



## DAWR (1)

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**DAWR** (Ar. and Pers.), period, era, or cycle of history, a term used by Ismaʿilis in connection with their conceptions of time and the religious history of mankind. The early Ismaʿilis conceived of time (*zamān*) as a progression of cycles or eras, *dawrs* (Ar. pl. *adwār*), with a beginning and an end. On the basis of their eclectic temporal vision, which reflected Greek, Judeo-Christian, and Gnostic influences, as well as the eschatological ideas of earlier Shiʿites, they worked out a view of history, or rather hierohistory, in terms of the eras (*dawrs*) of different prophets recognized in the Qurʾān. This prophetic interpretation of history was, moreover, combined with the Ismaʿili doctrine of the imamate, which had been inherited from the Imami Shiʿites.

The Ismaʿilis thus believed from early on that the hierohistory of mankind comprised seven prophetic eras (*dawrs*) of various durations, each inaugurated by the speaker-prophet or enunciator (*nāṭeq*) of a revealed message that in its exoteric (*zāher*) aspect contained a religious law, or *šarīʿa*. The *nāṭeqs* of the first six eras were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Moḥammad respectively. Each was succeeded by a legatee (*waṣī*), also called “foundation” (*asās*) or “silent one” (*šāmet*), who revealed to the elite the inner (*bāṭen*) meanings of the message for his *dawr*. These inner meanings represented the unchangeable truths (*ḥaqāʿeq*) of Ismaʿili gnosis. Each *waṣī* was, in turn, succeeded by seven imams, who guarded the true meaning of the message in both *zāher* and *bāṭen* aspects. The seventh imam of each *dawr* became the *nāṭeq* of the following *dawr*, abrogating the *šarīʿa* of the previous *nāṭeq* and promulgating a new one (*Feraq al-šīʿa*, pp. 61-63; Qomī, pp. 83-85,



apud Stern, pp. 49-55; Madelung, pp. 48 ff.; Daftary, pp. 104-05, 136-40). This pattern would change only in the seventh, final *dawr* of hierohistory.

In the sixth *dawr*, the era of the Prophet Moḥammad and Islam, the seventh imam was Moḥammad b. Esmā'īl b. Ja'far al-Ṣādeq, who had gone into concealment. On his reappearance as the *qā'em* (restorer of justice on earth and true Islam), or *mahdī*, he would become the seventh *nāteq*, ruling over the final, eschatological *dawr*. Moḥammad b. Esmā'īl would abrogate the law of Islam; his own divine message would not entail a new law, however, but would consist of the full revelation of the esoteric truths (*ḥaqā'eq*) concealed in all the previous messages, the immutable truths of all religions, which had previously been accessible only to the elite of mankind. In this final, messianic age there would be no need for religious law. Moḥammad b. Esmā'īl, the last of the *nāteqs* and imams, would rule in justice as the eschatological *qā'em* and would then bring to an end the physical world. His *dawr* would thus mark the end of time and human history (Ebn Ḥawšab, pp. 189, 191-92, 197 ff.; Ja'far b. Maṣū'ūr Yaman, 1952, pp. 14 ff., 50, 97, 104, 109, 113-14, 132-33, 138, 150, 170; Abū Ya'qūb, 1966, pp. 181-93; idem, 1980, pp. 47-56; Corbin, pp. 30 ff.; Halm, pp. 18-37; Walker, pp. 355-66).

The whole cycle from Adam to the advent of the *qā'em* as the seventh *nāteq* was also called the “era of concealment” (*dawr al-satr*), because the truths were concealed in the laws. By contrast, the seventh *dawr*, when the truths would be fully revealed to mankind, was designated the “era of revelation, or manifestation” (*dawr al-kašf*), an era of pure spiritual knowledge with no need for religious laws. The Isma'īlis also used the expression *dawr al-satr* in reference to a period when the imams were hidden (*mastūr*) from the eyes of their followers, in contradistinction to *dawr al-kašf*, when the imams were manifest and accessible.

This Isma'īli view of history was evidently first committed to writing in Persia and Transoxania by prominent early *dā'īs* (missionaries) and authors there, notably Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Nasafī (d. 332/943-44), whose major treatise *Ketāb al-maḥṣūl* has not survived, and Abū Ḥātem Rāzī (d. 322/934), whose ideas on the subject were primarily expounded in his *Ketāb al-eṣlāhā*, which is still unpublished. Both these early Isma'īli theologians envisaged hierohistory in terms of the scheme of seven prophetic eras, though they disagreed on some details. In fact, they became the protagonists in a scholarly debate over religious obligations and certain metaphysical issues, later joined by Nasafī's disciple Abū Ya'qūb Sejestānī. Subsequently the *dā'ī* Ḥamīd-al-Dīn Kermānī



acted as arbiter in this controversy (Kermānī, pp. 176-212). Nasafī and Abū Ḥātem devoted much energy and imagination to accommodating other religions, notably those of the Zoroastrians and the Sabaeans, within their scheme of seven prophetic eras, assigning these religions to specific *dawrs* and *nāṭeqs*. Abū Ḥātem also introduced the concept of an interim period (*dawr al-fatra*), marked by the absence of imams and occurring at the end of each prophetic *dawr*, between the disappearance of the seventh imam of that era and the advent of the *nāṭeq* of the following era. According to him, the Zoroastrians belonged to the fourth era, the *dawr* of Moses, and Zoroaster himself had appeared during the interim period at the end of that *dawr* (pp. 52 ff., 59, 69 ff., 160 ff., 171-77; Abū Ya'qūb, 1966, pp. 82-83; Corbin, pp. 187-93; Madelung, pp. 101-14; Stern, pp. 30-46; Daftary, pp. 234-39).

The cyclical prophetic view of hierohistory elaborated by the early Isma'īlis was retained by the Fatimid Isma'īlis, who refined or modified certain aspects of it, especially in connection with the duration of the sixth *dawr*, the era of Islam; the number of imams during that era; and the *qā'em* and his functions (see, e.g., Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr Yaman, 1984, pp. 21 ff., 57 ff., 67 ff., 101, 105, 109, 112, 164 ff., 201 ff., 217, 219, 229 ff.; Qāzī No'mān, pp. 40-368; Daftary, pp. 176-79, 218-20, 234). Some authors of the Fatimid period introduced new concepts into the cyclical scheme. The Persian Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow (394-ca. 471/1004-ca. 1078), for instance, distinguished between a grand cycle (*dawr-e mehīn*), encompassing the entire sequence of the seven *nāṭeqs*, and a small cycle (*dawr-e kehīn*), coinciding with the latter part of the grand cycle and including the era of Islam and thereafter (pp. 62-64, 126-27, 157, 169-70, 245, 256, 331).

Later Isma'īlis introduced further innovations into the earlier interpretation of hierohistory expressed in terms of the seven prophetic *dawrs*. On the basis of astronomical calculations the Yamanī Ṭayyebīs conceived of a grand eon (*kawr a'zam*) comprised of countless cycles, each divided into seven *dawrs*, which would be consummated in the *qā'em* of the "great resurrection" (*qīāmāt al-qīāmāt*). Furthermore, the grand eon was held to progress through successive cycles of concealment (*satr*) and revelation (*kašf* or *zohūr*), each composed of seven *dawrs* (see e.g. Ḥāmedī, pp. 149 ff., 205-27, 232 ff., 258-72; Walīd, pp. 100 ff., 121-28; Corbin, pp. 37-58; Daftary, pp. 140-41, 291 ff., 295).

The Nezārī Isma'īlis of the Alamūt period (487-654/1094-1256) in Persia followed a religious and political path of their own and, unlike the Ṭayyebī Isma'īlis, were not particularly concerned with the earlier cyclical view of



history, though they generally adhered to the scheme of seven prophetic eras. However, in connection with elaborating their own doctrines, they allowed for transitory eras of resurrection (*qīāmat*) during the *dawr* of the Prophet Moḥammad, who, like the five enunciating prophets before him, had initiated an era of concealment (*dawr-e satr*). In the era of Islam, and in special honor of Moḥammad's greatness, there could be occasional anticipatory eras of resurrection, each offering a foretaste of the *qīāmat* that was to occur at the end of Moḥammad's era, ushering in the seventh and final millennium in the religious history of mankind. The condition of *qīāmat* could in principle be granted at any time, to mankind as a whole or to the elite, by the current Nezārī imam, for every imam was potentially also a *qā'em*. As a result, in the era of Moḥammad human life could alternate, at the will of the imam, between *dawrs* of *qīāmat* and *satr*, the normal condition of human life. The Nezārīs, however, interpreted the *qīāmat* symbolically and spiritually as the manifestation of the unveiled truth in the person of the Nezārī imam, whereas *satr* meant concealment of the true spiritual reality of the imam, when truth was again hidden in the *bāṭen* of the laws, requiring the strictest observance of the *šarī'a* and *taqīya*, or dissimulation (Ṭūsī, pp. 61-63, 83-84, 101-02, 110, 117-19, 128-49; Corbin, pp. 117 ff.; Hodgson, pp. 148 ff., 225-38; Daftary, pp. 386 ff., 404 ff., 410-11).

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