Because studies on modern Islam tend to focus on political and legal aspects, eschatology has been neglected for quite some time. The fact that authors like Ghulām Aḥmad Parwēz (Pakistan, 1903–86),1 Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭāḥā (Sudan, 1909 or 1911–85),2 or Ḥasan Ḥanafi (Egypt, b. 1935), the advocate of the “Islamic Left” in Egypt,3 reformulate salvation as an inner-worldly concept seems to correspond to this politically focused approach to modern Islam. However, this should not distract from the persistence of more conservative interpretations in which the individual afterlife and traditional eschatological concepts play a dominant role. Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad have taken a first step toward filling the gap in research on such concepts by collecting references to the Intermediate World and the hereafter in nineteenth and twentieth-century Arab publications.4 More recently, interest in modern Islamic eschatology has been boosted by the discovery of the importance

2 The author interprets concepts like the barzakh as stages in a progressive development of mankind in which Muḥammad’s prophethood does not figure as the climax: Ṭāḥā, Risāla 211.
3 Riexinger, Nasserism 72, 79. In this case, the inner-worldly reinterpretation of eschatology reflects the influence of Latin American liberation theology on the author.
4 Smith and Haddad, Islamic understanding 99–146. Unfortunately, this work is more a collection of material than an analysis of concepts; Smith and Haddad do not discuss the ideas of the authors with regard to their general theological outlook nor do they endeavor to assess the impact and relevance of these concepts.
of apocalyptic motives in jihadist ideology, and radical currents in imāmī Shi‘ism. However, it would be a mistake to associate the interest in the hereafter exclusively with militancy, as life after death and the “last things” have been dealt with by a number of Turkish authors inspired by the ideas of Said Nursi, a figure with a rather irenic outlook.

1 Said Nursi and the Nurcu Movement

Nurcus (Nurcular, “disciples of [the divine] light”), is a term coined to describe the followers of Said Nursi, who was a Kurdish scholar born in the mid or late 1870s in the village of Nurs in eastern Anatolia. After finishing his studies by traveling from scholar to scholar and from medrese to medrese as was the norm at the time in the region “East of Sivas,” and while still at an early age he gained fame in his home region as someone skilled in religious disputations, and thereby attracted the interest of the state authorities. This earned him an invitation to the library of Tahir Paşa, the governor of Van. There, for several months he studied privately and dedicated himself to the study of the natural and social sciences. This experience convinced him that Islamic scholars should interpret the Quran in accordance with modern scientific findings, and that traditional religious studies should be combined with the teaching of secular subjects.

In 1908, Said Nursi traveled to Istanbul hoping to gain imperial support for his plans for a university designed to fit this purpose. While his efforts were of no avail, the trip thrust him into the life of the capital when sultan Abdülhamit II was deposed by the Committee for Union and Progress (İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti, commonly known in the West as the Young Turks). Although he initially lent his support to the Committee for Union and Progress, he was arrested for allegedly participating in the “counter-revolution” of 31 March 1909. After his acquittal, he withdrew to Van and gathered a group of disciples around

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5 Cook, Contemporary; Damir-Geilsdorf, Ende; Reichmuth, Second Intifada.
6 Ourghi, Schiitischer Messianismus; Ourghi, Licht.
7 On the other hand, not all radicals are inclined to eschatological speculation. Mawdūdī, Sirat i, 456, for example, urges the utmost caution with regard to traditions referring to the mahdī.
8 This biographical account is based on the somewhat hagiographic publications of Nurcu authors: Badıllı, Bediüzzaman; Şahiner, Son şahitler; Şahiner, Bilinmeyen taraflaryla. An English-language biography based on these books was written by the British convert Şükran Vahide, who is married to the high ranking Nurcu Mehmed Fırıncı: Vahide, Islam.
9 The movement is often referred to as Nurculuk. However, unlike Nurcu, the term is considered derogatory by many followers of Said Nursi.