

Imams' Esoteric Knowledge in *Başā'ir al-Darajāt*

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Abstract

One of the best-known researchers of Shiism in Europe, Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, has claimed that Imamate was an esoteric transcendental religion in the early centuries, and the belief in the supernatural powers of imams is attributed to the early Twelver Shiite tradition. However, in the mid-fourth century, as Shiite scholars turned to the Mu'tazilite School, this belief was rejected by the School of Baghdad. To assess this claim, we examine the hadiths on Imams' "knowledge" cited in *Başā'ir al-darajāt* and hadith sources of the School of Baghdad, using the content analysis method. In the book *Başā'ir al-darajāt*, nearly half (fifty-seven percent) of the content about knowledge is on "knowledge of the hidden." It also turns out that the School of Baghdad, just like the School of Qom, accepted Imam's "knowledge of the hidden." Books affiliated with this school cite many texts on the subject, except that certain aspects of Imam's "knowledge of the hidden" are only mentioned in *Başā'ir al-darajāt*. Hence, a drawback of Amir-Moezzi's methodology is lack of full examination of certain Shiite sources of hadith and failure to take note of certain hadiths.

Keywords: Amir-Moezzi; *Başā'ir al-darajāt*; esoteric knowledge; content analysis.

Introduction

Orientalists have long been concerned with Shiite studies, a field that has seen considerable growth in recent decades. A prominent figure in this field is Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, the most reputable researcher of Shiite studies in France and Europe.

Pivotal to Amir-Moezzi's studies is his account of Imamology in Shiism. In his view, the early Shiism sees the imam as the manifestation and the organ of God (Amir-Moezzi 1994, 125) and the possessor of supernatural knowledge and powers (Amir-Moezzi 1994, 16). Early

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Shiism is the “early esoteric transcendental tradition,” which is transmitted by “extremists” (ghulāt) (Amir-Moezzi 1994, 129). From the second half of the fourth AH /tenth CE century, the “theological-legal-rational” movement, which has lasted to this day, began to dominate, thus marginalizing the original “esoteric non-rational” current. For the rationalist trend, the term ‘ilm, hitherto meaning initiatory science or knowledge providing access to miraculous powers, was now completely “disavowed” and henceforth designated only the religious sciences, mainly rational theology and canonic law (Amir-Moezzi 2011, 225, 227).

The main source of hadiths in the works of Amir-Moezzi is Ṣaffār al-Qummī’s *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*. He believes that this book is the purest and most faithful source about the early “esoteric-transcendent” tradition and fundamental to the study of the emergence and formation of esoteric beliefs in the Islamic world (Amir-Moezzi 1991, 229, 242).

In his book *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, Amir-Moezzi cites *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt* and writes that

no monograph has yet dealt in depth with the early Imamate idea of ‘ilm. The reason for this has been the tendency to ascribe to ‘ilm the meaning it had taken on in ‘rationalist’ Shi‘ism, that is, the science of the Qur’an and the hadith, this is in no way the case in the view of the early corpus of the imams. In the early Imamism ‘ilm certainly referred to the religious sciences, but also and especially to the esoteric part of these sciences and other secret sciences; this is why it often has an initiatory, possibly even magical, connotation in the words of the imams. (Amir-Moezzi 1994, 69).

To examine different aspects of the issue, he discusses the sources of the Imams’ knowledge, modes of transmission, and nature of this knowledge (Amir-Moezzi 1994, 70-79).

This article undertakes a content analysis of hadiths in *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt* about the Imams’ knowledge to examine Amir-Moezzi’s claims.

Baṣā’ir al-darajāt is written by Ṣaffār al-Qummī (who died in 290 AH), a companion of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (Ṭūsī 1417 AH, 221). Scholars of biographical evaluation (rijāl) have praised and authenticated Ṣaffār and described him as being of superior status, preferred, and of low intermediary in narrating hadiths. Al-Najāshī mentions about forty works penned by Ṣaffār, mostly on jurisprudence (Najāshī 1416 AH, 357). *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt* is a work of hadith with a theological (kalāmī) approach concerning Imamate, the Imams, and their virtues. Many religious scholars have authenticated and cited this book (Najāshī 1416

AH, 357). Baṣā'ir al-darajāt contains 1881 hadiths and ten main chapters, each with ten to twenty-four sections. The majority of hadiths in this book have full chains of transmission, without any suspension.

There are two types of research in this domain: research on Imams' knowledge, and research into Amir-Moezzi's views. The research on Imams' knowledge in Baṣā'ir al-darajāt includes: Examining the sources of Imam's knowledge in hadiths (Soleimani Behbahani 1397 Sh), examining the sources of Imam's knowledge based on hadiths in Baṣā'ir al-darajāt (Mollanouri Shamsi 1394 Sh), and the scope of Imam's knowledge according to Kulaynī and Ṣaffār (Hammadi 1390 Sh).

The literature on Amir-Moezzi's views includes the following: A Critique of the theory of esoteric Imamate in early Shiism (Rezaee 1391 Sh), A critical exploration of Orientalists' approach to hadiths about the doctrine of Imamate (Khani Moghaddam 1395 Sh), and examining and criticizing Amir-Moezzi's ideas about the political Imamate of Ahl al-Bayt (Aghanouri 1395 Sh). Moreover, in the book *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: Hadith as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad* (Newman 2000), Andrew Newman examines three books of hadith from Qom: *al-Kāfī*, *al-Maḥāsin*, and *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, and just like Amir-Moezzi, he believes that the scholars of Baghdad abandoned Shiite hadiths in favor of the rational Mu'tazilite theology.

The contribution of the present study lies in a content analysis of hadiths in Baṣā'ir al-darajāt on Imams' knowledge and assessing Amir-Moezzi's ideas accordingly.

Methodology

The hadiths were examined via content analysis. As a research method applied in humanities and a scientific method for text interpretation, content analysis can yield highly valid results (Bardin 1375 Sh, 211).

Since content analysis is a scientific method for text interpretation and yields credible results, the current study adopted this method to analyze the hadiths in Baṣā'ir al-darajāt. Specifically, this study used thematic content analysis, and the unit of analysis was the sentence. The technique is consisting of (1) tabulating the hadiths, (2) converting relevant elements in a hadith into themes and concepts, (3) categorizing the themes, and (4) modeling and presenting the results.

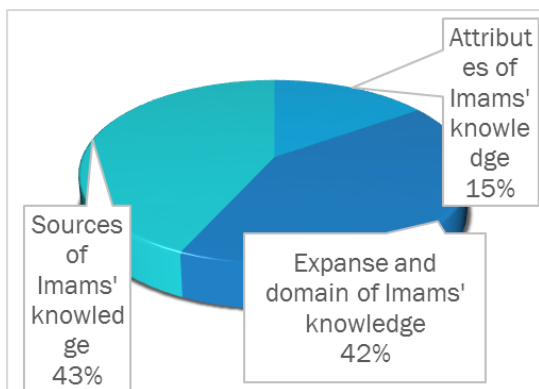
Qualitative Content Analysis of Hadiths in Baṣā'ir al-darajāt on the Imams' knowledge

Initially, hadiths about the Imams' knowledge in Baṣā'ir al-darajāt were tabulated in the content analysis table, from which 1367 themes and messages were extracted. The themes were then classified and subjects were proposed to form the final categories. To prevent redundancy and for the sake of brevity, only parts of the table that is the basis of the current study are presented here:

Number of hadith	Themes	Concept	Category	Number
754	Imams possess knowledge of everything in the Quran: the specific or general verses, verses with an established or unknown meaning, abrogating or abrogated verses	Imams' knowledge of the Quran and its interpretation	Domain of Imams' knowledge	1693
1083	Imams possess knowledge of the divine jurisprudence mentioned in the Quran and the Prophet's Sunna	Imams' knowledge of the divine halal and haram	--	2237
526	Imams possess all the scriptures revealed to previous prophets	Imams' knowledge of divine scriptures	--	1227
1219	Imam Ali al-Rida talked to each of his servants in their own language	Imams' knowledge of languages	--	2451
953	Imams possess the science of genealogy	Imams' knowledge of genealogy and races	--	2056
489	God has given Imams the unseen messages of the heaven and the earth	Imams' knowledge of the messages of the heaven and earth	Knowledge of the unseen	298
1580	Nothing that occurs in cities is hidden from Imams	Imams' knowledge of all regions, locations, and events	--	367

496	Imams possess the knowledge of everything that will occur until Resurrection	Imams' knowledge of the future	--	491
858	When an event occurs that is not mentioned in the Quran and Sunna, God reveals the truth to Imams	Expansion of Imams' knowledge by divine revelation	Sources of Imams' knowledge	1879
461	No Imam dies without another Imam coming after him to whom his knowledge is transferred	Transferring the knowledge of the previous Imam to the next	--	1010
241	Imams are keys to wisdom and sources of knowledge	Imam as the source and treasury of divine knowledge	Attributes of Imams' knowledge	512
1408	In addition to the knowledge of the Quran and halal and haram, Imams possess a sort of knowledge that is revealed to them day and night.	Increasing Imams' knowledge day and night	--	2716

The hadiths on Imams' knowledge in *Başā'ir al-darajāt* can be classified into three categories:



The Scope of the Imams' Knowledge

Imams are the knowledgeable who retain the truths of the Quran in their hearts (See *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, hadiths 759-76). Imams are aware of the Quran (hadiths 732, 734, 754, 758, 1055) and its messages (hadiths 739-40), heirs to the Quranic knowledge (hadiths 209, 269, 457, 1837), and translators of the divine revelation (hadiths 263, 411). They are the spokespersons of the Quran (hadith 1468) and instruct people on Quranic commands and arbitration (hadith 1472). They possess all the Quran, its apparent and latent content (hadiths 724, 727, 728). Imams know the seven facets of the Quran, some of which belong to the past and some to the future (hadiths 736, 738). They know the themes of the Quran better than everyone else (hadith 485). No verse was revealed to the Prophet without Imams knowing when, where, and about whom it was revealed (hadiths 513, 515, 523, 536, 741, 743, 744). They know and can distinguish abrogating from abrogated verses, clear verses from those with unknown meanings, specific from general verses, syndeton from asyndeton, and letters from their meaning (hadiths 523, 743, 744, 754, 758). They know the Quran from the beginning to the end (hadiths 729, 1811) as well as they know the back of their hands (hadiths 730, 742). They know the interpretation of verses (hadiths 737, 743, 752, 754, 755, 757, 758) and teach it to others (hadith 733). Knowledge of Quranic interpretation has been granted to Imams (hadiths 476, 744) and they will answer any questions about the Quran (hadith 1761). Imams possess the entire knowledge of the scripture (Quranic truth and interpretation; see hadiths 1302, 1311, 1312), where knowledge of the Scripture refers to the truth of the holy Quran that is preserved in *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz* (the Preserved Tablet) and is the comprehensive scripture (see Makarem Shirazi 1371 Sh, 10:254; Majlisī 1404 AH, 3:34; Māzandarānī 2003, 2:364). In the verse "Say, [O Muhammad], 'Sufficient is Allah as Witness between me and you, and [the witness of] whoever has knowledge of the Scripture,'" Imams are those who have knowledge of the scripture (hadiths 789, 791-94, 796-99, 801-807, 809, 846). Āṣif b. Barkhiyā, Solomon's vizier, partly possessed knowledge of the Scripture with which he brought the throne of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon in a blink of an eye. However, Imams possess the entire knowledge of the Scripture, and Āṣif's knowledge is a drop in the ocean of theirs (hadith 791).

Based on another category of hadiths, Imams know the divine jurisprudence mentioned in the Quran and Sunna (hadith 1083). They know

the entire divine halal and haram (hadiths 168, 190, 191, 249, 251, 254, 485, 732, 734, 744, 1177, 1180, 1740, 1827, 1840) and their interpretation (hadiths 1031, 1032, 1034, 1036-38, 1042), and are more knowledgeable than other people about these subjects (hadith 485). They possess knowledge of halal and haram, even the penalty for a scratch (hadith 569), and this is only a small part of their vast knowledge (hadith 732).

They are aware of people's questions and needs (hadiths 524, 591), and this knowledge was granted to them by God (hadiths 485, 486). Based on the verse "So ask the people of the message [i.e., former scriptures] if you do not know," people must put their questions to Imams, but Imams do not need to answer these questions (hadiths 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 174, 176, 178, 182, 186, 189). Imams, therefore, know all the questions about halal, haram, and the like, but can choose whether to answer them (hadiths 192-94). By "[He] created man [and] taught him eloquence," God refers to Imams to whom He has taught all people's need (hadith 1809). For instance, Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq answered five hundred questions asked by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam about the science of kalām or Islamic theology (hadith 485). Imam 'Alī always said, "Ask me before you fail to find me" (hadiths 953, 959, 960, 966) and "Ask me anything you want, and I shall give you knowledge about it" (hadith 1857).

Imams possess the knowledge of all divine scriptures (hadith 1653) and answer any question posed by the followers of the Torah, the Gospel, Zabur, and the Quran based on their own scripture (hadith 621, 825). Imams possess the Scrolls of Abraham, Moses' Tablets of Stone (hadiths 521, 522, 525, 528-33, 539, 662, 664, 691, 1172), the Torah, Gospel, and other prophets' scriptures (hadiths 524, 526, 540, 535, 1170), which they have inherited from Prophet Muhammad (hadiths 523, 529, 530, 533, 539). Moreover, God taught the Tablets of Stone to Imam 'Alī in one night (hadiths 539, 541) what was omitted from the Torah is possessed by Imams (hadith 527) who know the Torah and the Gospel better than Jews and Christians (hadith 520). Imams read prophets' scriptures like they themselves did (hadith 524); for instance, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim read the Gospel to a Christian man like Jesus the Christ (hadith 524).

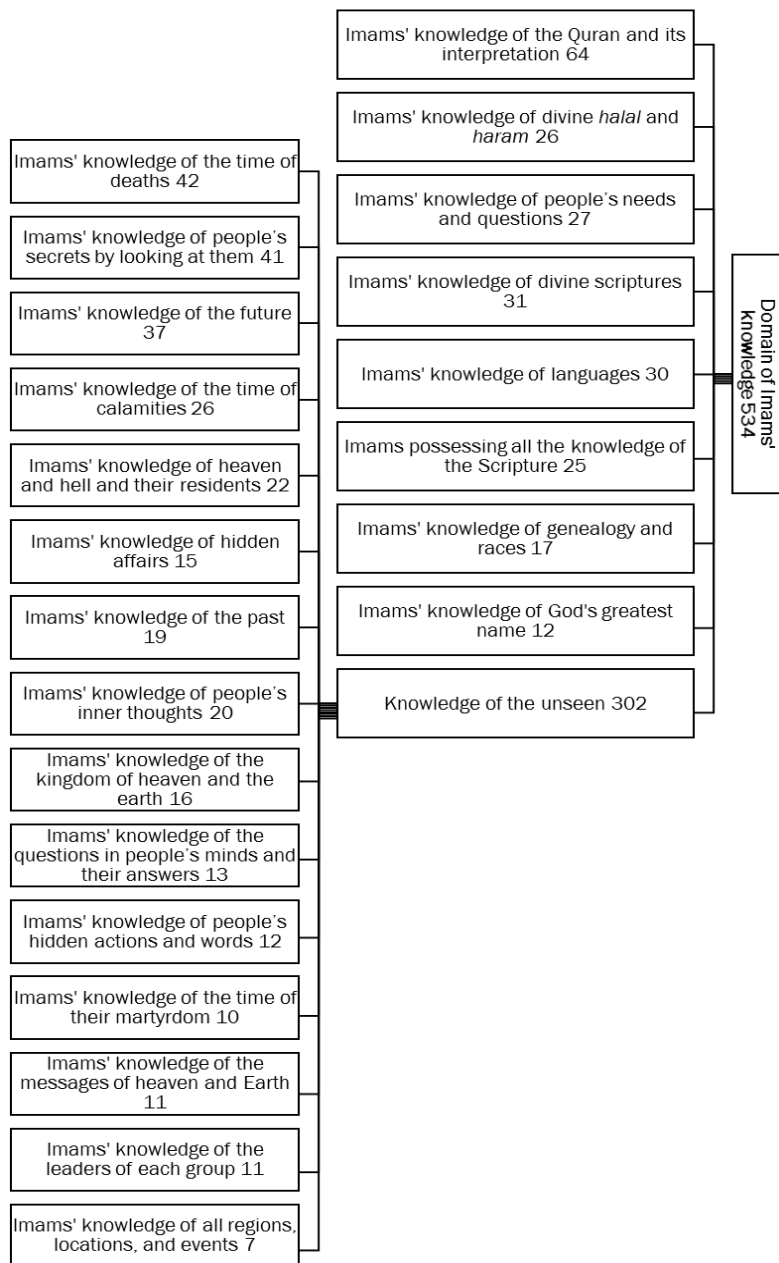
Imams know different languages (hadiths 1208-10, 1216, 1224, 1225, 1230, 1266, 1231, 1212, 1223, 1219, 1220, 1222, 1767, 1773, 1774, 1226, 1227): Imam al-Hādī spoke Persian (hadiths 1207, 1221) and Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq spoke Hebrew and Nabataean (hadiths 1213, 1211, 1217, 1218, 1229). (Imams' knowledge of different languages is based on nearly

mutawātir hadiths; that is, hadiths about Imams' knowledge leave no doubt about this unique characteristic of theirs. Although reason may be silent on the necessity of this knowledge, it does not assume it impossible either (Majlisī 1403 AH, 26:193.)

Imams know Arab races and descents (hadiths 473-76, 448, 749, 750, 953, 956, 957, 963-68) and God's greatest name. Out of the seventy-three letters of God's greatest name, seventy-two were granted to Imams (hadiths 778-88).

They know of the unseen but do not possess inherent knowledge of the unseen (hadith 1168); God has granted knowledge of the unseen messages to them (hadiths 487-92, 496-500). Imams know people's thoughts (hadiths 493, 865, 882, 867, 870, 871, 874, 878-81, 884, 885, 895, 907, 945, 949, 1380) and questions in their minds (hadiths 861-64, 868, 869, 872, 873, 875, 877, 1212, 908). For example, Imam Mūsā al-Kāzīm answered 'Alī b. Yaqtīn's question before his letter containing the question arrived (hadith 906). Imams are aware of hidden affairs (hadiths 399, 876, 899, 900, 902, 910, 922-24, 1421, 896, 1422, 1427, 1435, 1067, 888-90, 892, 897, 903): Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq was aware of Abū Bašīr's impurity (hadith 883), and Imam Mūsā al-Kāzīm knew poisoned dates were brought for him (hadiths 1721, 1730, 1805). Imams also know the events of day and night (hadiths 540, 1032, 1173, 1810), all the creatures, and God's friends and enemies until Resurrection (hadiths 541, 1810). They know the birthplace of Islam and infidelity (hadiths 750, 957), all souls and bodies (hadiths 658, 365), and the names of all Shias (hadiths 473, 1043, 1067, 651, 652-58, 660, 1024). Furthermore, they know hidden actions and words (hadiths 481, 891, 893, 894, 901, 905, 931, 1032, 1099, 1418, 1419, 1420) and are aware of all locations and the events that took place therein (hadiths 527, 542, 1580, 1767, 1773, 1774, 1813). They also know times of deaths (hadiths 473-75, 745, 447-50, 938, 940-54, 956-61, 963-68, 1095, 1213, 1289) and their own martyrdom (hadiths 1720, 1721, 1724-31). Imams know the news of the past (hadiths 495, 496, 499, 500-503, 587, 447, 886, 448, 898, 1095, 1146, 1144, 1146, 1852, 955, 1810) and future (hadiths 816, 495-97, 499, 500-503, 512, 518, 587, 650, 447, 750, 949, 955, 1067, 1068, 1095, 1143, 1144, 1146, 1397, 1170, 1172, 1439, 1719, 1732, 1810, 1852, 1855). People's affairs are disclosed to Imams (hadiths 479, 480, 482, 483, 484) and they know the leaders of any group or community (hadiths 1058-62, 1063-67, 1070). They possess knowledge of the kingdom of heaven and the earth (hadiths 422-30, 432-34, 452, 1441) and realize people's secrets

by looking at them (hadiths 543, 473, 475, 476, 1021-30, 1276-82, 1284, 1287-98, 1382, 1383, 1395, 1396, 1786). Imams also possess knowledge of the heaven and the hell and their residents (hadiths 496-98, 499, 500, 718, 720, 722, 723, 1778-83, 1785, 1786, 1791, 1792, 1794, 1795) and the time of calamities (hadiths 473-76, 447-50, 945, 949, 956-59, 961, 963, 965-68, 1095, 1120-24).



Sources of Imam's Knowledge

One source for Imams' knowledge is revelation from God. Imams' knowledge originates in divine knowledge (Baṣā'ir al-darajāt, hadiths 759-

76, 825, 955, 1838) and will run out if not incremented by God (hadiths 1400, 1402, 1405, 1409, 1410, 1412, 1414-17, 1168). God has taught his all-inclusive knowledge to angels, prophets, and Imams (hadiths 435-42, 444, 445, 447-51). God guides Imams (hadiths 1383-86), and when they choose to learn something, He will teach it to them (hadiths 1125-29) through revelation to their hearts (hadiths 827, 847-49, 851, 853, 1133-35, 1137-42, 1144, 1174-78, 1182). This is the best type of Imams' knowledge, which is concerned with new affairs (hadiths 1143, 1146); for example, when questions are posed to them whose answer they do not know (hadiths 1130-32, 1136); that is, when something is not been mentioned in the Quran or Sunna (hadiths 858-60). On Friday eves, Prophet Muhammad and Imams travel to the Divine Throne and their spirits return to their bodies with a great revelation of knowledge (hadiths 505-11).

When an issue does not appear in the Quran and Sunna, Imams resort to inspiration and *rajm* (hadiths 1388-94). *Rajm* literally means to rock or to throw rocks, and metaphorically it denotes speaking based on a conjecture (Ibn Manẓūr 1414 AH, 12:227; Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1412 AH, 345) and the unseen (Farāhīdī 1409 AH, 6:120), used in the same sense in the verse “guessing at the unseen” (Q 18:22). According to ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī, guessing at the unseen refers to a saying whose meaning is beyond human knowledge. Guessing at the unseen means to perform *rajm* based on conjecture instead of knowledge since the object of conjecture is somewhat hidden from its owner’s view (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1390 Sh, 13:268). Therefore, *rajm* in these hadiths refers to Divine inspiration (Majlisī 1403 AH, 26:32), which is confirmed by some of the above-mentioned hadiths (hadiths 858-60, 1130-32, 1136).

Another source of Imams' knowledge is instruction by the Prophet. The Prophet taught the Quran and thousands of gates of knowledge to Imam Ali (hadiths 476, 587, 1085-99, 1103-107, 1109, 1111-13, 1115-17, 1124, 1110, 1396, 505-11, 1096). The thousand gates may refer to general rules and principles of knowledge whereby all details and secondary arbitrations can be attained, an inference not based on conjecture, but with certainty and knowledge (Majlisī 1404 AH, 3:285). Imams are heirs to the Prophet's knowledge (hadiths 501, 840, 837, 1049, 1050, 1823, 1847) whose understanding, virtue, and knowledge are granted to them (hadiths 210-14, 219, 223, 225, 216, 217). At the time of his death, the Prophet left the knowledge of prophethood as a heritage to Imam ‘Alī, who then left it to his progeny upon his death (hadiths 670, 668, 677, 704, 837, 1174-82,

1411, 1663-66, 1821). Therefore, Imams do not speak arbitrarily, but based on the evidence and reasons sent by God to the Prophet and the Prophet's hadiths at their disposal (hadiths 1071-74, 1076). Imams are heirs to the knowledge of prophets (hadiths 209, 495, 887, 969, 455, 456, 458, 459, 462, 464, 460, 461, 839, 467, 466, 473-76, 717, 837, 840, 1403, 1406, 1407) and their successor (hadiths 745, 749, 750, 962, 965, 1053, 477, 1823). The Quran and al-Jafr al-Abyaḍ are among the written heritage of the Prophet. Imams acquire their knowledge from the Quran (hadiths 496-500, 1075, 1077, 1080, 1082-87). Al-Jafr al-Abyaḍ is a leather-bound container of the knowledge of prophets and their executors (hadiths 586, 587, 603, 608, 617, 619, 679), including Zabur, the Torah, the Gospel, the Scrolls of Abraham, halal and haram, and the Book of Fāṭima (hadiths 585, 599, 587, 599, 600, 605, 606, 614). Al-Jafr was first possessed by Imam 'Alī and then given to the Imams after him (hadiths 619, 638, 639, 714).

The Book of Fāṭima contains the words of an angel who consoled Fāṭima after the Prophet's death, written down by Imam 'Alī (hadiths 589, 598, 603, 617), which contains the news of the future (hadiths 602, 615, 616, 646-49, 643-45). It was based on al-Jafr that Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq said that no person from among the Zaydiyya will become an Imam (hadiths 600, 605, 606) and heretics will emerge in 128 AH (hadith 602).

Al-Jafr also consists of the Comprehensive Scripture, which is seventy cubits long. This book is authored by the Prophet, written down by Imam 'Alī, containing all the knowledge of halal and haram that people will need until Resurrection (hadiths 599, 614, 618, 538, 543, 551, 565, 575, 582, 591, 629, 632). It also delineates all events, such as the penalty of a scratch (hadiths 544-46, 548, 550, 552, 553, 557, 558, 560, 561, 563, 564, 567, 569, 571-74, 576, 584, 586, 587, 594, 596, 598, 609, 610, 615, 621, 623, 636, 1171) and the entire knowledge of judgment and religious duties (hadiths 549, 559). Imams possess this scripture (hadiths 622, 634, 641, 593, 642, 578, 621, 624, 637) and rule based on it if they become rulers (hadiths 547, 628).

Another source of Imams' knowledge is instruction by previous Imams. No Imam dies without being succeeded by an Imam to whom he grants his knowledge (hadiths 471, 461, 463, 465, 468, 460, 1648, 1649-52, 1656). At the time of his death, the Prophet disclosed his secret (shared with him by God) to Imam 'Alī, and every Imam shared it with the next Imam (hadiths 1345, 1346, 1349). Imams' hadiths are based on principles they have inherited from their forefathers (hadiths 1073, 1074, 1076, 1080).

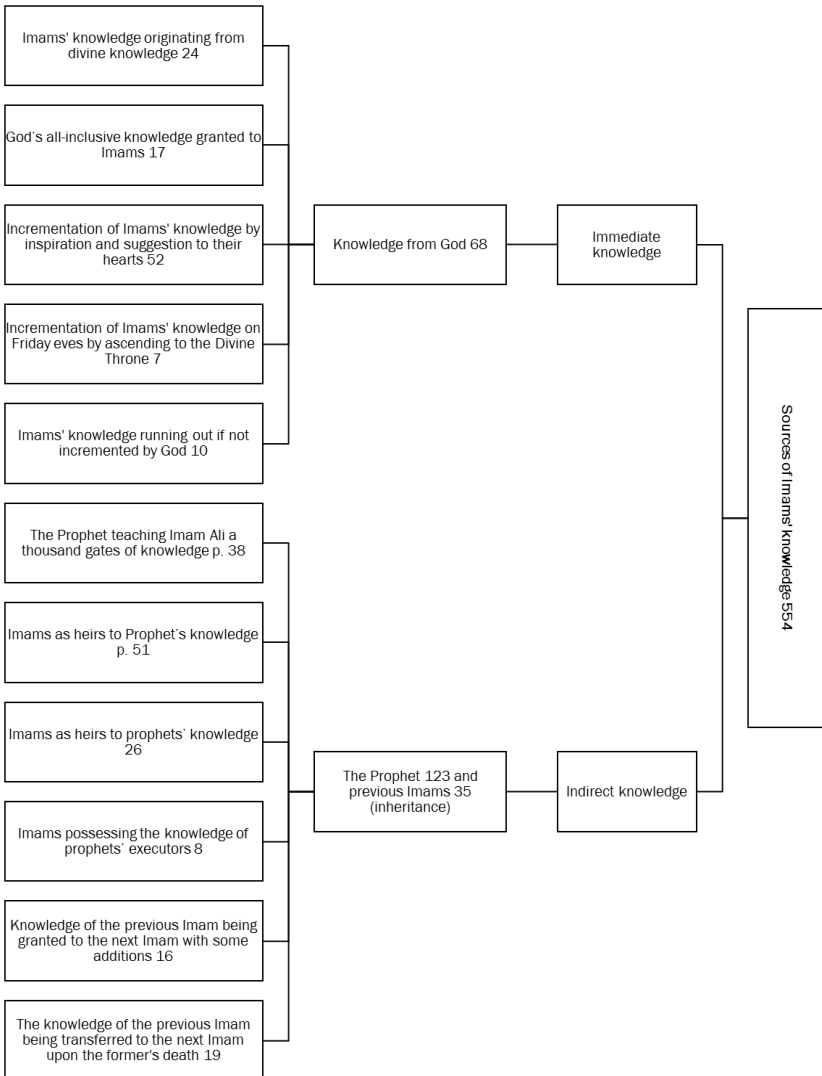
The knowledge of the previous Imam is granted to the next Imam with some additions, apart from the jurisprudence and the Quran (hadiths 455, 458, 459, 462, 464, 469, 470, 472, 1503-505). Some Imams are more knowledgeable than the rest, but their action in terms of halal, haram, and Quranic interpretation is the same (hadiths 1713-15, 1717).

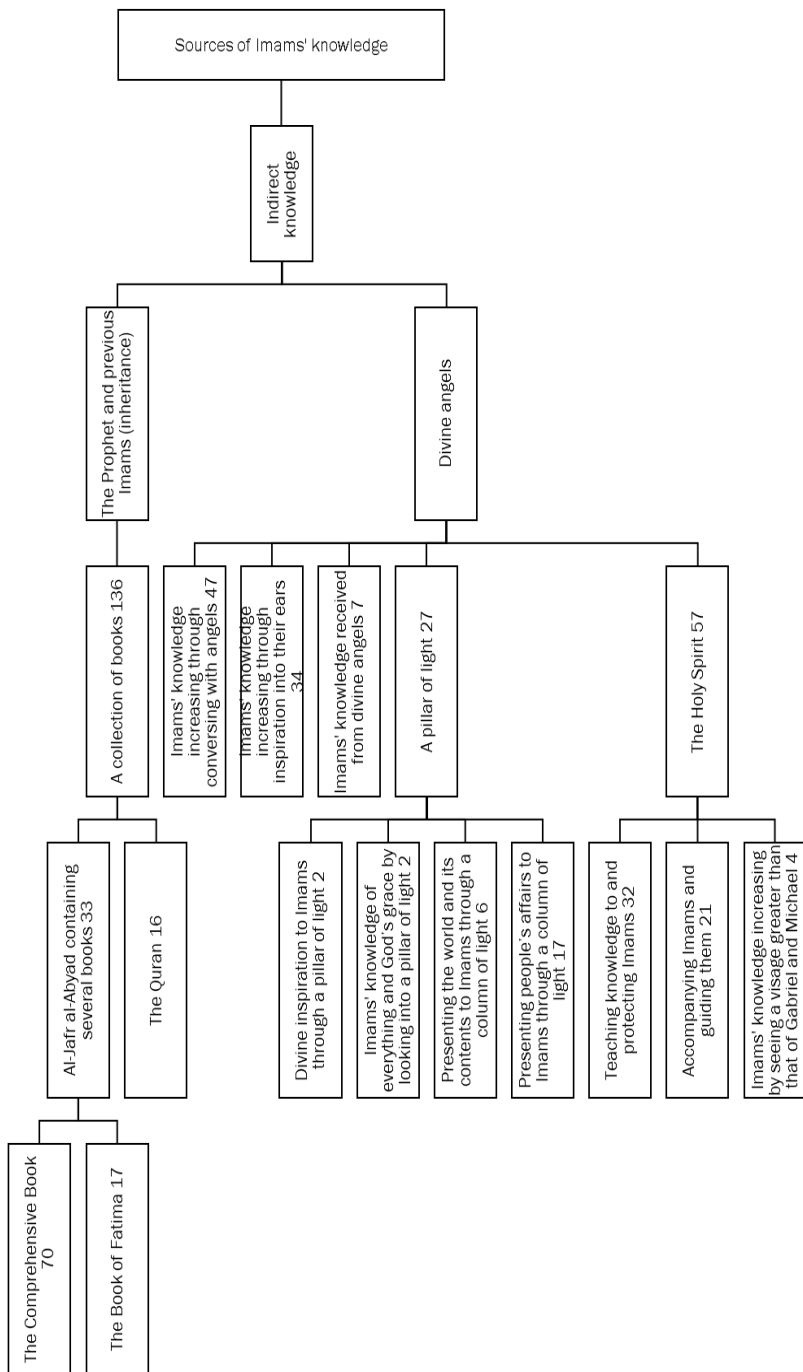
Angels are another source of Imams' knowledge. Imams' knowledge is partly incremented through conversing with angels (hadiths 375, 848, 1147-53, 1155, 1156, 1159, 1160, 1161, 1164, 1165, 1333-35, 1606, 1156, 1161). They hear the angels' voices but do not see them (hadiths 1320-24, 1326-32, 1338, 1162). Imams are like the companions of Solomon, Moses, Khidr, and Dhu l-Qarnayn, who were muḥaddath; that is, they heard the voices of angels (hadiths 1164, 1157, 1158, 1166, 1316, 1318, 1319). Gabriel descends upon Imams (hadiths 43, 44, 46) and angels report the events of the earth to them (hadiths 384, 388). Imams, therefore, receive divine knowledge through angels (hadiths 1336, 1166, 847-51, 853, 854, 1416) (like hearing the sound of chains). Imams' knowledge is also incremented by seeing a visage greater than that of Gabriel's and Michael's; that is, the Holy Spirit (hadiths 847, 850, 851, 853). The Holy Spirit always accompanies the Prophet and Imams and offers leadership, knowledge (hadiths 1631-41, 1626-28, 1638, 1644, 1645, 1621-30), and protection (hadiths 1610-20) from God. Imams are aware of what happens in the divine kingdom and the earth through the Holy Spirit (hadiths 1595, 1609, 1610). If they do not know something, the Holy Spirit reveals it to them (hadiths 1598-602, 1604, 1606).

The pillar of light constitutes another source of Imams' knowledge. A cylinder of light is granted to the Imam upon his birth: whenever he wishes to know something, he learns it by looking into the cylinder (hadiths 1575, 1574, 1579) and can also see the whole world in it (hadiths 1556-58, 1566-68). He can also understand people's latent truth and actions from this pillar of light (hadiths 1545-49, 1551, 1552, 1554, 1560, 1561, 1565, 1579). According to 'Allāma Majlisī, there are several possible interpretations of the pillar of light: actual light (God actually creates light for Imams to show people's actions); a metaphor for the Holy Spirit or another angel who sends news to Imams; or Imams' reception of divine revelation (Majlisī 1403 AH, 25:40). He also notes that light refers to an angel or the Holy Spirit (Majlisī 1404 AH, 4:263; Māzandarānī 1382 AH, 6:365). Based on a hadith with an authentic source, 'Alī b. al-Riḍā interprets the pillar of

light as an angel who elevates people’s actions and presents them to the Imam (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 2:296).

The pillar of light is elevated when Imams begin speaking (hadiths 1546, 1547) or undertake the mission of Imamate (hadiths 1562-64). ‘Allāma Majlisī believes that this pillar can be seen at all times. Imams may actually see the light and receive knowledge; the pillar of light could be a metaphor; or God could have predisposed them to view the light, and they see the light after becoming Imams (Majlisī 1403 AH, 25:40.)





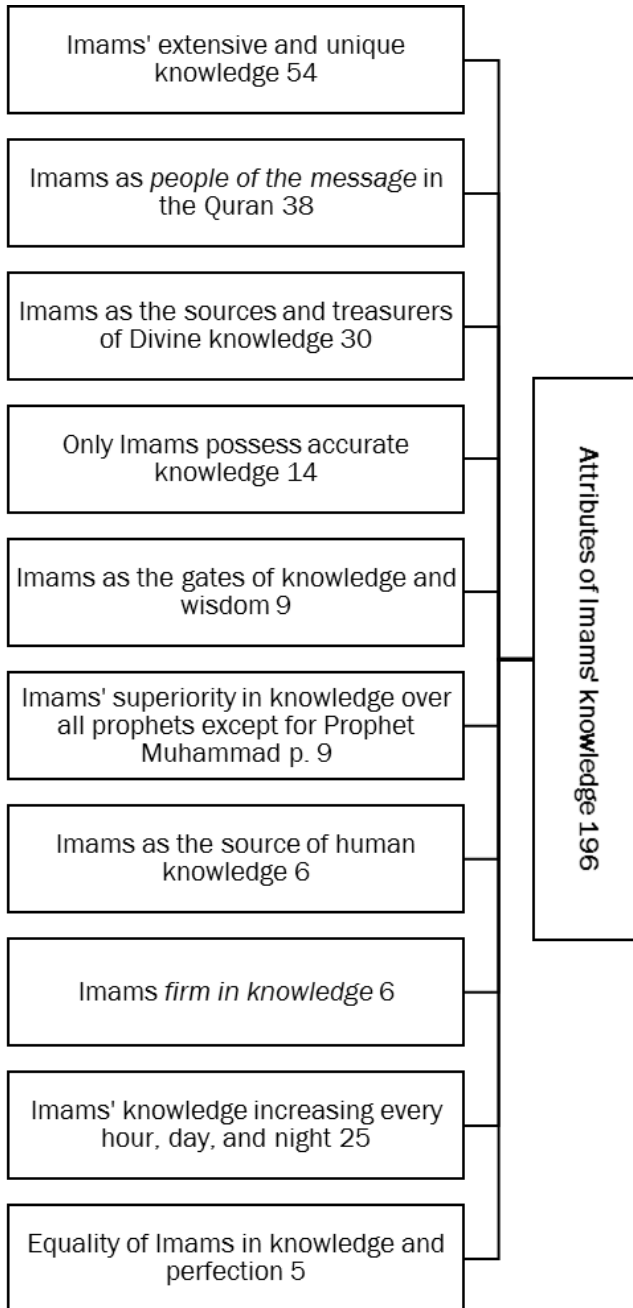
Attributes of Imams' knowledge

Apart from the Prophet, Imams are the most knowledgeable people (hadiths 37-41, 470-72, 1308, 1827, 1762) in the Umma (hadiths 458-60, 462, 464, 805, 806, 1052, 1824). They know everything, including everything under the sky (hadiths 488, 1581, 1840, 1857, 457). They are the havens of knowledge (hadiths 1299, 1300, 1302, 1303, 1305, 1307, 1309-312). Therefore, nothing could ever be taught to Imams because they are the most knowledgeable (hadiths 215, 218, 226). Moreover, Imams are the people of understanding in the verse "They will only be reminded who people of understanding are" (230-38, 478, 1147).

The people of the message in the verse "So ask the people of the message [i.e., former scriptures] if you do not know" are Ahl Al-Bayt who must be asked questions (hadiths 162-73, 175-89, 1827, 1830).

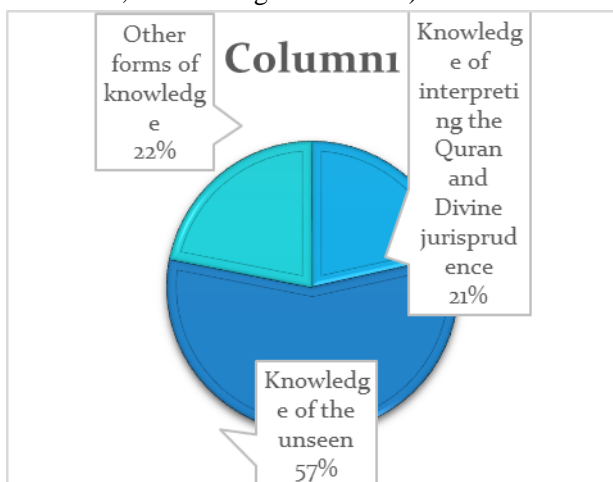
Imams are the treasurers of divine knowledge in the heaven and the earth (hadiths 406-410, 420) and the source and treasure of divine knowledge after the Prophet (hadiths 229, 239, 240, 242-47, 257, 258, 261, 294, 296, 411-13, 417, 419, 826, 1577). True knowledge stems from Imams alone (hadiths 42-44, 46, 47, 55, 1858-60).

Imams hold the gates of knowledge and wisdom (hadiths 1299, 1303, 1305, 1307, 1308, 1310, 22, 23), and people's knowledge originates in them (hadiths 52, 53, 1828, 54, 55, 1857). They are scientifically superior to all prophets, except for Prophet Muhammad (hadiths 887, 501, 842, 843-45, 836, 838, 841). Those firm in knowledge in the verse "And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allāh. But those firm in knowledge" (hadiths 737, 751, 752, 755-57) refers to Imams who are equal in terms of knowledge, the obligation of their obedience, and other virtues (hadiths 745, 476, 1820, 1824, 1718). Their knowledge is increased every day and night (hadiths 521, 522, 535, 538, 563, 587, 851, 853, 1167, 1171, 1656) or every hour (hadiths 521, 522, 535, 970, 1167, 1168, 1411), and God does not leave them to their own devices (hadiths 1648-52).



Examining Amir-Moezzi's Views about the hadiths in *Başā'ir al-darajāt* about Imams' Knowledge

The content analysis of *Başā'ir al-darajāt* yielded 3501 themes, 1309 of which (37%) were about Imams' knowledge in the following categories: the expanse and domain of Imams' knowledge (42%), the sources of Imams' knowledge (43%), and the attributes of Imams' knowledge (15%). More than half of the themes of the "expanse of Imams' knowledge" were about their knowledge of the unseen; approximately a quarter of the themes about Imams' knowledge dealt with Quranic and jurisprudential interpretation; and the other quarter dealt with other forms of knowledge (knowledge of other scriptures, languages, races and genealogy, people's questions and needs, and God's greatest name).



According to these statistics, a large percentage (57%) of the text on the Imam's "Knowledge" in *Başā'ir al-darajāt* is on the Imam's "knowledge of the hidden" and this is an approval of Amir-Moezzi's claim that "Knowledge in early Shii'sm refers to religious sciences, in particular its esoteric part and other hidden sciences."

To examine Amir-Moezzi's claim that, from the second half of the fourth century AH, the School of Baghdad (al-Shaykh al-Mufid and his followers) was influenced by the Mu'tazilite School, rejecting certain Imami teachings with esoteric transcendental aspects, it is also necessary to examine and analyze certain hadiths about the Imam's "knowledge" in the School of Baghdad. The following table is the outcome of the content analysis of the Imam's "Knowledge" from the two important hadith books of the School of Baghdad, namely al-Mufid's *al-Irshād* and al-Ṭūsī's *al-Amālī*, together with

the outcome of the analysis of the book Baṣā'ir al-darajāt, representing the School of Qom.

Scope of Imams' knowledge		School of Qom	School of Baghdad	
		Frequency of themes of Baṣā'ir al-darajāt	Frequency of themes of al-Ṭūsī's <i>al-Amālī</i>	Frequency of themes of <i>al-Irshād</i>
Imams' knowledge of the Quran and its interpretation		64	-	5
Imams' knowledge of divine halal and haram		26	-	3
Imams' knowledge of divine scriptures		31	-	2
Imams' knowledge of people's needs and questions		27	-	1
Imams' knowledge of languages		30	-	3
Imams' knowledge of genealogy and races		17	1	
Knowledge of the first and the last		-	-	2
Knowledge of the Prophet's religion and tradition		-	2	-
Imams' knowledge of God's greatest name		12	-	-
Imams possessing all the knowledge of the Scripture		25	-	-
Community of knowledge			2	
Knowledge of the unseen	Imams' knowledge of the future	37	4	40
	Imams' knowledge of the time of deaths	42	1	5
	Imams' knowledge of people's inward truth by looking at them	41	-	-
	Imams' knowledge of	15	3	22

Scope of Imams' knowledge	School of Qom	School of Baghdad	
	Frequency of themes of Baṣā'ir al-darajāt	Frequency of themes of al-Ṭūsī's <i>al-Amālī</i>	Frequency of themes of <i>al-Irshād</i>
hidden affairs			
Imams' knowledge of the past	19	4	4
Imams' knowledge of people's inner thoughts	20	3	15
Imams' knowledge of the messages of the heaven and the earth	11	1	2
Imams' knowledge of the time of their martyrdom	10	-	15
Knowledge of the martyrdom of their companions	-	1	5
Knowledge of causal chains	-	1	
Knowledge of dreams	-	2	
Imams' knowledge of the time of calamities	26	-	-
Imams' knowledge of the heaven and the hell and their residents	22	-	-
Imams' knowledge of the kingdom of heaven and earth	16	-	-
Imams'	13	-	-

Scope of Imams' knowledge	School of Qom	School of Baghdad	
	Frequency of themes of Baṣā'ir al-darajāt	Frequency of themes of al-Ṭūsī's <i>al-Amālī</i>	Frequency of themes of <i>al-Irshād</i>
knowledge of the questions in people's minds and their answers			
Imams' knowledge of people's hidden actions and words	12	-	-
Imams' knowledge of the leaders of each group	11	-	-
Imams' knowledge of all regions, locations, and events	7	-	-

According to the above table, the Imamate 'Knowledge of the Qu'ran and its interpretation' has been emphasized in the two Qum and Baghdad schools with numerous texts on the subject (The content of the Qum School is nearly three times that of the Baghdad School).

In the book Baṣā'ir al-darajāt, there are many texts on "knowledge such as al-aḥkām" (Islamic laws), the Revealed Books, questions by people, languages, races of humanity, God's Greatest Name, and "knowledge of the Book." In the School of Baghdad, however, only some of this "knowledge" has been mentioned (the content of the School of Qum is nearly fifteen times that of the School of Baghdad).

Sources of Imams' knowledge		School of Qom	School of Baghdad	
		Frequency of themes of Baṣā'ir al-darajāt	Frequency of themes of al-Ṭūsī's <i>al-Amālī</i>	Frequency of themes of <i>al-Irshād</i>
Immediate knowledge	Knowledge from God	68	10	5
Indirect knowledge	Divine angels	123	17	7
	The Prophet	172	7	3
	Previous Imams	35	-	-
	A collection of books (al-Jafr al-Abyaḍ and the Quran)	136	-	-

Like the School of Qom, the School of Baghdad believed in Imams' "knowledge of the hidden" and cites many hadiths on the subject. In the books *al-Irshād* and *al-Amālī*, eighty-seven percent and fifty percent of hadiths are respectively about Imams' "knowledge of the hidden," the only difference being that *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* speaks extensively on the subject and various aspects of a range of topics associated with Imams' "knowledge of the hidden" (fifty-seven percent of the content is on Imams' "knowledge"). Some of these are common with the School of Baghdad and others are exclusively cited in *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*. Knowledge of the past and the future, the time of death, hidden affairs, inner thoughts, legitimate and illegitimate groups and their leaders, and knowledge of the time of their own martyrdom are some of the common contents of the two schools. On Imams' knowledge, both schools mention that such knowledge was received from God, the angels, and the Prophet (s), with the difference that *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* mentions this nearly seven times more than the School of Baghdad. *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* also cites written sources stating that the imams are the inheritors of the Prophet, but there is no mention of this in the School of Baghdad.

According to the above statistics, it can be concluded that the School of Qom has transmitted numerous hadiths on Imams' "knowledge" and in particular "knowledge of the hidden" by citing sources due to the tradition of transmitted hadiths. In the School of Baghdad, because of a transition to rationalism and a change in accepting the hadiths, the acceptance of certain hadiths about Imams' knowledge became limited. However, as claimed by Amir-Moezzi, this did not mean the rejection of "knowledge of the hidden" and its hidden sources in the School of Baghdad. In reality, it can be said that, for the theologians of Baghdad, awareness of the hidden was necessary in affairs that called for their spiritual leadership and government and that this was considered an attribute of the Imam ('Alam al-Hudā 1410 AH, 3:164; Ṭūsī 1400 AH, 192-96). In their view, Imams' awareness of other issues was not rational (Mufīd 1992, 68); and if, based on correct hadiths, awareness of the hidden in other affairs is proved a necessity for them, it is due to the status of the imams, which are held in honor and grace of God towards them ('Alam al-Hudā 1405 AH, 394; Karājākī 1363 Sh, 112).

In addition, in reviewing Amir-Moezzi's views about sources of Imams' knowledge in Baṣā'ir al-darajāt, drawbacks can be attributed to his methodology:

Superficiality and Lack of Mastery over Denotations of Hadiths

Another methodological deficiency in Amir-Moezzi's work is his negligence of denotations of hadiths. The depth of the words of the Prophet and Shiite Imams cannot be fathomed without attending to the original denotations of the hadiths; otherwise, their meaning will remain partly hidden to the researcher. In numerous cases, Amir-Moezzi does not provide a correct interpretation of hadiths.

According to him, Imams' appeal to divination and fortune-telling (despite its low frequency) is an independent source of their knowledge. On his account, hadiths (Imams' action based on inspiration and rajm when there is no relevant statement in the Quran and Sunna; see Baṣā'ir al-darajāt, hadiths 1388-94) note that Imams resort to divination to acquire knowledge and find the solution by throwing rocks (rajm) (Amir-Moezzi 2019, 170). If we form a family of hadiths on this topic, we find several hadiths expressing that in new affairs (hadiths 1143, 1146), knowledge is inspired to Imams' hearts, e.g., when they do not know the answer to a question (hadiths 858-60, 1130-32), or an event occurs that is not

mentioned in the Quran or Sunna (hadiths 858-60). Therefore, *rajm* in these hadiths refers to divine inspiration (Majlisī 1403 AH, 26:32).

He also introduces the pillar of light as a source of Imams' knowledge and states that these hadiths significantly resemble the details of a well-known phenomenon in the esoteric and magical domain (Amir-Moezzi 2019, 114). Nevertheless, by forming a family of hadiths, we find hadiths that interpret the pillar of light as an angel or the Holy Spirit. For instance, a hadith with an authentic source interprets this pillar as an angel that elevates people's actions and presents them to Imams (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 2:296).

According to Amir-Moezzi, a Quran other than the current Quran is another source of Imams' knowledge. He claims that, according to hadiths, Imams have reported their teachings to be exclusively based on the text of the Quran (Saffār al-Qummī 1394 Sh, 335). Since not all the details of early Imamiyya have a Quranic basis (Amir-Moezzi 2019, 178-79), Imams must possess the full version of the Quran that is three times larger than the one collected at the time of 'Uthmān's caliphate (Amir-Moezzi 2019, 171). In his view, hadiths, directly and indirectly, point to this issue (see Amir-Moezzi 2019, 181-93). The most important of these hadiths include:

1. "Truly, the Quran brought down by Gabriel to Muḥammad was seventeen thousand verses" (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 4:674).
2. "Any person who says that he collected the entire Quran as it was revealed by God is a liar, and no one has collected and preserved it as revealed by God except 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his subsequent Imams" (Saffār al-Qummī 1394 Sh, 465).
3. "Until al-Qā'im (Imam al-Mahdī) starts his uprising. When he does so, he reads the Book of Allah as it is and reveals the book written by 'Alī" (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 4:672; Saffār al-Qummī 1394 Sh, 466).
4. "No one can claim that he has the entire Quran at his disposal—both its exterior and its interior—except the successors [that is, Imams]" (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 1:567).
"The Quran was revealed in four parts: four about us, and four about our enemy, and four about traditions and proverbs, and four about rulings and obligations" (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 4:660).
5. "Do not ask the religion of who is not your follower and do not love their religion, since they are traitors who betrayed Allah and His apostle and betrayed their trust, and you know how they betrayed their trust: they were trusted with the Book of Allah, but they distorted and changed what signifies the guardians of affairs from among them" (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 15:301).

Examining the Hadiths

The first hadith in al-Wāfi is reported without the word 'ashr, adding up to seven thousand verses, (Fayḍ Kāshānī 1406 AH, 9:1781), which is close to

the number of verses in the current Quran. The word 'ashr may have been an error made by scribes or narrators. Moreover, this hadith could imply that, in addition to the Quran, the explanation and interpretation of some verses may have been revealed by God to the Prophet through Gabriel. Thus, what is revealed other than the Quran, if added to the Quranic revelation, may add up to seventeen thousand verses (Ibn Bābawayh 1414 AH, 84-85).

In hadiths 2 and 3, "as it was revealed by God" and "he reads the Book of Allah" refer to reading the Quran based on its original meaning and interpretation, as revealed and explained by God through Gabriel to the Prophet (see Kulaynī 1429 AH, 2:413-21). In a similar hadith (Mufīd 1413 AH, 79), al-Shaykh al-Mufīd regards the phrase "as it was revealed by God" to denote an interpretation that clarifies the examples of the verse (see Mufīd 1413 AH, 81). Based on the second hadith, Imams are the collectors of the Quran. As the successors of Imam 'Alī did not collect the Quran, it can be concluded that their action falls in the realm of interpreting and explaining the words and determining their circumstances of revelation (see Māzandarānī 1382 AH, 5:360). Thus, when we speak of the entire Quran possessed by Imams, we mean Imam 'Alī's scripture, which was authored by the Prophet in Imam 'Alī's handwriting. This scripture differs from the current Quran in the order of revelation and interpretative additions; for example, circumstances of revelation, evidence, and interpretation of verses (Hilālī 1405 AH, 2:581 and 657).

In the fourth hadith, a full understanding of the Quran refers to an understanding of the surface as well as the depth of verses (Māzandarānī 1382 AH, 5:361; Majlisī 1404 AH, 3:32), which is exclusive to the Prophet and Imams. Quranic verses have various levels of meaning that cannot be fathomed by regular reason (Mesbah Yazdi 1380 Sh, 2:57-58).

The fifth hadith does not denote that Imams' names are explicitly mentioned in the Quran; rather, it means that the subject of walāya is discussed in the Quran; e.g., the Event of Ghadīr al-Khumm, or the virtues and merits of certain people, the clearest example of whom would be Imams.

The sixth hadith is about semantic distortion. Other hadiths emphasize the semantic distortion of the Quran and the protection of its words and phrases (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 6:446).

These hadiths, therefore, do not denote a distortion of the Quran, and Amir-Moezzi's views on this are due to his failure to understand the true

meaning of these hadiths. The differences in these hadiths do not deal with the text of the Quran; rather, they are due to the addition of an interpretation, the circumstance of revelation, or examples.

Conclusion

The present research demonstrates that a large percentage (fifty-seven percent) of the text on Imams' knowledge is about "knowledge of the hidden," confirming the claim made by Amir-Moezzi that, in the early sources, the Imam possesses supernatural "knowledge." However, by analyzing the content of hadiths about Imams' knowledge in the two important books of the School of Baghdad, namely al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād* and al-Ṭūsī's *al-Amālī*, his other claim that some of the teachings on Imamate with esoteric transcendental aspects are rejected in the School of Baghdad is not entirely confirmed. Because, as shown above, the School of Baghdad, just like that of Qom, also accepted Imams' knowledge of the hidden, and it has transmitted numerous hadiths on the subject. The only difference is that certain aspects of Imams' knowledge of the hidden have only been mentioned in *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*. As a result, a drawback in Amir-Moezzi's methodology is lack of full examination of certain Shiite sources of hadith and lack of attention to some of the hadiths. Therefore, his interpretation of Shiism is one-dimensional and this has been illustrated as a secretive esoteric sect.

Overall, it is concluded that both rational and esoteric Shiism is rooted in *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* and early Shiite sources without any extremism. Notably, Imams have cursed extreme esotericism and have not approved of exclusive jurisprudence without spiritual teaching (Saffār al-Qummī 1394 Sh, 1161-82)

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