The Most Learned of the Shi'a

The Institution of the *Marja' Taqlid*

Edited by

Linda S. Walbridge

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LINDA S. WALBRIDGE

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I dedicate this book to
John and Nathaniel
with love

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Acknowledgments

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The publication of this book has a slightly odd history. I was in Pakistan by the time I had all the papers for the volume in hand. I approached Oxford University Press in Karachi to see if they were interested in publishing the volume. Tayaba Habib promptly informed me that they were. However, due to the political climate in the country at the time, the publisher thought it best not to go forward with the project. However, Ms. Habib did not let the matter drop there. She approached Cynthia Read at Oxford New York, who graciously recommended the book for publication. I am grateful to both of these individuals for their interest in and concern for this project.

I would like to express my gratitude to the editorial staff at Oxford, who have given such painstaking attention to this volume. Also, I thank Cambridge University Press for permitting me to include a section of Edward G. Browne's wonderful book, *A Literary History of Persia*, volume 4, in this collection.

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Introduction

Shi'ism and Authority

Linda S. Walbridge

The problem of who should succeed the Prophet has plagued the Islamic community since the time of his death. Should politics be the overriding consideration in determining leadership, or should it be heredity? Should a leader be proclaimed on the basis of group consensus, or should there be formal elections? Who is qualified to judge whether or not one can lead? Is it the community, in general, or a select group with certain qualifications? What are the major attributes a leader should have? Should charisma override learning, or is it the other way around? What role should a leader take in society at large? Should the leader be at the forefront of societal and political issues, or should he limit his activities to the spiritual domain?

The Shi'a settled some of these problems by determining that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali was his rightful successor and that his descendants through the Prophet's daughter Fatima were eligible to lead the community. Those Shi'a who are known as Twelver or Ithna Ashari Shi'a recognize 'Ali, his sons Hasan and Husayn, and nine succeeding descendants through the line of Husayn as being the leaders, or Imams, of the faithful.

Mention of two of these Imams is critical for any discussion of Shi'ite leadership. The Imam most important for shaping the future of religious leadership and law in Shi'ism was the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, who died in the year 765 (148 of the Islamic calendar). His writings would become the basis of what would be known in the eighteenth century as the Ja'fari school of law. The twelfth of these Imams is shrouded in mystery. It is believed that he has gone into occultation and will reappear at the end of time when all peoples of the earth are judged. With his disappearance ended the succession of Imams. According to Cole and Keddie (1986), the Abbasid rulers favored the belief in the occultation of the twelfth Imam, a doctrine that meant the Imams were no longer contenders for temporal power. After the end of the imamate, the religious scholars of Shi'ism argued like others Muslims about the relative weight to assign to the traditions and jurisprudential reasoning. Not until the seventeenth century, with the Safavids' rise to power in Iran and the establishment of a Shi'i state, did the Shi'i ulama became economically powerful and influential enough to claim a more prominent and independent role for themselves. In this milieu a group of ulama emerged

who saw themselves as representing the Imams and argued for the primacy of rationalist jurisprudence in determining Shi'i law. They came to be known as the Usulis. Launching a successful challenge against their more literalist rivals, the Akhbaris, they have come to dominate Shi'i religious law and education.

By the eighteenth century there had emerged a religious elite known as *mujtahids*, who could practice *ijtihad*—that is, make religious decisions based on rational deduction from the traditional sources of law. Those without specialized religious knowledge were expected to submit (inf. *taqlid*; part. *muqallid*) to the judgment of a *mujtahid* in disputed religious issues. Eventually a hierarchy of *mujtahids* including the *Marja'iyat al-taqlid al-tamm* (complete authority of one *mujtahid* over the entire community) became recognized. Superiority in learning is generally held to be the primary prerequisite for the selection of a *marja'*, though no clear-cut set of criteria governs the choice. Ultimately, the followers (those who are *muqallid* to the *marja'*) decide which *marja'* to follow.

Ideally, one *mujtahid* is so renowned and revered for his knowledge and piety that he is recognized as the object of emulation for all Shi'a in matters of religious law. It is recognized that there might be more than one *marja'*. Such a notion does not imply a schism within the religion. There may also be more than one *marja'*—maybe several—but one will be *al-marja' al-a'zam*—the highest *marja'* in the world. Ideally, a person may elect to follow a particular *marja'*—and not necessarily the *marja' al-a'zam*—without fear of rebuke or condemnation from anyone else. The influence of the *marja'* is increased by the believers' payment of an important religious tax—the *sahm al-Imam* "the Imam's share"—to the *marja'* to whom he is *muqallid*. Such is the theory and to some extent the practice. To many Shi'a the opinions of the *marja'* are the "final word" on an issue. The *marja'*, therefore, has the potential to wield great influence and a strong *marja'* can be a powerful unifying force.

Whether *ijtihad* and *taqlid* were accepted simultaneously is unclear. According to Said Arjomand, most early religious scholars rejected *taqlid*, "emulation of a *marja'*," though the roots of this concept are obviously deep in Shi'i history. Arjomand reports that Ibn Mutahhar al-Hilli, the 'Allama (d. 1250 C.E.) "justifies taqlid on account of its practical necessity, as the laity do not have the necessary time to devote to acquiring the expert knowledge necessary or determining the ethically and ritually correct behavior in conjunction with new occurrences, and to attempt to do so would prevent them from earning their livelihood."[1] His thinking was influenced by al-Murtada, who lived three centuries earlier. Moussavi finds evidence that Tabataba'i Yazdi (d. 1919) was the first grand ayatollah to clearly state the legal necessity of following the opinion of a *mujtahid*, basing his opinions on ideas set forth by Shaykh Murtada Ansari (d. 1864).[2]

As for the evolution of the *marja'iya* itself , Moussavi claims that it "appeared as an institution rather than a personal office of the chief *mujtahid*'s network" under Shaykh Muhammad Hasan Najafi during the early nineteenth century.[3] Moussavi argues that the *marja'iya* was established on the basis of practical concerns rather than juridical analysis. In the mid-nineteenth century, the ulama faced the challenges of anticlerical Akhbaris, Shaykhis, and Babis. The need for an orchestrated response strengthened the position of the ulama, which led to the Usuli ascendance over the Akhbari school and to more consensus among the Usuli ulama. Other scholars, such as Abbas Amanat, Juan Cole, and Hamid Dabashi,[4] see the *marja'iya* as having emerged in the eighteenth century as the answer to the need to integrate Shi'ite clerics and establish lines of authority.

The *marjaʿ* is supposed to combine the qualities of learning and reason with those of extreme piety and devotion and a just character. As the representative of the "general deputyship" of the Imam, the *marjaʿ*, as source of emulation, enjoys the dual role of chief legal expert and spiritual model for all Shiʿa. A very high level of knowledge of *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh* (Islamic law and the principles of its deduction, respectively) reflected in his teaching and his writings are what generally qualify a person to be considered a candidate for this position. Authorship of a legal manual (*risala*) is said to indicate a person's willingness to take on the mantle of the position.

Yet, not until after Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Tabataba'i Yazdi, the author of *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa*, died in 1918, did it become customary for all *maraji'* to write such treatises, which are a summation of the *marjaʿ*'s opinions. However, there is no investiture into office. An *ʿalim* is a *marjaʿ* by virtue of (a) being acknowledged by at least some of his colleagues and (b) being the recipient of the *sahm al-Imam* religious tax.

The claim is frequently made that the Shiʿi world recognizes a sole *marjaʿ*. Moojan Momen, for example, identifies Ayatollah Burujirdi as the sole *marjaʿ* between 1946 and 1962.[5] In fact, Arab Shiʿa were not likely to follow Burujirdi, but rather followed Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. While scholars writing from an Iranian perspective say that Hakim was the *marjaʿ* whom most people turned to after the death of Burujirdi, Arab informants state that Hakim became the sole *marjaʿ* in the 1940s (during the lifetime of Burujirdi) after the death of Abu l-Hasan Isfahani, who resided in Najaf.

At times it is widely acknowledged that several *mujtahids* are qualified to be called *maraji'*, as was the case in Iran after the death of Burujirdi. And predictably, there is competition among the *mujtahids* for supreme leadership. This competition is not played out in an open political debate among the *maraji'* themselves, since the Shiʿa find this highly distasteful. Rather, their followers and representatives act to influence public opinion. After a *marjaʿ* dies, the believers, according to the Usuli school, are supposed to turn to another *marjaʿ*. The system of competition among the ulama, therefore, is perpetuated.

Certainly it was Ayatollah Khomeini who made *marjaʿ al-taqlid* almost a household term. While he fit the mold of the *marjaʿ* in many respects, he was not the most learned of the *mujtahids* of his time and would not have gained such recognition even in the Shiʿi world had it not been for his stance against the shah and his leadership in the revolution. His political activism against what was viewed as a tyrannical regime was hardly unusual among Shiʿi ulama. However, his success in overthrowing the shah and his advocacy of united political and religious leadership in the institution of the *wilayat al-faqih* (governance by the jurisprudent) singled him out and led to his recognition as both the temporal and spiritual head of Iran and as *marjaʿ al-taqlid al-aʿzam*, eliminating in this process other *mujtahids* whose scholarly scholarly achievement under more stable conditions would have outshone his. Yet even at the height of Khomeini's prestige, most Shiʿa followed Grand Ayatollah Abu'l Qasim Khu'i in Iraq.

Iraq has had its own political activists in this century. Some of its most outstanding *mujtahids*, including Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, who would later become the grand *marjaʿ* in Najaf, had participated in the 1920 revolt against the British. Later, in the 1950s, "young apprentice-ʿulama in Najaf had come to realise that short of a renewal, their position might be irreversibly jeopardised."[6] With the 1958 revolution, the ulama found themselves in a situation even more difficult than what they had experienced

under the British, especially with the land reform that threatened their economic support. That year Hakim authorized the formation of Jama'at al-'Ulama', modeled after the Egyptian Ikhwan (Muslim Brothers), whose goal was to strengthen the links between the clerical and nonclerical elements of Shi'i society in order to combat the overwhelming forces of the new regime.[7]

After the death of Ayatollah Hakim, Ayatollah Khu'i rose to the position of grand *Marja'* in Najaf, which made him Khomeini's chief competitor as leader of the Shi'i world. Khu'i was renown for his quietism, having never advocated the intertwining of religion and temporal politics, a position that strained relations between himself and social/political activists, most of whom were of a younger generation.[8]

The leader of these activists, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, pressed for the Islamization of society and for reforms within both the *hawza* and Shi'i society.[9] Sadr's influence was limited by his premature death and also by his deference to his teacher, Ayatollah Khu'i. As long as Khu'i was alive, al-Sadr could not openly put himself forward as a *marja'*. Al-Sadr's defiance of the Iraqi regime and Saddam Hussein's fear of an Islamic revolution led to al-Sadr's execution. It was only after al-Sadr's death that he became well known among Western scholars and non-Iraqi Shi'a, and to Sunni activists. Despite their efforts—and their untold suffering and bloodshed—the Iraqi Shi'a have never accomplished a successful revolution and, hence, never captured the world's imagination as the Iranians have.

Some ulama informants have stated that in the past the *marja'iya* was an extraordinarily important institution and that the vast majority of Shi'a were strongly attached to the person of the *marja'*, continually seeking his opinion. One shaykh referred to the Tobacco rebellion in Iran in 1891 as an example of the power of the *marja'*. He related the story that Nasir al-Din Shah's wife told the shah that she and those around her would avoid the use of tobacco because the *marja'* had declared its use religiously forbidden. The point of the story was that the shah's wife listened to the *marja'* rather than her own husband, the king. Another shaykh told the story of the escape of a son of Ayatollah Hakim from Iraq: that a woman saw the illustrious *marja'*'s son and upon hearing of his situation, she had vowed to maintain her fast until she was assured of his safety. This same shaykh spoke of the people's awe in the presence of a *marja'* and their sense of entering into a holy presence.

While such feelings of devotion and acts of obedience could no doubt be found, there were limits to how widespread these sentiments could have been. Before sophisticated technology allowed for easy communication, a single *marja'* could not exert a great deal of influence on the entire Shi'i community. In fact, parts of the Shi'i world were not even aware of the institution until recently and do not have such intimate contact with *mujtahids*. For example, in the early 1960s Shi'i Lebanese immigrants to the United States, though led by a shaykh trained in Najaf, procured their seed money for a mosque in Detroit from Nasser in Egypt, not from the coffers of the *marja'*. The Lebanese, even as late as the 1980s, were often unfamiliar with the term *marja'* though this ignorance was more common among people from the Bekaa than from Jabal Amil. Even some clerics will concede that the *marja'iya* has become a far more important institution over the past several years.[10]

During the 1950s through the 1970s, the Shah of Iran and the Iraqi regime enticed their youth to choose the benefits of secular society over those of a seminary education.

In Iraq, at least, communist manifestos seemed more compelling than the religious rulings of elderly *mujtahids*. The increasing prosperity of Iran, along with a pervasive ambivalence about religion and clerics among various segments of Iranian society, also marginalized the *mujtahids*.

The 1979 Iranian revolution and events that led up to it revitalized the institution, as did the writings of Baqir al-Sadr in Iraq. Religious leaders were offering attractive alternatives to secular or even atheistic ideologies and, for the first time in decades, Shi'ites, particularly young ones, were seeking answers to social dilemmas through religious teachings, which enhanced the prestige of the learned.

Middle Eastern oil money also strengthened the institution. This sudden upsurge in wealth enormously increased the base for paying the *sahm al-Imam*, which could, in turn, be used to increase the prestige of the institution. However, the present political turmoil in Iran and Iraq seems to have the greatest impact on the institution.

Of paramount concern among activist Shi'ites in Iran and Iraq was the question of who was to be given the reins of leadership, not just in religious matters, but at the head of the government. Should the faithful follow a Shi'i jurist in temporal/political matters as well as in spiritual matters? In his book *The Just Ruler*, A. A. Sachedina argues that the comprehensive authority of the most learned jurist was a well-developed concept in Shi'ism by the end of the ninth century; i.e., at the end of the period of the Imams.[11] He states that the Imams appointed close associates (specifically transmitters of *hadith*) as their personal representatives and gave them tremdendous power to administer the Shi'i community. In a 1991 review of Sachedina's book, Hossein Modaressi strongly refutes those arguments, stating that there are well-documented and explicitly stated views that no one can serve as an Imam, except for the Imams themselves.[12] The issue of the jurist's right to act in the place of an Imam is of critical importance today since it is basic to the justification of the Islamic state in Iran. And, if the notion of the guardianship of the jurist, that is, the *wilayat al-faqih*, is legitimate, is the person in that role the same as the *marja' taqlid*? As Iran has discovered, this theoretical issue presents problems when put into practice, as will be discussed in one of the chapters.

This volume explores the factors that gave rise to the the institution of the *marja'iya*—or challenged it—and influenced the institution's power during its uneven history. The articles reveal how social, political, and economic factors interweave with theological debates, leading sometimes to a powerful centralized clerical order and at other other times to one weakened by factionalism, economic constraints, and governmental intereference.

Before summarizing the articles, I should clarify that this volume does not claim to be a thorough review of the *marja'iya*, its history, its ideologues, or anything else. Readers will notice that some major figures and events are never even referred to. For example, the Constitutional Revolution and its major players, such as Ayatollahs Khorasani and Mazandrani, are not discussed because this topic has been written about fairly extensively elsewhere. By contrast, there are two articles about Baqir al-Sadr (chapters 7 and 8) and one on Sayyid Fadlallah of Lebanon (chapter 12). There is also an article about Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (chapter 5), the founder of the Shaykhi school. None of these personalities would be considered the core players in the institution of the *marja'iya*. Yet, they all have had—and, I would argue, continue to have—an influence on the development of Shi'ite leadership. In many respects, this is a collection of articles

about Shi'i leadership on the edges. It should be noted that even Khomeini, the most famous jurist both inside and outside the Shi'i world, was not mainstream in many of his important opinions. Ayatollah Khu'i, on the other hand, is referred to almost in passing, yet far more Shi'a were *muqallid* to him in his lifetime than were to Khomeini. Khu'i was very much within the conventional mode of a *marja'*, and hence his views are not of central concern to this volume, though they are certainly of importance and value on a larger scale.

Shahzad Bashir's article (chapter 2) exemplifies our approach in this volume. While the *mujtahids* represent the Twelfth Imam during his period of occultation, the idea that the Imam actually has returned and is living among the people as the Mahdi has never been well received among the high-ranking jurists. The author has given us accounts of two fifteenth-century religious leaders who, in announcing themselves as the Mahdi, found themselves at odds with normative Twelver Shi'ite thought and, consequently, with traditional jurists. These two men, Muhammad b. Falah Musha'sha' and Muhammad Nurbakhsh, though relying on Shi'ite doctrine and its model of messianism, were strongly influenced by Sufism, in which they found the theoretical bases for their claims to religious leadership. In their claims to religious authority, both men found themselves at odds with the state, though only in the case of Musha'sha' was there any overt attempt to gain political power. The accounts of the lives of Musha'sha' and Nurbakhsh clarify the potential challenge to the role of the *mujtahids* as preservers of the tradition by men who claim direct access to divine power, and also account for the perennial tensions between the two paradigms of leadership so strongly expressed in Shi'ism: the messianic/heroic figure vs. the legalistic/ritualistic caretaker, a theme also relevant to the history of nineteenth-century Shi'ism.

Andrew Newman's article (chapter 3 of this volume) brings the reader directly into the debates of seventeenth-century Safavid Iran as the state, in an effort to establish its own power, promoted the expanded authority of the clergy. The theological issue is the legality of the Friday prayer service during the occulation of the Twelfth Imam. As Newman explains, the state desired that this service, with its customary reference to the ruler, take place so as to give him religious legitimacy in the eyes of the people. As economic crises faced the regime, the issue gained urgency. Threatened with popular discontent and political upheaval, the state increasingly needed clerical support. Likewise, the idea of the *faqih* as surrogate for the Imam and supporter of a government that was considered to be corrupt was increasingly challenged. Discontent led to a revival of Sufism and to antagonistic competition between the ulama and the Sufis. The Friday prayer service and its implications also triggered disputes between Akhbari and Usuli clergy. Newman shows how this conflict during the Safavid period led to further debates over clerical rule and the rise of the *marja'iya*.

With the collapse of the Safavid state in 1722, the religious classes found themselves free of governmental control but also in dire need of financial support. In the 1790s the Qajars came to power in Iran, and they, like the Safavids before them, desired religious legitimacy, which they obtained through their support of Usuli leaders. Under the Qajars, the ulama gained power, autonomy, and, in many cases, great wealth. Willem Floor's study (chapter 4 of this volume) portrays the growth of the religious classes during the early Qajar period, their activities, and the manner in which they funded themselves and their projects. Governmental contributions, gifts from believers, endowed proper-

ties, and even bribery and the acceptance of fees to legalize prostitution were only some of the ways that the elite members of this establishment enriched themselves. Controlling education and resisting any educational or legal reforms, the Usuli ulama were able to spread their influence and their views. Highly conservative regarding any sort of social change, they, like so many other members of religious establishments, sought to alleviate the suffering of their people without upsetting their own social status.

The Usuli ulama were not without competitors. Aside from the Akhbari school and Sufism, the Shaykhi school emerged as the ideas articulated by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i gained prominence during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Juan Cole (chapter 5) examines the ideas of Shaykh Ahmad on the issue of religious authority and shows the rich variety of influences that shaped his thinking. Shaykh Ahmad was a defender of the rationalism of the Usulis, yet the ideas of the philosopher Suhravardi are reflected in his belief that the jurist receives illumination (*ishraq*) from the Hidden Imam. In exploring these ideas, Cole states that Shaykh Ahmad's ideas resemble those of clerics who turned to the Ni'matu'llahi Sufi order in the nineteenth century, though Shaykh Ahmad himself scorned Sufism and vehemently opposed blind obedience of a Sufi pir. To be a religious leader, according to Shaykh Ahmad, one must have great knowledge of jurisprudence (i.e., be trained in the Usuli school) but, in addition, he must have mystical insight. In other words, authority is "visionary yet rational, esoteric yet in acord with the literal text of scripture, and ethical in such a way as to put contemorary state practices inevitably under judgment." (Cole, this volume). Ultimately, the Usulis won out over the Shaykhis, but the way had been paved for the Babi religion that followed, which was to have far-reaching impact on Iranian society, not the least of which we credit to the remarkable Tahireh, a very early champion of the new faith. Indeed, her story is perhaps more remembered by history than that of the founder of the movement, the Bab himself. Todd Lawson's work (chapter 6 of this volume) provides some background for the extraordinary degree to which her religious authority was accepted by her followers and by the Babis in general. Lawson emphasizes the role of Fatima al-Zahra, of whom Tahireh was considered, if not a reincarnation, then certainly a "re-enactment." He focuses on the Bab's discussion of Fatima in an unpublished Qur'an commentary written before the founding of the Babi movement. Here it becomes clear that Fatima was a symbol and embodiment of the highest possible spiritual rank connected with cosmogony, gnosis, divine love and mercy, knowledge, heroism, and *walaya*. With the appearance of the highly gifted Tahireh in the midst of the eschatalogical drama that was the Babi movement, the reality of Fatima was made present and Tahireh's own authority was thereby retified.

Part II of this volume examines the ideas of contemporary Shi'i reformers. Responding to modern ideologies and to current political and social realities, these men sought to both rejuvenate and reshape religious authority to meet the challenges of modern society. There are two articles on Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, the brilliant Najafi scholar whose life was brutally cut short by the Iraqi regime in 1980. Baqir al-Sadr, recognized by both his peers and his elders as likely to rise to the position of a grand *marja' taqlid*, was also a political activist, one of the founders of the Da'wa movement. His quest for reform was therefore comprehensive and, as the authors show, well deserving of serious study.

The first study (chapter 7), by John Walbridge, focuses not on Baqir al-Sadr as scholar of *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*, but on Baqir al-Sadr the philosopher. Walbridge mentions that

Khomeini was also a philosopher, yet Khomeini's influence in this domain has not been felt; rather, his legalistic and political ideas have survived him. The philosophical ideas of Baqir al-Sadr, on the other hand, have spread beyond the Shi'ism into Sunni communities throughout the world. Baqir al-Sadr engaged Western philosophical ideas, not to discredit them but to challenge them when he sees fit and to incorporate them into his own system when appropriate. Baqir al-Sadr's goals are ultimately religious. He wished to show that religious knowledge was not the antithesis of scientific knowledge, but that the two are actually in the same category, thereby addressing issues of paramount concern to Muslim intellectuals.

Talib Aziz (chapter 8) looks at the political/religious legacy of Baqir al-Sadr based on a careful study of his writings and on interviews with his colleagues and close associates. Baqir al-Sadr wanted religious scholarly ideas to be accessible to educated Muslims. Consequently, attempting to abandon the obtuse writing style characteristic of the *hawzas*, he wrote in a straighforward language. But his contribution was as much substance as form. Aziz explains, for example, that al-Sadr proposed a new taxonomy of the legal system that had implications for the structure of society, including the marital relationship. One of Baqir al-Sadr's main focuses was on the institution of the *marja'iya* itself, citing as one of its primary shortcomings the absence of an organizational structure.

Other contemporary writers join al-Sadr in criticizing this problem, including Morteza Motahari. Morteza Motahari, assassinated in May 1979, was one of the most important ideologues of the Islamic revolution. A vociferous writer, he ardently attacked Iranian secular intellectuals and the materialism he felt he was corrupting Iranian society. While Khomeini lived in exile, Motahari acted as his representative in Iran while maintaining his own independent status as a revolutionary. In his treatise included in this volume (chapter 10), translated by Farhad Arshad with an introduction by Hamid Dabashi, Motahari clearly places the blame for the *marja'iya*'s lack of leadership and influence in society, not on the clerics themselves, but on various facets of its organization. Of particular concern to Motahari is the manner in which the ulama are funded. While expressing approval that the *mujtahids* are not financially supported by the government, which frees them from state control, he bemoans the fact that the ulama are forced to cater to public opinion in order to collect the khums. As a result, the productivity of the ulama is hampered by the "intellectual limitations of the populace."

Ayatollah Khomeini's objective was to eliminate any restrictions to the ulama's power, so that their authority would be equal to that of the Prophet and the Hidden Imam. In chapter 11 of this volume, Hamid Mavani examines the proofs that Khomeini advanced to substantiate his claims of the infallibility and total authority of the religious jurist. Other leading jurists, such as the late Ayatollah Abu'l Qasim Khu'i, did not share Khomeini's views on this subject. As Mavani explains, these jurists counter that Khomeini has based his arguments on traditions with weak chains of transmission and that he differs markedly from his predecessors in interpreting these traditions.

While some of Khomeini's ideas have been branded as unorthodox by more traditional *mujtahids*, those of Muhammad Fadlallah of Lebanon have engendered even more controversy. Talib Aziz (chapter 12) portrays Fadlallah as an enigmatic intellectual who aspires for the leadership of the Shi'i community. A supporter of the *wilayat al-faqih*, he does not approve of the leader of the Shi'i community being the head of a state. Rather,

he sees the person in this role as resembling the pope—that is, an international leader not tied to one nation. His unconventional ideas about the role of women in society and about the abolition of practices that divide Shi'a and Sunni and believer and nonbeliever have won him both ardent admirers and enemies.

Baqir al-Sadr's sister, with the backing of both her brother and Ayatollah Khu'i, led the movement to educate and uplift Iraqi Shi'i women. Joyce Wiley's article (chapter 9) on Bint al-Huda, the sister of Baqir al-Sadr, gives us a glimpse of the private world of the ulama. Educated at home by her brother, Bint al-Huda devoted her life to the education and uplifting of her Shi'i sisters, relying on Qur'anic support for ideas of gender equality. She explored ways to reach her audience that her male colleagues would probably not have even considered. To illustrate her vision of the ideal Islamic life, she wrote novels that deplored both subservience to men and Western values. Though Ayatollah Khu'i ruled that women could not be *mujtahids*, he still funded her religious school for girls in Najaf, suggesting that she was able to work effectively with the ulama—even the most conservative among them. However, she was far less successful in her dealings with the Ba'thist government. On April 8, 1980, Saddam Hussein's government executed both Bint al-Huda and her illustrious brother.

Part III looks at the social and political conditions of modern Shi'i communities, but from very different perspectives. Devin Stewart (chapter 13) discusses the historical rivalry between Najaf and Qom and Khomeini's role in accentuating this rivalry. Khomeini, after being exiled to Iraq, had hoped to achieve the status of *marja' taqlid* in Najaf after the death of Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. However, he lost out to the quiescent Khu'i and, thereafter, reviled Najaf for its obscurantism and lack of involvement in political issues. Even before the revolution he was praising Qom for producing scholars who were willing to endure imprisonment and torture rather than acquiesce to the shah's tyranny. As Stewart notes, the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran and subsequent turmoil in Iraq have bolstered Qom's claims to being the foremost center of learning in the Shi'i world.

It should be cause for sober reflection that study of the written historical record and anthropological fieldwork should produce such drastically different impressions of the situation. While Qom has many more students than Najaf today, it is not so clear that it is truly recognized as the center of Shi'ism throughout the world. In my article (chapter 14), I argue that the politicization of religious leadership in Iran has alienated Shi'a both within and outside Iran and that, at present, the *marja' taqlid* with the greatest number of *muqallids* is Ayatollah 'Ali Sistani, who resides in Najaf. Seen as Ayatollah Khu'i's successor, Sistani has risen to prominence as a *mujtahid* who is both apolitical and outside of the control of the Iranian government.

In the final article (chapter 15), Yousif al-Khu'i portrays the little known Shi'a community of Medina, the descendants of the earliest Muslim community. Suffering from discrimination in education, employment, and the freedom to practice their rituals and ceremonies, this community of Shi'a have sustained their beliefs, quietly coming together for prayer and praise of God, the prophet, and the Imams. Helping to sustain this shared identity is their commitment to following the *marja' taqlid*. A picture of 'Ali Sistani of Najaf graces their *husayniyas*.

I have chosen to begin the volume with a portrait of the life of an *alim*, extracted from E. G. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia*. It is a rare, first-person account of ulama

life that has not drastically changed over the past 600 years. This passage shows the intellectual rewards of the madrasa education, the mixture of the scholarly and the ambitious, and the hardships of a student's life.

Notes

1. Arjomand, *Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, p. 140.
2. Moussavi, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam*, p. 39.
3. Moussavi, "Institutionalization of the Marja'i Taqlid," p. 279.
4. See, among others, Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 33–69; Cole, "Imami Jurisprudence and the Role of the Ulama," pp. 33–46; and Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*.
5. Momen, Moojan, in *Introduction to Shi'i Islam*.
6. Mallat, *Renewal of Islamic Law*, p. 36. Mallat provides a valuable description of the workings of the Shi'i colleges.
7. Wiley, *Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 34.
8. In spite of Khu'i's noninvolvement in politics and his advanced age, Saddam Hussein placed him under house arrest. Family and close followers of Khu'i state that the ayatollah, though elderly, was not ill prior to his sudden demise, and this kindled suspicion that the Iraqi government had a hand in his death.
9. Aziz, "Role of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Shi'i Political Activism," pp. 207–22. See also Mallat's analysis of Baqir al-Sadr's contributions in *Renewal of Islamic Law*.
10. See Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam*.
11. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*.
12. Modaressi, "Just Ruler or Guadian Jurist."

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Part I

TRADITION