



ESCHATOLOGY III. IMAMI SHI'ISM

ESCHATOLOGY

iii. Imami Shi'ism

It is known that among Islamic doctrinal trends and schools of thought Shi'ism, Imami Shi'ism in particular, has developed eschatological doctrine most fully, to the point at which a good number of general Islamic messianic ideas seem to have originated in one of the numerous Shi'ite sects of the first Islamic centuries. On the other hand, Shi'ism profited at a very early period from eschatological traditions that were current from the first Islamic century, that is, even in the lifetime of the Prophet Moḥammad (van Vloten, pp. 1 ff.; Moeller, introd.). Twelver eschatology is completely dominated by the figure of the Mahdi, the Hidden Imam: his manifestation at the end of time, his soteriological mission, and the situation of the world at the time of these events. Such classical Islamic elements as description of the final judgment at the resurrection and the fates of the elect in paradise and the damned in hell are almost entirely absent from Imami eschatological literature (but see Ebn Bābūya Ṣadūq, 1971; Majlesī, XVIII/2, pp. 282-409), which is particularly abundant, rich, and even chaotic. The number of works devoted to the subject, from the earliest compilations of tradition to the doctrinal writings that continue to be published in modern times, can be counted in the thousands. Imami Hadith and Qur'ān commentary (*tafsīr*) contain a great many traditions



in which different koranic verses are interpreted in relation to the Hidden Imam and his mission. Almost every Imami dogmatic work written after the occultation (see below) includes at least several eschatological allusions or notions relative to the Hidden Imam. Only the most commonly repeated reports from the oldest sources will be discussed here; they were often reiterated and sometimes amplified by later authors.

The oldest sources belong to the original “nonrational esoteric” tradition: the chapters devoted to the twelfth Imam by Moḥammad b. Ya‘qūb Kolaynī (d. 329/940); ‘Alī b. Ḥosayn b. Bābūya (d. 329/940); Ebn Abī Zaynab No‘mānī (d. ca. 345 or 360/956 or 971); Ebn Qūlūya Qomī (d. 369/979); ‘Alī b. Moḥammad Ḳazzāz Rāzī (d. second half of the 10th century); Moḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Bābūya Ṣadūq (see [EBN BABAWAYH](#); d. 381/991), son of ‘Alī b. Ḥosayn; and Ebn ‘Ayyāš Jawharī (d. 401/1011). Authors belonging to the “rational theological-juridical” tradition, on the other hand, seem to have remained deliberately silent on many esoteric, occult, and magic aspects linked to the twelfth Imam, his return, and his companions during his final struggle (see Amir-Moezzi, 1992a, chap. 4). Among the oldest of these sources are the chapters on the twelfth Imam by Moḥammad b. Moḥammad Shaykh Moḥīd (d. 413/1022); two of his disciples, Šarīf Mortaḏā ‘Alam-al-Hodā (d. 436/1044) and Moḥammad b. ‘Alī Karājakī (d. 449/1057); and Šayḵ-al-Ṭā’efa Abū Ja‘far Moḥammad Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067; on the two strands of Imami tradition, see Amir-Moezzi, 1992a, p. 15-48). The works in the first series, of which the two oldest were prepared during the period of the lesser occultation (see below), are essentially compilations of Imami traditions, whether gathered directly by the authors or gleaned from earlier works most of which seem to be lost today (Hussain, pp. 2 ff.; Kohlberg, 1987). These original monographs did not all belong to the branch of Shi‘ism often designated in heresiographies as Emāmīya Qaṭ‘īya, which after the occultation became the Eṭnā‘ašarīya (Friedlander; Sachedina, 1981, pp. 42 ff.; Kohlberg, 1976). Zaydī or Wāqefī writings on the occultation (a notion current at least since the Kaysānīya, 7th-century Shi‘ite sectarians who applied it to ‘Alī’s son Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīya) were also used, that is, “recovered,” on behalf of the Twelver cause (Watt; Amir-Moezzi, 1992a, pp. 245-64; idem, 1992b, pp. 236 ff.). Finally, certain details about events linked with the final appearance of the Mahdi seem to be a posteriori elaborations of eschatological ideas and traditions associated with *malāḥem wa fetan* (predictions of upsets and vicissitudes to come), which were circulating among traditionists and their followers, particularly in Iraq (e.g., the celebrated eschatological Hadith about the Mahdi reported by Qatāda [d. 117 or



118/735-36], that reported by Maṭar b. Ṭahmān [d. ca. 125/743], and others related by Noʿaym b. Ḥammād [d. 227/842] in his *Ketāb al-fetan*; Madelung, *EI2* V, p. 1232; Aguade).

In Imamism the eschatological savior is Abu'l-Qāsem Moḥammad b. Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the twelfth and last Imam of the Twelvers, usually called by one of his many titles: *al-mahdī* (the rightly guided), *al-montaẓar* (the awaited), *ṣāḥeb al-zamān* (lord of the age), *al-ḡāʿeb* (the hidden), *al-ḥojja/ḥojjat Allāh* (the proof [of God]), *ṣāḥeb al-amr* (lord of the cause), *ṣāḥeb al-ḥaqq* (lord of the truth), *baqīyat Allāh* (the remnant of God), and most often *al-qāʿem* (he who will rise, he who will raise, or the “resurrector”; on this last term and its different meanings, see Nawbakhtī, pp. 90 ff.; Qomī, pp. 102 ff.; Sachedina, 1981, passim; Madelung, *EI2* IV, pp. 456-57). The date traditionally given for his birth is 15 Šaʿbān 256/18 July 870. At the death of his father, the eleventh Imam, in 260/874 he entered his first, or lesser, occultation (*al-ḡayba al-ṣoḡrā*), which lasted nearly seventy lunar years and during which he communicated with his followers through four representatives (*safīr*, *wakīl*, *nāʿeb*). The last representative declared on his deathbed in 329/940-41 that in a letter in his own handwriting the twelfth Imam had announced that from that time forward he would have no representative. This letter marked the beginning of the second, or greater, occultation (*al-ḡayba al-kobrā*), which, according to the Imamīs, still continues and will continue until the final appearance of the Qāʿem, who, endowed by providence with an extraordinarily long life, will come to conquer violently and finally the forces of evil on earth. The invisible but genuine physical presence of the Hidden Imam and the expectation and messianic realization of the end of time are the central elements in Twelver eschatology. The latter seems to have two dimensions: one collective, universal, and external, located in the history of mankind, to which it will bring a radical transformation, the other individual and internal, leading to the transformation of the believer’s being. The first is described in detail in the sources but the second only obliquely. In both the role of the Qāʿem, the living Imam and supreme spiritual guide, remains determinant.

The collective dimension. The date of the end of time, the advent of the Hidden Imam, is unknown. Although several traditions, for the most part attributed to Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādeq, seem to suggest the imminence of the event (the fall of the Omayyads?), nevertheless that this date is unknown seems quickly to have become an article of faith. “Haste” (*esteʿjāl*) and “reckoning the delay” (*tawqīt*) are expressly forbidden, and the faithful are invited to wait patiently for the



joyful deliverance (*entezār al-faraj*). The future coming of the Mahdi is the most frequent subject of the predictions of the Prophet, of Fāṭema (q.v.), and of the first eleven imams; entire chapters are devoted to it in the sources. These predictions essentially involve signs (*‘alāmāt*) warning of the appearance of the savior, as well as the acts and events that will accompany the rise (*qīām*) of the latter. The traditions are not all in agreement on the signs, divided between “inevitable” (*maḥtūma*) and “conditional” (*moštaraṭa*, i.e., those that can be changed or suppressed by divine decision). Among the plethora of signs mentioned, however, several are constant; they can be divided into two categories, signs of a general or universal order and specific signs.

The foremost universal precursor of the rise will be the general invasion of earth by evil, the crushing of the forces of light by those of the shadows, requiring some sort of manifestation of the eschatological savior if all humanity is not to be swallowed up by evil, whence the frequently cited sacred formula “The Mahdi will rise at the end of time and will fill the earth with justice, as before it was filled with oppression and injustice (or darkness; *anna al-mahdī yakrojo fī āker al-zamān fa-yamlā’a al-arḡ ‘adlan kamā mole’at jawran wa zolman [zōloman]*). From the imams’ “premonitory visions” (*malāḥem*) it is clear that the world immediately before the advent of the Qā’em will be characterized by a loss of the sense of the sacred, the annihilation of all that links man to God and to his neighbor, a general absence of religious precepts and moral obligations, and the confusion of human values. In this gloomy scenario the Shi’ites meet with no better fate than others; only a tiny minority, “the faithful” (*al-mo’menūn*), that is, the true initiates into the teachings of the Imams, will be spared from capture by evil.

A large number of “special signs” announcing the manifestation of the Mahdi are also enumerated in the sources. Five of them (*al-‘alāmāt al-ḳams*) recur with particular frequency: the arrival during the month of Rajab of Sofyānī, who will take command of the army of the “enemies” of the Imams and will conquer several provinces (often in Syria) before being killed by the Qā’em (Madelung, 1984); the advent of the Yamānī, who will appear in Yemen and will preach support for the Qā’em (and sometimes will oppose Sofyānī); the supernatural cry (*ṣayḥa, nedā’*) from the heavens calling upon men to defend the cause of the Imam (sometimes also another cry that is to arise from the earth inviting men to join the ranks of the enemy of the Imam); the swallowing up (*ḳasf*) in a desert (often located between Mecca and Medina) of an army composed of the enemies of the Imam (sometimes said to be sent by



Sofyānī); and assassination by the Meccans of the Soul or the Pure soul (al-Nafs, al-Nafs al-Zakīya), the messenger sent by the Imam to Mecca.

The Mahdi will thus appear, having kept his youth and in extraordinary fashion resembling the Prophet Moḥammad, both in his physical aspect and in his behavior; according to other traditions, he will resemble Jesus Christ. As the last link in the chain and the ultimate heir of the Imams, he will control the magical relics of the past prophets handed down through the line of Imams: the tunic of Adam, the seal of Solomon, the staff and the ark of Moses, and especially the invincible weapon of Moḥammad. He will also have in his possession the holy scriptures of the past prophets, the secret books of the Imams, and the complete version of the Qur'ān (see Amir-Moezzi, 1992a, pp. 200-27). He will come to combat and root out the invading evil and to prepare the world for the last judgment. By keeping in mind different elements of Imami doctrine and adopting a synoptic vision of the reports, it is possible to give an account of this final combat, based on three principal kinds of causation.

The historical cause. The Qā'em will return to avenge the assassination of Ḥosayn b. 'Alī. According to the sayings of the Imams, the snatching of power from 'Alī, the one true initiate of the Prophet, and the rejection of his recension of the Qur'ān, the only complete one, struck a fatal blow to Islam as a communal religion designed to save humanity. The real coup de grace, however, was the murder of Ḥosayn by the governors of the community, which thenceforth, aside from a small minority faithful to the Imams, was composed of the “enemies” of the Imams and their supporters. By assassinating a divine initiate, who was also the grandson and heir of the Prophet, “official” Islam condemned itself to founder in violence, corruption, and oppression. That is why, for order and justice to be reestablished, it is essential that the Qā'em avenge Ḥosayn; the majority of Muslims will thus be purged of the most odious crime ever committed in their name. This notion of vengeance is intimately linked with the Imami doctrine of the return (*al-raj'a*), itself linked with the advent of the Hidden Imam (Kohlberg, *EI2*). It involves the return to life of a certain number of good and bad individuals from preceding generations, of figures from sacred history and their adversaries, so that the good may take the opportunity to avenge themselves for injustices they have had to suffer. It is generally said that the Prophet or the Imams will return to aid in the victory of the Qā'em. In the last judgment 'Alī will be the one who divides (*qasīm*) humanity between paradise and hell.



The religious cause. The Qā'em will come to reestablish the lost sense of the sacred. He will first reestablish Islam in its original purity and integrity. Other religions (specifically Judaism and Christianity), equally abandoned and distorted, will also be restored to their original truth. It is said in fact that the Mahdi will bring all the holy books of the past out from the cavern where they are hidden and will apply their precepts among their respective followers (Ebn Bābūya Ṣadūq, 1405/1985, pp. 342 ff.; Ebn 'Ayyāš, pp. 181 ff.). According to some traditions, this cavern is located at Antioch, information probably originally based on a Hadith reported by Ka'b al-Aḥbār and circulated by Maṭar b. Ṭahmān (see above). In their essential truth these religions are identical with Islam, and it is doubtless in this sense that claims that the Mahdi will impose Islam on all the inhabitants of the earth are to be understood. According to some rare traditions, the Qā'em will introduce "a new order, a new book, a new law, a new sunna" (No'mānī, pp. 336, 368, 372), which seems to indicate a new religion abrogating Islam and a new book abrogating the Qur'ān (a belief of Qarmaṭian origin, according to Nawbakhtī, p. 88).

The spiritual cause. The Qā'em will come again in order to introduce wisdom (*ḥekma*) to men. Thanks to him, they will rediscover their 'aql, their sacred intelligence, the "interior imam" in each, the luminous organ of apperception of the sacred with its seat in the heart (Amir-Moezzī, 1992b, s.v., esp. pp. 15-33). This third cause complements the second in the sense that the religions restored by the Qā'em will no longer be only exoteric dogmas but will at the same time be esoteric spiritual teachings. It is reported in fact that the Hidden Imam will introduce to men the spiritual sense (*ta'wīl*, *tafsīr*; for these two terms, see Ḥasan al-'Askarī, p. 186; No'mānī, pp. 342, 345; *Nahj al-balāgha*, p. 458) hidden in the heavenly books: the universal initiation by the Imam of all men into the secrets of existence and those of their proper religion.

The Mahdi will not accomplish his mission alone. First, a certain number of individuals, for the most part great religious figures, are to return to aid the Mahdi. Among them several names recur frequently: Imam Ḥosayn; Esmā'īl Ṣādeq-al-Wa'd, the mysterious prophet mentioned in the Qur'ān (19:54-55); and Jesus, who, according to one well-known early tradition, will pray behind the Qā'em. In addition, the Imam will be accompanied by an army; good cannot triumph over evil except by force and violence, crushing in blood the opposing forces, who, according to some traditions, will be led by Dajjāl (q.v.; the Islamic Antichrist). The imam's army will consist of three kinds of "helpers": angels, fear, and the initiates.



First are the angels. Like the great prophets during the tests of their missions, the Mahdi will be assisted during his battle by angels. The Qur'ān, the Hadith, and the traditions of the Esrā'īliyat combined yield the number and names of these angels. There is particular insistence on the 313 angels who accompanied the Prophet on the day of the battle of Badr. In fact, comparisons with this famous battle are constant; Badr is considered the first great victory of Moḥammad over the unbelievers and in a way represents the beginning of the establishment of Islam, universal exotericism. The battle of the Qā'em will mark the ultimate victory of the initiates over their enemies and the definitive establishment of the religion of the Imams, universal esotericism.

The second “helper” is fear (*ro'ḥ*). Although it is merely alluded to in the traditions and the formulas are rather vague, it seems to be a terrifying heavenly entity, assisting the Mahdi by marching with his army (Ebn Bābūya Ṣadūq, 1405/1985, p. 331; No'mānī, p. 337).

Finally there are the believers, the companions of the Qā'em (*aṣḥāb al-Qā'em*), also numbering 313; it is said that, like the combatants at Badr, they will neither be killed nor die before having achieved victory. They constitute the militia (*jayš*, a word with a numerical value of 313) of the Mahdi. None, or perhaps only a few, of them will be Arabs; in fact, the numerous eschatological traditions of the Imams have a very strong anti-Arab flavor. The principal enemies of the Qā'em are all Arabs. His companions are “non-Arabs” or Persians (the two contemporary meanings of the term *'ajam*) coming from the east and carrying black banners bearing the seal of the Qā'em. In one tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādeq these companions are described as similar to worshipers of the sun and moon (No'mānī, pp. 451-52). In some traditions the head of this militia is a certain Šo'ayb b. Ṣāleḥ, who is supposed to come from Khorasan or Ray. The militiamen are initiated warriors and are in fact described in a whole series of reports relating to Imami initiation and esotericism: Each is the bearer of a sword on which are inscribed “a thousand words, each giving access to a thousand others,” an expression designating Imami initiation. At the moment of the rise, when the Mahdi launches his appeal from Mecca, they will come to join him by magical means (often by the power of the supreme name of God). Repeated comparisons between the manner of the companions' travel to Mecca and the movement of the clouds in the sky is reminiscent of the “magic flight” so well known in occult traditions. Other miraculous gifts are also attributed to the companions of the Qā'em: Once assembled at Mecca, their swords will descend from the sky. They will be



sent by the Imam to different places and will come to dominate absolutely everything; even the birds and the wild beasts will obey them. Should a decision be difficult for one of them to make, directives from the Imam will be inscribed on the palms of his hands. By writing “something” (probably the supreme name of God) on their feet, they will acquire the power to walk on water, and so on.

The army of the Qā'em, swollen by the mass of the oppressed and volunteers attracted to the cause, can only be victorious. The Ḥejāz, Iraq, the east, Egypt, Syria, and then Constantinople will be conquered before the entire world submits to the savior. The enemy and his forces will be exterminated once and for all, the earth adorned with justice, and humanity revived by the light of initiation. And what will happen afterward? The Mahdi will prepare the world for the final resurrection. According to some traditions, he will reign over the world for several (seven, nine, nineteen, etc.) years, after which death will come to all humanity just before the final judgment. According to other traditions, after the death of the Qā'em the government of the world will remain until the day of resurrection in the hands of the initiates (the terms used in the early sources are *awliā'* and *rejāl men ahl al-bayt*; later authors did not hesitate to use terms of the occult hierarchy of mystics: *awtād*, *abdāl*, *nojabā'*, *ṣolahā'*, etc.).

The individual dimension. To witness the return of the Mahdi and to join his army are the highest hopes of Imami believers, but not everyone can witness the end of time, and it is probably for this reason that the Imams ceaselessly reiterated that faith in the invisible presence and the final advent of the Mahdi is equivalent to being among his companions. This note of hope, originally intended perhaps for those who were disappointed and frustrated by the indefinite delay of the anticipated return, also introduced an individual soteriological dimension into Twelver eschatology. The existence of the Hidden Imam is an article of faith for all believers; it even forms part of the test (*emteḥān*) that is one of the conditions of the period of occultation and serves to distinguish “true Shi'ites” from Shi'ites in name only. But, as in all esoteric traditions, the teaching of the Imams comprises several levels designed for different categories of disciples. Some traditions in fact seem to involve more than a simple invitation to unconditional faith and to suggest that certain particularly advanced believers can come to know “the place where the Hidden Imam is located,” that is, can enter into contact with him and eventually see him. “The Qā'em will have two occultations,” Ja'far al-Šādeq



is supposed to have said, “one short and one of longer duration. During the first only a few elect among his Shi‘ites (*kaṣṣa šī‘ateh*) will know the place where he is located, and during the second only the elect among his faithful friends (*kaṣṣa mawālīh*)” will know the place (Kolaynī, II, pp. 141-42; No‘mānī, pp. 249-50). The “elect among the Shi‘ites” were doubtless the representatives during the lesser occultation; in fact, they alone were privileged to know the place of the Hidden Imam. “The elect among his faithful friends” would be the believers especially initiated to enter into contact with the Imam during the greater occultation. “The lord of this cause [i.e., the Qā’em],” Ja‘far al-Šādeq is supposed to have said, “will have two occultations, of which one will last so long that some among them [the Imamis] will say that he is dead, others that he has been killed, and still others that he has [definitively] disappeared. Only a few among the faithful (*aṣḥāb*) will remain attached to his cause, but none among the friends (*walī*) or others will know the place where it is to be found, aside from the faithful friend (*mawlā*) who guides his cause” (No‘mānī, pp. 250-51); it should be noted that this initiatory context does not necessarily involve all those many people to whom the Hidden Imam has appeared for specific and fortuitous reasons and whose stories fill long chapters, even entire monographs (see, e.g., the works of Nūrī Ṭabarsī cited in the bibliography; Amir-Moezzi, 1996). Naturally it was the mystics, theosophists and Imami Sufis, who meditated and developed these traditions. When confronted with the autograph letter attributed to the Mahdi, in which it is stated that he will not be seen again until the end of time, these authors (e.g., Raštī, pp. 356 ff.; Rāz Šīrāzī, pp. 98 ff.; Dehkordī, pp. 123 ff.) proposed different forms of the following syllogism: Seeing the Hidden Imam can be done only at the end of time; certain people can see the Hidden Imam; these people will thus attain the end of time. The final element of the syllogism is of course understood in the sense of the initiatory death: Seeing the resurrecting Imam marks death and resurrection, that is, the rebirth of the initiate. According to these authors, such an initiate can be only a “believer whose heart has been tested by God for belief” (*al-mo’men emtaḥana Allāh qalbahu le’l-īmān*). This expression recurs frequently in the mouths of the Imams, manifestly designating the believer initiated into the spiritual practice of “the vision by (or in) the heart” (*al-ro’ya be’l-qalb*), a secret practice that consists in discovering the Imam in the form of the light in the acute center of the heart; the consequences are redemptive knowledge and supernatural powers (Amir-Moezzi, 1992a, s.v., especially pp. 112-45). Although this interpretation is conjectural, certain early traditions appear to provide confirmation. First, the influence of the presence of the Hidden Imam is several times compared to an



illumination or a radiant shining, and it seems that benefit can be drawn from this radiant effusion only in an occult manner, all the more mysterious because each time the author adds that it is a holy secret (Ebn Bābūya Ṣadūq, 1405/1985, pp. 253, 372, 485). In one prophetic tradition, reported by Jāber Anṣārī, it is said that during the occultation only those whose hearts have been tested for belief remain faithful to the imamate of the Hidden Imam, that they will be illuminated by his light, and that they will benefit from his *walāya* as one can bēefit from the sun when it is hidden behind clouds. The discourse ends with these words: “This is a secret sealed by God, a hidden treasure of divine science; oh, Jāber, hide this secret from those who are not worthy of it” (Ebn Bābūya Ṣadūq, 1405/1985, p. 253). In one place in “the prayer of the time of the occultation” it is said “ . . . Lord, show us, eternally and without any shadow, his light [that of the Hidden Imam] and revive with it dead hearts . . .” (Ebn Bābūya Ṣadūq, 1405/1985, p. 515). The Imams often repeated that their teachings are difficult and demanding and that only the initiate with a tested heart has the power truly to receive them with faith (see, e.g., Ṣaffār Qomī, pp. 20-28). The soteriological dimension of the test of the heart is strongly emphasized at the end of the celebrated tradition about “armies of the *‘aql* and the *jahl*” (Kolaynī, I, pp. 23-26), when it is said that all the armies of the *‘aql*, but not their adversaries, will be brought together by a prophet, an Imam, or an initiate with a tested heart and that the last shares “the supreme degree” (*al-daraja al-‘olyā*) with the first two. Through the “test of the heart” the initiate attains the reality of the Imam, the ultimate goal of Imami teaching. The Hidden Imam is the living Imam of the period of occultation; it is thus he who has polarized these teachings and constitutes the principal support for Imami spiritual meditation and practice. Knowledge of his reality, identical with the reality of all the Imams, brings salvation in its train; it is equivalent to individual redemption. No doubt that is why it is said that “the hastening or the delay of the end of time makes no difference to one who knows his Imam” and that “he who knows his Imam is like one who already finds himself under the tent of the awaited Imam” (No‘mānī, pp. 470-73), for such a believer has already been revived by knowledge of the Imam. It is perhaps partly because of these mystical aspects that a good number of Sunni Sufis have adopted the Imami eschatological position, by accepting identification of the Mahdi with the twelfth Imam (see Madelung, *EI2* V, pp. 1236-37).

It has been said that Imami eschatology is the reflection of the frustrated hopes of a minority that has often been oppressed by the vicissitudes of history. It is true that the essentially political and revanchist attitude of



Imamism has crystallized around the figure of the awaited Imam and the notion of his final appearance. Even the term *qā'em* is contrasted with that of *qā'ed* (lit., “seated Imam”), which is applied to imams who, especially after the drama of Karbalā', refused to become involved in the dangers of an armed rebellion and justified their apoliticism by the claim that armed uprising against oppression belongs only to the Mahdi at the time of his final advent. But Twelver eschatology cannot be reduced to this single sociopolitical dimension (Watt; Blichfeldt). Imamism inherited a number of elements, including eschatological elements, from its predecessors, for example, the ancient Iranian religions and “heterodox” Judeo-Christian sects of the first centuries of the Common Era; like them it presents itself as a fundamentally mythical construction with an initiatory character. A doctrine of this kind must always rest on a tripartite base, in which each part can be plainly understood only in relation to the other two: origins, the present, and final things. That is, it encompasses a cosmogony (often founded on a mystical-theosophical anthropogony), a cosmology (in which “reality” is shaped by the irruption of the original events and is also a preparation for the end), and an eschatology (essentially soteriological, because founded on a return to the sacred origin; the term *ma'ād* designating the resurrection and future life means the movement by which one returns to the point of departure; cf. Sibawayh [Sībūya], cited in *Lesān al-'arab*). In this sense the collective dimension of Imami eschatology, so strongly marked by violence and war against evil, recalls the cosmic battle between the armies of the supreme intelligence (*'aql*, identified as the Imam) and of ignorance (*jahl*, identified as the enemy of the Imam) during the creation. This struggle characterizes the history of humanity, in the conflict between the imams and their initiates in all periods, on one hand, against the shadowy powers opposing initiation, on the other. The final annihilation of the dark forces of ignorance by the Mahdi, thanks to liberating battle and illuminating universal initiation, brings the world back to the initial state in which it was inhabited only by the forces of the *'aql*, before those of the *jahl* had even been created. As for the individual eschatological dimension, initiation and knowledge play an essential role in it; also from the dawn of creation initiation has determined the spirituality of humanity and has been renewed by the teachings of the imams of each lawgiving prophet. The believer attains redemptive knowledge thanks to the discovery in his heart of the light of the Imam. There, too, it is a matter of a return to creation, as, through this experience, the believer reenacts the primordial initiation in the original world of shadows or particles, when his pre-existing self was initiated into the divine secrets by the luminous form of



the Imam (see Amir-Moezzi, 1993, pp. 320-21).

See also [APOCALYPTIC ii. IN MUSLIM IRAN](#).

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