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The Range and Significance of the References to Elijah in John's Gospel

Maurizio Marcheselli

How extensive are the references to Elijah in the Fourth Gospel [FG]? Are they limited to the two explicit occurrences of the name in 1:21a.25 or do they include other passages? Moreover, what is the significance of the association of Elijah with the “Christ” and the “prophet” in the opening verses of the Johannine narrative? The present paper will seek to answer these questions.

1 The Immediate Context of John 1:21a and 1:25

In general, commentators recognise that, in John 1:21, Elijah represents a figure of eschatological saviour¹, but not that the FG intends to present Jesus with the features of the Elijah *redivivus*².

The necessary first step in our study is the examination of the immediate context of the two mentions of Elijah in 1:21a and 1:25. Thus, it is necessary to begin by explaining the structure of the first two days of the Johannine narrative (1:19-34) and the “rhetorical arrangement” of John's testimony which they contain. Then, we shall focus particularly on the dynamics of vv. 19-23, which contain John's indirect testimony to the messiah.

¹ SCHNACKENBURG, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 277: “Nach der Ablehnung des Messiasititels distanziert sich Johannes auch von anderen messianischen Gestalten mit einem klaren Nein. [...] handelt es sich entweder um Vorläufer bzw. Begleitpersonen des Messias oder – wahrscheinlich – um Messiasgestalten, Heilsbringer nach anderer Erwartung; sonst könnte der Täufer schwerlich mit einem glatten «Nein» antworten”.

² Cf. BECKER, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 113; WENGST, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 80.

1.1 The Structure of the First Two Days of the Johannine Account (1:19-34)

The immediate context of the twofold reference to Elijah in John 1:21a.25 is formed by vv. 19-28, which correspond to the first day of the Johannine narrative. However, we cannot approach vv. 19-28 without considering vv. 29-34: it is within the totality of these two days that the evangelist describes John's (first) testimony to Israel's messiah in a unitary way³.

The passage from one day to the next is marked explicitly in 1:29 ("the next day"), but the temporal indications are not the only criterion structuring vv. 19-34. The internal structure of these two days has to take account of the fact, first and foremost, that they are thought of as the reply to two different questions which those sent by the Jews from Jerusalem address to the Baptist: "Who are you?" (vv. 19.22) and "Then why are you baptising?" (v. 25)⁴. The answer to the first question is found precisely in v. 23 ("I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness") and that to the second in v. 31 ("For this I have come baptising with water, that he might be revealed to Israel")⁵.

The answer to the question "Who are you?" (repeated twice by the messengers) covers vv. 19-23 and is arranged in two stages: at first, John replies negatively, making it clear who he is not (vv. 19-21) and then positively, on the basis of Isa 40:3 (John 1:22-23). The response to the question "Then why are you baptising?" (1:24-34) is also structured in two steps: first, in the absence of Jesus, John replies by declaring that his baptism does not have a messianic character (vv. 24-28); then, the following day, in the presence of Jesus, he declares that his

³ John's second and final testimony to the messiah is recounted in 3:22-4:3.

⁴ If the principals are identified once for all in 1:19 as "the Jews" from Jerusalem, the messengers sent present a double profile in connection with their two successive questions: they are indicated, first of all, as "priests and levites" (1:19) and, then, as "some Pharisees" (1:24). In our view, the prepositional construction in 1:24 (*ek* + genitive) is not to be understood as a complement of agent (*ek = hypo*) but, rather, as a partitive: "[some] of the Pharisees".

⁵ The messengers' second question presupposes that the messiah has to perform a baptismal ministry, to be understood, obviously, as a gesture of purification. John's first response to the question "Why are you baptising?" is that his baptism is not this messianic baptism (1:26a): he, John, is not claiming the right to baptise like the messiah. Thus, he is making it clear that the type of purification effected by his baptism is of a completely different nature from that implied in the baptism of the one who is coming after him. Cf. GRASSILLI, "*Santificali nella verità*", 101-108.

baptism has the task of causing the messiah to be manifested to Israel (vv. 29-34). In this case too, a first, negative, declaration (vv. 24-28) is followed by a positive one (vv. 29-34).

1.2 *A Testimony Arranged in a Double Crescendo*

If, on the one hand, the first two days of the account appear as a response to two different questions posed to the Baptist, on the other hand, they are profoundly linked by the category of “testimony” (1:19.32.34). The particular quality of this word of John is underlined right from the beginning in two complementary ways: with the vocabulary of testimony (v. 19: *martyria*) and with that of confessing (v. 20: *hōmologeō*). Both terms come from juridical language; both are employed in a technical way in the Johannine writings (Gospel and Letters)⁶.

Schematically, John’s testimony to Jesus in 1:19-34 is arranged as follows.

- I. “Who are you?” – *Indirect* testimony of John to Jesus (vv. 19-23)⁷
 - a) the Christ, Elijah, the prophet vv. 19-21
 - b) the *Kyrios* vv. 22-23
- II. “Then why are you baptising?” – *Direct* testimony of John to Jesus (vv. 24-34)
 - a) first series of clues about the messiah (“one whom you do not know”, etc.) vv. 24-28
 - b) second series of clues about the messiah (“the Lamb of God”, etc.) vv. 29-34

In response to the question “Who are you?” John already offers a series of identifications of the messiah, both in the negative part of his reply (1:19-21) and in the positive one (vv. 22-23). In response to the question “Then why are you baptising”, he gives further details of the profile of the messiah of Israel,

⁶ Cf. BEUTLER, *μαρτυρέω*, 958-964; BEUTLER, *μαρτυρία*, 964-968; HOFIUS, *ὁμολογέω*, 1255-1263.

⁷ Various authors identify John’s indirect testimony with vv. 19-28 and his direct testimony with the following day (vv. 29-34): WENGST, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 78-86; SCHNELLE, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 46-47; SCHENKE, *Johannes*, 43. However, already in 1:26-27, John speaks directly of the messiah although he is not yet present on the scene. In fact, Schenke recognises that, although Jesus does not yet appear on the first day, he is nonetheless already present in the testimony which John gives to him in 1:26: SCHENKE, *Johannes*, 39.

beginning in Jesus' absence (vv. 24-28) and concluding in his presence (vv. 29-34).

Thus, the two main movements of 1:19-34 set out a double crescendo: the *direct* testimony of John to Jesus (vv. 24-34) culminates, in v. 34, with the proclamation of Jesus as Son of God⁸; this high point is matched – in the *indirect* testimony of vv. 19-23 – by the allusive use of *Kyrios* with reference to this same Jesus (v. 23)⁹.

Both these developments contain the same sideslip: it is more immediately clear in 1:19-23 but can also be identified in vv. 24-34¹⁰. In verses 19-23, John passes from indicating Jesus (indirectly) as the Christ, Elijah and the prophet (vv. 19-23) to referring to him (indirectly) as Lord (vv. 22-23). In verses 24-34, there is a movement from indications which evoke the *motif* of the hidden messiah and the messiah who comes as a bridegroom (vv. 26-27)¹¹ to the recognition of Jesus

⁸ Verse John 1:34 should be read in close connection with the whole section that precedes it and prepares for it where we find messianic descriptions and titles which are no less significant than that of v. 34. John's testimony "is later amplified in the declaration that Jesus is (a) the Lamb of God; (b) one who, being equipped with the Spirit, is able to baptize with the Spirit, and (c) the Elect One (or Son) of God": BARRETT, *The Gospel according to St John*, 170. In verse 34, the reading with *υἱός* has to be preferred for external and internal reasons: cf. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary*, 200. The close connection between Lamb of God (v. 29), Son of God (v. 34) and the action of baptising in the Spirit (v. 33) is expressly highlighted also by MOLONEY, *Belief in the Word*, 64; FABRIS, *Giovanni*, 191-192.

⁹ The title *κύριος* is found in the quote from Isa 40:3 [LXX]. On the mouth of John the Baptist, it could not refer to anyone else, if not Jesus. This is the opinion of FREED, *Old Testament Quotations*, 3-4; MENKEN, *Old Testament Quotations*, 30, and of almost all the commentators (exceptions are WILCKENS, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 39; WENGST, *Das Johannesevangelium I*, 80-81). Also, the interpretation of Simoens ("the way of the Lord" as an exegetical genitive: the way which the Lord is) presupposes a reading of *κύριος* in John 1:23 in Christological terms: SIMOENS, *Selon Jean*, 88.

¹⁰ In connection with John 1:29-34, Moloney correctly observes: "The Baptist renders witness to Jesus in a way that transcends Jewish messianic expectation: Jesus is the Lamb of God, «he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit», the Son of God. None of this can be «contained» within the historical, cultural, or religious expectations of Israel. The reader is challenged to go beyond what he knows and understands" (MOLONEY, *Belief in the Word*, 64). In our interpretation, this going beyond happens precisely twice within the first two days.

¹¹ The interpretation in nuptial terms of the gesture of undoing the lace of the sandals is traditional: cf. SANCTI THOMAE DE AQUINO, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, caput I, Lectio XIII,4 [Accessed 17-11-2020]. In recent times, it has been taken up with convincing arguments by PROULX – ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Las sandalias del Mesías Esposo*, 1-37. The examination of the legal and narrative texts relating to the levirate law, and its interpretative tradition, conducted by these two scholars shows how the expression "untie the

as the Lamb of God, the pre-existent One, the Son of God who baptises in the Holy Spirit (vv. 29-34).

1.3 The Christological Outline of the Indirect Testimony of John to Jesus (1:19-23)

Within the structured testimony/confession of John in 1:19-34, we shall now consider more closely the characteristics of what we have identified as the first movement (vv. 19-23) and of the two parts of which it is composed (vv. 19-21 and vv. 22-23).

In 1:19-23, John replies, twice, to the question “Who are you?” and, therefore, describes his own identity. However, while he speaks of himself, he is already bearing witness to Jesus, albeit indirectly. That vv. 19-23 are already an integral part of the testimony which John gives to the messiah can be demonstrated on the basis of the two lexical clues recorded above: v. 19 places explicitly under the category of testimony what John says from that moment on (“this is the testimony of John); the threefold introduction to John’s first answer (v. 20) alludes to the quality of public confession attaching to all his words (“and he confessed, he did not deny but confessed”)¹².

John’s indirect witness to the messiah (1:19-23) is structured in two stages arranged by the repetition of the question over his identity: by refusing for himself the identification with the Christ, with Elijah and with the prophet, John – at first – implicitly causes these titles to bounce back toward the one who is their proper owner (vv. 19-21)¹³; presenting himself as the voice crying in the

snare” has been converted into an overall figure of a legal act by which a matrimonial right is renounced.

¹² In 1 John “confess” (ὁμολογέω) is a technical term for the profession of faith (2:23; 4:2-3; 4:15), but, already in the FG, this verb has the clear connotation of a public declaration before a hostile audience: cf. 9:22; 12:42. The use of ὁμολογέω in these two passages of the FG is bound up with a bitter observation: both the parents of the blind man who was cured (9:22) and many of the Jewish leaders (12:42) did not dare to profess faith in Jesus publicly because of the Pharisees. In both passages, the resulting confession was to provoke their expulsion from the synagogue. Mentioning the presence of the Pharisees in 1:24 reinforces the connection with the two subsequent uses of ὁμολογέω in which someone avoids confessing precisely because of this group (9:22; 12:42). Of John the Baptist alone, the FG proclaims solemnly that he confessed.

¹³ Limited to the first of the three titles, this observation is found also in HOFIUS, *ὁμολογέω*, 1262: the public affirmation of the Baptist is an indirect profession of Jesus as messiah.

wilderness, John – then – makes a veiled allusion to Jesus as *Kyrios* (vv. 22-23)¹⁴. The arrangement is one of a crescendo: the identification as “Lord” surpasses the three previous ones.

2 John 1:19-21: A Threefold Description of the Messiah?

By means of a rapid comparison with the Synoptic tradition and with the manuscripts of the Dead Sea, we shall now seek to sketch the historical-religious frame within which to interpret the threefold description of John 1:19-21.

2.1 John 1:19-21 and the Synoptic Tradition

The last two characters with which John the Baptist refuses to be identified (Elijah and the prophet) are both figures of a prophetic type. If, then – as we shall see – “the prophet” is to be identified with “the prophet like Moses”, the portrait of Jesus implicitly drawn by the Baptist in 1:21 is associating Elijah and a figure who recalls Moses. The fact that Jesus is presented allusively along with these two characters evokes the Synoptic episode of the Transfiguration (Mark 9:4-5 // Matt 17:3-4 and Luke 9:30.33)¹⁵.

The question arises whether the three titles found in John 1:19-21 are all on the same level. These three figures return together in a list in v. 25, and in the same sequence: an indication that they probably have some features in common. However, the text seems to suggest a gradation between the first title refused by John (the Christ: v. 20) and the two following ones (Elijah and the prophet: v. 21): in fact, whereas the refusal to be identified with Elijah and the prophet is the response to two precise questions formulated by the priests and levites, the declaration that he is not the Christ is made by John without him having been given any direct question on the subject. Can we ascribe this difference to the fact that the figures of Elijah and the prophet are not on the same level as the former? Have we to understand that, having heard John's confession that he is not the Christ – that is, the messiah –, the messengers then ask him if he happens to be some figure of lesser significance?

¹⁴ ZUMSTEIN, *L'évangile selon saint Jean*, 75; THEOBALD, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 158.

¹⁵ In this episode, the Synoptic sequence normally places Moses before Elijah (Mark 9:5; Matt 17:3.4; Luke 9:30.33); in Mark 9:4: however, we find the same order as in John 1:21: Elijah comes first, and Moses follows.

In the Synoptic account, when Jesus poses the explicit question about his own identity, the replies he is given correspond broadly to the three identifications (the Christ, Elijah, the prophet) which John the Baptist refuses for himself in John 1:19-21¹⁶. The passages of the triple tradition in question are precisely two: in Mark 6:14-16 (// Luke 9:7-9)¹⁷, the identifications suggested for Jesus are “John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets”; in Mark 8:28-29 (// Matt 16:14-16 and Luke 9:19-20)¹⁸, to the three already presented is added “the Christ”. Prescinding from the fact that the way in which the FG understands the figure of Elijah and that of the prophet might not coincide with the Synoptic position, the juxtaposition of John 1:19-21 with Mark 8:28-29 would seem to support the idea of a different degree of importance between “the Christ” and the other figures proposed for identifying Jesus: in Mark, it is only Peter who recognises Jesus as the Christ whereas the other identities are suggested by the people; similarly, in John, it is the Baptist who takes it on himself to deny that he could be the Christ whereas Elijah and the prophet are suggestions which are found in the mouths of the priests and levites.

2.2 *John 1:19-21 and Messianic Expectation at Qumran*

Is it possible, however, to maintain that, in the FG, the Christ, Elijah and the prophet are, in fact, three representations of the “eschatological mediator of salvation”? This is the significance which we attribute to the term “messiah”¹⁹. Messianic expectation is a particular form of eschatological expectation: it foresees the participation of one or more human mediators in the salvific action of God. Monti has given a useful working definition of messianism: that body of concepts which express the certainty of the coming of a happy world whose inauguration is aided by the decisive contribution of one or more mediators of salvation endowed by God with particular charisms²⁰.

¹⁶ Cf. BEUTLER, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 101, with reference to other german-speaking scholars.

¹⁷ The parallel in Matt 14:1-2 is much shorter and contains only the words of Herod identifying Jesus with a risen John the Baptist.

¹⁸ Between Elijah and one of the prophets, Matthew adds Jeremiah. In both cases, Luke gives the formula “one of the ancient prophets”.

¹⁹ SACCHI, *L'apocalittica giudaica e la sua storia*, 199: “Chiameremo messia la figura di ogni mediatore di salvezza, qualunque sia la sua natura”.

²⁰ Cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 21.

Qumran attests a notable complexity in the representations of the eschatological mediator or mediators of salvation for the period prior to Jesus of Nazareth and the composition of the gospels²¹. The interest of the Qumran texts for our enquiry is twofold: on the one hand, the messianic expectations which we encounter in the manuscripts introduce the figure of a prophet who is to be identified with “the prophet like Moses”, and who turns out to be, to all intents, a messianic figure (cf. John 1:21b); on the other hand, not without a certain level of uncertainty/speculation in the interpretation of the passages, Elijah too could be included among the eschatological mediators of salvation (cf. John 1:21a)²².

At Qumran, in successive phases of the community's existence, a messianic function was attributed to a good six, different subjects: the priestly messiah; the royal messiah; the archangel Melchizedek; Moses; Elijah; and the community itself²³. We could ask whether, in indicating the mediators of eschatological salvation spoken of by the manuscripts, the generic expression “positive eschatological protagonist” would be more accurate. However, the legitimacy of the use of the term “messiah” in this connection can be defended on the basis of the linguistic usage peculiar to the Qumranic community²⁴: 1Q28a (better known as 1QSa) 2:12 and 4Q252 (better known as 4QpGen^a) 5:3 represent the most ancient cases in the whole of Jewish literature of the absolute use of the substantive “messiah”, preceded by the article, to indicate the eschatological figure *par excellence*. It should then be added that the various titles employed to designate the eschatological figures of a priestly and a royal type can basically be summed up in those of the *messiah* of Aaron and the *messiah* of Israel (cf. 1QS 9:11)²⁵.

Two specifically Qumran texts, which were composed in the second half of the second century B.C., 4Q521 (known also as 4QMessianic Apocalypse or 4QOn the resurrection) and 11Q13 (known also as 11QMelchizedek or 11QMelch),

²¹ Cf. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, *Esperanzas mesiánicas*, 187-222.

²² This is maintained by MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 40-48.120-122.

²³ Cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 23-24. The whole of Monti's study revolves round the chronological development of the messianic expectation, something which he has reconstructed on the basis of the dating of the various manuscripts.

²⁴ Cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 23.

²⁵ Thus, with the substantive “messiah” and with the adjective “messianic”, we are referring to those texts which contain direct references to the figure of the messiah (by means of the technical term), but also to those which refer to other messianic figures – as the eschatological authors of salvation –, who are not properly designated with the term messiah: cf. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, *Esperanzas mesiánicas*, 188.

share the conception of a prophet who has to carry out a role of precursor in relation to the actual protagonist of the eschatological action²⁶. According to Monti, the most ancient messianic reflection at Qumran, attested by these two manuscripts, appears as an expectation of Elijah and Moses as prophets *redivivi* charged with introducing the action of the eschatological liberator, whether God (4Q521) or the archangel Melchizedek (11Q13)²⁷. In view of the fact that fr. 2 col. 3 seems to quote Mal 3:24 and Sir 48:10 *ad sensum*, we could hypothesise that the figure of the messiah in 4Q521 fr. 2 col. 2 is to be identified with the prophet Elijah *redivivus*, whose action remains subordinate to that of the protagonist proper of the final judgement, that is, God himself²⁸. 11Q13 represents the earliest sufficiently developed expectation of the eschatological liberator: it describes the complex superhuman figure of a royal and priestly archangel identified as Melchizedek²⁹. At a certain point, alongside this heavenly messiah, the text seems to introduce another character identified as the “messenger” of Isa 52:7 and described as “messiah of the spirit”. This messenger / messiah of the spirit, who announces the liberating work of Melchizedek, is the eschatological prophet who, by virtue of the juxtaposition with 4Q377, can finally be identified with Moses *redivivus*³⁰. On the one hand, the title of “messiah” is ascribed to him and, on the other, he is attributed with the function of precursor of the activity of the heavenly messiah (Melchizedek)³¹.

²⁶ The dating has been established on the basis of the studies of Puech: cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 40, n. 2.

²⁷ Cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 47.

²⁸ Cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 43. A wholly different interpretation is offered by GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, *Esperanzas mesiánicas*, 198-200, who thinks the text is speaking of the Davidic messiah.

²⁹ Cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 46. This figure anticipates in itself the diarchic (priestly and royal) messianic expectation and can be placed at the root of all the subsequent developments of the Qumranic expectations regarding human messianic figures.

³⁰ Thus MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 46.

³¹ It is completely justified to consider this prophet an authentic messianic figure: cf. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, *Esperanzas mesiánicas*, 218. His identification with the messianic figure of the eschatological prophet is the most probable hypothesis (cf. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, *Esperanzas mesiánicas*, 208.217). On the other hand, this character of a messianic figure does not contrast with the characterisation of the precursor (cf. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, *Esperanzas mesiánicas*, 220).

It is well known that a peculiar feature of Qumranic expectation is constituted by diarchic messianism³². The expectation of two messiahs at Qumran is attested by two works which can be dated to the beginning of the first century B.C.: 1QS 9:9-11 and 4Q175 (known also as 4QTestimonia). Actually, however, there are three figures of eschatological mediator of salvation attested in these two manuscripts: side by side with the messiahs of Aaron and Israel is the prophet³³. In 1QS 9:11, these three characters do not perform any particular role. What we have is, respectively, a messiah of a priestly nature (the messiah of Aaron) and another of a royal nature (the messiah of Israel). As for the prophet, the community subsequently identified him with the Teacher of Righteousness³⁴. However, 4Q175, which represents the most significant parallel with 1QS 9:9-11, shows clearly that the expectation of the prophet (better, of “a prophet”) mentioned alongside the two messiahs has its roots in Deut 18:15 (the prophet like Moses). 4Q175 appears as a collection of four quotations, juxtaposed without a break in continuity, which have the purpose of announcing the coming of three messianic figures and their opponent³⁵: Exod 20:21b according to the Samaritan Pentateuch, that is, combining Deut 5:28-29 and Deut 18:18-19 (the messianic figure is the prophet like Moses expected for the end times); Num 24:15-17 (royal messiah); Deut 33:8-11 (the priestly messiah, descendant of Levi)³⁶; Josh 6:26, interpreted through a passage from the *Apocryphon of Joshua*^b. 1QS 9:11 and 4Q175 testify to an eschatological projection of the figure of Moses. The formation of the expectation of a return of Moses in the future could have its roots in an exaltation of the historical Moses such as that attested

³² This diarchic Messianism is without analogy in Jewish literature of the second and first centuries B.C. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 59-60: it is only a passing idea attested solely by manuscripts copied in a very precise period of the community's history.

³³ Some authors claim that Qumran's “messiah of Aaron” can be identified with Elijah: cf. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean*, 157-158; WITCZYK, *Gesù nel ruolo di Elia*, 33-42. This is not our position.

³⁴ Cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 51-53.

³⁵ In 4Q158:6 also, there is a very broad florilegium of biblical texts including, among others, Exod 20:19-22; Deut 5:29; 18:18-20.22. The particular importance assumed by Deut 18 at Qumran is clearly attested.

³⁶ Cf. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, *Esperanzas mesiánicas*, 218: these three quotations are found on a single level and in perfect parallelism, and, consequently, have to be referred to three analogous figures.

in 4Q377 fr. 2 2:5³⁷. The biblical bedrock of the Mosaic expectation shared by 1QS 9:11 and 4Q175 is undoubtedly constituted by Deut 18:18-19: these two texts are among the most ancient witnesses to a Mosaic typology in a messianic key³⁸.

At Qumran, therefore, the eschatological figure of Moses appears as precursor (messiah of the spirit), either (typologically) of the two messiahs, priestly and royal (1QS 9:9-11 and 4Q175), or (*redivivus*) of Melchizedek (11Q13)³⁹. With regard to Elijah, 4Q521 is the only text of any length to treat of Elijah in an eschatological context⁴⁰. Here, he appears as precursor of the eschatological work of God, in judgement and in teaching. In this fragment, the Elijah *redivivus* is expected as the precursor of the final judgement carried out by God. This day of God's judgement does not coincide with that of the coming of the messiah: at Qumran, Elijah is not understood as precursor of the messiah⁴¹.

The working hypothesis which we formulated at the end of the first section is that, by rejecting for himself the threefold identification with the Christ, with Elijah and with the prophet, John makes it implicitly revert to Jesus (cf. §1.3). Within the framework delineated in this section, there seems to be a certain plausibility in the hypothesis that the three titles which the Baptist cannot accept for himself in 1:19-21 correspond in fact to three different messianic profiles.

3 The First and Third Figures: The Christ and the Prophet

We shall focus first of all on the first and third identifications proposed by John in order to outline the profile of the messiah in John 1:19-21. With these, the expectations relating to the Davidic messiah and the messianic figure of the prophet like Moses are transferred to Jesus.

³⁷ Moses is described here as "his messiah", on account of his prophetic role. The title of "messenger" is also attributed to him.

³⁸ Cf. also, perhaps, 1 Macc 14:41.

³⁹ At Qumran, there is no trace of a concept of Moses as type of the messiah (the messiah as a second Moses): cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 119-120. Rather, the final development attested is that of 11QMelch: the expectation of an eschatological prophet identified with Moses *redivivus*.

⁴⁰ Monti criticises the opinion of those who think that, in 4Q521, Elijah corresponds to the figure of the priestly messiah: cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 43, n. 3.

⁴¹ For Monti, this is true of all the Jewish literature prior to Christianity: cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 122.

3.1 *The Christ*

This term (ὁ χριστός) indicates the royal expectation of a Davidic type. The title, “Christ”, is the Greek translation of “messiah” and is to be taken here in its restricted sense of king of Israel, descendant of David⁴². This Messianism of a Davidic type implies a liberation achieved within the framework of the monarchy.

If, in John 1:20, the Baptist refuses for himself the title of “Christ”, it is because he regards it as the exclusive prerogative of Jesus. Taking up again in 3:28 the declaration formulated for the first time in 1:20, John makes it understood more clearly, though still indirectly, that the title ὁ χριστός must be reserved exclusively for Jesus.

In fact, Jesus is identified several times in the FG as “the Christ”. Various figures within the account recognise him explicitly as such: Andrew (John 1:41), the Woman of Samaria (4:25.29), the crowd (7:31.41a; cf. 12:34) and Martha (11:27). In 9:22, the parents of the man born blind do not dare confess that he is the Christ: the implication is that they believe that that is what he is⁴³. The evangelist himself presents Jesus as “the Christ” in the first conclusion of the book (20:31)⁴⁴. Jesus calls himself “Christ” in a single case (17:3) where the value of the title is weak, forming – as in 1:17 – a single expression with the name “Jesus”⁴⁵. However, the Johannine Jesus shows that he does not reject this title absolutely, as is seen on the occasion of the dispute which takes place in the context of the feast of Dedication (10:24-30).

Thus, it is more than reasonable to argue that the first of the three identifications rejected by John indicates a messianic profile that is wholly

⁴² Cf. BROWN, *An Introduction*, 155: the term “Messiah”, with the capital letter, is better restricted to a concept delineated with precision, that is to say, the anointed king of the Davidic dynasty who was to establish in the world the definitive kingdom willed by God for Israel.

⁴³ In three cases, a collective figure hesitates over the possibility of attributing the title to Jesus: some of the people of Jerusalem in 7:26-27; some of the crowd in 7:41b-42; the Jews in 10:24.

⁴⁴ Before this passage, the evangelist has used the title only in 1:17, as a single whole with the name, Jesus: “Jesus Christ”.

⁴⁵ This is a verse which many hold to be a gloss. Cf. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John*, 741.

compatible with the Johannine theology. “The Christ” represents a piece in the picture of the messiah, Jesus, provided by the witness of John⁴⁶.

3.2 *The Prophet*

“The prophet” of John 1:21b is not a reference to a generic figure of a prophetic type but constitutes an allusion to the prophet like Moses spoken of by Deut 18:15⁴⁷. In this passage, Moses announces to the Israelites that the Lord will raise up in their midst “a prophet like me”⁴⁸. Actually, the whole passage of Deut 18:15-19 is of great importance for the FG⁴⁹: sufficient to recall that the *motif* of no longer (willing) to listen to the voice of the Lord God (Deut 18:16) is taken up polemically in John 5:37b. If one then considers that it is in the mouth of this prophet like Moses that YHWH will place his words, and that the former will say what he has been commanded (Deut 18:18), it is not difficult to recognise in this aspect a fundamental feature of Johannine Christology (cf. 3:34a; 7:16; 12:49-50; 14:24b).

Our investigation into the messianic expectation at Qumran in the second section revealed the existence of an eschatological-messianic expectation connected with this figure starting already from the II-I centuries B.C. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke explicitly refers the text of Deut 18:15-19 on the prophet like Moses to the coming of the messiah, Jesus (“his Christ”: Acts 3:18): cf. Acts

⁴⁶ An argument in favour of a major role of David for the development of Johannine Christology has been advanced by DALY-DENTON, *David in the Fourth Gospel*.

⁴⁷ Among the patristic commentators, we recall in particular CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentary on John*, I,10: for him, “the prophet” of John 1:21 is “the prophet like Moses” of Deut 18 and is the messiah.

⁴⁸ In 1 Macc 14:41, there emerges the expectation of “a faithful prophet” (or one “worthy of faith”) who is to arise after Simon, commander and high priest. It is possible that this is the same figure as the one indicated in Deut 18:15.

⁴⁹ Boismard has thoroughly studied the Johannine Christology of the prophet like Moses: emphasising that the complex of *motifs* which is found in Deut 18:15-19 surfaces repeatedly in the FG: cf. BOISMARD, *Moïse ou Jésus*, 1-71. According to Boismard, the presence of the *motif* of the prophet like Moses in the FG goes well beyond the presence – albeit significant – of the title *προφήτης*. According to Boismard, the presentation of the *motif* of the prophet like Moses in the FG is arranged in four parts: some explicit uses of the title of prophet; seven texts or groups of texts which evoke the *motif*; the account of the call of Nathaniel; and the three Galilean signs as a reprise of the *motif* of the threefold sign of Moses. Few are ready to follow him down this road.

3:22-23; 7:37⁵⁰. It is now useful to add some thoughts on the expectation of the prophet like Moses in the Samaritan world.

Part of the definitive system of the Samaritans' creed is the belief in the *taheb* son of Joseph, "a prophet like Moses" who will appear in the end times, on the day of revenge and reward. The term *taheb* derives from the Aramaic root "return": he is "the one who returns", that is, the prophet like Moses promised in Deut 18:15.18. For the Samaritans, the *taheb* is neither a redeemer nor a liberator: he is a revealing messiah with prophetic traits⁵¹. According to some, the adoption of the title *taheb* comes from a late period: however, the absence of the title does not imply the absence of the concept⁵².

It is in *Tibât Mârqe* that we find a description of the Samaritan messiah with both prophetic and royal traits. This collection of midrash was known previously as *Memar Marqah* (*Mimar Mârqe*). It is one of the most important proto-Samaritan works of midrashic exegesis⁵³. In it, the eschatological saviour adds together the features of the prophet like Moses and of the king descended from Joseph, and he is called *taheb*⁵⁴.

Clearly, the question of dating is relevant for the content of the Samaritan creed, including the eschatological prophet, the *taheb*. *Tibât Mârqe* is made up of six books. The first and sections of the second date from the fourth century although they contain later interpolations; the final four books were put into writing many centuries later: however, one can speculate that they too – or, at

⁵⁰ Marguerat describes the Lucan use of Deut 18 in terms of Moses as "typological counterpart of Jesus", "prefiguration of the messianic prophet", of whom he is also the herald: MARGUERAT, *Les Actes des Apôtres*, 135, 255. Here, Luke would be taking up a Jewish-Christian tradition.

⁵¹ The assigning of royal traits to this prophetic messiah would be mirroring a subsequent stage in the establishment of the Samaritan creed, and his association with the eschatological events would also belong to the most recent stages: cf. PUMMER, *The Samaritans*, 293-294. BOISMARD, *Moïse ou Jésus*, 25-44, was of a different opinion.

⁵² Cf. PUMMER, *The Samaritans*, 293-294.

⁵³ Modern editions of this text are: MACDONALD (ed.), *Memar Marqah* of 1963 and BEN-HAYIM, *Tibât Mârqe* of 1988. MacDonald's text provides an English translation, Ben-Hayim's, one in modern Hebrew. A new edition of ms K (XIII century: the most ancient manuscript to have come down to us) with English translation edited by Avraham Tal is in preparation.

⁵⁴ *Tibât Mârqe* 4:12 makes reference to Joseph and Moses: there is no one greater than those two. There is no one like Joseph, the king, and no one like Moses, the prophet. Both possessed an elevated condition: Moses possessed prophecy, and Joseph possessed the good mountain [Gerizim].

least parts of them – go back to the earliest period. In Ben-Ḥayim’s edition, this figure is mentioned explicitly only in the first two books. Although they are the oldest books, Ben-Ḥayim claims that what we have here are interpolations because these passages are missing in ms K, the most ancient witness to have come down to us (XIII century). However, the possible absence of the title does not imply that the most ancient layers of the work lack the concept of a revealer-messiah with the traits of the prophet like Moses⁵⁵.

Undoubtedly, in ancient time, the Samaritans already attributed a very special importance to the text of Deut 18:15.18-19, which is found twice in their Pentateuch. In the Samaritan Pentateuch, in fact, Deut 18:18 is also inserted into the expansion which follows the Decalogue, that is, after Exod 20:21. If, therefore, we must put forward strong reservations as to the possibility that the Samaritan belief in the *taheb* had already been systematised in the first century, for our purposes, it is sufficient to be able to observe that, for the Samaritans, already in the first century, the prophet like Moses constituted a particular messianic figure with a function that was essentially revelatory.

We believe it completely plausible that John 1:21b reflects the expectation of the prophet like Moses⁵⁶ and that the FG attributes to Jesus this messianic profile also. If John the Baptist refuses for himself the identification with “the prophet”, it is because he holds it to be a trait belonging to Jesus. In a couple of circumstances, the FG actually identifies Jesus as *ὁ προφήτης*: he is called this by the crowd in 6:14 and 7:40. In the use of “prophet” in the mouth of the Woman of Samaria (4:19) and the blind man who was healed (9:17), as also in 7:52, there is the problem of the absence of the article. However, it is admitted by various authors that, at least in the case of the Woman of Samaria, the reference to “a prophet” (4:19) could be understood in a non-generic sense, above all in the light of how the dialogue closes in 4:25-26: Jesus’ last words to the woman are “I who am speaking to you am he” (4:26). With that, he identifies himself precisely with that revealer-messiah which the woman says she is expecting

⁵⁵ Cf. PUMMER, *The Samaritans*, 224.

⁵⁶ This is the opinion of many commentators: cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 278-279; BROWN, *The Gospel according to John*, 49-50; BOISMARD, *Moïse ou Jésus*, 2-5. Cf. also the note of the *Bible de Jérusalem* (1998) at John 1:21. Even in 1967, MEEKS, *Prophet-King*, 21-29, was able to say that the title of prophet as something independent in the FG had rarely been given importance. Often, there was an attempt to read this designation against the Hellenistic background of the *theios anēr*; only rarely had some authors drawn attention to the possible significance of the title in relation to Deut 18:18.

(4:25: “When he comes, he will show us all things”). On the lips of the Woman of Samaria, the messiah assumes clear prophetic traits (v. 19 and v. 25) along the lines of Deut 18:15-19. Thus, Jesus' words in 4:26 are not to be minimised: he is not saying “I who am chatting to you am he”; but rather “I who am communicating the divine revelation to you am he”. The declaration of 7:52 would be clearer if it referred to the eschatological prophet and not to a generic prophetic figure⁵⁷: why could Galilee not be the home region of such a generic prophetic figure? It would be more difficult to accept that it could be the place of origin of the eschatological prophet, the one like Moses. This narrower interpretation of the prophet mentioned in v. 52 seems to find support in 7:40-42 where we encounter, on the lips of the crowd, in rapid succession, first the identification of Jesus as “the prophet” and then as “the Christ”⁵⁸: for the first group in the crowd, he is the eschatological prophet promised by Deut 18:15.18; for the others, he is the consecrated king, the Davidic descendant of royal messianism⁵⁹. The two groups are probably referring to two possible profiles of messianic figures.

By contrast with what happens with the title “Christ”, the Johannine Jesus never describes himself as “the prophet”, not even indirectly. However, it appears to be sufficiently clear that the last of the three identifications rejected by John points to a profile of an eschatological emissary compatible with the Johannine picture of Jesus.

⁵⁷ A couple of papyri (P⁶⁶ and perhaps P⁷⁵) support the *lectio* with the article: “the prophet” (cf. 1:21). Many recent commentators hold that this is the preferable *lectio*: cf. THEOBALD, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 547; WENGST, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 300-301. In any case, it appears that – even if the term were used here without the article – the “prophet” intended in John 7:52 is not just any prophet but “the prophet like Moses”. Indeed, the generic assertion that no prophet comes from Galilee is contradicted, for example, by 2 Kgs 14:25.

⁵⁸ In examining the Johannine texts which refer “the prophet” to Jesus directly, Meeks concentrates almost exclusively on John 7:40: a passage which poses the question of the relationship between “prophet” and “Christ”, and so of the relationship with the Davidic ideology (MEEKS, *Prophet-King*, 32-99).

⁵⁹ The order is reversed compared with John 1:19-21, and the absence of a reference to Elijah is striking.

4 The Central Figure: Elijah

We turn now to the figure mentioned second in John 1:19-21, the one who constitutes the specific object of our enquiry. First of all, we intend to enquire whether the FG also has traces elsewhere of an interest in Elijah, even in the absence of an explicit mention. Then, we shall summarise the pre-Johannine evidence for an expectation of Elijah as figure of eschatological mediator of salvation (Elijah *redivivus*). Finally, we shall clarify the sense gained by the reference to Elijah in v. 21a in the light of what we have called the indirect testimony of John to Jesus in vv. 19-23.

4.1 Traces of Elijah in the FG Outside 1:19-21

In the FG, not only does Jesus never call himself Elijah – the same applies to “the prophet” –, but – prescinding, obviously, from John 1:21a.25 – he is never explicitly identified as such either by anybody in the narrative or by the evangelist. However, there are some passages and expressions in the gospel which could be taking up aspects of the Old Testament presentation of this prophetic figure.

a) The syntagma *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*. Brown has maintained that the origin of the expression “the one who comes” – used frequently for Jesus in the FG – could be Jewish speculation about Elijah⁶⁰. The reasons for thinking that “the one who comes” (*ὁ ἐρχόμενος*) was originally a way to indicate Elijah are two. First of all, there are the texts which refer the verb *ἔρχομαι* to him: Mal 3:1 [LXX], a passage associated with Elijah because of its reprise in Mal 3:22-23 [LXX], says “Behold, he is coming”; Matt 11:14 speaks of Elijah as “the one who is to come”. Then, there are the texts which refer the verb *ἔρχομαι* to the Baptist, who – at least in the proto-Christian tradition attested by Matthew – was interpreted as Elijah (Matt 11:14.18; 17:10-12). In the FG, “the one who comes” is found frequently referring to the messiah: John 1:27 is the first attestation. This Johannine linguistic usage (cf. 11:27) could be explained (at least in part) by the fact that, in Johannine theology, Jesus also assumes the features of the Elijah *redivivus*.

b) The resuscitation of the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17-24 LXX). Two Johannine passages echo the Old Testament account of the cure of

⁶⁰ BROWN, *The Gospel according to John*, 44.

the son of the widow of Zarephath: John 20:22a refers to 1 Kgs 17:21; John 4:50 to 1 Kgs 17:23.

The gesture performed by Jesus in John 20:22a is explained in the light of some important passages of the OT where we find again the same rare verb ἐμφυσάω (Gen 2:7; Ezek 37:9; Wis 15:11), including the description of Elijah who gives breath to the widow's son (1 Kgs 17:21)⁶¹. Thus, in the background to Jesus' gesture, there lie a series of texts describing the communication of life on the part of God (Gen 2:7; Wis 15:11), possibly through the mediation of a prophetic figure (Elijah [1 Kgs 17:21] or Ezekiel [Ezek 37:9]).

In 4:50, Jesus uses the same words as those used by the prophet in 1 Kgs 17:23 on the occasion of the healing of the son of the widow of Zarephath. Only the order is different (1 Kgs ζῆ ὁ υἱός σου; John ὁ υἱός σου ζῆ) and there is a different command (1 Kgs "see"; John "go").

On the basis of these traces, it could be argued that the figure of Elijah contributes to the Johannine representation of Jesus in two ways: through the fact that he "comes" into this world, coming from the world of God (Elijah *redivivus*) and through his capacity to communicate life⁶².

4.2 Representations of a Messianic Elijah prior to or contemporary with the FG

There is no scholarly agreement about the existence of pre-Christian representations of Elijah as precursor of the messiah⁶³. Instead, there is solid attestation of Elijah as a messianic figure in a series of witnesses prior to the FG⁶⁴.

⁶¹ In the LXX, the verb ἐμφυσάω is used for the creation of Adam in Gen 2:7 and for the return to life of the people of Israel after the Exile in Ezek 37:9. Wis 15:11, which speaks of the folly of the maker of idols, is to be compared with Gen 2:7. In Job 4:21, on the other hand, the verb is used in a threatening context.

⁶² Cf. PIDYARTO GUNAWAN, *Jesus the New Elijah*: in this author's judgement, the main reason for the Johannine interest in Elijah, on the level of Christology, is the theme of life.

⁶³ Cf. FERGUSON, *The Elijah Forerunner Concept*, 127-145. He concludes that, even if there is no direct, pre-Christian textual evidence, there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to show that the concept of Elijah as the precursor of the messiah had its origin in pre-Christian Judaism. Be that as it may, this debate does not affect our study.

⁶⁴ This is also the basic assumption of the study of FERGUSON, *The Elijah Forerunner Concept*. He holds that Elijah as precursor of the Day of the Lord is a datum taken for granted for pre-Christian Judaism, one which does not require any demonstration.

The first text to be considered is Mal 3:22-23 [LXX] = 3:23-24 [MT]⁶⁵, which cannot be understood apart from 3:1. This prophetic text does not speak of Elijah as precursor of a human mediator of eschatological salvation: in Mal 3, he simply precedes the coming of the Day of the Lord (Mal 3:23; cf. 3:2), that is, of the Lord himself (Mal 3:1). In Mal 3, therefore, Elijah appears as a man with decidedly particular characteristics; he will collaborate in some way in the salvation of Israel without being either king or priest: perhaps he is something more⁶⁶. Malachi is different from all the other sources which speak of the Day of the Lord: he foretells the coming of Elijah before that day. One can speculate as to what happened from the historical point of view. When the expectation of the restoration of the Davidic monarchy was set aside, the messianic hope that had previously reposed in the figure of the king – according to the position expressed by Haggai and Zechariah – passed over to the high priest. Malachi, on the other hand, is the expression of a different tendency: the royal figure was replaced by a prophetic character (Elijah) who was to bring the process of the redemption of the people to fulfilment⁶⁷. In Malachi, it is the messianic Elijah who takes the place of the Davidic royal messiah.

Sirach 48:1-12 too shows a notable interest in Elijah. Verse 10 is especially important for us: the third stich is a clear reprise of Mal 3:23 LXX. This text assigns a role to Elijah for the “future times”: placating the wrath of God by healing the divisions within families and by re-establishing the tribes of Israel. In this case too, Elijah directly precedes the divine judgement (the explosion of wrath)⁶⁸.

We have seen above (§2) that the varied messianic expectation that can be traced from the Qumran manuscripts seems, at least in the judgement of some, to include an Elijah *redivivus* whose eschatological coming is immediately prior to the divine judgement.

⁶⁵ Verse Mal 3:22 of the MT is v. 24 in the LXX: Moses (v. 24) has been shifted after Elijah (vv. 22-23) in reverse order to the MT.

⁶⁶ Cf. SACCHI, *L'apocalittica giudaica e la sua storia*, 206.

⁶⁷ ASSIS, Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope, 214-220. In this role, Elijah assumes traits which belonged to Moses. Assis postulates this sequence: a royal Davidic messiah (Haggai and Zechariah) → a prophetic messiah = Elijah, who takes up characteristics which initially belonged to Moses (Malachi) → a royal messiah with Elijah as the herald of the coming of this Davidic messiah (the Jewish sages of subsequent periods).

⁶⁸ Cf. MONTI, *Una comunità alla fine della storia*, 120-122: the prophet Elijah is the only figure in the history of Israel whose return as a figure *redivivus* is already attested in the Bible (cf. Mal 3:23-24 and Sir 48:10).

In all three Synoptics, Elijah is mentioned fairly frequently: Mark and Matt use his name nine times each, Luke seven times⁶⁹. Luke's position is rather two-pronged: on the one hand, he links Elijah with John the Baptist; on the other hand, he makes him typologically the figure of Jesus as a prophet. However, our interest is not in Elijah as type of a gospel figure (thus Luke), whether Jesus or John the Baptist; our concern is rather for Elijah *redivivus*. In the dialogue which follows the Transfiguration in Mark and Matt (a passage absent in Luke), Elijah is clearly presented as the precursor of the messiah and is identified explicitly with the Baptist: Mark 9:11-13 // Matt 17:10-12. Whereas, in Mark and Matt, the Elijah *redivivus* is identified with John, the FG seems to identify him with Jesus⁷⁰.

In his commentary on John, Brown was hesitant over the possibility that the messiah could have the features of Elijah: in his judgement, the attestations would only be later, and this Elijah-type messiah would, therefore, remain conjectural⁷¹. More recently, however, Brown changed his opinion on this point⁷². The evidence that emerges from the sources examined undoubtedly assigns an eschatological role to this figure. If, in some contexts, we cannot, perhaps, exclude a representation of Elijah as a precursor of the messiah⁷³,

⁶⁹ In §2, we have already looked at two passages where the crowd suggests various possible identifications for Jesus, as well as the episode of the Transfiguration: in the first two passages, the name of Elijah occurs 5 × in all (2 × each in Mark and Luke; 1 × in Matt); in the context of the Transfiguration, 6 × (Mark 9:4-5 // Matt 17:3-4 and Luke 9:30.33). Only these episodes are attested in all three Synoptics. In the Synoptics, Elijah appears in two other main contexts: the dialogue following the Transfiguration (6 ×: Mark 9:11-13 // Matt 17:10-12) and the account of Jesus' death (4 ×: Mark 15:35-36 // Matt 27:47-49). We can also add the saying recorded in Matt 11:14. Luke mentions Elijah without a Synoptic parallel in 1:17 and 4:25.26.

⁷⁰ It is clear that, in the FG, John the Baptist, cannot be identified with Elijah in any way: are we to see in this a polemic against the followers of the Baptist? Various commentators are disposed to accept this, even if we have no clear proofs that the Baptist's followers thought of him as Elijah (cf. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John*, 48).

⁷¹ "There is not sufficient evidence for a messianic view of Elijah at the time John was written": BROWN, *The Gospel according to John*, 47.

⁷² Cf. BROWN, *An Introduction*, 155: Judaism knew of a gallery of characters who were expected to appear at the moment of the definitive intervention of God on behalf of Israel; for example, Elijah, the Prophet-like-Moses, the Priestly Messiah and, probably, the Son of Man. These figures can be vaguely described as messianic. Without any hesitation, Lambrecht affirms that, in Judaism, sometimes Elijah is a messianic figure, other times, the precursor of the messiah: LAMBRECHT, 'Ἠλίᾱς, 286.

⁷³ Thus FERGUSON, *The Elijah Forerunner Concept*, 144-145.

nevertheless, for the most part, he is presented with an autonomous role which is directly oriented to the coming of the Day of the Lord. In this sense, he can be described a messianic figure.

4.3 Jesus as Elijah in John 1:21a

To assess the significance of the reference to Elijah in John 1:21a, what is important is not so much the deeds of the person which are recounted in the book of Kings as, rather, the function which was gradually attributed to him in relation to the future developments in the history of salvation.

The placing of Elijah between the Christ and the prophet suggests that this figure too expresses something correct, if insufficient, about the identity of Jesus. Elijah is able to say something of the Johannine Jesus, and that is that he is a messianic figure⁷⁴. The three identifications put forward in John 1:19-21 are to be understood as three possible profiles of an eschatological mediator of salvation. More than preparatory and secondary figures, not only “the Christ” but also “Elijah” and “the prophet” represent designations of an eschatological messenger invested with the task of inaugurating the last days.

It is possible that the importance to be attributed to the three figures is not identical for the FG. Such a diversified perception would find its confirmation in the Synoptics and, perhaps, in the texts of Qumran also. Nonetheless, it appears that we can speak of three profiles of the messiah, or, if one prefers a less specific expression, three pictures of the “positive eschatological protagonist”.

The fact that these titles can be referred to Jesus and that, in fact, in the development of the Johannine account, at least two (the Christ and the prophet) are so referred – albeit in different ways – does not mean that they are an adequate expression of the identity of the eschatological messenger. These three identifications may be acceptable for the theology of the FG, but none speaks exactly of the identity of Jesus. Even “the Christ” is a title which cannot be

⁷⁴ The thesis that Jesus is pictured in the FG as the messianic Elijah is maintained by the above-mentioned WITCZYK, *Gesù nel ruolo di Elia*. Before him, cf. PIDYARTO GUNAWAN, *Jesus the New Elijah*. Also, ASHTON, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 256, claims that the author of 1:19-21 (which, in his view, would be part of the Signs Source) intends to assign to Jesus the title of Elijah, and the identification with Elijah could be one of the sources for the Johannine idea of the pre-existence of Jesus.

accepted without reservation⁷⁵. None of these three titles indicates the proper nature of the messiah of Nazareth according to Johannine understanding.

Only the title of "Lord" is an adequate expression of the Johannine understanding of the messiah. In fact, the allusive reference to Jesus as *Kyrios* (v. 23) constitutes the climax of the indirect testimony of the Baptist (vv. 19-23): it takes its cues from the expectations of a royal messiah (v. 20), a messianic Elijah (v. 21a) and a prophet like Moses (v. 21b), ending up in attributing to Jesus the title which is the translation of the divine tetragrammaton. In John 1:23, as an obvious allusion to Jesus, "the Lord", indicates in the clearest way possible his especial closeness to the God of Israel. Something indicated elsewhere in John by "Son", "Only begotten", and even by "Logos".

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⁷⁵ Jesus does not reject it when the Jews ask if he is the Christ on the occasion of the Feast of the Dedication (10:24-30): however, he responds to the question of v. 24 in terms of his unity with the Father (v. 30). The evangelist does not disdain it: we find it in the first conclusion of his gospel (20:31). However, precisely here, we see that this title is not sufficient and that it cannot stand alone: Jesus is the Christ in the sense that he is the Son of God.

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Zhrnutie

Eliáš sa spomína v Jánovom evanjeliu dvakrát (Jn 1,21a a 1,25), a to iba v kontexte narácie o prvom dni (1,19-28). Nachádza sa výlučne v spoločnosti ďalších dvoch postáv: „Krista“ a „proroka“. Cieľom tejto štúdie je dokázať, že z úst Jána Krstiteľa má toto trio poskytnúť prvý, hoci nepriamy popis izraelského mesiáša. Z Jánovho pohľadu je však Ježišov portrét ako Krista, Eliáša redivivus a proroka ako Mojžiša – i keď nie mylný – nedostatočný. Tento príspevok pozorne sleduje, ako štvrtý evanjelista koncipuje svedectvo Jána Krstiteľa o izraelskom mesiášovi v 1,19-23 a ukazuje, že identifikácia Ježiša s Eliášom – ale aj s Kristom a prorokom – volá po tom, aby bola objasnená a prekonaná použitím názvu kyrios (1,23), čo je slovo, ktoré používa grécka Biblia Izraela na preklad božského tetragramatónu.

Kľúčové slová: Eliáš, prorok ako Mojžiš, Kristus, mesiášske očakávanie, samaritánsky mesiáš.

Summary

Elijah is mentioned twice in John's Gospel (John 1:21a and 1:25), and only in the context of the first day of the narrative (1:19-28). He is found exclusively in company with two other figures: “the Christ” and “the prophet”. The article aims to demonstrate that on the lips of John the Baptist, this trio is meant to provide a first, although indirect, description of Israel's

messiah. However, in the johannine view, Jesus' portrait as the Christ, the Elijah redivivus, and the prophet like Moses – although not wrong – is insufficient. Carefully observing how the fourth evangelist structures John the Baptist's testimony to the messiah of Israel in 1:19-23, this contribution shows that the identification of Jesus with Elijah – but also with the Christ and the prophet – cries out to be clarified and surpassed by the use of the title *kyrios* (1:23), a term the Greek Bible of Israel uses to translate the divine tetragrammaton.

Key words: Elijah, prophet like Moses, Christ, messianic expectation, Samaritan messiah.

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Obsah

Štúdie

<i>Daniela DE PANFILIS</i> Nie iba prorok. Viacero tvári Samuela	125-157
<i>Johanna ERZBERGER</i> Legislatívne termíny vo verziách Jeremiáša	158-178
<i>Pavel PRIHATNÝ</i> Poéma o zodpovednom živote a smrti (Sir 40,28–41,4). Poeticko-sémantická analýza	179-197
<i>Jeremy CORLEY</i> Eliáš medzi skoršími prorokmi v hebrejskej verzii Knihy Sirachovca 48,1-12	198-226
<i>Maurizio MARCHESELLI</i> Rozsah a význam odkazov na Eliáša v Jánovom evanjeliu	227-251
<i>Levente BALÁZS MARTOS</i> Prorok a zvyšok, kríza a obnova. Pavlovo použitie Eliášovho príbehu v Rim 11	252-265
<i>Július PAVELČÍK</i> Eliáš v Jakubovom liste	266-306

Poznámky

<i>Frédéric MANNS</i> Hieronym a židovské tradície	307-311
Abstrakty a recenzie	312-324
Správy a oznamy	325-327

Contents

Treaties

- Daniela DE PANFILIS*
Not Only a Prophet: The Numerous Faces of Samuel 125-157
- Johanna ERZBERGER*
Law Terms in the Versions of Jeremiah 158-178
- Pavel PRHIHATNÝ*
Poem on Responsible Life and Concerning Death (Sir 40:28–41:4):
Poetic and Semantic Analysis 179-197
- Jeremy CORLEY*
Elijah among the Former Prophets in Hebrew Ben Sira 48:1-12 ... 198-226
- Maurizio MARCHESELLI*
The Range and Significance of the References to Elijah in John's
Gospel 227-251
- Levente BALÁZS MARTOS*
Prophet and Remnant, Crisis and Renewal: Paul's Use of the Elijah
Story in Romans 11 252-265
- Július PAVELČÍK*
Elijah in the Letter of James 266-306

Notes

- Frédéric MANNS*
Jerome and the Jewish Traditions 307-311
- Abstracts and Reviews 312-324
- Communications and References 325-327