
The End of Time and the Return to the Origin

Nowadays, in Islamic lands, the term ‘eschatology’ is almost always translated as *‘ilm al-ma’ād*, *ma’ād shenāsī* or *‘elm-e ma’ād* to cite only from the Arabic and Persian, the two major languages of Islamic culture; which is to say that learned Muslims have always perceived the notion of *ma’ād* as generally referring to the ultimate end of man and the world, incorporating other aspects of the *eskaton* such as *‘āqiba*, *ḥashr*, *ba‘th*, *qiyāma* or *ākhirā*. Now, as we know, *ma’ād* literally means the place of return or the very movement of returning towards the point of departure, whence the countless speculations by theologians, philosophers and mystics generally considering this eschatological notion either as a return to the source of being, namely God, or as a return to existence after death or resurrection.¹

As for Imami eschatology, it has already inspired a large number of studies;² however, to my knowledge, no critical study

1. L. Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l’homme* (Paris, 1967), passim; R. Arnaldez, ‘Ma’ād’, *EL2*, vol. 5, pp. 899–901; M. Smith and Y. Y. Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany, NY, 1981); J.-R. Michot, *La destinée de l’homme selon Avicenne. Le retour à Dieu (ma’ād) et l’imagination* (Louvain, 1986) (this work, devoted to Avicenna’s philosophy, also contains much valuable information on other authors and doctrinal trends).

2. E. Moeller, *Beiträge zur Mahdilehre des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1901); H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 4, pp. 301–460; A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The*

has as yet been devoted to the relationship that exists between the two crucial concepts of the End of Time and the Return to the Origin as established in the earliest sources, texts dating mainly from the pre-Buyid and Buyid periods,³ and developed subsequently by later thinkers. Notwithstanding, it seems to me that this relationship proves to be fundamental for not only a better understanding of the specific concepts regarding Imami eschatology and messianism but also a better appreciation of the key role played by the figure of the imam.

Established almost definitively in the early fourth/tenth century, Twelver messianism is entirely centred around the figure of the hidden imam, the twelfth and last, or the eschatological Saviour.⁴ The figure of the latter, his Occultation, his soteriological mission, his manifestation at the End of Time and the situation of the world at the moment of his coming constitute the principal subjects of the vast corpus of messianic and eschatological Imami literature, to such an extent that the more classical material such

Idea of the Mahdī in Twelver Shi'ism (Albany, NY, 1981); J. M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background* (London, 1982). To place the analysis provided by these monographs in a larger historical context, see e.g. J. Aguade, *Messianismus zur Zeit der frühen Abbasiden: Das Kitāb al-Fitan des Nu'aim b. Hammād* (Tübingen, 1979) or J. O. Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism: Politics and Religion in the Formative Period of Islam* (Leiden, 1986). For sources and other studies, now consult M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Eschatology in Imami Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 8, pp. 575–581.

3. Regarding these sources, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 48–58 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 19–22).

4. E. Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya to Ithnā'ashariyya', *BSOAS*, 39 (1976), pp. 521–534 (rpr. in *Belief and Law in Imāmi Shi'ism*, article XIV); V. Klemm, 'Die vier Sufarā' des Zwölften Imām. Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferšī'a', *Die Welt des Orients*, 15 (1984), pp. 126–143; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Šaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–3) et son *Kitāb basā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250, esp. pp. 236–242; H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993) part 1; S. A. Arjomand, 'The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi'ism', *The Journal of Religion*, 21 (1996), pp. 548–571 and 'The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shi'ism', *IJMES*, 28 (1996), pp. 491–515. Also, Chapter 13, this volume.

as the description of the final Tribunal of the resurrection, the fate of the elected in paradise or that of the damned in hell seem comparatively meagre and secondary.⁵ The first major source for this genre of literature would be *Kitāb al-ghayba* by Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ‘Ibn Abi Zaynab’ al-Nu‘mānī (d. ca. 345/956), which is the earliest monograph regarding the hidden imam that has come down to us.⁶ Widely and regularly used by later authors, in this section it will constitute our main source.

The End of Time and the manifestation of the Saviour consists of two dimensions, responding it seems to the pair, *zāhir/bāṭin*, omnipresent in Shi‘ism: a collective, universal, external dimension supposed to occur in ‘history’ in order to disrupt or shatter it, and then another entirely individual internal dimension, shattering the being of the faithful.⁷ For the sake of clarity, it is useful to examine our subject – the relationship between the notions of *ākhir al-zamān* and *ma‘ād* – in each of these two dimensions.

1

What characterises the End of Time, and in a manner renders the manifestation of the Hidden Imam indispensable, is the widespread invasion of the earth by Evil, the crushing of the forces of Light by forces of Darkness, the universal rule of violence, injustice and ignorance; whence the sacred formulaic statement: ‘The Mahdī/Qā’im will rise at the End of Time and will fill the earth with justice just as before it overflowed with oppression and injustice (or “darkness”) (*sa-yaqūmu’l-mahdī/al-qā’im fi ākhir al-zamān fa-yamla’u’l-ard’ adlan kamā mali’at jawran wa zulman/zuluman*).’ The universal Deliverance (*faraj*) will be accomplished only by violent means, by a terrible war.⁸ The

5. Amir-Moezzi, ‘Eschatology in Imami Shi‘ism’, pp. 575–576a.

6. Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, Arabic text ed. ‘A. A. Ghaffārī with Persian trans. M. J. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1985).

7. ‘Eschatology in Imami Shi‘ism’, pp. 576bf.

8. *Guide divin*, pp. 283ff. (*Divine Guide*, pp. 116ff.).

Saviour will not only deliver the oppressed of the period but also avenge all the accumulated injustices over the ages.

He [i.e. the Mahdī] will rise, emboldened by the spirit of revenge and anger, grief-stricken with the wrath of God striking the creatures. He will be dressed in the shirt worn by the Messenger of God on the day of [the battle of] Uḥud, as well as al-Saḥāb, his 'turban with a train' (*imāmathu al-saḥāb*), his imposing armour and his sword, Dhu'l-faḡār. For eight months, he will have his sword drawn, killing with no respite.⁹

Aided in his mission by God, the Mahdī – final successor to Muḥammad – is bound to be victorious:

He will bear the Prophet's standard (*rāya*) whose pole is made from pillars of the Throne of God (*'umud al-'arsh*), and His Mercy (*rahma*); the fabric from His triumphal Assistance (*naṣr*). All that is touched by this standard, will be annihilated by God.¹⁰

Apart from divine assistance, the Mahdī is helped by other companions of war. Who might they be, and generally speaking, who are the protagonists of the Battle? The forces of Good, those that fight on the imam's side, are composed of various kinds of 'support'. First, according to Imami doctrine of the 'return to life' (*al-raj'a*),¹¹ some individuals, mostly great figures from sacred history, victims of injustice and impiety of their day, will be revived in order to help the Mahdī in his final battle and to avenge their oppressors and tyrants; these antagonists will also return to life in

9. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 19, pp. 437–438, no. 2 (tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq).

10. Ibid., p. 438, no. 3 (Muḥammad al-Bāqir), p. 441, no. 5 (Ja'far al-Ṣādiq); see also al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, 4 vols (Tehran, n.d.), 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb mā 'inda'l-a'imma min šilāḥ rasūl Allāh', vol. 1, pp. 337–343.

11. R. Freitag, *Seelenwanderung in der islamischen Häresie* (Berlin, 1985), pp. 29–34; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin and New York, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 285–308; E. Kohlberg, 'Radj'a', *EI2*, vol. 8, pp. 371–373.

order to be punished.¹² The traditions differ on the exact identity of the saintly individuals but some names recur more frequently than others: ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib,¹³ al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and generally the Impeccable Ones (the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima and the first eleven imams), the mysterious prophet mentioned in Q 19:54–55, Ismā‘īl ‘True to his promises’ (*ṣādiq al-wa‘d*)¹⁴ and Jesus Christ who according to a well-known tradition, will participate in prayers led by the Qā’im.¹⁵

Just as when the major prophets faced trials in their missions, in his battle, the imam will be assisted by angels, archangels and celestial beings: the angels who accompanied Noah in the Ark, Abraham when he was cast into fire, Moses when he parted the sea, Jesus when God raised him to be with himself;¹⁶ the different troops of angels mentioned in the Qur’ān, the *murdifīn* (angels in procession i.e. coming one after another, Q 8:9), the *munzalīn* (angels descended from Above, Q 3:124), the *musawwimīn* (the swooping angels, Q 3:125), the Cherubim (*karrūbiyyīn*), Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel and the Frightful One (*al-ru‘b*), a terrifying celestial being, bringing victory to the Mahdī’s army by ‘marching’ alongside it.¹⁷

12. The notion of *raj’a* in the sense just mentioned is also called *ḥashr khāṣṣ* (‘particular resurrection’) as distinct from return to universal life for the Last Judgement called *ḥashr ‘amm* (‘general resurrection’).

13. In this context, surnamed *ṣāhib al-karrāt*, ‘Master of cyclical Returns’; *karra*, pl. *karrāt* is here synonymous with *raj’a* (see E. Kohlberg, ‘Radj’a’).

14. According to Imami tradition, he was the son of the Prophet Ezekiel and was seized, dismembered and executed by his own ungrateful people.

15. Ibn Qūlūya al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* (lithograph, Iran, n.d.), ch. 19, pp. 65ff.; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 51, pp. 77–78 and vol. 53, pp. 101–117; in general, see al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *al-Īqāz min al-haj’a fi’l-burhān ‘alā’l-raj’a*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, 1381/1962).

16. Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 19, pp. 439–440.

17. Ibid., ch. 13, pp. 337f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-nī‘ma*, ed. ‘A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1405/1985), vol. 1, ch. 33, p. 331.

There is particular insistence on the 313 angels who accompanied the Prophet on the day of the Battle of Badr.¹⁸ In this eschatological context, comparisons with this famous battle are constantly made. Badr is considered Muḥammad's first major victory against the disbelievers and in a way represents the beginning of the establishment of Islam. The battle of the Qā'im will signal the ultimate and definitive victory of initiatory religion of the imams against their 'enemies'. Badr universally established the exoteric dimension of religion; the manifestation (*zuhūr*) and rising (*qiyām, khurūj*) of the Mahdī will universally establish the esoteric religion. Moreover, the core of the Saviour's Army is composed of initiates. The Companions of the Qā'im (*aṣḥāb al-qā'im*), whom tradition also calls 'the militia' (*jaysh*), 'the militia of anger' (*jaysh al-ghaḍab*) or 'men of sincere devotion' (*ahl al-ikhhlāṣ/al-khullaṣ*)¹⁹ are also, like the soldiers of Badr, 313 in number.²⁰

An entire series of traditions describe them as warriors initiated into the secret Science ('*ilm*):²¹ each one of them bears a sword upon which is inscribed a 'thousand words, each leading to another thousand', a sacred statement denoting Imami initiation.²² At the moment of the Rising, when the Qā'im launches his appeal from Mecca, they will come to join him by supra-natural means, by the

18. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 19, pp. 440f.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 285, 378f., 443f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, pp. 268 and 331, vol. 2, pp. 378, 654, 671f.

20. It should be noted in passing that the numeric value of the term *jaysh* is 313: *jīm* = 3, *yā'* = 10, *shīn* = 300. On the existence of the esoteric science of letters in early Imamism, and for relevant sources, see *Guide divin*, index, under '*ilm al-ḥurūf*' and '*ḥisāb al-jummal*'.

21. For more on this concept see *Guide divin*, pp. 174–199 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 69–75).

22. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 447ff.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, p. 671; for the sacred formula see al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mīrzā Kūchebāghī (Tabriz, n.d. [ca. 1960]), part 6, ch. 18, pp. 309–312; part 7, ch. 1, pp. 313–315; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. M. B. Kamare'i (Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982), pp. 326f.

power of the Supreme Name of God and by supernatural aerial travel. Once gathered in Mecca, their swords will descend from heaven. Sent by the imam to places throughout the earth, they will dominate absolutely everything; even the birds and wild beasts will obey them. For difficult decisions, they will receive directives from the imam that will be written on the palms of their hands. Knowledge of the Supreme Name of God will provide them with miraculous powers such as walking on water and soaring through the heavens, etc.²³

Poised against the divine forces of justice and knowledge are those of oppression and ignorance led by illustrious eschatological characters such as al-Dajjāl or al-Sufyānī. Based on what emerges from messianic Imami traditions, we come to realise that the Qā'im's adversaries in the final battle are not the disbelievers but rather ignorant Muslims.²⁴

23. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfi*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1389/1969), vol. 2, p. 145; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 352f., 445f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, pp. 672f.

24. For a better appreciation of what is to follow, it seems necessary to recall some fundamental concepts that underpin the Imami 'theory of opponents' (*ḍiddiyya*). The omnipresent pair *ẓāhir/bāṭin* is obviously also at work in the revelation. Divine Truth is manifested in two forms: the exoteric aspect of Truth is revealed by the legislating prophethood (*nubuwwa*) which brings to the masses (*ʿamma*) a Sacred text 'descended from heaven' (*tanzīl*). The secret dimension of Truth, its esoteric aspect, enveloped by the letter, is revealed thanks to the initiatory mission of the imam (*imāma, walāya, amr*), accompanying each prophetic mission and bringing to an elite minority (*khāṣṣa*) the veritable hermeneutics of the sacred Book which 'returns [the Book] to its Origin (*ta'wīl*)'. Each religion has thus had its 'Shi'is'. As Muḥammad is considered the 'Seal of Prophets', historical Shi'ism presents itself as the last link in the chain of the initiatory tradition of sacred History. Due to this, the imam is naturally presented as the leader of the forces of knowledge. At the same time, it is said that these, especially the imam at the helm, always endure adversity inflicted by the forces of ignorance. Indeed each revelation of the divine Word within the community of the Book gives rise to a certain number of 'adversaries' (*ḍidd*, pl. *aḍḍād*) or 'enemies' (*aduww*, pl. *a'dā'*) who deny the very existence of a hidden meaning to revelation, and thus oppose the imam's mission and betray the prophet by cutting off religion from its most profound element, dragging the majority of the community, the People of the Exoteric (*ahl al-ẓāhir*), into

On the occasion of his Rising, our Qā'im will have to confront ignorance (*jahl*) even greater than that of the ignorant ones faced by the Messenger of God during the Age of Ignorance [before Islam] (*juhḥāl al-jāhiliyya*) . . . For, at the time of the Prophet, the people worshipped stones, rocks, plants and wooden statues, but when our Qā'im will summon the people [to his Cause], they will interpret the entire Book of God [i.e. the Qur'ān] against him and will argue against him and use the Book to fight him (*kulluhum yata'awwalū 'alayhi kitābi'llāh yahtajjū 'alayhi bihi wa yuqātilūnahu 'alayhi*).²⁵

The enemies of the Mahdī are naturally the descendants of the adversaries in the history of Shi'ism. In a prophetic tradition reported by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, after telling 'Alī that the Mahdī will be one of the descendants of al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet addresses al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the namesake of the Abbasids, thus:

'Uncle of the Prophet! Do you wish me tell you about what the Angel Gabriel revealed to me?' 'Yes, Messenger of God.' – 'Gabriel said to me: "Your descendants will have to bear suffering inflicted by the descendants of al-'Abbās.'" – 'Messenger of God, must I avoid women [to avoid having descendants]?' – 'No, God has already decided from whom they will come.'²⁶

In addition, a number of eschatological traditions have a pronounced anti-Arab flavour, no doubt because, from the Imami perspective, those truly responsible for the decadence of religion from overlooking 'Alī to the persecution and assassination of the imams and their followers were Arab Muslims. 'Misfortune to the

ignorance, injustice and violence. In the Islamic period, the 'Enemies' are those that reject the *walāya* of 'Alī and as a consequence, that of the other imams. In this case, this means almost all of the Companions, particularly the first three caliphs, the Umayyads, the 'Abbasids and generally speaking, those whom the Shi'is call 'the majority' (*al-akthar*) or 'the masses' (*al-'amma*), those who eventually came to be known as 'the Sunnis'; refer to Chapter 8 in this volume.

25. Al-Nu'māni, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 423–424 (tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq).

26. Al-Nu'māni, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 356f.

Arabs', 'Misfortune to the Arabs for the Evil that forebodes', 'Our Qā'im will be merciless against the Arabs', 'Between the Qā'im and the Arabs shall be nothing but the sword', 'Between the Arabs and us, only massacres will be left' and so on.²⁷

At the same time, it is said that almost all of the Companions of the Qā'im are 'non-Arabs' or Persians (*'ajam*). In response to the question: 'How many among those accompanying the Qā'im are Arabs?' imam Ja'far al-Šādiq is said to have answered: 'Very few,' 'But there are many Arabs who profess this Cause', 'The people will inevitably be tested, separated, riddled (*yumahḥašū wa yumayyazū wa yugharbalū*); many will fall from this riddle.'²⁸ According to a tradition dating back to imam al-Bāqir, the 313 Companions of the Qā'im are all sons of *'ajam*²⁹ and a saying attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq seems to indicate that they profess a religion entirely different than exoteric Islam since: 'They resemble worshippers of the sun and moon (*shibh 'abadat al-shams wa'l-qamar*).'³⁰

In this gloomy picture of the Islamic community, the Shi'is are not better provided for than the others:

'When the standard of Truth (*rāyat al-ḥaqq*) [of the Qā'im] becomes manifest', Ja'far al-Šādiq is supposed to have said, 'the inhabitants of the Rising and Setting will curse it . . . due to what the people will have endured from his family before the Rising [*ahl baytihi* or according to another version, "from the Banū Hāshim"]'.³¹

27. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb al-tamḥiṣ wa'l-imitihān', vol. 2, pp. 194–197; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 337f.; al-Iskāfi, *Kitāb al-tamḥiṣ* (Qumm, n.d. [ca. 1995]), pp. 42f.

28. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 298–299; al-Iskāfi, *Kitāb al-tamḥiṣ*, p. 53.

29. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 448; al-Ṭūsī, Abū Ja'far, *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Tehran, 1398/1979), p. 284.

30. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 451–452.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 424–425.

In another tradition, going back to the same sixth imam, it is said: 'This event [i.e. the Rising of the hidden imam] will not take place until some among you [the Shi'is] spit in the face of the others, until some of you curse the others and accuse them of lying.'³² Only a small minority, 'the true Shi'is', that is, those initiated into the complete teachings of the imams, will be spared from the clutches of Evil. This minority is composed of followers each of whose 'hearts has been tested by God for faith' (*al-mu'min imtahana'llāh qalbahu li'l-īmān*), those that are supported by the strength of their *walāya*, their certitude and knowledge.³³

The Mahdī's army, swelling in numbers with the mass of oppressed and volunteers won over to the Cause, will triumph. The Hijaz, Iraq, the East, Egypt, Syria and then Constantinople, will be conquered before the whole world surrenders to the Saviour. The 'Enemies' and their supporters will once and for all be wiped off the face of the earth; the world will be restored with justice, humanity will be revived by the light of knowledge. And what shall happen thereafter? The Saviour will prepare the world for the final Resurrection. According to some traditions, he will rule over the world for several years (seven, nine, nineteen . . . years) to be followed by the death of all humanity before the appearance of the final Tribunal. Other traditions report that after the death of the Qā'im, the government of the world will remain, for a relatively long time before the Day of Resurrection in the hands of the initiated wise ones.³⁴

* * *

Let us now consider accounts of the Origins, in cosmogonic traditions. These may be divided into two groups. The first concern

32. Ibid., p. 300; al-Iskāfi, *Kitāb al-tamhīṣ*, p. 43.

33. Refer to Chapter 8, this volume.

34. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 473–475; Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal al-sharā'if wa'l-ahkām* (Najaf, 1385/1966), pp. 6f., and *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, p. 256; also Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 279–301 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 115–123) and 'Eschatology'.

what we might call exoteric cosmogony: the *ex nihilo* creation, the First Created Things, the cosmos of the seven heavens and the seven subterranean worlds, angelology and demonology, the Pillars of the universe, the regions, their inhabitants and the age of the universe etc. This information is generally found in one form or another in Muslim cosmographic works and is thus common to both Shi'ī and Sunni literature. The second group seems specifically Shi'ī and presents a cosmogony that one might define as esoteric since it contains material regarding the initiatory doctrine of the imams.³⁵ The tradition that interests us here (mainly because a comparison with eschatological elements proves to be significantly informative) belongs to the second group. This is the long and important *ḥadīth* of the 'Armies (*junūd*) of 'aql and *jahl*'. Several of the earliest sources report this tradition³⁶ and it has attracted the attention of many major interpreters of *ḥadīth*.³⁷ Here are some excerpts:

Samā'a b. Mihrān [Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥadramī al-Kūfī, disciple of the sixth and seventh imams, died in the second/seventh century in Medina] says: 'I was in the house of Abū 'Abd Allāh

35. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–22.

36. Al-Barqī, Abū Ja'far, *Kitāb al-maḥāsin*, ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī (Tehran, 1370/1950), vol. 1, pp. 96–98; Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'kitāb al-'aql wa'l-jahl', vol. 1, pp. 23–26; (Pseudo?) al-Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya* (Najaf, n.d.), pp. 1–3; Ibn Shu'ba, *Tuḥaf al-'uqūl 'an āl al-rasūl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1987), pp. 423–425.

37. Al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'uqūl* (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 45; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* (lithograph, Tehran, 1283/1865), pp. 14ff.; al-Qazwīnī, Mullā Khalīl, *al-Shāfi fi sharḥ al-Kāfi* (lithograph, Lucknow, 1308/1890), pp. 21f. I have already devoted a study to the various meanings, technical or otherwise, of the term 'aql in the Imami corpus and have suggested translating it – in its cosmogonic dimension – as 'hiero-intelligence' to distinguish this level from other semantic levels of the notion such as 'reason', 'intellect', 'discernment' etc. See *Guide divin*, pp. 15–33 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–13); on this tradition see also D. Crow, 'The Role of al-'Aql in Early Islamic Wisdom, with Reference to Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq' (McGill University, Montreal, 1966), ch. 13; E. Kohlberg, 'Evil: in Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 9, pp. 182–185, esp. 182.

[i.e. Ja'far al-Šādiq] along with a group of his disciples. We spoke of Hiero-Intelligence and Ignorance. He then said: "Recognise Hiero-Intelligence and its Armies, Ignorance and its Armies and you will be on the well-guided path." — Samā'a: "May I serve you as ransom! We only know what you enable us to know."

'Abū 'Abd Allāh: "God, may He be glorified and exalted, created Hiero-Intelligence and it was the first of the spiritual beings (*rūhāniyyīn*) to be created, drawn from the right-hand side of the Throne and from the Light of God.

"Then He ordered it to retreat and it retreated, to advance and it advanced. God then proclaimed: 'I created you glorious and gave you pre-eminence over all My creatures.' *Then* God created Ignorance from a bitter Ocean; He made it dark and commanded it to retreat and it retreated, to advance but it did not advance at all. God therefore said: 'Surely you have become arrogant' and He cursed it.

"God then created seventy-five Armies for Hiero-Intelligence. When Ignorance saw the divine generosity to Hiero-Intelligence, it felt a fierce hostility (*'adāwa*) against it and addressed God thus: 'Lord! Here is a creature similar to me [Ignorance is also a "non-material" entity, a cosmogonical, archetypal counterforce]; You favoured and rendered it powerful; now, I am its adversary [lit. its Opponent, *ḍidd*] and I have no power. Give me troops similar to his.' 'So be it', answered God, 'but if you prove to be rebellious once again, I shall banish you and your troops from My Mercy.' 'Let it be so', said Ignorance. *Then* God created seventy-five Armies for it as well. Here then are the seventy-five Armies that God provided [for Hiero-Intelligence and Ignorance]: Good, minister of Hiero-Intelligence and its adversary (*ḍidduhu*), Evil, minister of Ignorance; Faith and its adversary Infidelity . . . Justice and its adversary Injustice . . . Clemency and its adversary Wrath . . . Knowledge and its adversary Ignorance . . . the Preservation of secrets and its adversary, Divulging of secrets . . . Wisdom and its adversary Passion . . . Joy and its adversary Sadness, etc."

We will set aside theological issues of divine justice or the origin of Evil that the *ḥadīth* includes and that have attracted and held the attention of commentators. In the context of the issue that interests us, the parallel with messianic-eschatological traditions is striking. One must first note that the correspondence, even the

identification between ‘*aql*’ and the figure of the imam is constant in the early corpus of traditions attributed to the historical imams. ‘*Aql*’ is said to be the ‘interior proof’ (*al-ḥujja’l-bāṭina*) of God whereas the imam is His ‘exterior proof’ (*al-ḥujja’l-zāhira*) (bear in mind that *ḥujja*, pl. *ḥujaj*, is one of the most recurring titles for the imams in general and the hidden imam in particular).³⁸ The imam is the exterior ‘*aql*’, whereas ‘*aql*’ is the interior imam of the loyal-faithful.³⁹ According to a Prophetic tradition reported by imam ‘Alī: ‘The ‘*aql*’ in the heart is like a lamp in the centre of a home.’⁴⁰ And Ja‘far al-Šādiq is said to have declared: ‘The status of the heart (seat of ‘*aql*’) within the body is the same as the status of the imam in the midst of men who owe him obedience.’⁴¹ Similarly, the adversaries of the imams are frequently called ‘the guiding leaders of Ignorance (*a’immat al-jahl*) and their supporters’, ‘the ignorant ones (*juhhāl, jahala, ahl al-jahl*)’.⁴²

In the sayings of Ja‘far al-Šādiq, as reported by Samā‘a b. Mihrān, the usage of the term *jund*, pl. *junūd* (army, troops) is obviously not without significance. It relates to the archetypal Battle between two forces: Intelligence and Ignorance, in which their troops, the virtues and the vices, are elevated to the rank of cosmic forces and counterforces. It is the first battle of a universal war that defines the entire History of humanity by setting the imams, various prophets and their followers against their adversaries – the forces of counter-initiation and their leaders. In this context, the eschatological battle of the Mahdī is the last of this endless cosmic War which will seal the definitive victory of the Forces of Intelligence over those of Ignorance. This victory thus constitutes the *ma‘ād*, the Return to the Origin, since by overcoming Ignorance and its Armies, the Mahdī restores

38. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 19.

39. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 28–29; Ibn Shu‘ba, *Tuḥaf al-‘uqūl*, pp. 404ff.

40. Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal*, p. 98.

41. Ibid., p. 109.

42. *Guide divin*, see index.

the world to its original state, when *jahl* and its troops had not yet come into existence. In my translation of the *ḥadīth*, I have emphasised the adverb 'then' used on two occasions. This is so because Hiero-Intelligence was created first and 'then' Ignorance. The Armies of 'aql come into existence first and 'then' those of *jahl*. Moreover, in his commentary, Mullā Ṣadrā underlines the importance of the adverb (*ḥarf*, 'thumma' and 'fa-') to develop his philosophy on the Good Origin of creation.⁴³ By establishing his worldwide government over a population exclusively composed of faithful initiates (I shall return to this point later in this chapter), this Origin of creation is started again by the Saviour, when the universe was only peopled with the Hiero-Intelligence and its troops.

2

On the individual dimension of eschatology, information is much scarcer, more discreet, following the principle that almost always prevails in esoteric aspects of the teachings of the imams. Moreover, as we will see, the developments concerning this dimension are found especially in the works of later authors but, not surprisingly, the latter support their claims with information gathered from the early corpus.

Witnessing the manifestation of the Mahdī and being one of his Companions constitutes the most fortunate soteriological aspect of Imami piety. However, of course not everyone can witness the End of the World and it is undoubtedly for this reason that many traditions repeatedly state that to have faith in the invisible presence and eventual final advent of the Mahdī is equivalent to being a part of his Army. This hopeful note, perhaps originally meant for those disappointed and frustrated by an indefinite delay of the Saviour, at the same time introduced an individual soteriological dimension into Twelver eschatology. Believing in the hidden imam is an article of faith for all the faithful; for Shi'is, it even

43. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi*, pp. 18–19.

constitutes part of putting them to the test (*imtiḥān, tamḥiṣ*); this in turn is one of the conditions of the period of Occultation that distinguishes ‘true Shi‘is’ from those simply in name (see above). However, as with all esoteric doctrines, teachings dating back to the imams contain many levels of understanding meant for different categories of disciples.⁴⁴ In fact, some *ḥadīths* seem to go much further than a simple invitation to an unconditional faith and an indefinite waiting period before the manifestation of the Saviour; they suggest that some especially advanced believers are able to know ‘the place where the hidden imam is located’, or, in other words, to establish contact with him and eventually see him:

The Qā‘im will enter two Occultations [allusions to the minor Occultation, *al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*, from 260/874 to 329/940–941 and the major Occultation, *al-ghayba al-kubrā*, which began in 329 and continues to this day], one term short and the other long. During the first, only the elect few of the Shi‘is (*khāṣṣa shī‘atihi*) know where the imam is located and during the second, only those elect of the faithful Friends (*khāṣṣa mawālīhi*).⁴⁵

The expression ‘the elect of the Shi‘is’ no doubt refers to the four ‘representatives’ (*nā‘ib/wakīl/safīr*) of the hidden imam during the minor Occultation; according to tradition, during this period they alone had the privilege of knowing the ‘location’ of the imam. ‘The elect of the faithful Friends’ refers to the faithful who have been especially initiated in order to be able to communicate with the imam during the major Occultation.

The Lord of this Cause (*ṣāhib ḥādḥā‘l-amr*) will enter two Occultations, one of which will last so long that some among you [the Shi‘is] will say that he is dead, others that he was killed and still

44. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, ‘Du droit à la théologie: les niveaux de réalité dans le shi‘isme duodécimain’, in *L’Esprit et la Nature*, Groupe d’Etudes Spirituelles Comparées, 5 (1997), pp. 37–63.

45. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, ‘Bāb fi’l-ghayba’, vol. 2, pp. 141–142; al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 249–250.

others that he has [definitively] disappeared. Only some of the faithful (*aṣḥāb*) will remain true to his Cause, but none of his allied Friends (*wālī*) or others will know where he is located, except the faithful friend who champions his Cause (*al-mawlā'l-ladhī yalī amrahu*).⁴⁶

Hagiographical literature devoted to the Awaited imam (*al-muntazar*) indeed contains several reports of encounters with the hidden imam.⁴⁷ Now, according to Imami belief, the last signed letter from him, received by 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Simmari, his fourth and last 'representative' during the minor Occultation, stipulates, among other things, that the hidden imam will henceforth no longer be seen by anyone until the End of Time. This is why this letter signals the beginning of the major Occultation.⁴⁸ One of the many attempts to reconcile these contradictory facts, derives from the mystical milieu of Shi'ism and develops the individual dimension of eschatology. To my knowledge, this interpretation is used for the first time by Sayyid Kāzīm al-Rashtī (d. 1259/1843), second great master and true founder of the theological mystical Shaykhiyya order. In response to a disciple, during a long exposition on the relationship between the believers and the hidden imam, al-Rashtī presents a rich and dense system of thought that may be summed up by the following syllogism: the hidden imam cannot be seen until the End of Time (according to his last letter); now some people have seen the hidden imam (according to numerous reports from reliable sources), therefore these individuals have reached the End of Time (i.e. the End of their 'time', the 'time' of their own egos). The conclusion reached in this syllogism is obviously meant in the sense of an initiatory death: the vision of the Resurrector imam (one of the meanings

46. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 250–251.

47. Chapter 13, this volume.

48. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, p. 516; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 257; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 52, p. 151; Chapter 13, note 51 in this volume and the relevant text.

given by tradition to the word *qā'im*) signals the death of the ego and the resurrection, the rebirth, of the initiate.

Having cited the Prophetic *ḥadīth* 'Die before dying' (*mūtū qabla an tamūtū*) that mystical literature regularly advanced, Sayyid al-Rashtī gives a hermeneutical reading of some of the reports of encounters with the Qā'im. He concludes:

These accounts may be interpreted spiritually (*maḥmūl 'alā'l-ta'wīl*). These thirsty men, overburdened, sick, threatened and tortured, are symbols (*rumūz*) of suffering imposed by the perilous desert of spiritual quest (*tih al-ṭalab*) and the oppression of the thirst for the vision of the Beloved (*liqā' al-maḥbūb*). These dead men are brought to life by the imam, meaning to say, they have had a spiritual birth (*wilāda rūḥāniyya*) due to a vision of the radiant face of the imam and the initiation (*ta'lim wa talqin*) that this vision includes.⁴⁹

This conception of some encounters with the Mahdī⁵⁰ was subsequently repeated in one form or another by other mystics belonging to Imami mystical orders, such as, for example, Mīrẓā Abu'l-Qāsim Rāz Shīrāzī (1286/1869), master of the Dhahabiyya, or Sayyid Aḥmad Dehkordī (1339/1920), master of the Khāksāriyya.⁵¹

It is obvious that the subject is a delicate one and when it concerns visionary experience, just as their predecessors had, these later authors limited themselves to allusive comments. Humility

49. Al-Rashtī, Sayyid Kāzīm, *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 356–365; Chapter 13 in this volume.

50. This initiatic context of eschatological bearing does not necessarily concern all those individuals, quite numerous in fact, to whom the hidden imam – mainly as a humanitarian gesture – appeared for specific reasons or by chance, and whose reports fill chapters, and even entire monographs, such as the works by Ṭabarsī/Ṭabrisī Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, published at the end of vol. 53 of the *Bihār al-anwār* by al-Majlisī, and *al-Najm al-thāqib* (Qumm and Jamkarān, 1412/1991). See also Chapter 13, this volume.

51. Rāz Shīrāzī, *Mirṣād al-'ibād* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.) (published in a collection of his works), pp. 97–115, esp. pp. 98ff.; Dehkordī, Sayyid Aḥmad, *Burhān-nāme-ye ḥaqīqat* (lithograph, Tehran, n.d.), pp. 123ff.

and the duty to maintain secret (*taqiyya*, *kitmān*) are certainly factors, but also the penultimate sentence of the letter from the hidden imam, according to which whosoever claims to have seen the Mahdī before the End of Time is but an imposter and liar.⁵² Still, the analysis of such reports of encounters that are initiatory, soteriological and eschatological in nature, reveal some significant recurring motifs. The imam of the Time is always bathed in light or depicted in a luminous form. He initiates the witness into secret teachings that plunge him into a state of ecstasy and fill him with bliss. It is this state that some authors do not hesitate to describe as initiatory death and spiritual resurrection. Finally, the imam can be seen either 'externally', as a luminous physical person, or 'internally', as a luminous spiritual form in the subtle centre of the heart (*laṭīfa qalbiyya*). Some examples follow.

In his treatise *al-Muwāsa'a wa'l-muḍāyaqa*, Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs (664/1266) narrates in a highly allusive style, in the guise of a description of his companion's dreams, that he encountered the hidden imam in a state of deep contemplation, that the latter revealed secret knowledge of a higher order that drove him into a profound and intensely beatific state.⁵³

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī (912/1506–1507) devotes a chapter to the Seals of prophethood and *walāya* in his monumental commentary on the *Golshan-e Rāz* by Maḥmūd Shabistārī (720/1317). In his long mystical account, in which his own encounter with the hidden imam is only hinted at, he explains that manifestation of the Mahdī is equivalent to the revelation of realities, of divine knowledge and secrets (*ḥaqā'iq*, *ma'ārif*,

52. Ṭabrisī Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, p. 236 and *al-Najm al-thāqib*, p. 474 (the account by Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī 'Baḥr al-'ulūm').

53. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Risāla fi'l-muḍāyaqa fi fawāt al-ṣalāt* (known as *al-Muwāsa'a wa'l-muḍāyaqa*) published in the margins of Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* (lithograph, n.p. [Iran], 1321/1904), pp. 30–40, in particular pp. 36–37. It is interesting to note that this legalistic text by Ibn Ṭāwūs, on the rules concerning the forgetting of canonical prayers, is not *a priori* mystical in nature. Discreetly including a report of his encounter with the hidden imam in it seems to be a form of *taqiyya*.

asrār-e elāhī) and it is this that constitutes the reality of the Resurrection, transforming simple followers into ‘Companions of the Qā’im’ (*aṣḥāb-e qā’im*) and veritable men of knowledge (‘*ārifān-e ḥaqīqī*).⁵⁴

Mullā Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, known as Majlisī the First (1070/1659–1660), father of the famous author of *Biḥār al-anwār*, is said to have allusively stated in his *Sharḥ al-ziyāra al-jāmi’a l-kabīra* that he encountered the Mahdī on many occasions, both in dreams and in an awakened state. It is reported that regarding the following ecstatic experience, he wrote:

It is as though I tasted death and returned to my Lord due to his overwhelming presence [i.e. the Mahdī] and his blessed light (*ka-annī dhā’iq al-mawt wa rāji’ ilā rabbī min fayḍ huḍūrihi’l-mutaḍammin wa nūrihi’l-mutabarrik*).⁵⁵

Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’ī (1241/1826), namesake of the Shaykhiyya order as well as Muḥammad Karīm Khān (1288/1870) his second successor in the Kirmānī branch, allude to their visionary experiences, in which the imams appear in the form of luminous beings, and mention that they achieved contentment through their initiation.⁵⁶ Although neither mystic master specifically mentions

54. Lāhijī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Mafātīḥ al-i’jāz fī sharḥ Golshan-e Rāz*, ed. M. R. Barzegar Khāleqī and ‘E. Karbāsī (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), pp. 265–268.

55. Al-Aḥsā’ī, Shaykh Aḥmad, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-jāmi’a* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.), p. 268; Bihbahānī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad ‘Alī, *Mir’āt al-aḥwāl-e jahān-namā*, ed. ‘A. Davānī (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), p. 70. The sentence clearly draws from two Qur’ānic passages. First, ‘Every soul [one day] tastes death’ (*kullu nafs dhā’iqatu’l-mawt*) (Q 3:185; 21:35 and 29:57). Secondly, ‘O soul at peace, return unto thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing!’ (*yā ayyatuḥā al-nafsu’l-muṭma’inna/irji’i ilā rabbiki rāḍiyyatan marḍiyya*) (Q 89:27–28). The saying attributed to al-Majlisī seems thus to suggest that the encounter with the Resurrector signals the death of the ego and the resurrection of spiritual individuality.

56. Al-Hindī, Āghā Sayyid Hādī, *Tanbīh al-ghāfilin wa surūr al-nāzirin* (lithograph, n.p. [Tabriz], n.d.), pp. 53–54; al-Riḍawī, Mirzā Ni’mat Allāh, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’* (lithograph, Bombay, 1313/1895), p. 14.

the Mahdī among the imams encountered, given their mystical profession of faith which includes considering the latter 'the living imam of the Time' who certainly enters into contact with his 'Companions',⁵⁷ one can reasonably conclude that the vision of the Qā'im was also part of their spiritual experiences.

Later mystics, belonging to other Imami orders (Ni'matull-āhiyya, Dhahabiyya, Khāksāriyya, Uwaysiyya) mention the possibility of the vision of the imam, in the form of a luminous entity, in the subtle centre of the heart, and thus benefiting from this secret initiation. The assertion is almost always founded on the *ḥadīth* dating back to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, applied to all the imams and to the Qā'im in particular, as the 'imam of this Age':

To know me as Light is to know God, and to know God is to know me as Light. He who knows me as Light is a believer whose heart God has tested for faith' (*ma'rifatī bi'l-nūrāniyya ma'rifatu'llāh wa ma'rifatu'llāh ma'rifatī bi'l-nūrāniyya man 'arafani bi'l-nūrāniyya kāna mu'minan imtaḥana'llāhu qalbahū li'l-imān*).⁵⁸

This is 'vision by (or "in") the heart' (*al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb*), a spiritual experience whose outcome is said to be salvatory knowledge and paranormal powers.⁵⁹ It should be recalled that the expression 'the believer whose heart God has tested for faith' designates, among others, the Companions of the Qā'im, the 'true Shi'i' (cf. above). These later authors continually justify and corroborate their asser-

57. Al-Kirmānī, Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Tawḥīd nubuwwa imāma shī'a* (lithograph, Tabriz, 1310/1892), pp. 56–59.

58. Muzaḥfar 'Alī Shāh Kirmānī, *Kibrīt-e aḥmar (+ Baḥr al-asrār)*, ed. J. Nūrbakhsh (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971), pp. 5f.; Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gonābādī the Second, *Ṣāliḥiyya* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1387/1967), pp. 159f.; Palāsī Shirāzī, Ḥasan b. Ḥamza, *Tadhkere-ye Muḥammad b. Ṣādiq al-Kujujī* (Shiraz, n.d.), pp. 14, 18–25, 38, 68.

59. R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, Zweiter Teil, *Glaube und Lehre* (Wiesbaden, 1976), p. 207, n. 1073 and pp. 247–250; *Guide divin*, pp. 112–145 (for earlier sources) (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–56) and refer especially to Chapter 10, this volume (where many other sources and studies are cited).

tions by traditions from the early corpus of sayings attributed to the imams. It is true that, ever since the early period, the influence of the hidden imam is constantly likened to an illumination or a luminous ray and it appears that for the followers, benefiting from this radiating effusion is only possible by mysterious or occult means, since on each occasion, each one adds that this is a sacred secret.⁶⁰ For example, in a tradition dating back to the Prophet and reported by Jābir al-Anṣārī, it is said that, during the Occultation, only those whose heart has been tested by God for faith will remain loyal to the hidden imam, that they shall be illuminated by his Light and will benefit from his friendship (*walāya*) just as one benefits from the sun while it is hidden by clouds; the saying ends with these words: ‘This is God’s sealed secret, a hidden treasure of divine knowledge. Jābir! Hide this secret from those who are not worthy of it.’⁶¹

In one section of the famous and extensive ‘Prayer during the Qā’im’s Occultation’, it says: ‘O Lord, show us eternally his Light [i.e. of the Mahdī] which has no shadow and by which dead hearts are revived . . . (*yā rabbi arinā nūrahu sarmadan lā ẓulma fīhi wa aḥyi bihi’l-qulūb al-mayyita*).’⁶²

The initiate with ‘a tested heart’ can thus attain the luminous Reality of the imam, the ultimate aim of Imami teaching. As the Mahdī is the living imam of the Time, that is the Time of Occultation, he is naturally the focus of these elements and constitutes the principal aid for meditation and spiritual practice. His ‘Encounter’ and the initiation undertaken during it, entails salvation and is equivalent to individual resurrection. It is in this sense that our mystics understand the early traditions, attributed to many of the imams, such as: ‘The advent or the delay of the End of Time bears no prejudice for one who knows the Qā’im’, and ‘He who knows

60. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, pp. 253, 372 and vol. 2, pp. 485f.

61. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 253.

62. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 515.

his imam is just as if he had already found himself inside the tent of the Awaited imam.⁶³

This individual eschatology corresponds fundamentally with certain cosmic and anthropogenic traditions of an esoteric nature. These accounts of the Origin can be regarded as narratives of the Primordial Initiation. I have described and analysed them elsewhere in detail.⁶⁴ Here, I will only describe them briefly in order to show their connection with individual eschatology.

Creation begins with calling a series of 'Worlds' and their inhabitants into existence; these are all non-material, as they have been created thousands of years before the creation of the material world. The first of these Worlds is called 'the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*)' and its inhabitants, the first created beings, are the luminous formless entities of the Impeccable Ones (the Prophet, Fāṭima and the imams), drawn from the Light of God Himself. This pleroma is the Imam in the original, cosmic, archetypal dimension. Next is created the First World of Particles (*'ālam al-dharr*, lit. 'ants', *al-awwal*) also called the First World of the Shadows (*'ālam al-aẓilla al-awwal*) or the World of the Primordial Pact (*'ālam al-mīthāq*). There the luminous entities take human form. Designated by expressions such as 'silhouettes of light' (*ashbāḥ nūr*), 'spirits made of light' (*arwāḥ min nūr*) or 'shadows of light' (*aẓilla nūr*), they undertake an archetypal circumambulation around the divine Throne, attesting to the Unicity (*tawḥīd*, *tahlīl*) and praising the Glory (*taḥmīd*, *tamjīd*, *taqdīs*, *tasbīḥ*) of God. Then the Particles or Shadows, that is, the non-material, pre-existent entities of the 'pure beings', enter this world: angels and other celestial entities, prophets and believers (*mu'minūn*), the latter being faithful to the imams of all the ages, those initiated to the esoteric dimension of all religions, different from the simple practitioners who have submitted only to the

63. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 470–473.

64. *Guide divin*, pp. 75–110 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–43); 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol 6, pp. 317–322; Chapter 4 in this volume.

exoteric religion (*muslimūn*). After taking an oath of allegiance, the 'pure beings' are initiated by the Imam of Light into the secret knowledge of the Unicity and the Glory (*asrār 'ilm al-tawhīd wa'l-tahmīd*).⁶⁵ The subsequent phases in the cosmo-anthropogony, such as the creation of the Second World of Particles and Adam's descendants, that is, their non-material entities or the creation of the physical world, are not dealt with here as these points do not bear upon our current subject.

One can readily see that in these accounts of the Origin we find the essential elements of individual eschatology: the imam in his form of light, the elect of tested believers, the initiation into secrets. Everything occurs as if the Encounter and initiation of the hidden imam bathed in light provokes the *ma'ād* of the faithful 'with the tested heart', his Return to this Origin where his non-material, pre-existent being was initiated by the luminous entity of the Imam with divine, secret knowledge, and his individual resurrection was effected by the same.

The initiatory dimension of the *ma'ād* is also very present in collective, universal eschatology. The supporters of the Qā'im during his final battle are exactly the same as the 'pure beings' initiated in the First World of the Particles: angels, celestial entities, prophets and saints, faithful initiates (cf. above). After his victory, the Saviour brings wisdom for all human beings won over to his Cause:

During the Manifestation [of the Qā'im], God will place the hand of our Qā'im upon the head of the faithful; due to this hand, they will have their wisdom ('*aql*) unified and their sagaciousness (*hilm*) completed.⁶⁶

65. It seems that what is taught are the thaumaturgic powers of the formulae that every Muslim knows: *lā ilāha illā'llāh*; *Allāhu akbar*; *al-ḥamdu li'llāh*; *subḥāna'llāh*; *lā ḥawl wa lā quwwa illā bi'llāh*. It should be recalled that these formulae also constitute the standard mystical *dhikrs*.

66. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 29; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, p. 675. The term *hilm* here denotes an intelligence applied to the profane sphere, as differentiated from '*aql*', intelligence, intuition or knowledge applied in the sacred sphere, see *Guide divin*, pp. 16–17 (*Divine Guide*, p. 7).

Islam, along with other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, distorted and abandoned by their followers, will be re-established in their original truth and integrity.⁶⁷ Moreover, the re-established religions will no longer be only exoteric dogmas but also spiritual esoteric teachings, for the Mahdī will provide the believers of each religion with the hermeneutics of the hidden meaning of their sacred Scripture.⁶⁸

[At the time of the Qā'im] men will have their eyes enlightened by the [authentic] text of the Revelation and their ears touched by the explanation of its hidden meaning. Morning and evening, they will constantly be drinking from cups of wisdom ([...] *tujlā bi'l-tanzīl abṣāruhum wa yurmā bi'l-tafsīr fī masāmi'ihim wa yughbiqūna ka's al-ḥikma ba'd al-ṣabūḥ*) [a tradition dating back to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib].⁶⁹

By universal initiation, lifting the veil that separates the exoteric from the esoteric, the Qā'im re-actualises the Primordial Initiation and returns the world to this original 'moment' when only those filled with wisdom inhabited the universe. In these terms, the End of Time marks, in the words of Lāhijī, a new Beginning (*isti'nāf*),⁷⁰ literally *Apokatastasis*, the restoration of the world to its primordial state of light and wisdom.

In messianic Twelver eschatology, although not mentioned *expressis verbis*,⁷¹ the *ma'ād* begins well before the final Tribunal of the universal *qiyāma* and the division of men between Heaven

67. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 333ff., 342–343; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, pp. 161–163.

68. Al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (attrib.), *Tafsīr* (lithograph, Lucknow, 1310/1893), p. 186; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 345.

69. Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, Arabic text and Persian trans. by 'A. N. Fayḍ al-Islām (6th edn, Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), p. 458.

70. Lāhijī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Mafātīḥ al-i'jāz fī sharḥ Golshan-e Rāz*, p. 267.

71. Perhaps because of *taqiyya*, since in this way the 'orthodox' meaning of *ma'ād* is made to recede into the background.

and Hell. It is intimately linked to the different episodes of cosmo-anthropogony, in such a way that one might say that the End of Time and the Return to the Origin define each other in a mutual relationship. Whereas in the universal dimension of eschatology, it is the End of the World which sets off the process of the Return to the Origin, in the individual dimension, the inverse seems to be the case since it is the re-actualisation of the Origin that gives rise to spiritual Resurrection.

* * *

It has often been said and written that Imami eschatology is a reflection of the frustration and thwarted hopes of a much-oppressed minority at the mercy of the vicissitudes of history. It is true that, as it appears in its foundational texts, the specifically vengeful attitude of Imamism crystallised around the Figure of the Awaited imam and his eventual advent. The very term *qā'im* (in the sense of 'standing imam'), applied to the eschatological Saviour, is in contrast to *qā'id* ('seated imam') which characterises the other imams, who especially after the tragedy of Karbalā', refused to let themselves be entangled in the vagaries of armed rebellion and, indeed, justified their quietist policy by reasoning that armed uprising against oppression was the prerogative of the Mahdī upon his final manifestation:

Any banner raised before the uprising of the Qā'im belongs to a rebel against God (*inna kulla rāyatīn turfa'u qabla qiyāmi'l-qā'im fa-ṣāhibuhā ṭāghūt*).⁷²

However, critical analyses of both early and later texts that deal with messianic beliefs clearly show that the chapter on eschatology is much more complex and can hardly be reduced to this one 'political' dimension. Indeed, just like some preceding faiths,

72. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 2, pp. 121–122; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 161–168; on the Imami quietist political attitude see *Guide divin*, pp. 155–173 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 61–69).

for example the Iranian religions, or the 'heterodox' Jewish, Judeo-Christian or Christian sects of the first centuries of the common era, precedents from which it seems to have inherited many elements, doctrinal Imami Shi'ism can only be appreciated, in its particular features, as an initiatory esoteric teaching with a mythical discourse. Summarising the research of scholars of the esoteric tradition, Antoine Faivre has very ably shown that the mythical language of esoteric doctrines (which he calls 'theosophical') always rests on the all-encompassing triptych, namely the origin, the present state of things and the final happenings.⁷³ In other words, this constitutes a cosmogony (often linked to a theogony and/or an anthropogony) marked by the force of Good, a cosmology in which – enduring the counter-force of Evil – the 'real' will be a perpetual continuation of the confrontation of both forces simultaneous with preparation for the final happenings, and lastly an eschatology which is essentially soteriological because it is founded on a return to the sacred Origin.⁷⁴ This triptych, in which each term bears its full meaning only in relation to the other two, characterises the fundamental *Weltanschauung* of Neoplatonism or of gnosticism built upon the triad: the original unity of beings, the division or the fall and finally the return to unity. One can look further back in history and cite the concepts of *bundahishn* (Creation), *gumezishn* (Mixture) and *wizarishn* (Separation)/*frashgird* (Transfiguration) in Mazdaism and Zoroastrianism.

In this sense, the collective dimension of Imami messianism, emphatically marked by violence and a battle against Evil, re-enacts the primordial Battle between the forces of Hiero-Intelligence and Ignorance. Waged ever since the dawn of creation, this Battle defines the History of humanity since it has repercussions, from age to age, in the conflict setting the imams of all times and their initiates against the forces of darkness and counter-initiation. The

73. A. Faivre, *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* (Paris, 1986), p. 24.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25, 117 and 158f.

definitive annihilation of the forces of Ignorance by the Saviour, by means of a liberating battle and enlightening initiation brings the world to this original state in which it was only inhabited by the Armies of *'aql* before those of *jahl* were created. As for the individual dimension, it completes the cycle of Initiation which also began at the origin of creation and continues throughout the Spiritual life of humanity, since it is renewed over the ages by the teaching of the imams of all times. The believer who discovers the Light of the imam of the Time and the initiation that he grants also returns to the Origin since he reenacts the primordial Initiation when in the World of Particles his pre-existing entity was initiated into divine secrets by the luminous form of the archetypal Imam.