated the holy prophet in the important places of Elias' life.

In the IV cent. Aetheria informs us of the existence of a monastery near Thesbe and of the dwelling of a solitary in the valley of Carith, where Elias dwelt during the times of King Achab (*Peregrinatio Sylviae* 4 and 16, in *Itinera Hierosolymitana*, CSEL, XXXIX, 1898, pp. 41 and 59). A century later Theodosius mentions the monks living at Sarephta (*De situ Terrae Sanctae*, 23, ib., p. 147); and the pseudo-Antoninus reports the presence of hermits in the valley of the Jordan (*Itinerarium*, 9, im., p. 165; see *Élie*, t. 1, p. 211).

The way of life established by Pachomius also bears some analogy with that of the prophet: «The Tabennesiots are clothed in skins, after the example of Elias the Thesbite. I think this is to recall, at the sight of that clothing of skin, the virtue of the prophet, and thus courageously to resist shameful desires and to increase the hope of like recompense» (Sozomenus, *Storia ecclesiastica*, III, 14, PG, 67, col. 1069 bc). In the Life of Pachomius, Elias, together with Eliseus and John the Baptist, is set in relief as a great model of St. Anthony (PL, 73, col. 231a).

Nevertheless, St. Basil, the founder of a truly cenobitic life, does not evoke the great solitary of the Old Testament in a special way. When St. Gregory of Nazianzen and St. Gregory of Nyssa, in their panegyrics, compare Basil to the prophet, they are merely following earlier models. We note, moreover, that it is the solitude that is taken as the point of comparison (Gregory of Nazianzen, *In Laudem Basilii*, PG, 36, col. 536 b). The same is also true of the work of the pseudo-Basil, which reads: «Such also was Elias, who fled the tumult of men and enjoyed living in the deserts... Look at Elias! After how much solitude, after how much silence, after how much sweat did he merit to see God?» (*Commentarium in Isaiam*, proemium 7, PG 30, col. 129 b)

In the West, «the monks who lived in community under the rule of St. Benedict or of St. Caesarius did not have the same motives as the solitaries of the East to preserve in a

special way the memory of the old prophet who lived in his desert» (B. Botte, *Le culte du prophete Elie dans l'Eglise chretienne*, in *Élie*, I, p. 214).

2. Elias the inspiration of the hermetical life. If Elias is not the founder of the monastic life in a strict sense, he may be considered an authentic precursor. He is a master, says St. Ambrose; the monks are his disciples (Ep. 63, 82, PL 16, col. 1211b). St. Jerome writes of this primacy: «*Our leader is Elias; ours is Eliseus; our guides are the sons of the prophets; who dwelt in the fields and in solitary places and made abodes for themselves near the river Jordan*» (Ep. 58, ad Paulinum, PL 22, col. 583). In his Life of St. Paul he presents the prophetic origin of the monastic life as an opinion sustained by some:

«Many have often wondered who was the first of the monks to inhabit the desert. Some, indeed, looking farther back, have traced its beginning to blessed Elias and John» (PL 23, col. 17 a). Sozomenus profers the same concept as a current conviction: «The leader of this excellent way of life was, as some recall, the prophet Elias and John the Baptist» (1. c, I, 12, PG 67, col. 894 a). St. Niles will call Elias *pases askeseos archegos* /leader of all ascetics/ (Ep. 181, PG 79, col. 152 c). «They laid the first foundations of this profession,» says Cassian, in speaking of Elias and Eliseus: «*fundavere primordia*» (De institutis coenobiorum I, 2, PL 49, col. 61 a; see the commentary of Herve de la Incarnation, 1.c., pp. 194-5).

3. Purity of heart. Purity of heart is the monastic ideal. At first, virginity was attributed to Elias; in this the monks were following a Hebrew tradition. St. Ambrose expresses his belief in it (PL 16, col. 192 a). St. Jerome attributes virginity to the sons of the prophets as well: «*Elias was a virgin; Eliseus was a virgin; many of the sons of the prophets were virgins*» (Ep. 22, 21, ad Eustochium, PL 22, col. 408). Gregory the Great (Horn, in *Evangelia* II, 29, 6, PL 76, col. 1217 b) and St. Niles (Ep. 181, PG 79, col. 152 c) see the taking up of Elias as a reward of his purity. This purity, moreover, must be understood in the sense of monastic purity, of detachment (apatheia). In loving «the secrets of solitude and purity of heart», Elias has realized the ideal of the monk: «We know that he adhered to God in a most familiar way through the silence of solitude» (Cassian, *Collationes* 14, 4, PL 49, col. 957 a). In regard to this full availability of the pure heart, we make reference to a beautiful text of Afraate, a text inspired by Elias and cited in *Élie* (t. I, pp. 165-6). In the life of Elias, finally, are found the principal «athletic» exercises of the hermit: solitude, fasting (see *De Elia et ieiunio* of St. Ambrose, PL 14, coll. 697-728) and prayer.

4. The monks were inspired, above all, by Elias' *life of prayer*. Elias exhorts to the totality of divine love: «How long do you halt between two sides?» (I Kg. 18: 21) It is with these words of the prophet that Orsiecus exhorts his monks (*Doctrina de institutione monachorum* 28, PG 40, col. 892 c). The prayer of Elias, a man like us, was most powerful. Thus, on this point, he is a complete exemplar. The seer of Horeb and of Tabor is also the exemplar of a great intimacy with the Lord. For Maximus, the Confessor, the vision of the glorious Elias in his cave is a symbol of apophatic mystical experience:

«Horeb represents ... an habitual exercise of the virtues in a spirit of grace. The cave is the mystery of wisdom hidden in the soul, and its sanctuary. The man who will have entered there will have the profound and mystical intuition of the knowledge 'which is above all knowledge' and in which the presence of God is revealed. Therefore, if, like the great Elias, a man truly seeks God, he must not only 'betake himself to Horeb' (it is evident that he who is committed to action must also apply himself to the virtues), but also 'penetrate to the interior of the cave' situated on Horeb — that is, be completely devoted to contemplation, in the obscurity and in the most profound mystery of wisdom, based on a habitual practice of the virtues» (2 Centuria, cited by Francis of Saint Mary, in *Les plus vieux textes du Carmel*, pp. 47 ff.). It would be fitting to cite here also a beautiful mystical text of St. Gregory the Great (In Ezechielam II, 1, 17, PL 76, col. 948 a).

Hesychastic mysticism, which sees the mystic moment in the light of Tabor (see art. Contemplation, DS, II, coll. 1851-4), can be equally referred to the example of Elias. Peter the Atonite (VIII cent.) is perhaps the first of the Hesychasts who is thus praised: «You have determined to live on Mount Athos as Elias on Carmel, to seek God in silence» (Cited by Theodosy Spasky, the *culte do prophete Élie et sa figure dans la tradition orientale*, in *Élie*, I, p. 222).

In the liturgical celebrations of the East the title of holy monks — «an earthly angel and a heavenly man» — is attributed to Elias (ib., p. 221). In the West there is hardly a trace of liturgical cult offered to Elias (B. Botte, the *culte du prophete Élie dans l'Église chretienne*, in *Élie*, I, pp. 213-6). Even among the Carmelites the feast of St. Elias is quite late (Paschal Kallenberg, the *culte liturgique d'Élie dans l'Ordre du Carmel*, in *Élie*, II, p. 138); the proper preface for the feast of St. Elias (until the latest reform) used the words: «He laid the foundations of the monastic life.»

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Bibliography and author as for the following section VI.

VI. ELIAS AND THE CARMELITES. At the time of the Crusades some warriors, attracted by the beauty of Carmel, by its geographical position and also by the memory of the prophet, retired to the mount. At the beginning of the XIII cent. James de Vitry traced a retrospective picture of the spiritual rebirth of the Holy Land after the Crusades of the XI and XII centuries:

«Pilgrims devoted to God and religious men streamed to the Holy Land from the various parts of the world... Some holy men, however, renounced the world, drawn as they were by various affections and desires and inflamed with religious fervor; they chose for themselves places more suited to their purpose and devotion. ... Others, after the example and in imitation of the holy and solitary man, Elias the prophet, led a solitary life on Mount Carmel, and especially on that part which overlooks the city of Porphyria, which today is called Haifa, near the fountain, which is called the fountain of Elias, not far from the monastery of the blessed virgin Margaret. Like bees of the Lord, they produced the honey of spiritual sweetness in their honeycombs of modest cells»

(Historia orientalis sive hierosolymitana I, capp. 15-52; ed. J. Bongers, Gesta Dei per Francos, Hanover, 1611, p. 1075).

Between the years 1206-14 a group of Latin hermits, who lived «near the fountain on Mount Carmel» received from the hands of Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, a «formula of life,» confirmed in 1226 by Pope Honorius III. They are the Carmelites, the Friars of Our Lady of Carmel and the sons of Elias. It is not certain whether it was veneration of the prophet Elias that led these hermits to Carmel. The rule does not speak of the Carmelite life as inspired by Elias. Later, in his Fiery Arrow, Nicholas of Gaul, wishing to bring the Carmelites back to the purity of the hermitical life, will not evoke the example of the great solitary of the Old Testament. More probably, the fact of finding themselves on Mount Carmel and, later, the memory of this fact contributed to the birth and development of the hermits' devotion to St. Elias. Only in the course of their history did the theme of Elias become an «integral part» of Carmelite spirituality. Some allusion to the progressive legend of an hermitical life continued on Mount Carmel, from the times of Elias until the Crusades, is found in the first rubric of the Constitutions of the chapter of London in 1281:

«We declare, therefore, in order to witness to the truth, that, beginning with the prophets Elias and Eliseus, who were devout dwellers on Mount Carmel, a number of saintly fathers of both the Old and New Testaments, duly impressed by the solitude of this mountain so well adapted to the contemplation of heavenly things, have doubtlessly lived there, near the fountain of Elias, in a laudable manner in uninterrupted, holy penance with holy results. During the time of Innocent III, Albert, patriarch of the church of Jerusalem, united their successors into one community (collegium) and wrote a rule for them which Pope Honorius, the successor of Innocent, and numerous others after him, in approving this Order, confirmed. This devout approval of the Order is evidenced by their various bulls. It is in this profession that we, their disciples, serve the Lord until today in various parts of the world» (Latin text in Anal. O. C, XV /1950/, p. 208).

There was still a difference between the first hermits of the Old and New Testaments, and their successors in the epoch of Pope Innocent III. In the first rubric of the constitutions of 1324, however, the successors already appear at the time of Christ. It is thus that the idea was formed of the uninterrupted hereditary succession of the Carmelite Order. This conviction will lead to the sad struggle between the Carmelites and D. Papenbroeck. Meanwhile the figure of Elias became ever more significant in the spirituality of the Order; in the XV cent. Thomas of Walden wrote, without any further distinctions: «*Our profession spurs us on to his outlook*» (Mhc, p. 446).

It seems that it was John Baconthorp, who died in 1346, who for the first time united the Marian devotion of the Order of Carmel with the memory of the prophet Elias: «According to the prophets (prophecies?), the friars of Carmel originated especially for the veneration of the blessed Mary... And since /the blessed Mary/

is honored and preached through Carmel, it is fitting that on Carmel, which is dedicated to her, she should have the Carmelites who venerate her in a special way. This is how it was in ancient times; in reality, prophecies are understood in the light of subsequent facts... How many prophets and kings has Carmel had who through their deeds rendered honor to the Lady of the place, the blessed Mary! It was in order to continue the cult of the blessed Mary on Carmel that the Order of the Friars of Carmel had its origin. For, veneration given in places sacred to the saints is attributed, after God, to the saints themselves... But even if all those who were to be saved at the time of the prophets rendered honor to the Son Who was to come through the blessed Mary..., nevertheless, it was the friars of Carmel, venerating Him Who was to come at the time of Elias and Eliseus, who began their Order of the blessed Mary on Carmel... Therefore, it is by reason of this veneration that they took root» (*Speculum de institutione Ordinis /Mirror on the institution of the Order/,* cap. 1; the Latin text also in *Élie*, t. II, pp. 42-43).

The most complete form of this Elian and prophetic spirituality is found in a book of the XIV century, the *Liber de institutione primorum monachorum /Book on the institution of the first monks/*; the text also in Anal. O. C, III /1914-16/, pp. 347-49.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: *Élie le prophete, (études carmelitaines)*, 2 voll. (Bruges-Paris) 1956; E. Magennis, *The Life and the Times of Elias, the Prophet of Carmel*, Dublin 1925; Soeur Jeanne d'Arc *Élie dans l'histoire du salut*, VS, LXXXVII, 1952, pp. 136-147; *Élie et nous*, p. 289-295; T. Brandsma, Canines, in *DS* II, coll. 157 ff.

Cosmas Peters

VII. CULT. There is no doubt about the great antiquity of the cult attributed to Elias in the churches of the East. The Christians who visited the Holy Land stopped to pray at places which were of interest by reason of the saints of the Old Testament. The *Iter Burdiglense /Bordeaux Journey/* notes as sacred to Elias: Mount Carmel, the mount of the transfiguration, the hill from which Elias was taken up into heaven (B. Botte,

Le culte du prophete Élie dans l'Eglise chretienne, in *Elie*, I, p. 210). The best known sanctuary dedicated to him is that of Sarephta. In recounting the journey of Paula, St. Jerome describes her as she entered to pray in the small tower of the widow of Sarephta (Ep. 108, 18, in PL, XXIV, col. 882). Elias is venerated as a miracle worker, because he brought the son of the widow back to life.

Another sanctuary is noted by Aetheria (end of the IV cent.) on Horeb. The cult of Elias, like that of the Old Testament, was not long in passing beyond the boundaries of Palestine; and epigraphs permit us to ascertain its propagation. So, for instance, in the province of Arabia, inscriptions attest that Elias is the most popular saint of Ledgaa (see Devreesse, *Le christianisme dans la province d'Arabie*, in *Revue Biblique*, LI /1942/, pp. 110-46). In Syria, an inscription attests that in 542 the inhabitants of Ezra built a church dedicated to Elias at their own expense. At Byzantium, a tradition attributes the founding of a sanctuary to Elias to the legions of the Emperor Zeno after the Persian campaign, in recognition of an apparition to the army.

His feast was celebrated at the Petrion of Constantinople on July 20 (Synax. Constantinop., col. 832). The Syriac churches celebrated the memory of the saint on the same day from the XV cent. on. Among the Maronites, the celebration of the feast on the same day is evident only from the year 1673. In ancient times the feast of Elias was usually connected with the feasts that celebrated the manifestations of Christ in the world; more precisely, the circumcision, which the Jacobite church of Egypt celebrated on Jan. 1, was accompanied by a long memorial of Elias. The same occurred on the 6th, the solemnity of the transfiguration, on which Elias is found together with Moses. Sometimes the memorial of Elias is taken up again the day after, as among the Melkites (PO, X, p. 310). The same solemnity is celebrated by the Nestorians and Jacobites on Oct. 2, in the month dedicated to Moses and considered the first month of the year. The month of

September closed the cycle and hence represented the end of the annual cycle. Elias, the precursor who was promised to prepare the final triumph of the Messiah, is remembered in a special way on the six succeeding Sundays, from Aug. 6 to Sept. 14. In ancient times the Syriac churches celebrated the feast of Elias under the title of «Migration» (Forget, SA, p. 192). The feast of Elias is also celebrated in the Eastern Orthodox church on July 20, with a vigil as well, in which the memory of Elias was long associated with the cult of the prophet Eliseus, who is honored separately on July 14.

Devotion to Elias prospered in Constantinople. Basil the Macedonian (IX cent.), besides restoring the ancient sanctuary of the Petrion, built a church dedicated in the name of the Savior, of St. Michael and of St. Elias. He built another church in honor of Elias in the Mangani quarter (see F. Halkin, *Inscriptions Grecques relatives a l'hagiographie*, in *Anal. Boll.*, LXXI /1935/, pp. 326-58), and finally a chapel in his own palace (see PG, CIX, coll. 336, 354). Constantine Porphyrogenitus (ib., col. 237) explains this devotion of the emperor to Elias by a vision of the prophet to the emperor's mother, in which the prophet foretold the imperial destiny of her son. The *Synaxarium Constantinopolitanum* (col. 230) also notes on Jan. 13 the dedication of a church in honor of the prophet in the monastery of Batyriax.

The Byzantine East has remained faithful to this tradition. In 1918, of 4,637 churches in Greece, a kind of statistical report indicates that 752 were dedicated to the Most Blessed Virgin, 196 to St. Athanasius, 189 to St. John the Baptist, 75 to Elias, and 69 to St. George.

We know that in the Latin church the saints of the Old Testament had a very restricted cult. The liturgy of Rome, which imposed itself very quickly on the whole West, celebrated the feasts of martyrs almost exclusively; afterwards bishops who had fought for the orthodox faith were added to the martyrs, under the title of confessors. Only one feast of saints of the Old Testament penetrated the Roman liturgy, that of the Maccabees, on Aug. 1, inasmuch as these brothers were martyrs.

The cult of Elias seems to have made its entry into the West at Auxerre (see Messes de Mone: B. Botte, *Une fête du prophète E. au vie siècle en Gaule*, in *Cahiers Sioniens*, III /1950/, pp. 170-77), probably on the same date as in the East, July 20. The entire preface is dedicated to Elias. But this is the only witness for such a cult before the XV cent. Under the influence of the Byzantine menologies, the saints Of the Old Testament began to enter into the martyrologies. Elias had to wait until the publication of the *editio princeps* of the Roman Martyrology (1583).

The Carmelites themselves did not render him any cult until very late. The Ordinate of Sibert de Beka, of c. 1312, does not contain his feast, which appears for the first time in the Carmelite missal of 1551. The preface of Elias was approved by the S. Congregation of Rites in 1919. The cult of the prophet, therefore, does not belong to the Roman liturgy, but is proper to the Carmelites. It does not seem that there are any churches dedicated to Elias in the West, except those found in Byzantine (southern) Italy. In the approval of the new Carmelite proper, granted on April 17, 1972, the S. Congregation for Divine Worship «willingly concedes that St. Elias be honored with the rank Of solemnity, in order to give preeminence to the ideal founder of the /Carmelite/ Order». On Oct. 20, 1971, the rank of feast had been granted to the Discalced Carmelites.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: *Acta SS. Iulii*, V, Venice 1748, pp. 4-22; *Élie, Le prophète*, I-II, Bruges 1956; B. Botte *Le culte d'É. dans l'Église chrétienne*, I, pp. 208-18; Th. Spasky, *Le culte du prophète É. et sa figure dans la tradition orientale*, I, pp. 219-32; M. Hayek, *É. dans la tradition syriaque* I, pp. 159-78; P. Kallenberg, *Le culte Uturgique d'É.*, dans *l'ordre du Carmel*, II, pp. 134-50; M. J. Strassny, *the prophète S. dans le Judaïsme*, II, pp. 199-255.

Francis Spadafora

VIII. ICONOGRAPHY. In very numerous representations of Byzantine and western art, the prophet Elias generally appears vested as a holy hermit of the desert. His hallmarks are the crow (which fed him in the desert), a flaming sword, a cart wheel (alluding to his taking up), and sometimes a spade. The iconographic characteristics of the figure of Elias derive in this case from the traditional interpretation of Elias as the precursor of St. John the Baptist. As prefiguring Christ, to Whom various episodes in Elias' life liken him, the prophet is always represented in the desert as being consoled or nourished by an angel (frescos of the XIV cent. in the cathedral of Orvieto; Tiepolo, on the ceiling of the archiepiscopal palace of Udine) or while he restores the son of the widow of Sarephtha to life (frescos of the III cent. in the synagogue of Dura Europos, and of the XIV in the convent of Emmaus in Prague) or is carried away in his fiery chariot.

The ascent of Elias is the most diffused theme because of its reference to the ascension of Christ, because of various other symbolic meanings, and above all because it found an iconographical model in the classical portrayals of Helios-Apollo on his chariot of fire. Except for some medieval representations in which the prophet appears in a vehicle without horses or drawn by horses without a vehicle, traditional iconography portrays Elias as he is taken up to heaven in a chariot with two or four horses, sometimes guided

by an angel; Elias is in the act of extending his right hand towards God and with his left hand he offers his mantle to the prophet Eliseus, who is blinded by the vision.

Often the episode is localized by the portrayal of the river Jordan, personified by a classical river divinity. Among the very numerous and very ancient portrayals of this episode we can recall those of the frescos of the cemetery of Domitilla in Rome, the paleochristian sarcophagi of the Louvre and of the Vatican basilica, the reliefs of the wooden doors of St. Sabina at Rome, the very numerous medieval miniatures, and the reliefs of the Cremona cathedral dating from the XII cent., etc.

Numerous other episodes from the life and miracles of the prophet are narrated in the cycles dedicated to him, generally in the churches belonging to the Carmelite Order, as St. Martin of the Mountains in Rome, the chapel of the Discalced Carmelites in Paris, and the Carmelite churches of Cordoba and Madrid. As a patron of the Order, Elias also appears in the habit of a Carmelite religious, with the traditional iconographic attributes and characteristics. Rarely, the prophet appears clothed in the armor of a warrior (e. g., in the frescos of St. Elias at Nepi).

Among the episodes most frequently narrated in the above-mentioned cycles are obviously the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, with the miracle of the fire that came down from heaven, which miracle prefigures the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles (v. g., the frescos of the III cent. in the synagogue of Dura Europos and the marble marquetry of the Beccafumi in the cathedral of Siena); Elias fed by the crows, a common subject in the refectories of the convents on Mount Athos (with another example painted by Rubens, in the Louvre, Paris); Elias is given to drink and is nourished by the widow of Sarephta (e. g., the XIII cent. window of the cathedral of Chartres and the painting by Lanfranco in the museum of Poitiers); the massacre of the 850 prophets of Baal, a theme often treated in Byzantine and Russian art; and Elias separating the waters of the Jordan with his mantle (e. g., the reliefs of the XII cent. on the facade of the church of Ripoli, in Catalonia).

BIBLIOGRAPHY: L. Leger, *Études de Mythologie slave*, 3 voll., Paris 1895-97 passim; V. Bratulescu, in *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor*, Bucarest s.a. (XII), pp. 122-34; *Künste*, I, p. ,00; Réau, II, pp. 347-59; Emond, I, pp. 52-78 and passim.

Francis Negri Arnoldi

IX. FOLKLORE. The popularity of Elias was truly extraordinary. The biblical account, in the so-called Elian cycles of the Old Testament and in the texts of the transfiguration in the New Testament, strongly impressed the imagination of the faithful, because of its grandiose and efficacious character. This happened particularly in regard to the taking up of Elias and to the belief that he remained alive, that he intervened in favor of the good in their needs, and that he would return at the end of the world to combat the anti-Christ.

At the time of St. Martin, a young man pretended to be Elias and sustained his claim with feigned miracles; he successfully deceived the crowds and even a bishop (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, 24, in CSEL, I, p. 133). And at the time of St. Gregory the Great, as he himself reports, a Jew named Nasas, in Syria, gathered the Christians around an altar built by himself and dedicated to Elias (Ep. 38 in PL, LXXVII, col. 635).

Among the Slav customs, the feast of Elias took on a particular importance that distinguished it from others. The feast of Elias — called «*Elias, the thunder*» — was awaited as people await a day of rest, with the suspension of farm work. According to popular beliefs, Elias commands the thunder and the rain; and in his anger he can send drought. According to the historian Zabeline (*Les coutumes, les traditions, les légendes... russes*, Moscow, 1800, p. 96), in the popular opinion of old Russia, Perun, the pagan god of thunder and of lightning, has ceded his place to the prophet Elias, who is venerated also — and this is a notable fact — by the Buriati and by the Tartars. The life of Elias was bound up with the heavenly phenomena, thunder, rain and drought. The people saw in Elias an intercessor with God in regard to the hard labor of the fields (see traces of this belief in the *Eucologium /ritual/*, Leopoli, 1695). In 1198, in the countryside of Novgorod, was built the first church in honor of St. Elias; the cult of the saint was transferred here when Kiev was invaded. The noise of thunder was explained by the passage of the chariot of Elias over the clouds.

In the Syriac communities, even before they became Christian, Elias, through the influence of Jewish legends, had already become this mysterious being, half angel and half man, covered with feathers and able to fly, in order to help as many as turned to him for help. E. Sue, the author of *The Wandering Jew*, drew upon these popular beliefs.

On July 20, a great concourse of people devoted to Elias inundates Carmel: Christians of the various rites, Jews, Moslems. All ascend the mountain by various means of transportation or on foot to fulfill their vows, to present their babies for Baptism and, above all, to sing and dance in honor of the prophet. From the interior of the monastery can be perceived the din, as it were, of a great fair. That whole varied multitude finds itself united there, every year, in the name of Elias, who continues to exercise his attraction and to play a dynamic part in the life and in the beliefs of those people.

Francis Spadafora