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ARTICLE

Apocalypticism and prognostication in early Shiʿi literature

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Abstract

This article studies the origins of *Jafr*, an apocalyptic, eschatological and occult book attributed to the first Shiʿi imam, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661). While it remains unclear whether *Jafr* was ever physically composed, it became associated with lettrism (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) in medieval Sunni and Shiʿi literature. *Jafr* gradually evolved into a crucial component of Islamic occult traditions and influenced various cosmological theories as well as the letter-magic practices of prominent Sunni and Shiʿi occultists. Despite its historical significance, confusion regarding *Jafr*'s roots, authorship and content in Shiʿi sources from the third to fifth centuries AH persists in scholarship. This article examines various aspects of *Jafr* in early Shiʿi tradition and sheds light on its status as a key text of messianism, prognostication and apocalypticism.

Keywords: apocalypticism; Jafr; *ʿilm al-ḥurūf* (lettrism); occult sciences; prognostication; Shiʿi Imamate

> Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood
> there wondering, fearing,
> Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortals ever dared
> to dream before.[1]

Introduction

In 1951, the renowned historian of science Otto E. Neugebauer made an important observation that still holds significance for scholars of Islamic studies today. He urged historians of science to seriously study "wretched subjects". Neugebauer warned that by dismissing certain texts as superstitious and irrelevant, we "destroy the very foundations of our studies: the recovery and study of the texts as they are, regardless of our own tastes and prejudices".[2] Neugebauer's call is particularly relevant to ongoing debates about the boundaries of science, especially discussions about incorporating the study of occult practices, such as

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven*, illus. Gustave Doré (New York, 1884), 20.
[2] Otto Neugebauer, *Astronomy and History: Selected Essays* (New York, 1983), 3.

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astrology, geomancy, numerology and lettrism, into the broader history and classification of science.[3]

Over the last two decades, scholarship on occult sciences has moved beyond clichéd dismissals that reduce them to mere superstitions and overlook their relevance to Islamic studies. One branch of occult sciences that has garnered significant scholarly attention is lettrism (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*).[4] It gradually became associated with the science of *Jafr* (*ʿilm al-jafr*) in medieval Islam, a term derived from the name of a mysterious book called *Jafr*. This text as well as other works attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, such as *Jāmiʿa* and the Book of ʿAlī (*Kitāb ʿAlī*), have historically shaped his image as the principal source of esoteric, apocalyptic and occult knowledge.[5] Consequently, the science of *Jafr* has often become synonymous with lettrism, which constitutes a prognostic, apocalyptic and metaphysical branch of occult sciences in medieval and modern Islamicate societies.[6]

Various Sunni and Shiʿi occultists, such as Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 1225), Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa (d. 1254), Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī (d. 1397), Ibn Turka Iṣfahānī (d. 1432), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 1454) and Maḥmūd Dihdār (fl. 1576), wrote treatises on *Jafr* or incorporated it into their cosmological theories and practical grimoires. Today, lettrism is sometimes known as *Jafr* and is widely practised across the Islamic world, and its manuals are easily accessible on popular and social media, as well as in widely available Persian, Arabic, Urdu and Turkish texts.[7] Despite *Jafr*'s rich and significant history among Muslims, there is still no dedicated study of its origins in Western scholarship, and much confusion remains

[3] See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Introduction: de-orienting the study of Islamicate occultism", *Arabica* 64/3–4, 2017, 287–95.

[4] For studies on lettrism, see Noah Gardiner, "Lettrism and history in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī's Naẓm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk", in Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Farouk Yahya (eds), *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden, 2021), 230–66; Noah Gardiner, "Diagrams and visionary experience in al-Būnī's (d. 622/1225) Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyyāt", in Giovanni Maria Martini (ed.), *Visualizing Sufism: Studies on Graphic Representations in Sufi Literature (13th to 16th Century)* (Leiden, 2023), 16–50; Mohammad Amin Mansouri, "Walāya between lettrism and astrology: the occult mysticism of Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. c. 787/1385)", *Journal of Sufi Studies* 9/2, 2021, 161–201; Mohammad Amin Mansouri, "In the name of letters: Basmala as the cosmic design", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 145/2, 381–400; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Of Islamic grammatology: Ibn Turka's lettrist metaphysics of light", *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 24, 2016, 42–113; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "World as (Arabic) text: Mīr Dāmād and the neopythagoreanization of philosophy in Safavid Iran", *Studia Islamica* 114/3, 2019, 378–431; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Pseudo-Shaykh Bahāʾī on the Supreme Name, a Safavid-Qajar lettrist classic", in Jamal Elias and Bilal Orfali (eds), *Light upon Light: Essays in Islamic Thought and History in Honor of Gerhard Bowering* (Leiden, 2020), 256–90; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Being with a capital B: Ibn Turka on Ibn ʿArabī's lettrist cosmogony", in Mohammed Rustom (ed.), *Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation* (Leiden, 2023), 150–77; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Safavid Twelver lettrism between Sunnism and Shiʿism, mysticism and science: Rajab al-Bursī vs. Maḥmūd Dihdār", *Global Intellectual History* 8 /4, 2023, 1–38.

[5] For this aspect of ʿAlī's image, see Mohammad Amin Mansouri, "The greatest name of God: ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as a cosmic image in Rajab al-Bursī's Mashāriq al-Anwār", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, 2024, 687–710.

[6] Lettrism should not be equated with *Jafr*, as the former refers to a broad range of esoteric, cosmological and magical interpretations of letters, divine names and various elements of language. See Mansouri, "In the name of letters". Also, occult sciences in the medieval Islamic world were part of the broader classification of sciences. Matthew Melvin-Koushki demonstrated that occult sciences in the Perso-Islamic world underwent a significant epistemological shift from being classified as natural sciences, following the Aristotelian-Avicennian framework, to being increasingly classified as mathematical and Neoplatonic-Pythagorean sciences. This transformation, or the "mathematicalization" of occult sciences, played a crucial but often overlooked role in the intellectual history of science in the post-Mongol period. Notably, narratives about *Jafr* also became popular during this period. The emergence of *Jafr* as a dominant occult science was partly a consequence of this epistemological shift in medieval Islamic thought, during which sciences such as lettrism, astrology and geomancy became central to both imperial ideology and intellectual history. See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of one: the mathematicalization of the occult sciences in the High Persianate tradition", *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 5/1–2, 2017, 127–99.

[7] For references to various books on *Jafr*, see Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe: Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l'Islam* (Leiden, 1966), 219–24.

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regarding the work's alleged authorship, content and particularly its broader role in early Shiʿi sources from the third to fifth centuries.[8] To address this gap, this article examines the origins, development and significance of *Jafr* in early Shiʿi literature and contributes to the growing scholarship on occult sciences and esotericism in Islamic studies.[9] It presents a historical and intellectual context for scholars interested in occult sciences, esotericism, Shiʿism and "wretched" academic subjects, which are often overlooked due to academic trends that dismiss the occult and esoteric as insignificant or absurd.[10]

Jafr, which is often mentioned along with another book titled *Jāmiʿa* in Shiʿi sources, is part of a larger tradition in which various hidden, esoteric and apocalyptic books are attributed to the Prophet's family, and these texts show their access to sacred knowledge that was passed down to them through the Prophet. Alongside these texts, *Kitāb ʿAlī* stands

[8] Although this article focuses on early Twelver Shiʿi literature, early Ismaili sources also display a consistent fascination with Arabic letters and their occult properties. The first cosmological pair, *kūnī* and *qadar*, symbolizes the intellect (*ʿaql*) and the soul (*nafs*) in these sources, and their seven letters (*k-w-n-y-q-d-r*) are linked to the seven celestial spheres and the seven speakers of the Ismaili tradition. See Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 2004), 198–9; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, second ed. (Cambridge, 2007), 134–5; Heinz Halm, "The cosmology of the Pre-Fatimid Ismāʿīliyya", in Farhad Daftary (ed.), *Medieval Ismaʿili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), 75–83; S.M. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism* (Jerusalem, 1983), 3–29; Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge, 1993), 30, 47. These cosmological ideas are absent from early Twelver sources, but *Jafr* traditions appear to have been integrated into early Ismaili thought. However, the nature and scope of these connections remain understudied. For example, a fragment ascribed to Muḥammad ibn Sinān (d. 220/835) in the early Ismaili text *Kitāb taʾwīl al-ḥurūf al-muʿjam* presents *Jafr* as a repository of secret knowledge passed from the Prophet to ʿAlī. See David Hollenberg, "Anta anā wa-anā minka ('You are me, and I am from you'): a Quasi-Nuṣayrī fragment on the intellect in the early Ismāʿīlī treatise *Kitāb Taʾwīl ḥurūf al-muʿjam*", in Joseph E. Lowry and Shawkat M. Toorawa (eds), *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett K. Rowson* (Leiden, 2017), 50–66.

[9] Most Western studies of *Jafr*, which also contain short sections on its role in Shiʿism, have thus far been encyclopedic and preliminary. See Noah Gardiner, "Jafr", in Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Devin J. Stewart (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_32687; Gernot Windfuhr, "Jafr", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/jafr; Toufic Fahd, "D̲jafr", in P.J. Bearman (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online*, https://referenceworks.brill.com/display/entries/EIEO/SIM-1924.xml?rskey=ZeiYM8&result=1&ebody=metrics-126131; D.B. Macdonald, "D̲jafr", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam First Edition Online*, https://referenceworks.brill.com/display/entries/EI1O/SIM-1973.xml?rskey=MHBeXj&result=1. Other sources often treat *Jafr* sporadically. For example, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany, 1994), 74, 78; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qur'an & the Speaking Qur'an: Scriptural Sources of Islam between History and Fervor*, (trans) Eric Ormsby (New York, 2016), 103, 118; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London, 2011), 165, 201–02; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Christian Jambet, *What is Shiʿi Islam? An Introduction*, (trans) Kenneth Casler and Eric Ormsby (London, 2018), 60; Teresa Bernheimer, "Rulers as authors: ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the other Twelver imams", in Maribel Fierro, Sonja Brentjes and Tilman Seidensticker (eds), *Rulers as Authors in the Islamic World* (Leiden, 2021), 11–12; Fahd, *La divination arabe*, 25, 32–3, 49, 183–4, 216–17, 219ff.; Etan Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few: Studies in Shiʿi Thought and History*, (ed.) Amin Ehteshami (Leiden, 2020), 353–4; Mohammad Ahmad Masad, "The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition: Divination, Prophecy and the End of Time in the 13th Century Eastern Mediterranean", PhD thesis, Washington University in St Louis, 2008, 118–26; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "The quest for a universal science: the occult philosophy of Ṣāʾin al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (1369–1432) and intellectual millenarianism in early Timurid Iran", PhD thesis, Yale University, 2012, 285–9; Mansouri, "Walāya between lettrism and astrology", 171–80; Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʾite Literature* (Oxford, 2003), 5–6, 18–19. There are, however, some comprehensive studies of *Jafr* in Persian and Arabic scholarship. See Akram Barakāt al-ʿĀmilī, *Ḥaqīqat al-Jafr ʿind al-Shīʿa* (Beirut, 1416/1995); ʿAmmār Ṣadr al-Dīn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī al-ʿĀmilī, *Baḥth ḥawl al-Jafr wa-ʿilm al-maʿṣūm ʿalayhi al-salām min khilāl al-āthār*, second ed. (Beirut, 1429/2008); Ḥusayn Mūsavī Zanjānī, *Nigāhī naw bi Jafr-i ʿAlī ʿalayhi al-salām* (Ardabil, 1384/2005).

[10] For recent critiques of such trends in academia, see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Is (Islamic) occult science science?", *Theology and Science* 18/2, 2020, 303–24; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "An Islamic scientific revolution? Early modern occult science, cosmic philology and the weird", Special roundtable issue, (eds) Justin Stearns and Nahyan Fancy, *History of Science* 61/2, 2023, 166–72.

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out. Some hadith describe it as the only complete copy of the Quran,[11] while others portray it as a record of everything that will happen until the end of time. Before his passing, the Prophet entrusted this book to ʿAlī.[12] *Muṣḥaf Fāṭima* is another such text in Shiʿi tradition, believed to have been dictated by an angel (often identified as Gabriel) to Fatima after the Prophet's death. Unlike the Quran, this text contains no legal rulings but instead foretells political transformations as well as the destiny of Fatima's descendants. It is said to contain not a single word from the Quran.[13] These narratives are apocalyptic and prognostic, as they reveal the hidden knowledge of Shiʿi imams and forecast the future and ultimate destiny of humanity. *Jafr, Jāmiʿa, Kitāb ʿAlī, Muṣḥaf Fāṭima* and similar books are conduits for eschatological foresight, ultimate tribulations and the eventual triumph of divine justice. These books take on even greater significance in Shiʿi cosmology, as they affirm the rightful authority of Shiʿi imams and the injustices they have endured, wrongs that will be redressed in a messianic, eschatological and cosmological reckoning in the salvific future. The existence of these books reinforces the idea that Shiʿi imams are not simply historical individuals and figures, but the very truth and spirit of history.

Jafr, a pastoral term

The term *jafr* carries a range of meanings. It can refer to a young sheep or a goat that is weaned and typically slaughtered after 50 days or four months of age.[14] Specifically, it denotes a young goat (*maʿz*), a ewe (*shāʾ*) or a sheep (*ḍaʾn*), which is slaughtered before reaching full maturity. The term can also apply to a young female goat that has not yet reached four months of age, when its sides are visibly spread (*jafara janbāhu*) and it has been weaned from its mother.[15] Sometimes, *jafr* is also used to describe a young female sheep.[16] It is also said that *jafr* is male, while *jafra* is female.[17] In a more general sense, *jafr* may refer to a small lamb (*al-ḥamal al-ṣaghīr*). The plural forms are *ajfār* or *jifār*, and *jafr* can appear in verbal forms such as *jafara, istajfara* and *tajaffara*.[18]

In another pastoral context, *jafūr* refers to the period when a male animal, such as a camel or horse, either ceases to mate altogether[19] or does so after sexual excess and exhaustion.[20] This usage is related to terms such as *ijtifār, ijfār* and *tajfīr*, which also describe the cessation of breeding activity. For example, *ajfara ʿan al-mirʾa* means that a man has ceased engaging in sexual relations with a woman.[21] Sometimes, *ajfara* is used to refer to giving up a certain habit or behaviour.[22] *Majfūr* also refers to a large animal or one with an especially

[11] Khalid Sindawi, "'Fāṭima's book: a Shīʿite Qurʾān?", *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 78/1–2, 2004, 3.

[12] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 74. While there are some overlaps between *Jāmiʿa* and *Kitāb ʿAlī*, they are not identical. See Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few*, 354–6.

[13] Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few*, 356–8; Sindawi, "'Fāṭima's book", 57–70.

[14] Muḥibb al-Dīb Abī Fayḍ al-Sayyid Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Wāsiṭī al-Zubaydī al-Ḥanafī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs*, (ed.) ʿAlī Shīrī, 20 vols (Beirut, 1414/1994), 4: 238.

[15] al-Ḥanafī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 6: 203; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, (ed.) ʿAlī Shīrī, 17 vols (Beirut, 1408/1988), 14: 227; Ismāʿīl ibn Ḥammād Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥḥāḥ: Tāj al-lugha wa-ṣiḥḥāḥ al-ʿArabiyya*, (ed.) Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghafūr, 7 vols (Beirut, 1404/1984), 2: 615. For a similar root, see ʿUmar ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, (ed.) Muḥammad Bāsil ʿUyūn al-Sūd, 7 vols (Beirut, 1424/2003), 5: 264.

[16] al-Ḥanafī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 6: 204.

[17] Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Muqrī al-Fayyūmī, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-munīr*, 2 vols, second ed. (Qom, 1414/1993), 1: 269.

[18] al-Ḥanafī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 6: 203.

[19] al-Ḥanafī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 11: 385; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 11: 223.

[20] Ḥammād Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥḥāḥ*, 2: 616.

[21] al-Ḥanafī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 6: 205.

[22] Ḥammād Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥḥāḥ*, 2: 616.

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broad torso (*jufra*).[23] There are other meanings as well. For example, the phrase *jafara min al-maraḍ* means recovering from illness.[24] In other non-pastoral contexts, *jafr* can denote a well that has not been completely closed up,[25] a young boy[26] or, when spelled as *jufra*, a large circular piece of land.[27]

Given this philological survey, *jafr*'s association with a book may have stemmed from the material upon which it was written. Since the term *jafr* denotes young sheep, goats, ewes or even camels, it is likely that the term originally denoted parchments made from their skins, which were presumed to be used as writing surfaces for the book of *Jafr*. Certain hadith in early Shiʿi literature support this interpretation, and assert that *jafr* was made from the skin of certain animals, such as a ewe (*shāʾ*), a camel (*baʿīr*),[28] an ox (*thawr*),[29] a goat (*maʿz/māʿiz*)[30] or a sheep (*ḍaʾn*).[31] It is also stated that *jafr* came from the skin of a ewe of moderate size – neither too large nor too small.[32] Such associations between animal skins and prophetic knowledge might be traced back to ancient practices. In ancient Mesopotamia, for instance, sheep were already regarded as vessels of prophecy, and diviners analysed the internal organs of sacrificial sheep. The individual requesting an oracle would supply an unblemished animal. The diviner would then perform the sacrifice and seek answers from deities such as Marduk and Shamash by studying the organs, especially the liver and lungs, for any anomalies that would indicate favourable or unfavourable outcomes.[33] In pre-Islamic Mesopotamia and the Near East, animal parts, especially the liver and shoulder blades, were used in divination practices. Scapulimancy, or divination based on the form of a sheep's scapula (*ʿilm al-katif*), also became popular in early Islamic traditions, and it was the subject of some Arabic treatises credited to figures like Hermes.[34]

The use of animal skins as writing surfaces parallels the long-standing Jewish practice of inscribing sacred texts on parchments made from kosher animals. Indeed, from ancient times, Jews copied the Torah onto parchments made from the skins of kosher animals and sewed the sheets together with sinews. This practice is illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were also written on similar parchments in the eastern Mediterranean region.[35] Before the advent of paper, the Sasanian and Byzantine empires relied on materials such as animal skins for writing, and Iranians reputedly copied the Avesta onto 12,000 skins.[36] Early Islamic papyrus documents from Egypt were in the form of loose sheets. However, the pre-Islamic Sasanian administrators recorded information on codices made from animal skins, while Byzantine bureaucrats used papyrus rolls in Egypt and Syria.[37] Amājūr al-Turkī, the governor of Damascus from 870 to 878, also commissioned a Quran manuscript in 30 volumes. Each volume contained approximately 200 parchment leaves. This process

[23] Ḥammād Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥḥāḥ*, 2: 615; al-Muqrī al-Fayyūmī, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-munīr*, 1: 103.

[24] al-Ḥanafī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 6: 205.

[25] al-Ḥanafī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 6: 204; Ḥammād Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥḥāḥ*, 2: 615.

[26] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 7: 53.

[27] Ḥammād Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥḥāḥ*, 2: 615.

[28] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Farrūkh al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, (ed.) Mīrzā Muḥsin Kūchabāghī al-Tabrīzī (Qom, 1404/1983), 152, 153.

[29] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 153, 156, 160, 161.

[30] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 157.

[31] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 155.

[32] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 155.

[33] Gwendolyn Leick, *The Babylonians: An Introduction* (New York, 2002), 123.

[34] Emilie Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Aldershot, 2004), xxxi.

[35] Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven, 2001), 24.

[36] Bloom, *Paper before Print*, 47; Yves Porter, *Painters, Paintings and Books: An Essay on Indo-Persian Technical Literature, 12–19th Centuries* (Abingdon, 2021), 13.

[37] Bloom, *Paper before Print*, 48.

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required the skins of roughly 300 sheep, which demonstrates the widespread use of sheepskin for sacred texts.[38] The historical context shows that the term *jafr* in early Shiʿi tradition may have been influenced by the long-standing practice of using animal hides as writing surfaces for texts of great worth.

Red *Jafr* and white *Jafr*

In early Shiʿi literature, the red *Jafr* (*al-jafr al-aḥmar*) and the white *Jafr* (*al-jafr al-abyaḍ*) are mentioned together as a pair, and both have their own distinct functions and significance. The following two hadith, though similar in tone, provide complementary details about these two books, which shed light on their respective meanings and roles:

> I [al-Ḥusayn ibn Abī al-ʿAlā] heard Abā ʿAbd Allāh [Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765)] say, "I possess the white *Jafr* (*al-jafr al-abyaḍ*)." When I inquired, "What does it contain?" he replied, "It includes the Psalms of David, the Torah of Moses, the Gospel of Jesus, the books (*ṣuḥuf*) of Abraham, guidelines on what is permissible and impermissible, and the book (*muṣḥaf*) of Fatima, which does not contain anything that is in the Quran. The white *Jafr* contains matters that make people dependent on us, but we are not dependent on anyone. It even details punishments such as lashing, half or a quarter of it, or even compensation for a scratch on the body. I also have the red *Jafr* (*al-jafr al-aḥmar*)." I asked, "What is it?" He answered, "It is a weapon, and it is used only for bloodshed; the owner kills all the opponents."[39]

> Ghābir is the knowledge of whatever will happen, Mazbūr is the knowledge of whatever happened before, the scratching of the heart (*al-nakt fī l-qulūb*) is the inspiration (*ilhām*), the rapping on the ears (*al-naqr fī l-asmāʿ*) is the speech of the angels that we hear but we cannot see them, the red *Jafr* contains the prophetic weapon (*silāḥ rasūl Allāh*) that will not appear until the arrival of our resurrector (*qāʾimunā*) from the prophetic household (*ahl al-bayt*), the white *Jafr* contains the Torah of Moses, the Gospel of Jesus, the Psalms of David, and the primary books of God. The book of Fatima contains accounts of all events and also names of all who will rule until the resurrection, and *Jāmiʿa* is a book that is seventy cubits long measured by the Prophet himself, dictated by him, and written by ʿAlī with his hand. This book contains everything that people will need until the Resurrection, even the compensation of a scratch on the body or [the punishment of] lashing is in it.[40]

[38] Bloom, *Paper before Print*, 104. For research on writing culture in the Islamic world, see Sebastian Günther, "Praise the book! Al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba on the excellence of the written word in medieval Islam", in Yohanan Friedmann (ed.), *Franz Rosenthal Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem, 2006), 125–43; Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2012); Ignaty Y. Kratchkovsky, *Among Arabic Manuscripts: Memories of Libraries and Men*, (trans.) Tatiana Minorsky (Leiden, 1953); Geoffrey Roper (ed.), *The History of the Book in the Middle East* (Farnham, 2013).

[39] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, *al-Kāfī*, (ed.) Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Dirāyatī, 15 vols (Qom, 1387/2008), 1: 597–8; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 150–1. This hadith is also cited in the following sources: Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma fī uṣūl al-aʾimma*, (ed.) Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Qāʾimī, 3 vols (Qom, 1376/1997), 1: 485–6; Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Kitāb al-wāfī*, (ed.) Kamāl al-Dīn Faqīh Īmānī, 26 vols (Isfahan, 1406/1985), 3: 582; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 111 vols, second ed. (Beirut, 1403/1983), 6: 37–8.

[40] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Nuʿmān (al-Shaykh al-Mufīd), *al-Irshād fī maʿrifa ḥujaj Allāh ʿalā al-ʿibād*, 2 vols (Beirut, 1416/1995), 2: 186; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 318–19; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1: 658; Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, (ed.) al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsawī al-Khirsān, 2 vols, third ed. (Beirut, 1421/2000), 2: 372; al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warā bi-aʿlām al-hudā*, (ed.) ʿAlī Akbar Ghaffārī (Beirut, 1424/2004), 287–8. Also see Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few*, 243.

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The white *Jafr* is a comprehensive book, and only Shiʿi imams have access to it. It contains holy texts, such as the Psalms of David, the Torah of Moses, the Gospel of Jesus and the books of Abraham, and provides guidance on religious and legal matters, which exemplifies the imams' superiority in both esoteric and exoteric issues. Additionally, the white *Jafr* contains prognostications and predictions about future events, including the names of rulers until the Resurrection and the anticipated arrival of the resurrector. In Twelver Shiʿi sources, this resurrector is identified as the Twelfth Shiʿi imam, al-Mahdī. The red *Jafr*, however, remains somewhat enigmatic. It is a prophetic weapon of unparalleled power with a clear apocalyptic dimension. Shiʿi imams have concealed this weapon, and it will be revealed by al-Mahdī, whose messianic return is believed to bring salvation and eradicate injustice around the world.[41]

Although the exact nature of the red *Jafr* remains unclear, various hadith in early Shiʿi sources confirm that Shiʿi imams indeed inherited a collection of prophetic weapons.[42] Some hadith make general references to these prophetic weapons. For example, it is reported that the fifth imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 733), was asked whether ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib had inherited any weapons from the Prophet, to which he responded affirmatively.[43] In another hadith, ʿAlī informed his son al-Ḥasan that he had inherited the books (*kutub*) and the weapon of the Prophet. He explained that he was passing them on to al-Ḥasan, as instructed by the Prophet, and advised him to pass them on to his brother, al-Ḥusayn.[44] This weapon has been passed down from one imam to the next. Muḥammad al-Bāqir also stated,

> Before his death, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn brought out a casket or box and said, "O Muḥammad, carry this casket." It was carried by four people. When he passed away, his brothers came claiming what was in the box and saying, "Give us our share of the casket." He [Muḥammad al-Bāqir] replied, "By God, you have no share in it. If you had any share in it, it would not have been given to me." Inside the casket were the weapons of the Messenger of God and his books.[45]

The sixth Shiʿi imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, is also said to have possessed the hidden prophetic weapon.[46] Muḥammad ibn Fuḍayl, a companion of the eighth imam, ʿAlī ibn al-Riḍā (d. 818),

[41] Hadith about the red *Jafr* and the white *Jafr* are also cited in later Shiʿi works. For example, see Nāṣir al-Dīn ibn Isḥāq al-Baḥrānī, *Mukhtaṣar fī taʿrīf aḥwāl sādat al-anām*, (ed.) Nabīl Riḍā ʿUlwān (Qom, 1429/2008), 86–7; Abī al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā Abī al-Fatḥ al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma fī maʿrifat al-aʾimma*, (ed.) ʿAlī Āl Kawthar, 4 vols (Beirut, 1433/2012), 3: 179–80; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 26:1 8; Quṭb al-Dīn Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*, 3 vols (Qom, 1409), 2: 894–5. The red *Jafr* and the white *Jafr* were also incorporated into the medieval occult tradition. For instance, Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī states that he composed his works on *Jafr* only after studying various texts on the red *Jafr*, the white *Jafr*, the secret *Jafr* and the universal *Jafr*, as he encountered passages in these texts that were difficult to interpret. See İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, 2016), 153.

[42] For discussions on the connection between weapons and *Jafr* in Shiʿi literature, as well as the role of these weapons in Shiʿi Imamology, see al-ʿĀmilī, *Ḥaqīqat al-Jafr*, 194–224; Ḥusayn Ḥusayniyān Muqaddam and Muḥammad Mahdī Ḥusayniyān Muqaddam, "Naqsh-i nishāna-shināsī-yi silāḥ dar Imām-shināsī", *Tārīkh-i Islām dar Āyīna-yi Pazhūhish* 15/2, 1397/2019, 39–57; Aḥmad Shujāʿī and Muḥammad Farḍī Pūryān, "Taḥlīlī darbāra-yi jafr va Jāmiʿa, du manbaʿ-i ʿilm-i imām", *Kalām-i Islāmī* 26/102, 1396/2017, 77–98.

[43] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1: 585; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 177.

[44] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2: 36–7; ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn Sayyid Murtaḍā, *al-Shāfī fī al-imāma*, (ed.) Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dirāyatī, 5 vols (Mashhad, 1398/2019), 3: 424; al-Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warā*, 215; Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī (al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī), *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, (ed.) ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, 10 vols (Tehran, 1376/1997), 9: 206–07. Also see al-Nuʿmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥayyūn al-Tamīmī al-Maghribī, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, (ed.) ʿĀṣif ibn ʿAlī Aṣghar Fayḍī, 2 vols, second ed. (Cairo, 1383/1963), 2: 348.

[45] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2: 56; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 180.

[46] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1: 581; al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 2: 188; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 153, 156.

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recounted that he visited the imam and posed various questions but forgot to enquire about the prophetic weapon. Later, he received a letter from the imam in which he wrote: "I am like a father and the rightful heir to the Prophet, and everything that has come from him, including his weapon, is in my possession."[47] This prophetic weapon is compared to the Ark of the Covenant in some hadith. For example, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq stated, "I possess the prophetic weapon, and it holds the same significance for us as the Ark of the Covenant does for Jews. It accompanies us wherever we go and remains with each Imam."[48] In various hadith, this weapon is counted as one of the signs (*ʿalāmāt*) of Shiʿi imams, as its possession grants its holder the status of Imamate.[49]

While these hadith contain little information about the nature of the prophetic weapon, other hadith provide specific details about various prophetic weapons that are secretly held by Shiʿi imams. One notable example is the Prophet's armour (*dirʿ*), which is said to be in the possession of Shiʿi imams. In a hadith attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, it is stated.

> When the Messenger of God was near death, he called for al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭallib and the Prince of the Faithful [ʿAlī]. He said to al-ʿAbbās, "O uncle of Muḥammad, will you take the inheritance of Muḥammad, settle his debts, and fulfill his promises?" Al-ʿAbbās replied, "O Messenger of God, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you. I am an old man with many dependents and little wealth. Who can bear your burden and you are such a generous man?"...
>
> The Prophet then said, "I will give it to the one who is worthy of it." He turned to ʿAlī and said, "O ʿAlī, brother of Muḥammad, will you fulfill Muḥammad's promises, settle his debts, and take on his inheritance?" ʿAlī replied, "Yes, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you. That is my duty and my obligation."
>
> The Prophet then called out, "O Bilāl, bring me the helmet (*mighfar*), the armour (*dirʿ*), the banner (*rāya*), the shirt (*ghamīṣ*), Dhū al-Fiqār, the turban (*siḥāb*), the garment (*burd*), the belt (*abraqa*), and the staff (*ghaḍīb*)."[50]

The prophetic armour is another piece of weaponry inherited by Shiʿi imams, and it will be one of the signs of the final imam, al-Mahdī, who will don the Prophet's robe, turban, shirt and armour in the end time.[51] Similarly, various hadith affirm that Shiʿi imams possess the Prophet's banner (*rāya*). One such hadith states that when the awaited imam, al-Mahdī, appears, one of his major signs will be the Prophet's banner, which Gabriel brought down on the day of the Battle of Badr. According to the hadith, this banner was not made of wool, cotton, silk or satin, but rather from a paradise leaf (*waraq al-janna*). The Prophet entrusted it to ʿAlī, and it ensured his military victory. The hadith further explains that the banner was passed down to other imams, and it will remain unseen until the arrival of al-Mahdī, when it will strike unparalleled terror and fear into his opponents.[52] A better-known version of

[47] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 252; Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*, 2: 663; Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, second ed. (Beirut, 1408/1988), 187–8.

[48] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1: 590–2; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 176–81.

[49] For example, see Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *al-Khiṣāl*, (ed.) ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, 2 vols (Qom, 1416/1995), 2: 528; Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, (ed.) ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Qom, 1361/1982), 102; Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, (ed.) al-Sayyid Mahdī al-Ḥusaynī al-Lājiwardī, 2 vols (Tehran, n.d.), 1: 213; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2: 590–91.

[50] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1: 585–7.

[51] Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nuʿmānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, (ed.) ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1397/2018), 270, 310.

[52] al-Nuʿmānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, 307–08.

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this hadith states that the banner was given to the first imam during the Battle of Khaybar, and this hadith is cited in various Shiʿi and Sunni sources.[53]

Thus, the white *Jafr* is said to contain a range of sacred texts, including the Psalms of David, the Torah of Moses, the Gospel of Jesus and the books of Abraham. It also contains legal and religious guidance, along with prophecies and prognostications about the future. However, the red *Jafr* is associated with apocalyptic militarism. While the nature of the red *Jafr* remains unclear, various hadith elaborate on different prophetic weapons inherited by Shiʿi imams, such as the Prophet's armour, banner and sword, which are passed down through each imam. These weapons are imbued with eschatological significance as they will be revealed only during the apocalyptic events led by al-Mahdī. They will strike terror into his enemies at the end of time. In this sense, narratives about these two books help us understand *Jafr* not only as a book of prognostications and prophecies, but also as a book of weapons – an arsenal of prophetic apparatuses that will play a decisive role in the ultimate and final messianic battle. Thus, these two *Jafr* books endow Shiʿi imams with foreknowledge, prognostic insight and utopian triumphalism.

Jafr: genesis, content and authorship

Jafr is frequently mentioned in hadith as a distinct text and as an emblem and hallmark of Imamic knowledge. Early Shiʿi sources uniformly assert that the Prophet dictated the book of *Jafr* to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who inscribed it on *Jafr*. A notable example is the following hadith, which provides a detailed narrative of the compilation of the book of *Jafr*:

> Al-Ḥasan ibn Rāshid reported: I heard Abū Ibrāhīm [Mūsā al-Kāẓim] saying: "God revealed to the Prophet that 'your time in this world has come to an end, so hasten to meet your Lord'." The Prophet then raised his hands toward the sky and said, "Fulfill the promise You made to me, for You never break Your promises."[54] "You must go to Mount Uḥud with someone you trust," God commanded the Prophet. The Prophet repeated his request, and God reassured him: "Go to Mount Uḥud with your cousin [ʿAlī], facing away from the Kaʿba. Then, summon the wild animals of the mountain, and they will come to you. Among them will be a young female goat (*jafra*), just beginning to grow her horns, with fresh blood in her neck. She is yours. Instruct your cousin to sacrifice it and remove the skin from its neck. Once the skin is removed and tanned, Gabriel will appear before you, and he will carry an inkwell and a pen. This pen is unlike any earthly pen: its writing endures forever, the parchment never ages, and neither the earth nor the soil can erase it. Each time you open it, it remains fresh, protected (*maḥfūẓ*), and concealed (*mastūr*). Gabriel will reveal to you the knowledge of the past and the future, and you are to recite it to your cousin, who will then dip into the inkwell and write it upon *jafr*."

[53] For Shiʿi sources that record this hadith, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 15: 773; al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 1: 64; al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, 2: 328; al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān ibn Muḥammad al-Tamīmī al-Maghribī, *Sharḥ al-akhbār fī faḍāʾil al-aʾimma al-aṭhār*, (ed.) al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī, 3 vols, second ed. (Qom, 1409/1988), 1: 147–9. For Sunni sources that document this hadith, see Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, (ed.) Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, 20 vols (Cairo, 1416/1995), 2: 277–8; ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mughīra al-Juʿfī al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (ed.) ʿIzz al-Dīn Ḍillī, ʿImād al-Ṭiyār and Yāsir Ḥasan, third ed. (Beirut, 1439/2018), 784–5; Aḥmad ibn Shuʿayb al-Nisāʾī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ Amīr al-Muʾminīn*, (ed.) Ḥamza al-Nashratī, ʿAbd al-Ḥafīẓ Farghalī and ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Muṭafā, second ed. (n.p., n.d.), 25; Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Qazwīnī (Ibn Māja), *al-Sunan*, (ed.) ʿAlī Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, 4 vols (Riyad, 1419/1998), 1: 76.

[54] Q. 3:194.

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> The Prophet made his way to Mount Uḥud and followed the instructions exactly. Each detail unfolded as foretold. As he began to skin the goat (*jafra*), the faithful spirit Gabriel appeared before him, surrounded by countless angels, whose number only God knows. ʿAlī then took the skin in his hands, and the inkwell and pen were handed to him – both resembling vibrant green plants, yet even greener and more radiant.
>
> The Prophet then received the revelation and recited it to ʿAlī, who inscribed everything that had occurred – and all that would take place in the future – onto the skin. The Prophet conveyed to ʿAlī the knowledge of all past and future events until the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*). He also explained matters whose true meanings are known only to God and those deeply rooted in knowledge.[55] The Prophet enlightened ʿAlī about all the saints of God who would emerge from his descendants until the Day of Resurrection, as well as the identities of all his adversaries throughout history. ʿAlī carefully recorded each one. The Prophet then revealed what would transpire after his death. When ʿAlī asked about his responsibilities, the Prophet instructed him to remain patient and to command all imams and their followers to endure until the difficult times passed. The Prophet described these challenging periods as well as their signs and informed ʿAlī of the indicators that would herald the rule of Banū Hāshim. All apocalyptic revelations (*malāḥim*) and the miraculous knowledge possessed by every legatee (*waṣī*) are drawn from this book.[56]

The book of *Jafr* is, thereby, far more than an ordinary book; its writing is celestial and it defies human conventions. It is crafted through divine communication and inscribed with a heavenly pen and inkwell by ʿAlī. Its words are immortal and impervious to the ravages of time or earthly forces. It is written in radiant green ink, shimmering with a heavenly glow, and etched onto the skin of a goat or sheep. While some hadith suggest it includes legal minutiae, its essence is deeply apocalyptic. It includes all that will unfold in the course of history. Indeed, it is not merely a record of events but a divine chronicle of rulers, sovereigns and pivotal incidents, thus embodying a powerful political nature.

There are also certain Judaic connections with *Jafr*. In a hadith narrated from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, it is mentioned that the original tablets of the Torah contained all the knowledge humanity would need until the end of time, and they were crafted from heavenly emeralds. As the time of Moses drew to a close, God instructed him to hide these sacred tablets. Moses went to a certain mountain, which miraculously split open and allowed him to conceal the tablets inside until the appropriate time. When the era of the Prophet of Islam arrived, a caravan passed by the same mountain, and once again, it miraculously split open, which revealed the tablets exactly as Moses had left them. They brought these tablets to the Prophet, who read them, written in the Hebrew script, and found that they contained a comprehensive record of all events from the dawn of humanity to the end of time. The Prophet then asked ʿAlī to keep these tablets, but ʿAlī responded that he could not read Hebrew. The Prophet, however, reassured him, saying that the angel of revelation had said that if ʿAlī placed the tablets under his pillow for a night, by the next day he would be able to read them. As foretold, ʿAlī awoke the following day with the ability to understand the script. The Prophet then instructed ʿAlī to transcribe the contents of the tablets, which he did, and he then wrote them on the skin of a sheep (*jild shā*), hence the name *Jafr*. This sacred book, which preserves the divine knowledge of past and future events, was passed down through Shiʿi imams.[57]

[55] It is a reference to the following verse: Q. 3:7.
[56] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 506–07.
[57] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 140.

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The apocalyptic and prognostic nature of *Jafr* is also vividly expressed in the following hadith, where Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, overcome by grief, recounts the future tribulations that will accompany the occultation of the awaited Qāʾim (al-Mahdī):

> Sadīr al-Ṣayrafī narrates: "I, along with Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar, Abū Baṣīr, and Abān ibn Taghlib, entered the presence of our master Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him. We found him seated on the ground, dressed in a simple Khaybarian garment with no collar, and its sleeves were short.[58] He was weeping like a grief-stricken mother who had lost her child, his heart burning with sorrow. The signs of deep anguish were visible on his face; his cheeks had paled, and tears had worn down the rims of his eyes. He cried out, "My master! Your absence has taken sleep from me, narrowed my resting place, and stolen the peace from my heart. My master! Your absence has connected my sorrow to eternal grief, and the loss of one after another has led to the disappearance of all and everything. Every time a tear rises to my eyes or a sigh escapes my chest from the trials of past misfortunes, greater and more terrifying calamities – far harsher and worse than those I have already endured – appear before me, disasters blended with your wrath and tribulations mixed with your displeasure."
>
> Sadīr continued, "Our minds were shaken with terror, and our hearts shattered with fear at this overwhelming calamity. We assumed that a grievous catastrophe had befallen him or that a great misfortune had struck him. We said, 'May God spare your eyes from tears, O son of the best of humankind! What event has caused such a downpour of tears and brought upon you this heavy mourning?'"
>
> Imam al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him, heaved a deep sigh, so heavy that it seemed to swell within him, which was caused by the intensity of his fear. He then said, "Woe unto you! This morning, I was looking into the book of *Jafr* (*kitāb al-jafr*). This book contains the knowledge of deaths, afflictions, great calamities, as well as what has passed and what is to come until the Day of Judgment. It is a knowledge that God has granted exclusively to Muḥammad and the imams after him. I was contemplating therein the birth of our Qāʾim, his occultation, the delay in his reappearance, his prolonged life, and the trials that the believers will endure in that time. Their hearts will be tested by the length of his occultation, doubts will arise, many will turn back from their faith, and they will cast off the yoke of Islam from their necks...[59]

Jafr, as described in the lament of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, is a sombre chronicle of humanity's trials and tribulations. The book's revelations foretell a future that is fraught with existential despair. The faithful will grapple with doubt and fear, and their resolve will be tested in the

[58] The Khaybarian refers to the type of garment the imam wore. Notably, in pre-Islamic Arabia, Jews in Fadak were known for their textile production, and they manufactured several distinct garments, including *qatīfa Fadakiyya* (villous fabric), *abāʾa Fadakiyya* (striped woollen cloaks) and *aksiya Fadakiyya* (woven wraps), some of which were worn by figures like Abū Bakr (d. 634). Some Jews apparently moved from Fadak to Khaybar and formed a significant community there. See Michael Lecker, "The Jews of northern Arabia in early Islam", in Phillip I. Lieberman (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge, 2021), 286. In early Islamic history, Jewish merchants, known as *al-Rādhāniyya* or Radhanites, actively traded various items such as furs, textiles, hides and cloth with Muslims. See Moshe Gil, "The Rādhānite merchants and the land of Rādhān", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17/1, 1974, 312–13; Richard Foltz, "Judaism and the Silk Route", *The History Teacher* 32/1, 1998, 12–13. Jews also played a significant role in the silk trade in medieval North Africa. See Camilla Adang, "A fatwā by al-Māzarī (d. 536/1141) on a Jewish silk merchant in Gafsa", in Josef Meri (ed.), *Jewish-Muslim Relations in Past and Present: A Kaleidoscopic View* (Leiden, 2017), 162–71.

[59] Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿma*, (ed.) ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, 2 vols, second ed. (Tehran, 1395/1975), 1: 352–4.

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face of ordeals during the period of the occultation of the awaited imam. Some reports also indicate that Shiʿi imams utilized this book in their political decision-making. It is said that when the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Maʾmūn (d. 833) invited ʿAlī ibn al-Riḍā to accept the caliphate, the eighth Shiʿi imam initially resisted. He only agreed to it after the caliph resorted to threats, as the imam recognized that the invitation was insincere since "*Jafr* and *Jāmiʿa* indicate otherwise".[60] In other words, the imam was aware that the offer to accept the caliphate was a plot against him, as these two books made no mention of such an event.

Jafr was believed to be enigmatic and difficult to interpret precisely because it was not composed in the conventional methods of writing but rather in a secretive and coded form.[61] This is why some hadith maintain that access to *Jafr* was strictly restricted to Shiʿi imams. In a hadith attributed to al-Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 799), the seventh Shiʿi imam, he addressed his son, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, saying, "we both can read *Jafr*, and only a prophet or his legatee can read this book".[62] Thus, it appears that *Jafr* is a secretive and hidden book that can only be accessed by Shiʿi imams. Despite this, later Sunni and Shiʿi writers, while maintaining their belief in the book's hidden nature, were convinced that its contents were not inaccessible to them, which arguably fuelled a surge of interest in the book during the late medieval and early modern periods.[63]

Some confusion about the authorship of *Jafr* also needs to be addressed. Early Shiʿi sources are unanimous about the fact that the Prophet dictated this text and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib put it into writing. However, medieval Sunni sources sometimes attribute *Jafr* to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, a claim that has no basis in early Shiʿi literature. While some mentioned that Ibn al-Qutayba (d. 889), an early Muslim theologian, attributed *Jafr* to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq,[64] this seems to be a misunderstanding. He was a contemporary of Ibn al-Ṣaffār, who appears to be the first Shiʿi scholar to document *Jafr* traditions. According to Ibn al-Qutayba, *rawāfiḍ*, a derogatory term for the Shiʿa, consider this book to be an esoteric commentary on the Quran. He also cites a poem by the Zaydī poet Hārūn ibn Saʿd al-ʿIjlī, who ridiculed these claims.[65]

[60] Although this story is not found in early Shiʿi sources, it gained prominence in medieval Sunni and Shiʿi writings. See Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, (ed.) al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sayyid Jamāl Ashraf al-Ḥusaynī, 12 vols (Qom, 1390/2011), 12: 232; Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ṭabāṭabā (Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā), *al-Fakhrī fī ādāb al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-duwal al-Islāmiyya*, (ed.) ʿAbd al-Qādir Muḥammad Māyū (Aleppo, 1418/1997), 215.

[61] For additional information, see al-ʿĀmilī, *Ḥaqīqat al-Jafr*, 70–80.

[62] al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, 3: 353; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2: 73; al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 2: 592.

[63] In these accounts, Shiʿi imams are the sole interpreters of *Jafr*, a claim that stands in contrast to its later evolution as an occult science which is accessible to skilled and initiated practitioners. In other words, while *Jafr* in early Shiʿi sources was an exclusive marker of Imamate and it was accessible only to Shiʿi imams, later occult literature redefined it as an initiatic science, and extended its scope beyond strictly Imamic authority. This transformation most likely fuelled its widespread popularity across Islamicate societies. While the timing of this shift remains uncertain, the adoption of *Jafr* in Sunni contexts – no longer seen as exclusive to Shiʿi imams but as a standard occult practice – appears to have played a pivotal role in this transition. For the reception of *Jafr* in the Sunni Ottoman world, see Cornell H. Fleischer, "A Mediterranean apocalypse: prophecies of empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61/1–2, 2018, 18–90; Cornell H. Fleischer, "Ancient wisdom and new sciences: prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries", in Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı (eds), *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington, 2009), 231–44; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Toward a Neopythagorean historiography: Kemālpaşazāde's (d. 1534) lettrist call for the conquest of Cairo and the development of Ottoman occult-scientific imperialism", in Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Farouk Yahya (eds), *Islamic Esotericism and the Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden, 2021), 380–419.

[64] See ʿAlī Āl Kawthar's footnote here: al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, 3: 152. For a medieval source for this confusion, see Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Khallikān, *Wafiyāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*, (ed.) Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 8 vols (Beirut, n.d.), 3: 240.

[65] Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Aṣfar, second ed. (Beirut, 1419/1999), 122–3.

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Although Ibn al-Qutayba did not associate *Jafr* with Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, later medieval Sunni writers frequently drew such connections.

The Mamlūk historian Ibn Khallikān (d. 1282), for example, asserts that Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq compiled *Jafr* and incorporated all that people will need until the end of time into this book.[66] Ibn al-Khaldūn (d. 1406), the renowned Sunni historian, offers a similar narrative. He notes that Hārūn ibn Saʿd al-ʿIjlī had access to *Jafr*, a book that contained prophecies from the prophetic family (*ahl al-bayt*) and was written by Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq on the skin of a small bull (*jild thawr ṣaghīr*). According to Ibn al-Khaldūn, many claims attributed to this book are unfounded, yet he acknowledges that the prophetic family possessed the ability to predict the future, as they were "people of wonder (*ahl al-karāma*)".[67] He also states that the philosopher Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī (d. 873) wrote an astrological book on conjunctions (*qirānāt*) for the ʿAbbāsid caliphs. However, Shiʿa claimed this work to be *Jafr* and attributed it to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. This book was said to predict the future of the ʿAbbāsids, including the fall of Baghdad and the decline of Islam during the Mongol invasions. Although Ibn al-Khaldūn notes that no one has seen this book, he also suggests that it may have been among the books thrown into the Tigris River by the Mongol warlord Hülegü Khan (d. 1265) after he captured Baghdad.[68] The Almohads in the Maghrib, he noted, possessed a work known as "little *Jafr*" (*al-jafr al-ṣaghīr*), which contained predictions about the future.[69] The prominent Sufi and Persian poet ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492) similarly wrote:

> If there is any *Jafr*, it is the wisdom of the Prophet,
> Drawn from the radiant niche of the Prophet.
>
> Without the light of following him,
> How could the veil be lifted from His face?
>
> The so-called masters of *Jafr* today, drunk and reckless,
> Have laid down books on this subject.
>
> They neither fear the blows of destiny,
> Nor do they inquire about the means to salvation.
>
> They scribble a few letters side by side,
> Placing some numbers beneath them.
>
> They wrap themselves in vain delusion,
> Entirely detached from the cloak of reason.
>
> What could this *Jafr* be, other than a torment for the wise?
> But how could it be the *Jafr* of Jaʿfar Ṣādiq?
>
> Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq would turn away from you in disguise,
> For the truthful (*ṣādiq*) has no kinship with the liar (*kādhib*).[70]

[66] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafiyāt al-aʿyān*, 3: 240.

[67] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldūn*, (ed.) ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Darwīsh, 2 vols (Damascus, 1425/2004), 1: 550–1.

[68] Ibn Khaldūn's narrative also seems to fit into his anti-occultism. For Ibn Khaldūn's attitudes towards occult sciences, see Noah Gardiner, *Ibn Khaldūn versus the Occultists at Barqūq's Court: The Critique of Lettrism in al-Muqaddimah* (Berlin, 2020); Mushegh Asatryan, "Ibn Khaldūn on magic and the occult", *Iran & the Caucasus* 7/1/2, 2003, 73–123.

[69] Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldūn*, 1: 555.

[70] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad Jāmī, *Mathnavī-yi haft awrang*, (eds) Jābalqā Dād ʿAlīshāh et al., 2 vols (Tehran, 1378/1999), 1: 152. Jāmī's anti-Shiʿi rhetoric should be also noted here. While he was undoubtedly committed to the medieval tradition of ʿAlid loyalties, he simultaneously and strategically distanced himself from Shiʿism. See Hamed Algar, "Naqshbandis and Safavids: a contribution to the religious history of Iran and her neighbors", in Michel Mazzaoui (ed.), *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors* (Salt Lake City, 2003), 7–48.

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Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī (d. 1397) also offers a similar genealogy for *Jafr*. He maintains its connection to ʿAlī, as he states that the practitioner of *Jafr* must be a *sayyid*, a descendant of ʿAlī. Although he traces the lineage of its practitioners back to ʿAlī, he does not attribute *Jafr* to him. Instead, Akhlāṭī specifically mentions that in writing his *Risāla-yi Jafr-i jāmiʿa*, he drew upon the secret *Jafr* (*al-jafr al-khafī*), which he attributes to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. According to Akhlāṭī, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq had access to an original *Jafr* manuscript that was preserved in the treasury of Solomon. This knowledge was subsequently passed down to Āṣaf ibn Barkhiyā, Solomon's vizier, Alexander the Great (*Dhū al-Qarnayn*), the prophetic books (*ṣuḥuf al-anbiyāʾ*) and Gabriel.[71] The authorship of *Jafr* has long been a source of confusion in Islamic history. Early Shiʿi sources consistently assert that the Prophet dictated the text, which was transcribed by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and subsequently passed down to other imams. In contrast, later Sunni sources often attribute *Jafr* to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. Overall, various hadith in early Shiʿi sources consistently view *Jafr* as a hallmark of supreme Imamic knowledge and a divine chronicle of events, rulers and all occurrences throughout history. Despite being perceived as esoteric and enigmatic, with access restricted to Shiʿi imams, *Jafr* has attracted the interest of various occultists over time, which demonstrates its fundamental role as the ultimate symbol of occult, apocalyptic and prognostic knowledge.

Jafr versus *Jāmiʿa*

Various hadith mention *Jafr* and *Jāmiʿa* together, which has created some confusion about their connections. Some reports describe *Jāmiʿa* as a comprehensive legal text that outlines what is lawful and unlawful. A key early source on this matter is *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* by al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, which includes a section titled "A Chapter on the Comprehensive Book (*al-ṣaḥīfa al-jāmiʿa*), Dictated by the Messenger of God and Written by ʿAlī, which is Seventy Cubits Long".[72] *Jāmiʿa* is a comprehensive collection that not only contains broad and specific legal issues but also particular regulations, such as the punishment for inflicting a scratch on someone's skin. The vast scope and dimensions of *Jāmiʿa* indicate that it must be a colossal text. Spanning 70 *dhirāʿ*, which is equivalent to roughly 35 metres by modern standards, *Jāmiʿa* is not only physically immense but also covers a wide range of legal matters. This expansive nature is indicated in a hadith in which Muḥammad al-Bāqir refers to a "large house" (*bayt kabīr*) that held this enormous book. After gesturing towards this large house, he told his companion, Ḥamrān ibn Aʿyan, "If we rule, we then follow what God revealed and we do not disobey this book."[73] *Jāmiʿa*'s thoroughness is further emphasized by Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, who notes that even mundane details, such as the rattling of chains or private conversations, are meticulously recorded in it.[74]

Overall, while *Jāmiʿa* is exoteric and legal, *Jafr* is esoteric, apocalyptic and prognostic. This is plausible, as the combination of these two books reveals Imamate's dual nature – exoteric and esoteric or legal and theosophical. Together, these two texts complement one another as they demonstrate the unparalleled mastery of Shiʿi imams across all domains of knowledge, from the mysteries of the cosmos and prognostic and futuristic prophecies to the most detailed and nuanced legal codes. However, some hadith attribute similar exoteric characteristics to the white *Jafr*. This book is said to contain detailed legal matters. It outlines what is permissible (*ḥalāl*) and what is not (*ḥarām*), and prescribes punishments for minor offences, such as inflicting a small scratch on someone's skin.[75] Thus, the confusion

[71] Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, 152–4.
[72] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 142–50.
[73] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 143.
[74] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 144–5.
[75] al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 150–1; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1: 597–8.

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regarding these two books and their distinction seems to arise from early Shiʿi sources that attribute similar characteristics to both the white *Jafr* and *Jāmiʿa*.[76]

This confusion may account for the gradual emergence of *al-Jafr al-jāmiʿ* or *The Comprehensive Prognostication* as a lettrist work in medieval occult literature. This book is often attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.[77] Some may have conflated *Jafr* and *Jāmiʿa* and interpreted the latter as a description of the former's contents, thus leading to the idea of *al-Jafr al-jāmiʿ*. The Syrian occultist Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ṭalḥa (d. 1254) provides one of the earliest references to *al-Jafr al-jāmiʿ* and notes that *Jafr* had become popularly known as *al-Jafr al-jāmiʿ wa-l-nūr al-lāmiʿ*.[78] While hadith discussing *Jafr* and *Jāmiʿa* remain integral to Shiʿi tradition,[79] these two sources increasingly appear to have merged into *Jafr* as a unified occult text in medieval Islamic literature. Ibn Ṭalḥa offers an early narrative that sheds light on this discernible shift.[80] He describes *al-Jafr al-jāmiʿ* as a book, attributed to ʿAlī, that contains 1,700 sources of knowledge. It appears that, by this period, the book had already gained a significant reputation, as Ibn Ṭalḥa recounts various interpretations of its contents. For example, he states that lettrists (*al-sāda al-ḥarfiyya*) regarded the book as the key to unlocking the secrets of the unseen (*miftāḥ al-ghuyūb*), while the diviners (*ahl al-malāḥim*) believed it revealed the mysteries behind worldly events (*ḥawādith al-kawn*), alongside other similar narratives.[81] *Miftāḥ al-Jafr al-jāmiʿ*, written by the occultist ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 1454), is another highly esteemed Arabic text in Islamic apocalyptic literature, in which ʿAlī is the focal figure of divination and prophecy. *Miftāḥ*'s significance was such that it became a closely guarded family secret, often copied and illuminated in both its original Arabic and Ottoman Turkish versions in royal workshops.[82] At any rate, it appears that the overlapping attributes of both the white *Jafr* and *Jāmiʿa* in early Shiʿi sources most likely played a key role in combining these two sources together into one comprehensive book of prophecy and divination in later occult traditions.[83]

[76] For this matter, also see al-ʿĀmilī, *Ḥaqīqat al-Jafr*, 83–95.

[77] *Jafr* and *Jāmiʿa* remain distinct texts in Shiʿi tradition, despite some confusion regarding their characteristics and roles. However, in the Sunni occult tradition, *Jafr* is primarily regarded as a singular prognostic and apocalyptic work, and references to *Jāmiʿa* as a separate text are uncommon. As discussed, multiple books of *Jafr* exist in Shiʿi tradition; therefore, the term *Jafrān* is sometimes used to refer to them collectively. For example, see al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 151.

[78] Ibn Ṭalḥa's treatise is among the earliest surviving works on *Jafr*. Though relatively brief, it is often reproduced in the manuscripts of *Miftāḥ al-Jafr al-jāmiʿ* by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 1454), and the latter's work functions as an expansion or elaboration of Ibn Ṭalḥa's ideas. Ibn Ṭalḥa explicitly asserts a Shiʿi origin for his text. He claims not only that he received it from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib but also attributes to him the well-known circular diagram at the book's opening, which provides instructions for calculating letter values and using them for divinatory purposes. See A.C.S. Peacock, "Politics, religion and the occult in the works of Kamal al-Din Ibn Talha, a vizier, 'alim and author in thirteenth-century Syria", in Carole Hillenbrand (ed.), *Syria in Crusader Times: Conflict and Coexistence* (Edinburgh, 2022), 36–7.

[79] Mansouri, "Walāya between lettrism and astrology", 171–80.

[80] Further research is required to clarify the relationship between *Jafr* traditions in early Shiʿi sources and its development into a medieval occult science.

[81] Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Durr al-muntaẓam fī al-sirr al-aʿẓam*, (ed.) Mājid ibn Aḥmad al-ʿAṭiyya (Beirut, 1425/2004), 32–3. For questions about the authenticity, dating and content of this work, which is also recorded as *al-Durr al-munaẓẓam*, see Masad, "The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition", 68–88.

[82] Fleischer, "A Mediterranean apocalypse", 24. Also see Cornell H. Fleischer, "The lawgiver as messiah: the making of the imperial image in the reign of Süleymân", in Gilles Veinstein (ed.), *Soliman le magnifique et son temps* (Paris, 1992), 159–77.

[83] Notably, the Muslim theologian and philosopher Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) was introduced as a significant authority on *Jafr* in the Islamic West. For instance, the Moroccan historian ʿAlī ibn Abī Zarʿ (d. *c.* 1315) recounts that Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130), the Muslim theologian who founded the Almohad dynasty in North Africa, possessed a book titled *Kitāb al-Jafr* on his deathbed, which he had received from al-Ghazālī. See ʿAlī ibn Abī Zarʿ al-Fāsī, *al-Anīs*

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Concluding remarks

This article examined various aspects of *Jafr* in early Shiʿi literature. Contrary to later Sunni sources, which attributed it to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, early Shiʿi texts unequivocally assert that *Jafr* was revealed by the Prophet and transcribed by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib on the skin of animals such as a sheep or a goat. These sources describe *Jafr* as a repository of divine knowledge that contains past and future events and offers humanity all necessary knowledge. The *Jafr* hadith, thus, show its role not just as a fountain of esoteric knowledge and a vital link between the divine and the created. These narratives particularly present Shiʿi imams as the bearers of sacred knowledge essential for human salvation. *Jafr* in early Shiʿi sources represents the extraordinary knowledge of the imams, knowledge that combines the esoteric and the exoteric. These narratives introduce them as the guardians of all branches of knowledge, custodians of cosmic mysteries and providers of legal and exoteric guidance for the faithful. Furthermore, some narratives distinguish between white and red *Jafr*, but the latter remains shrouded in mystery. As demonstrated, the red *Jafr* refers to the collection of prophetic instruments and weapons, which are destined to be revealed in the end time by al-Mahdī. Thus, *Jafr* is not only a source of prophecy but also the key to ultimate prophetic power, which promises a prognostic glimpse into the future as well as Shiʿi imams' ultimate triumph and sovereignty over all.[84]

If lettrism became the most Islamic of all occult sciences by the early modern era,[85] then early Shiʿi literature on *Jafr* offers an excellent vantage point for understanding the evolution of occult thought in early Islamic history and its influence on later Sunni and Shiʿi lettrists, who regarded *Jafr* not as absurd or fantastical but as a crucial tool for unlocking the mysteries of the cosmos. Initially, *Jafr*, with its apocalyptic and prophetic aspects, was regarded in early Shiʿi sources as a distinctive symbol of Imamate, and the book was inaccessible to fallible humans. However, it soon captured the imagination of various Muslim kabbalists and emperors, who perceived it as a valuable scientific tool for apocalyptic militantism, utopian messianism and prognostic futurism.[86] *Jafr*, then, sheds light on the emergence and development of prognostic and apocalyptic mindsets in the Islamic world, which are ultimately entangled with the central and symbolic role of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

al-muṭrib bi-Rawḍ al-qirṭās fī akhbār mulūk al-Maghrib wa-tārīkh madīna Fās (Rabat, 1972), 180. Also the Andalusian historian Ismāʿīl Ibn al-Aḥmar (d. 1407) states that the Almoravids opposed Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* to such an extent that the scholars of Fez ordered its burning, a decree that was enforced throughout the Maghrib and al-Andalus. Upon hearing of this in Baghdad, al-Ghazālī is said to have raised his hands in supplication (*duʿāʾ*) and prayed for the destruction of the Almoravid state. Ibn Tūmart was present when al-Ghazālī prophesied that the downfall of the Almoravids would come at his hands. Ibn al-Aḥmar further notes that al-Ghazālī instructed Ibn Tūmart in various fields of knowledge, including occult sciences such as the secrets of letters (*sirr al-ḥurūf*) and magical sciences (*ʿulūm al-siḥr*). See Ismāʿīl Ibn al-Aḥmar, *Buyūtāt Fās al-kubrā* (Rabat, 1972), 34. A similar trend of transforming classical philosophers into occultists was evident in the Islamic East, where, for instance, the Ismaili philosopher Nāṣīr-i Khusraw (d. *c.* 1070) was portrayed as an occultist *par excellence* in the hagiographical traditions of the late medieval and early modern periods. See Mohammad Amin Mansouri, "Letters and divine writing in Nāṣir-i Ḫusraw's works", *Arabica*, forthcoming.

[84] For this aspect of ʿAlī's appeal in this era, see Mansouri, "The greatest name of God", 687–99.

[85] Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Astrology, lettrism, geomancy: the occult-scientific methods of post-Mongol Islamicate imperialism", *The Medieval History Journal* 19/1, 2016, 144.

[86] For millenarianism, sacred kingship and the fusion of Sufi/occult sciences and imperial authority in the early modern Islamic world, see A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012).

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