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بازخوانی کتاب «علی، رازِ خوش‌نگه داشته‌شده: چهره‌های نخستین استاد در معنویت شیعی» اثر محمدعلی امیرمعزی

باقر ریاحی‌مهر[1] ✉

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چکیده

هدف: این پژوهش با هدف نقد و ارزیابی انتقادی کتاب «علی، رازِ خوش‌نگه داشته‌شده» نوشته محمدعلی امیرمعزی انجام شده است تا بازسازی پدیدارشناختی و تطبیقی چهره امام علی(ع) در معنویت نخستین شیعی و میزان اعتبار فرضیه‌های روش‌شناختی آن بررسی گردد.

روش پژوهش: این مطالعه با استفاده از روش مرور و نقد انتقادی-تحلیلی، به واکاوی بخش‌های سه‌گانه کتاب (شامل جایگاه امام در نسبت با قرآن و پیامبر، ابعاد ربانی امام، و افق‌های عرفانی متون متقدم شیعی) و تطبیق آن با اصول قرآنی، معناشناختی و متون اصیل اسلامی می‌پردازد.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌های نقد نشان می‌دهد که مؤلف علی‌رغم ارائه مباحث ارزشمند در عرفان شیعی، از چارچوب‌های خاورشناسانه‌ای بهره برده که با اصول قرآنی ناسازگارند؛ از جمله تشکیک در منابع اصیل (سیره و تفسیر)، نفی کاربرد واژه «مسلمین» در صدر اسلام، و ریشه‌یابی‌های گمانه‌زنانه برای واژگان قرآنی در زبان‌های آرامی یا سریانی که موجب انحراف در فهم حقیقت ولایت شده است.

نتیجه‌گیری: فهم درست و دقیق از مقام والا و معنویت امام علی(ع) تنها از طریق چارچوب درونی سنت اسلامی، تفسیر قرآن و تعالیم اصیل اهل بیت(ع) امکان‌پذیر است و بی‌نیاز از اتکا به خوانش‌های برون‌دینی و حدسیات تاریخی-زبانی می‌باشد.

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Re-reading "Ali, The Well-Guarded Secret: Figures of the First Master in Shi'i Spirituality" by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to critically evaluate Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi's book *Ali, the Well-Guarded Secret: Figures of the First Master in Shi'i Spirituality*, analyzing its phenomenological and comparative reconstruction of Imam ʿAlī (a.s) in early Shiʿi spirituality and assessing the validity of its methodological assumptions.

Methodology: The research employs a critical-analytical review methodology, examining the book's three-part structure—spanning the Imam's relationship to the Qur'an/Prophet, his divine/lordly aspects (*al-janbah al-rabbāniyyah*), and mystical text horizons—against foundational Qur'anic, semantic, and Islamic historical frameworks.

Findings: The study finds that while the book offers insights into Shiʿi mysticism, Amir-Moezzi relies on problematic Orientalist premises: skepticism toward primary Islamic sources (*sīrah* and *tafsīr*), rejection of the term *Muslimīn* for early Islam, and reductionist Syriac/Aramaic etymological conjectures. These non-Qur'anic frameworks distort the authentic station of *Wilāyah*.

Conclusion: An accurate understanding of Imam ʿAlī (a.s.) and Shiʿi spirituality must be grounded in the internal logic of the Qur'an and authentic Ahl al-Bayt teachings, rather than external, conjectural interpretive readings.

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Introduction

The book Ali, the Well-Guarded Secret: Figures of the First Master in Shi'i Spirituality (Persian: ʿAli, Rāz-e Sar-be-Mehr: Sīmā-ye Nukhustīn Imām dar Maʿnaviyyat-e Shīʿī), authored by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, occupies a distinctive position within the field of Shiʿi studies, not through a conventional historiographical portrayal of the figure of Imam ʿAli, but through a rigorous examination of specific and comparatively less-explored dimensions of his spiritual persona. From the outset, the author clarifies that the purpose of the work is not to provide an exhaustive study encompassing every dimension of the historical and spiritual character of the First Imam, but rather to focus on a selected constellation of aspects that play a foundational and formative role within the framework of Shiʿi spirituality, particularly within Twelver (Imamate) Shiʿism. This approach distinguishes the work from general and descriptive literature and places it within the category of thematic and text-based scholarly inquiry.

In compiling this volume, Amir-Moezzi draws upon a corpus of academic papers previously published in reputable peer-reviewed journals or presented at academic forums. Having substantially revised and updated these studies, he brings them together in a manner that establishes a coherent overarching structure and an organic relationship among the chapters. This arrangement prevents thematic fragmentation and clarifies the author's intellectual trajectory for the reader. Consequently, the chapters are not intended to be read in isolation; rather, they engage in a dynamic dialogue with one another, allowing the broader conception of *"the spiritual persona of Imam ʿAli (a.s.)"* to emerge organically from their interconnected treatment.

The book is organized into three principal parts, each comprising designated chapters that address a specific sphere of scholarly inquiry. A precise delineation of this structure, followed by an exposition and critical analysis of each part, therefore constitutes an essential first step toward understanding the significance and scope of the author's scholarly enterprise.

Part One: Characteristics of Imam ʿAli (a.s.)

This part comprises three chapters, each examining a distinct dimension of Imam ʿAli's relationship with the Islamic and Qur'anic heritage, as well as with the theological and devotional orientations of the early Shiʿites.

Chapter One: ʿAli and the Qur'an

In this chapter, the author explores the multilayered relationship between the Imam and the Qur'an, ranging from his role as an authoritative exegete

(*mufassir*) and the object of interpretation to the point at which he himself becomes the ultimate object of divine revelation. These two statuses are intertwined with the dual postulate concerning the *"human and divine nature of the Imam."* From this perspective, the groundwork is laid for the emergence of the hypothesis concerning the *"identification of ʿAli with Christ"*, a view supported through reference to several early Shiʿi traditional texts and an emphasis on the convergence of the spiritual stations of the two figures (Amir-Moezzi, 2014, pp. 669–704).

Chapter Two: Muhammad Is the Paraclete and ʿAli Is the Messiah

This chapter is constructed around an analogy rooted in the relationship between the Prophet of Islam and the biblical scriptural tradition. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUHH) announces the imminent advent of the end of the world and thereby assumes a role analogous to that of the *"herald of the Messiah"* (the Paraclete / *Fāriqlīṭ*). However, unlike certain hadith traditions, the Qur'an does not explicitly designate Jesus (the Messiah) as the eschatological savior of the end times. In early Shiʿi texts, the spiritual identity of ʿAli is presented as corresponding to and commensurate with that of Jesus. Consequently, the Imam emerges as occupying the transcendent station of the "*eschatological savior"* (Amir-Moezzi, 2016a, pp. 19–54).

Chapter Three: Remarks on the Expression *Dīn ʿAli* and the Origins of Shiʿi Faith

The unconventional and archaic expression *Dīn ʿAli* ("the Religion of ʿAli") found in early sources constitutes the subject of this chapter. The author examines its distinction from the religion of the Prophet Muhammad ("Islam") and elucidates the distinctive dimensions of this terminology. From a historical perspective, this concept signifies the extraordinary and exceptional status of the First Imam among the Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*), representing a form of spiritual and doctrinal autonomy within the framework of his religious system (Amir-Moezzi, 2000, pp. 29–68).

Part Two: Half Human, Half Divine

The four chapters in this part explore the esoteric (*bāṭinī*) and mystical dimensions of the Imam's station within Shiʿi scholastic theology (*kalām*) and the ancient spiritual heritage.

Chapter Four: Remarks on the Divinity and Lordliness of the Imam

The Imam is presented as the locus of manifestation of the Divine Names and Attributes. This analysis reveals the esoteric depth of Shiʿi thought concerning divine-human leadership (Amir-Moezzi, 1996, pp. 193–216).

Chapter Five: The Five Spirits of the Divine Man

This chapter elucidates the fivefold spiritual structure of the *"divine man"*, a concept that bears affinities with Gospel traditions of Late Antiquity and Manichaean teachings. Within this framework, the *"Holy Spirit"* (*Rūḥ al-Qudus*), as the supreme faculty among the intellectual and spiritual faculties of the divine man, plays a pivotal role in the direct reception of divine inspiration (Amir-Moezzi, 2015, pp. 297–320).

Chapter Six: The Night of Qadr (Qur'an, Sūrat al-Qadr) in Early Shiʿism

This chapter presents the *"Night of Destiny"* (*Laylat al-Qadr*) as the consecrated locus and temporal matrix for the Imam's reception of specific divine inspirations, offering a comprehensive rereading of the esoteric Shiʿi exegesis of Sūrat al-Qadr (Amir-Moezzi, 2016b, pp. 181–204).

Chapter Seven: *Taqiyyah* and the Seal of Prophethood

This chapter investigates the question of the *"continuation of prophecy/inspiration"* through the Imam and its apparent tension with the mainstream Sunni doctrine of the *"Finality of Prophethood"* (*Khatm al-Nubuwwah*). The author argues that, under the coercive pressure of Sunni orthodoxy, the Imams resorted to the prudent strategy of *"dissimulation"* (*taqiyyah*) to conceal the doctrine of continuous revelatory inspiration without fundamentally denying it (Amir-Moezzi, 2014, pp. 411–438; Amir-Moezzi, 2017, pp. 3–27).

Part Three: Spiritual Horizons

This part consists of two chapters that demonstrate the continuity of spiritual devotion to Imam ʿAli and its mystical and artistic manifestations in the later and contemporary periods.

Chapter Eight: *Al-Durr al-Thamīn* Attributed to Rajab al-Bursī

(Five Hundred Qur'anic Verses Concerning Imam ʿAli, Peace Be Upon Him)

An analytical examination of the mystical-exegetical treatise of Rajab al-Bursī—one of the prominent figures in Imamate mystical thought—constitutes the core of this chapter. The author approaches this treatise as a distinct form of Shiʿi *"personalized Qur'anic commentary"* that reveals what he characterizes as the true mystical religion of the First Imam (Amir-Moezzi, 2017, pp. 207–240).

Chapter Nine: Icon and Contemplation

(ʿAli as the Face of God and the Foundation of Contemplation)

This chapter examines the spiritual and contemplative function of images and iconographic representations of Imam ʿAli in modern Shiʿi Sufism. These representations are regarded not merely as devotional instruments for spiritual seekers (*sālikūn*), but also as a profound means of internalizing the living presence of the Imam within the hearts of the faithful (Amir-Moezzi, 2010, pp. 1–12; Amir-Moezzi, 2018, pp. 87–103).

Analysis of the Approach and Significance of the Work

From a methodological standpoint, the book is based on close textual analysis of early Shiʿi sources and the application of interreligious comparative analysis, particularly between Islam and Christianity and between Islam and Manichaeism. Rather than adopting a linear historiographical approach, Amir-Moezzi traces a complex network of concepts and symbols situated within the intellectual and religious context of the formative centuries of Islam. His treatment of the persona of Imam ʿAli is characterized by a "phenomenological" approach to the Imam's spiritual persona; that is, it focuses on how the Imam's spirituality was manifested and experienced within the inner consciousness and spiritual imagination of his earliest followers, rather than limiting the inquiry to external historical chronicles.

A distinctive feature of the work is its sustained attention to intertextual and cross-cultural continuities. For instance, in the opening chapters, the relationship between the status of Imam ʿAli and imagery derived from earlier sacred scriptures concerning the eschatological savior is examined in a manner that allows the reader to discern parallel theological trajectories between the Christian and Shiʿi traditions. This approach contributes to an understanding of how "Shiʿi faith" crystallized, suggesting that it was not an isolated phenomenon generated purely *ex nihilo* within the first century of the Islamic era, but rather emerged through dynamic interaction and profound engagement with pre-existing theological and symbolic repertoires.

Furthermore, through an in-depth examination of concepts such as *Dīn ʿAli*, the *"divinity/lordliness of the Imam,"* and the *"perpetuation of revelation,"* the book argues that, during the earliest centuries, the theological boundaries between Shiʿism and Sunnism had not yet developed into rigid and closed dogmatic systems. The doctrinal dynamism of that period allowed for diverse intellectual possibilities, a significant number of which Amir-Moezzi brings to the fore in this work. From the perspective of contemporary scholarship, the concluding section of the book is particularly significant: the author examines the continuing spiritual presence of Imam

ʿAli through the living traditions of iconography and contemplation in modern Shiʿi Sufism. Thus, the study extends beyond antiquity into the present, establishing a living connection between the ancient heritage and the contemporary spiritual experience of believers.

In the view of this reviewer, *Ali, the Well-Guarded Secret: Figures of the First Master in Shi'i Spirituality* is a scholarly work that transcends a merely historiographical inquiry and leads the reader into the profound domain of Shiʿi spirituality and esoteric theology. Its three-part structure begins with the Qur'anic and devotional characteristics of the Imam, proceeds to an ontological analysis of his divine-human nature, and ultimately explores the spiritual and artistic horizons of his continuing presence. Through textual rigor and comparative analysis, each chapter contributes not only to historical understanding but also to a deeper theological comprehension of the First Shiʿi Imam. By combining scholarly rigor, fidelity to textual sources, and intellectual boldness in exploring new interpretive horizons, the book makes a significant contribution to the literature on comparative Shiʿi and intercultural studies and occupies a distinctive position among scholarly works devoted to Islamic spirituality and Imamological studies.

Evaluation, Critique, and Academic Recommendations

While *ʿAli: The Well-Guarded Secret* constitutes a distinguished and thought-provoking contribution to the study of the spiritual and mystical dimensions of Imam ʿAli's persona within the Shiʿi tradition, its treatment of Qur'anic and historiographical foundations reveals certain analytical shortcomings that affect the coherence of its argumentative framework. In some sections, the author's approach to the Qur'an and Hadith departs from the methodological standards generally expected in Islamic studies, relying on conjectural interpretations that neither accord with the historical and linguistic context of the Qur'an nor withstand the evidence provided by primary Islamic textual sources. A prominent example is the author's argument concerning the chronology of the emergence of the terms *"Islam"* and *"Muslims"* and their alleged connection with the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān. Amir-Moezzi maintains that, until the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, the Prophet and his followers were identified primarily by the designation "the Believers" (*Muʾminūn*), and that the terms *"Islam"* and *"Muslims"* acquired broader currency only after the establishment of the Umayyad imperial apparatus and through the official coinage of that period. This interpretation is grounded primarily in a socio-political and

historiographical reading of the institutionalization of the Prophetic polity (*Madīnat al-Nabī*) as a cultural-religious system, rather than in an internal and text-critical examination of the Qur'anic evidence.

In evaluating this premise, it is first necessary to emphasize that the Qur'anic use of the term *Muʾminūn* ("the Believers") functions fundamentally as a description of those characterized by faith (*waṣf al-īmān*), rather than exclusively as a communal designation for a distinct religious identity. The Qur'an itself demonstrates that believers are identified by their faith in God, the Prophet, and divine revelation; this does not, however, entail that their religion was formally designated as "Faith" (*Īmān*). Conversely, the terms *Muslimūn/Muslimīn* in the Qur'an do not merely function as descriptive adjectives denoting those who submit; they also designate a community whose name is explicitly attributed to God: *"He named you Muslims before and in this [revelation]"* (Sūrat al-Ḥajj, Qur'an 22:78).

Accordingly, the Qur'anic evidence indicates that the designation "Muslims" belongs to the community from the earliest period of Qur'anic revelation. On this basis, the proposition that Umayyad coinage constituted the catalyst for the emergence of this designation is historically and textually difficult to sustain. Official coinage may be understood as an instrument through which an already established religious and communal identity was publicly institutionalized, rather than as the primary mechanism through which such terminology was originally created. Thus, ʿAbd al-Malik's administration may be understood as having incorporated the terms *"Islam"* and *"Muslims"* more explicitly into the official administrative and symbolic apparatus of the empire at a time when the terms were already attested within the Qur'anic and Islamic textual tradition, rather than as having constituted the *terminus a quo* of their emergence.

The second foundational weakness in Amir-Moezzi's methodology concerns his systematic skepticism toward early Islamic sources. He explicitly argues that the accounts preserved by early Muslims, traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*), and early chroniclers concerning the period of revelation and the compilation of the Qur'an are inherently unreliable, and maintains that research into this period should instead draw upon contemporaneous non-Islamic sources, particularly Jewish and Christian texts and the administrative records of neighboring empires. While such an approach may appear attractive from the perspective of cross-cultural historical comparison, it risks creating a methodological circularity (*dawr bāṭil*).

During the early centuries of Islam, there was no non-Arab or non-Muslim historian who directly witnessed the events of the Prophetic period

and systematically documented the Prophet's biography (*sīrah*) and the emergence of Islam. Much of the historical knowledge available to us concerning this period was transmitted through early Muslim scholarly circles and is preserved in works associated with figures such as Ibn Isḥāq, Ibn Hishām, al-Wāqidī, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Balādhurī. To dismiss these sources categorically as unreliable would leave the reconstruction of early Islamic history without a substantial portion of its primary evidentiary base. This is particularly significant given that many Western Orientalists themselves relied extensively upon these Islamic sources in constructing their accounts of early Islam, rather than depending exclusively on external documentation. Consequently, a wholesale rejection of Islamic primary texts risks undermining a fundamental evidentiary foundation of historical inquiry into the formative period of Islam.

Moreover, by placing primary emphasis on thematic affinities between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and advocating comparative readings of ancient religious texts, Amir-Moezzi at times reaches conclusions that may portray the Qur'an as a syncretic product of intersecting Abrahamic traditions. From the perspective of the Qur'anic conception of revelation, however, the essential unity of the divine religions (*al-waḥdah al-jawhariyyah li-l-adyān*) signifies continuity in the source and fundamental message of revelation rather than imitation or derivative dependence (Rezaei Isfahani & Karimi, 1400/2021). The verse, *"Say: O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you"* (Sūrat Āl ʿImrān, Qur'an 3:64), illustrates the Qur'anic recognition of a common revelatory foundation among the Abrahamic traditions. Such commonality may be understood as spiritual convergence (*tawārud maʿnawī*), rather than as evidence that the Qur'an was excerpted from or derived from earlier scriptures. The Qur'an simultaneously presents itself as a criterion (*muhaymin*) over previous revelation and addresses what it portrays as distortions (*taḥrīf*) and deviations within the religious traditions of the People of the Book. Accordingly, its relationship with earlier revelation is not adequately described through a model of simple borrowing or textual dependence; rather, it involves affirmation, correction, clarification, and theological differentiation. If comparative analysis of conceptual affinities between Islamic revelation and biblical texts is allowed to move beyond the framework of spiritual and revelatory convergence, it risks diminishing the Qur'an's claim to the distinctive and transcendent character of its revelation. Comparative scholarship should therefore attend not merely to lexical and thematic similarities, but also to semantic development, textual context, and revelatory intentionality in order to illuminate differences in ultimate purpose and theological orientation (cf. Rezaei Isfahani & Karimi, 1400/2021).

Furthermore, Amir-Moezzi's assessment of the phenomenon of abrogation (*al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*) in the Qur'an reflects, from the perspective adopted in this review, a deficiency in accounting for the theological and jurisprudential logic underlying the progressive development of legal rulings (*sharīʿah*). He characterizes abrogation as a construct developed by early Muslims to resolve what they perceived as internal contradictions within the Qur'an. In contrast, the Qur'an itself explicitly refers to the reality of abrogation in Sūrat al-Baqarah, verse 106: *"We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth [one] better than it or similar to it"*. Within the Islamic jurisprudential framework, abrogation does not necessarily signify contradiction or inconsistency; rather, it can be understood as an expression of the progressive character of divine legislation, whereby legal ordinances are revealed in accordance with the changing circumstances and stages of development of the Muslim community (*ummah*). Thus, where the Qur'an instructs believers during a particular period to *"restrain your hands [from fighting]"* (Sūrat al-Nisāʾ, Qur'an 4:77), and later commands, *"Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you"* (Sūrat al-Baqarah, Qur'an 2:190), the transition may be interpreted within the framework of gradual legislative guidance (*al-tashrīʿ al-tadrījī*) rather than as evidence of inconsistency within divine revelation. Accordingly, interpreting abrogation primarily as a manifestation of internal contradiction may arise from insufficient consideration of its theological and jurisprudential foundations and of the historical development of legal ordinances, rather than from an intrinsic inconsistency in the Qur'anic text.

Another methodological limitation in Amir-Moezzi's work concerns what appears to be an insufficiently nuanced understanding of the Qur'anic mode of narration. He interprets the thematic distribution of prophetic narratives across different Sūrahs as an indication of textual fragmentation, whereas this feature may instead be understood as one of the Qur'an's distinctive rhetorical and pedagogical characteristics. The Qur'an does not present prophetic narratives merely as historical accounts or for the sake of entertainment; rather, it presents them for moral admonition, spiritual insight, and instruction: *"There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding"* (Sūrat Yūsuf, Qur'an 12:111). The deliberate distribution of different episodes of a single narrative across multiple Sūrahs is governed by thematic considerations: each Sūrah presents those elements of the narrative that correspond to its broader theological and rhetorical purpose, thereby contributing to a coherent framework of guidance and spiritual instruction. A continuous, uniformly chronological narrative

constructed primarily for dramatic storytelling belongs more properly to certain forms of literary historiography and fiction than to the distinctive mode of revelatory discourse. Accordingly, evaluating the structural coherence of the Qur'an exclusively according to the conventions of secular or linear storytelling risks overlooking the rhetorical, theological, and pedagogical principles that govern Qur'anic narration.

Another questionable aspect of the author's approach is his recourse to ancient Aramaic and Syriac languages in interpreting certain Qur'anic terms. The comparative study of cognate Semitic roots, when conducted within sound historical and lexicographical parameters, can contribute to the study of the development of vocabulary. Nevertheless, within the semantic system of the Qur'an, words operate within the Arabic linguistic and cultural environment of revelation and acquire meanings that must be examined in their immediate textual and revelatory contexts. For instance, Amir-Moezzi derives the term *"Qur'an"* from the Syriac *qeryānā*, understood as referring to a "lectionary" or "liturgical prayer book." While this hypothesis may be of historical and comparative-linguistic interest, it does not adequately account for the internal Arabic morphology and Qur'anic usage of the term. Within Arabic morphology, *Qur'an* is understood as a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) associated with the root q-r-ʾ, conveying the meanings of reading and recitation: *"So when We have recited it [through Gabriel], then follow its recitation"* (Sūrat al-Qiyāmah, Qur'an 75:18). The Qur'anic context therefore associates the term with recitation and its attentive reception, rather than restricting its meaning to that of a liturgical book.

As in other languages, Arabic vocabulary may undergo semantic development in response to changes in usage and context. The Persian word *Inqilāb* ("revolution"), for example, illustrates how a term may acquire a specialized sociopolitical meaning beyond its earlier lexical sense of turning or transformation. Similar processes of semantic development can occur within Arabic. Nevertheless, linguistic analysis that detaches Qur'anic terms from the linguistic, cultural, and textual context of the period of revelation risks producing conclusions that do not adequately reflect their Qur'anic meanings. An accurate study of Qur'anic vocabulary therefore requires consideration of the internal evidence of the Qur'anic text alongside the historical development of Arabic usage and the testimony of authoritative classical Arabic lexicons, including al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī's *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, al-Jawharī's *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, and Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-ʿArab*, which preserve and document lexical meanings within the historical and linguistic tradition of Arabic.

Another contention in Amir-Moezzi's work that warrants scholarly reconsideration is his substantial reliance on the theory of textual alteration (*taḥrīf*) in his examination of Qur'anic texts and variant readings (*qirāʾāt*). In his analysis, he refers to the alleged omission of certain verses concerning Imam ʿAli (a.s.), whereas traditions transmitted from the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and the authoritative works of prominent Shiʿi theologians affirm the preservation, integrity, and divine protection (*ṣiyānah*) of the Qur'an (Rezaei Isfahani & Karimi, 1405/2026; Amir-Moezzi, 1404/2025, pp. 33–37). If the historical adversaries of the Commander of the Faithful (*Amīr al-Muʾminīn*, a.s.) were unable to eliminate his extensive virtues (*faḍāʾil*) from the documentary record of Sunni traditions, it is difficult to explain how they could have successfully removed Qur'anic verses concerning him, particularly in a period when numerous memorizers (*ḥuffāẓ*) and reciters (*qurrāʾ*) were present throughout the major centers of the Islamic world.

Moreover, the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) did not, in their theological and intellectual disputations, treat the alleged textual alteration of the Qur'an as an established doctrinal issue requiring the restoration of omitted verses. Likewise, major Shiʿi theologians such as Shaykh al-Mufīd did not advocate the reinstatement of allegedly excised Qur'anic verses in their theological writings. The sustained defense of the Qur'an's freedom from textual alteration by Shiʿi scholars in classical Baghdad therefore reflects their commitment to the integrity of revelation rather than a tactical withdrawal from previously held doctrinal positions. Accordingly, the hypothesis of Qur'anic textual alteration, insofar as it is advanced on the basis of conjectural interpretations rather than compelling historical and textual evidence, cannot be adequately established through the Islamic primary sources themselves and appears to derive in significant measure from interpretive frameworks associated with certain Orientalist approaches, toward which Amir-Moezzi appears to have inclined (Amir-Moezzi, 1404/2025, pp. 33–37).

In overall synthesis, it may be argued that Amir-Moezzi's methodology in Qur'anic studies, notwithstanding its innovative comparative perspective and sustained attention to the esoteric dimensions of ʿAlid spirituality, requires substantial methodological reconstruction along four foundational axes:

1.Reaffirming the authority and reliability of early Islamic primary sources as an indispensable foundation for the reconstruction of early Islamic history;

2. Distinguishing revelatory convergence (*tawārud waḥyānī*) from interreligious syncretism and imitation in comparative religious analysis;

3. Adhering to the internal logic of the Arabic language and the classical exegetical tradition (*tafsīr*) when establishing the meanings and semantic development of Qur'anic vocabulary;

4. Critically reassessing Orientalist presuppositions concerning the origins, transmission, and redaction of the Qur'an, rather than accepting them without sufficient examination.

Only within such an integrated epistemological framework can scholarly research into the spiritual persona of Imam ʿAli and the historical and intellectual roots of Shiʿi faith yield methodologically robust and academically defensible conclusions, rather than relying predominantly on analogies derived from external premises that may diverge from the internal coherence of the Islamic textual and intellectual tradition. If Amir-Moezzi were to engage more fully with the evidentiary and interpretive capacities of Islamic primary sources, rather than approaching them primarily through a framework of historical skepticism, his scholarship could move beyond unresolved conjectures toward a more comprehensive understanding of the religious and spiritual dimensions of Imam ʿAli.

Conclusion

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi's *'Ali, the Well-Guarded Secret: Figures of the First Master in Shi'i Spirituality'* represents an ambitious attempt to reread the persona of Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) within the framework of Shiʿi spirituality, navigating the interconnected domains of theological interpretation, mystical hermeneutics (*taʾwīl*), and interreligious comparison. The work makes a valuable contribution to the study of the symbolic and spiritual structures of early Shiʿism and opens new avenues for understanding the depth and complexity of the Shiʿi religious experience. Nevertheless, when the author moves beyond the analysis of spiritual and mystical dimensions to reconstruct the historical origins of the Qur'an and Islam, his arguments encounter significant methodological weaknesses and historiographical difficulties.

In his Orientalist methodological framework, Amir-Moezzi at times distances his analysis from the linguistic and textual foundations of the Islamic tradition and situates aspects of the history of revelation within external cultural and comparative hypotheses. Consequently, his representation of the Qur'an may at times tend toward an interpretation that gives insufficient consideration to its claim to divine revelation. This is particularly significant given that Islamic primary sources and the extensive

exegetical tradition contain substantial conceptual and textual resources for examining the spiritual and symbolic development of the image of Imam ʿAli (a.s.). In light of the methodological criticisms discussed above, the reconstruction of Imam ʿAli's persona within Shiʿi spirituality can be rendered more coherent and comprehensive when grounded in the Qur'an and the transmitted teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), while also engaging critically with relevant historical and comparative evidence.

Ultimately, although the book contains methodological and analytical difficulties in certain aspects of its treatment of Qur'anic and historical questions, its exploration of the intersection of mysticism, theology, and Imamate (*Wilāyah*) constitutes a noteworthy and intellectually ambitious contribution. Scholarly engagement with the work should therefore not take the form of wholesale rejection, but rather of critical assessment and constructive completion. Through sustained textual criticism, methodological refinement, and critical examination of its historical and hermeneutical premises, it is possible to develop a more precise and comprehensive account of the transcendent spiritual persona of Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) within the intellectual and religious history of Shiʿism.

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