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## One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf: Myth and History of the Shi'i Ḥawza

*According to Shi'i tradition, the seminary (ḥawza) in Najaf, Iraq is 1,000 years old. The origins of the ḥawza are closely associated with the famous scholar Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (385/995-459/1067). This paper addresses the question of whether or not there is sufficient historical evidence to support the tradition that the ḥawza of Najaf is indeed 1,000 years old. On the basis of Arabic sources, the article argues that although Shi'i educational institutions in Najaf were incepted a millennium ago, Najaf was rarely the locus of Shi'i education prior to the thirteenth/nineteenth century. Based on statistical and historical analysis of Shi'i scholars in Najaf, this paper outlines a short history of scholarly activity in one of the oldest college towns in the world. In addition to developing a working definition of the term ḥawza, the paper situates the rise of Shi'i educational systems in the broader context of the evolution of Islamic scholarly institutions, including colleges (madrasas).*

### Introduction

The city of Najaf, also referred to as al-Gharī, is located in southern Iraq and stands out as one of the holiest cities in the Islamic world.<sup>1</sup> It is home to the golden-domed shrine of the Prophet Muḥammad's son-in-law—the first Shi'i Imam and fourth rightly guided caliph—'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 41/661).<sup>2</sup> In the Shi'i tradition, Najaf is cited as the dwelling place of prophets and the location where Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad attained prophethood. Additionally, it is the supposed burial site of Adam and Noah, the final destination of Noah's ark, and the expected site of the Hidden Imam's return.<sup>3</sup> Najaf is also one of the oldest college towns in the world. In fact, the history of scholarly activity in Najaf stretches back before the oldest university in the English-speaking world, the University of Oxford, which was established in the sixth/twelfth century.

The long history of intellectual endeavor in Najaf has recently been the cause of great celebration throughout the Shi'i world because many Shi'is believe that the first Shi'i seminary (*ḥawza*) was established in Najaf 1,000 years ago. Conferences

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and other commemorations have been held in the past several years, celebrating the millennial anniversary of Shi'i scholarship in Najaf.<sup>4</sup> The Islamic Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization nominated Najaf as its capital of Islamic culture for 2012, and more than fifty wax figures of Najaf's Shi'i scholars were reportedly commissioned as part of the commemorative activities.<sup>5</sup>

Outside of Iran, Najaf is currently the most important seat of Shi'i authority and knowledge production, which is directly tied to the Shi'i seminary system (*hawza*).<sup>6</sup> The only contemporary international rival of the *hawza* complex in Najaf is Qom in Iran.<sup>7</sup> There is a loose comparison to be made between the Najaf-Qom rivalry and the rivalries between universities in the West, such as Cambridge and Oxford. Claims to higher authority in Najaf are often a direct result of the notion that its tradition of learning is older than any other Shi'i center, including Qom.

References to the 1,000-year tradition of learning in Najaf are abundant in Shi'i literature.<sup>8</sup> The author of *The Schools of Najaf (Madrasat al-Najaf)* sums up the sentiments of many Shi'is as he asserts, "Najaf has been the location of the study of Islamic law (*fiqh*), legal principles (*uṣūl*), exegesis (*tafsīr*), philosophy (*falsafā*), and whatever else is related to Islamic affairs and thought for the past one thousand years."<sup>9</sup> Shi'i historians generally agree that the great scholar Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (385/995-459/1067) founded the Shi'i seminary system (*hawza*) in Najaf in the mid-fifth/eleventh century.<sup>10</sup> In the words of Wahid Akhtar, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī moved "from Baghdad and settled in al-Najaf al-Ashraf, where he established the first *hawza 'ilmiyyah* that proved to be the highest centre of Shi'i studies and spiritual leadership, and enjoyed this status till Saddam, the Ba'athist tyrant, recently closed it by force."<sup>11</sup> Prior to taking up refuge in Najaf, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī had been the leading Shi'i scholar in Baghdad, the capital of the Buyid dynasty, which lent patronage to Shi'ism. He has been immortalized as the author of many foundational works on Shi'ism and as the compiler of two of the "four books" of Shi'i hadith material that were collected before 447/1055.<sup>12</sup> Robert Gleave argues that "the genesis myth of the *Hawza*" based on Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's arrival in Najaf and the common view that the period following Shaykh al-Ṭūsī was marked by intellectual "stagnation" or "unoriginality" has been "promulgated in Shi'i legal histories in order to establish al-Ṭūsī as the undisputed progenitor of the Shi'i legal tradition."<sup>13</sup>

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī did in fact arrive in Najaf toward the end of his life, after the Seljuqs ousted the Buyids from Baghdad in 447/1055. Sectarian strife overtook the capital city and Shaykh al-Ṭūsī was particularly targeted. Especially because he arrived in Najaf under harrowing circumstances, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī has achieved legendary status in Shi'i lore. Therefore, traces of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī continue to be found in Najaf. For example, one of the main mosques in Najaf bears his name, and the northern gate of the city, which leads to the shrine of Imam 'Alī, is called the "gate of al-Ṭūsī." Furthermore, the unique system of learning that continues in contemporary *hawzas*, which allows students the freedom to choose their courses of study and is based on the oral transmission of knowledge from one scholar to the next, is often referred to as the "Shaykh al-Ṭūsī method."<sup>14</sup>

In what follows, I endeavor to answer the question of whether or not there is sufficient historical evidence to prove that the *hawza* of Najaf is, in fact, 1,000 years old. In addition to contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the origins and history of the Shi'i *hawza* system, this study adds to the scholarship on Islamic education and the history of Najaf. First, I will develop a working definition of the term *hawza*. I will then contextualize the origins of the *hawza* in Najaf within the history of Islamic educational institutions, and finally I outline a history of scholarly endeavors in Najaf.

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī was the first great Shi'i scholar to reside in Najaf and therefore had a profound influence on Islamic education in that city. There appears to have been a steady trickle of scholars in Najaf throughout much of Shi'i history. Although Najaf has a long and storied scholarly tradition and is an enduring center of Shi'ism, it has rarely been the most prominent center of Shi'i learning. Excluding the time of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and his students, Najaf only became the most prominent educational center of Shi'ism in the early thirteenth/nineteenth century. Put differently, aside from the period surrounding Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, the majority of scholarly output in Najaf has occurred in the past 200 years. Therefore, Roy Mottahedeh points out that "We have very little information about the teaching system and curriculum in Najaf before the nineteenth century."<sup>15</sup> The proliferation of *hawzas* and *mujtabids* in Najaf (and Karbalā') resulted from the expansion of neo-Usulism, which began in the late twelfth/eighteenth century, and exerted a profound influence on the histories of Shi'ism, Iraq, Iran, and indeed the Islamic world.

### *Defining Islamic Educational Institutions*

Islamic educational systems were not built overnight; they slowly evolved alongside the development of Islam. By the sixth/twelfth century, when the so-called Sunni-Seljuq revival was underway, Islamic education had developed into the full-fledged *madrassa* system, which was partially constructed on the educational traditions of the Buyid-Fatimid era of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. Although historians might emphasize specific moments that were integral to the process of developing various Islamic educational institutions, single individuals or moments in time did not produce a phenomenon as long-lasting, complex, and impressive as the Islamic scholarly tradition.

In order to begin to answer how old the *hawza* is, it is necessary first to examine what the *hawza* is. Is it a building, an institution, a charitable endowment, a collection of teachers and students, the location where great scholars operate, a curriculum, an intellectual movement, a college (*madrassa*), a study circle, a seminary? The figurative meaning of *hawza* certainly includes many of these descriptors. Shi'i historians often focus their definition of the *hawza* on great scholars who produce influential works. Certainly, such scholars can attract students and funds. Therefore, a good indicator of which *hawza* was the most prominent at a given time is the location in which influential scholars studied, lived, worked, and received and distributed teaching licenses

(*ijāzas*).<sup>16</sup> The issuance of *ijāzas* and scholarly output are both good indicators of how active a *hawza* is. A scholar on his own, however, without students, is not a *hawza*.

Literally, *hawza* has been defined as an “enclosed, barricaded area or specified place.”<sup>17</sup> The verbal form (*ḥa-wa-za*) means to possess, obtain, or gain control. *Ḥawza* as a noun can also be defined as territory or property.<sup>18</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Šālihī defines *hawza* in terms of township, community, and center of gravity.<sup>19</sup> ‘Alī al-Bahādilī describes *hawza* as a “scholarly entity,” especially for the purpose of conducting *ijtibād*.<sup>20</sup> Laurence Louer suggests that *hawza* refers to a community of learning in a particular place, especially considering the fact that Islamic authority was more localized prior to the second half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Meir Litvak writes, “The *hawza* denotes a communal whole which encompasses scholarship, interpersonal and social bonds, as well as organizational and financial aspects.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, Devin Stewart defines *hawza ‘ilmiyya* as an “academic center” and argues that the *hawza*, more than any other institution (including the *ra’s al-madhbhab* and *marja’ al-taqlīd*), “gives structure to the Twelver Shi’ite legal *madhbhab* diachronically” and “has allowed a remarkable degree of continuity in Shi’ite legal education from the 5th/11th century until the present.”<sup>23</sup> A critical component of the *hawza* system, therefore, is related to the locality in which scholarly activity is carried out.<sup>24</sup>

Coincidentally, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī appears to have been the first Shi’i scholar to utilize the term *hawza*.<sup>25</sup> However, he does not use it in reference to education. He employs the phrase *al-ḥawza al-Islamiyya* in the context of a discussion on the necessity of jihad. In a similar way, Shi’i seminaries are commonly referred to as *al-ḥawza al-‘ilmiyya*, literally meaning realm, domain, or territory of scholarship. Therefore, *hawza*, like *madrasa*, refers to a localized community of learning, not to be confused with a *maddhab*, which is a school of legal thought that is not necessarily confined by local boundaries. Only Shi’is, not Sunnis, use the term *hawza* in reference to places of learning. The fact that *hawza* connotes a defensible territory may indicate that Shi’i scholars felt that their institutions of learning were under attack and needed to be defended.

#### *Najaf and the Evolution of Islamic Colleges (madradas)*

Historically speaking, Islamic learning has taken on a multiplicity of forms. In addition to *hawza*, the term *madrasa* is commonly used in pre-modern as well as modern Shi’i (and Sunni) literature to refer to the location in which teaching, learning, and research was conducted. The term *madrasa* was first used in the third/ninth century, and initially referred to centers of learning that developed in relation to mosques.<sup>26</sup> In addition to teaching and learning activities, early *madradas* carried out state functions, especially as they related to the legal system. As George Makdisi and others have pointed out, the *madrasa* developed explicitly for the study of Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>27</sup> Judges at these institutions held court sessions, participated in tax agreements, and provided other legal services.<sup>28</sup> As will be clear from what follows, the term *madrasa* refers to a variety of institutions that evolved over time.

Different from Western scholarship, which generally emphasizes institutions of learning, Islamic education places a high premium on individual scholars. As Jonathan Berkey has argued, "Islamic higher education ... rested on the character of the relationship a student maintained with his teachers, and not the reputation of any institution."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, *madrasas* are often referred to by the names of influential scholars. Unlike Western education, it is the individual scholar who grants *ijāzas*, not the institution. Additionally, Islamic education, including the training of Muslim scholars, often occurred outside of the *madrasa*.<sup>30</sup> However, the advent of more formalized educational systems, especially related to the *madrasa*, certainly marked the beginning of a new era of Islamic education and deeply influenced the lives of Muslim academics.<sup>31</sup> Formal and informal learning in the classical period of Islamic education included the following settings:

1. Lectures given by Muslim scholars held in public squares, gardens, etc., and often attended by large crowds.
2. Study circles (*al-halaqāt al-'ilmiyya*) held in teachers' homes, shops, bookstores, archways, city gates, etc.
3. Discipleship, which often meant that a student lived with a scholar long enough to acquire the teacher's knowledge.<sup>32</sup>
4. Mosque-colleges (*masjid-madrasa*), which continued to be centers of learning after the establishment of more formalized *madrasas*.
5. Shrine-colleges (*mashhad-madrasa*), which developed near shrines instead of mosques. The Shi'i centers of learning in Najaf and Karbalā' are examples of shrine-colleges.
6. *Madrasas* unassociated with mosques or shrines.

The history of Islamic colleges (*madrasas*) reinforces the plausibility that Shaykh al-Ṭūsī contributed to the development of a center of learning in Najaf. Indeed, the evolution of Islamic educational institutions had already been well on its way. Some scholars suggest that the Seljuqs built the first *madrasas* in the fifth/eleventh century, even though the term *madrasa* had been in use since the third/ninth century, and Shi'is established institutions of learning by the fourth/tenth century.<sup>33</sup> In his widely cited book, *The Rise of Colleges*, George Makdisi suggests that *madrasas* developed in three phases. In the second/eighth century, the *masjid* became a college—providing stipends for staff and students. During the second phase, *madrasas* developed into the *masjid*-inn complex, providing students with room and possibly board. Finally, the *madrasa* developed as an institution complete with all the requisites of teaching and learning.<sup>34</sup> Accepting Makdisi's three phases, Said Amir Arjomand adds a fourth stage: the "educational-charitable complex," which, he argues, developed in the late seventh/thirteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Makdisi supports the notion that the institution of the *madrasa* flourished in the fifth/eleventh century as a result of the so-called Sunni revival associated with Seljuq rule.<sup>36</sup> However, he argues that pre-*madrasa* institutions of learning had been developing as part of mosques from the early stages of Islamic history.

Essentially describing the development of the *madrasa* in Najaf, Makdisi points out that the phenomenon of a shrine-college (*mashhad-madrasa*) was one of the many cognate *madrasa* institutions. Instead of Najaf, he cites Abū Hanīfa as an example, which was founded around the same time as Najaf, in 459/1067. Although some scholars categorize Najaf as a mosque-college (*masjid-madrasa*),<sup>37</sup> it is more precisely a shrine-college (*mashhad-madrasa*). Shrine-colleges are often perceived to have more religious legitimacy than other *madrasas* because of the authority that the shrine adds to the educational endeavors that occur nearby. The shrine also attracts pilgrims, who often extend their stay in the shrine city for educational pursuit. This phenomenon has historically occurred in Najaf and Karbalā' as well as Mecca and Medina.

The longevity of Najaf as a center of learning, therefore, is largely related to the authority provided by the shrine of Imam 'Alī. In fact, the origins of Najaf itself are directly related to 'Alī, who was buried in Najaf after his assassination in 41/661 in Kufa. By the third/ninth century, the 'Abbasid caliph Harūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) built a domed structure over the once-secret location of 'Alī's resting place, which attracted pilgrims. The Buyid ruler 'Adud al-Dawla (d. 372/983) then built a more elaborate superstructure in 337/949.<sup>38</sup> Najam Haider argues that by the fourth/tenth century "pilgrimage became an integral and even necessary component of Imami [Shi'i] identity."<sup>39</sup> Rose Aslan suggests that 'Alī's grave was, in fact, a center of pilgrimage by the late second/eighth century and that pilgrimage manuals developed as part of the scholarly activity in Najaf.<sup>40</sup>

Returning to the question of the evolution of Islamic educational institutions, it is important to consider the specific institutions leading up to the establishment of the renowned Seljuq *madrasas*. Bayt al-Ḥikma in Baghdad is often cited as one of the earliest such institutions. However, as Dimitri Gutas argues, Bayt al-Ḥikma was not a *madrasa* or even a meeting place for scholars. Instead, he suggests that it was a "library, most likely established as a 'bureau' under al-Manṣūr, part of the 'Abbasid administration modeled on that of the Sasanians."<sup>41</sup> An additional institution is al-Azhar in Cairo, established in 359/970 by Ismā'īlī Shi'is of the Fatimid Caliphate. According to al-Maqrīzī, the Fatimid Caliph al-'Azīz Billah (d. 386/996) paid stipends to legal scholars and built living quarters for them near al-Azhar in 378/988.<sup>42</sup> Although many scholars have suggested that al-Azhar stands out as the world's oldest *madrasa* and university,<sup>43</sup> Paul Walker argues that during the Fatimid period, al-Azhar was not an educational institution at all, whether as a university, *madrasa*, or otherwise.<sup>44</sup> Instead, Walker suggests that the *majlis al-ḥikma*, which unlike *madrasas* moved to different locations, was "the most enduring educational institution of the Fatimids."<sup>45</sup> Al-Ḥākim, the famous Fatimid caliph, founded Dār al-Ḥikma in 395/1005 in Cairo as a similar institution to the Bayt al-Ḥikma library in Baghdad.<sup>46</sup> The first Twelver Shi'i institution of higher learning, al-'Aḍdiyya, was established by the Buyid ruler 'Aḍud al-Dawla in Baghdad in 362/973 and was equipped with student housing.<sup>47</sup> Claude Cahen suggests that the Dār al-'Ilm (383/993) of the Buyid vizier Shapur was also established as an endowment (*waqf*) and was modeled on the Fatimid system.<sup>48</sup> Bayard Dodge argues that

the first institution that deserves the name *madrasa* is the one built in Nishapur in the first quarter of the fifth/eleventh century.<sup>49</sup> Al-Mustansiriyya (est. in 631/1234) in Baghdad, which Hisham Nishabe refers to as “the highest form of expression in classical muslim [*sic*] education,” stands out as a culmination of the *madrasa* system following the Seljuq invasion.<sup>50</sup>

Like the Fatimids and Seljuqs, the Buyids were extraordinary patrons of learning, which, according to Joel Kraemer, resulted in a veritable renaissance in humanistic learning.<sup>51</sup> Buyid patronage extended beyond “religious” and “legal” studies. In fact, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Ṣāliḥī argues that prior to the establishment of al-‘Aḍudiyya in Baghdad, study circles had been established in philosophy, theology, medicine, astrology, mysticism, and mathematics.<sup>52</sup> During the Buyid period, these circles of study and scholarly discussions took place at a great variety of locations, including mosques, gardens, city squares, private residences, markets, archways, gates, and bath houses. Bookshops were the most prominent forums for informal intellectual pursuits and were bona fide literary salons.<sup>53</sup> The proliferation of bookshops under the Buyids was so great that the Shi‘i neighborhood of al-Karkh in Baghdad hosted roughly a hundred book dealers.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, debate sessions (*majlis al-munāzara*) were often held in the courts of Buyid officials, especially ‘Aḍud al-Dawla who provided scholars with funds, a massive library, and space to hold discussions.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, major intellectual discovery and artistic output resulted from Buyid patronage. For example, Ibn al-Nadīm produced his famous *Fihrist* during this time and the great Ibn Sīna (Avicenna) flourished under Buyid support.<sup>56</sup> The Buyids also established hospitals in Baghdad and Shiraz as well as an observatory in Baghdad. ‘Aḍud al-Dawla’s hospital is said to have staffed twenty-four physicians.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the great libraries in Baghdad, the cities of Shiraz, Rey, and Isfahan were also home to impressive libraries.<sup>58</sup>

Buyid sponsorship of Shi‘ism provoked violent sectarian strife in Baghdad and beyond. “In the conflagration of 362/972,” as Kraemer reports, “seventeen thousand people are said to have perished, and 300 shops and 33 mosques were burned to the ground.”<sup>59</sup> In the 410s/1020s, Sunnis began to attack Shi‘i houses and institutions in Baghdad.<sup>60</sup> When the Seljuqs conquered Baghdad in 447/1055, Shi‘i libraries and educational institutions in Baghdad were destroyed, including al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā’s collection of books, which is said to have been composed of some 80,000 titles. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s house and library were also among those torched.<sup>61</sup> As a result of the Seljuq invasion, Shi‘i learning decentralized and Shi‘i scholars were displaced.

After toppling the Buyid dynasty in the mid-fifth/eleventh century, the Seljuqs certainly expanded the *madrasa* system, and A. C. S. Peacock argues that the *madrasa* is “perhaps the period’s most lasting legacy.”<sup>62</sup> For this reason, the Seljuqs are often credited with establishing the *madrasa* system. Although the number of Sunni *madrasas* increased exponentially under Seljuq rule, Shi‘i historians often point out that Shi‘is were the first to establish *madrasas* in the Islamic world.<sup>63</sup> As Omid Safi states, “Nizām al-Mulk and the [Seljuq] patronage of madrasas became so synonymous that many later scholars would come to erroneously assume that he had invented the whole madrasa system.”<sup>64</sup>



Whether or not Nizām al-Mulk and his successors proliferated Sunni *madrasas* as a method to counteract the “Shi‘ification” of the Islamic world that had taken place in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries is the subject of serious scholarly debate. Some historians have focused on the utility of Seljuq *madrasas* as a method of maintaining Islamic orthodoxy and countering Shi‘ism.<sup>65</sup> According to Safi, the Seljuqs developed *madrasas* as a “coercive ideological state apparatus,” to counter Ismā‘ilism and contribute “to the larger process of legitimizing and maintaining Saljuq rule and legitimacy.”<sup>66</sup> Peacock, however, asserts that the Seljuq religious policy was contradictory, did not unambiguously promote Sunnism, and even supported Shi‘ism at times.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, he argues that “the madrasa served as a means of extending patronage” and was not an “instrument of state policy.”<sup>68</sup> Additionally, Daphna Ephrat argues that there are no grounds on which to argue that the Seljuqs “supported the madrasas because they were fanatically anti-Shi‘i.”<sup>69</sup>

### *Scholarly Activity in Najaf during the Past 1,000 Years*

Returning to the question of the origins and longevity of the Shi‘i intellectual tradition in Najaf, I argue that we can determine whether or not a center was active when known scholars were living there. Certainly, teaching and learning without the output of scholarship is also important. However, it is nearly impossible for historians to determine whether teaching and learning occurred in the absence of such evidence. Eyewitness accounts do exist—like the one from Ibn Battuta discussed below. However, such references are rare and do not give a clear picture of how active a center of learning was over time. For the purpose of this study, therefore, I consider Najaf to be an active scholarly center during times in which scholarship was produced there or scholars are known to have spent time there. I have searched each period before and after Shaykh al-Tūsī to determine how many Shi‘i scholars lived in Najaf in relation to other Shi‘i centers at a given time.

A study of the birthplace of influential Shi‘i scholars who died between the beginning of the fourth/tenth and the end of the eighth/fourteenth centuries shows that a grand total of six of them were from Najaf. According to Shaykh al-Tūsī’s *Fihrist*, most scholars of the fourth/tenth century were from nearby Kufa, a few were from Baghdad, and not one was from Najaf.<sup>70</sup> Aqa Bozorg Tehrani’s list of scholars from the fifth/eleventh century shows that most scholars were from Iran, especially Khorasan and Qom, twelve were from Baghdad, and not one was from Najaf.<sup>71</sup> Most scholars in the sixth/twelfth century were from Iran (especially Rey and Qom) and eight were from Karbalā’. Not one was from Najaf.<sup>72</sup> Scholars in the seventh/thirteenth and the eighth/fourteenth centuries were primarily from Hilla and six were from Najaf.<sup>73</sup> It is only in the eighth/fourteenth century, therefore, that we see more than one or two scholars from Najaf. In total only six Najafis are reported among the noteworthy scholars during the 400-year period between the fifth/eleventh and eighth/fourteenth centuries. Five of them lived in the eighth/fourteenth century.

During the Safavid period (1501-1722), many Shi'i scholars were attracted to Iran, and consequently the old centers in Hilla, Aleppo, and elsewhere declined during this period. However, Karbalā' and Najaf slowly began to rise in importance during the Safavid period. Still, in the eleventh/seventeenth century the majority of scholars were from Jabal 'Amil and Bahrain and only eight were from Najaf. By the twelfth/eighteenth century, most scholars were from Isfahan and only one was from Najaf.<sup>74</sup>

This survey suggests that Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's presence in Najaf did not make the city a bastion of Islamic scholarship. These statistics, however, may not tell the whole story. For Najaf to be an active center of learning simply means that scholars studied, taught, or conducted research in Najaf—not that they were born there. So, what about those who died, studied, or taught in Najaf?

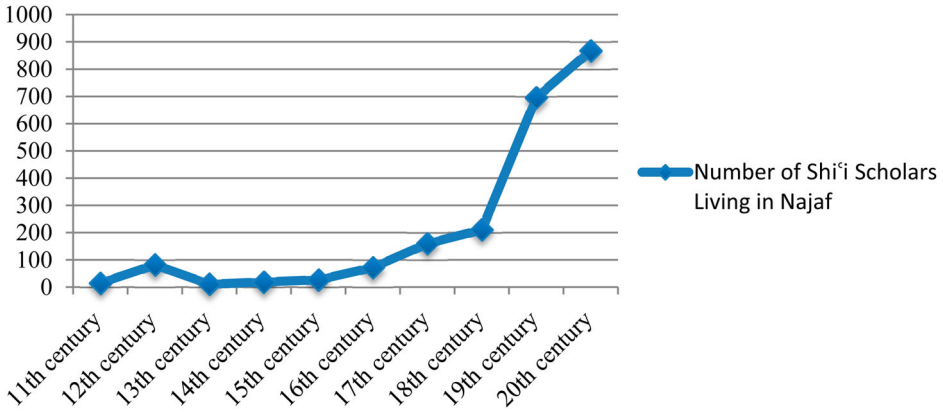
Based on a list of fifty-four of the most influential Shi'i scholars of all time, twenty-eight of them lived in Najaf as students, teachers, or both.<sup>75</sup> This does not mean that these scholars were "Najafis" per se, but at first glance it seems to suggest that Najaf, historically, has been a major center of Shi'i learning. Does it mean, however, that Najaf has been a center of learning for a full thousand years? Out of these twenty-eight scholars who spent time in Najaf, twenty-three lived in the past two centuries. Therefore, among these fifty-four influential scholars, only five lived in Najaf during the first 800 years of the 1,000-year period that Najaf has been a center of Islamic learning.

Even if the above-mentioned sample is a rough representation of the most influential scholars, it is still a relatively small sample. Therefore, I have compiled a fairly exhaustive list of over 2,000 Najafi scholars based on a wide range of Shi'i biographical sources.<sup>76</sup> This list corroborates what I have outlined above. That is, although there were a few high points in Najafi scholarship prior to the modern period, Najaf rarely dominated Shi'i learning prior to the thirteenth/nineteenth century (Figures 1 and 2). Below is the numerical distribution of Shi'i scholars in Najaf from Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's time until the present. Additionally, I have added the number of *madrasas* established in Najaf during each century:

fifth/eleventh century: 15 scholars  
sixth/twelfth century: 82 scholars  
seventh/thirteenth century: 11 scholars  
eighth/fourteenth century: 92, two *madrasas*  
ninth/fifteenth century: 27 scholars  
tenth/sixteenth century: 72 scholars, one *madrasa*  
eleventh/seventeenth century: 160 scholars, two *madrasas*  
twelfth/eighteenth century: 211 scholars  
thirteenth/nineteenth century: 696 scholars, two *madrasas*  
fourteenth/twentieth century: 868 scholars, thirty-four *madrasas*  
(fifteenth/twenty-first century: 92 scholars)

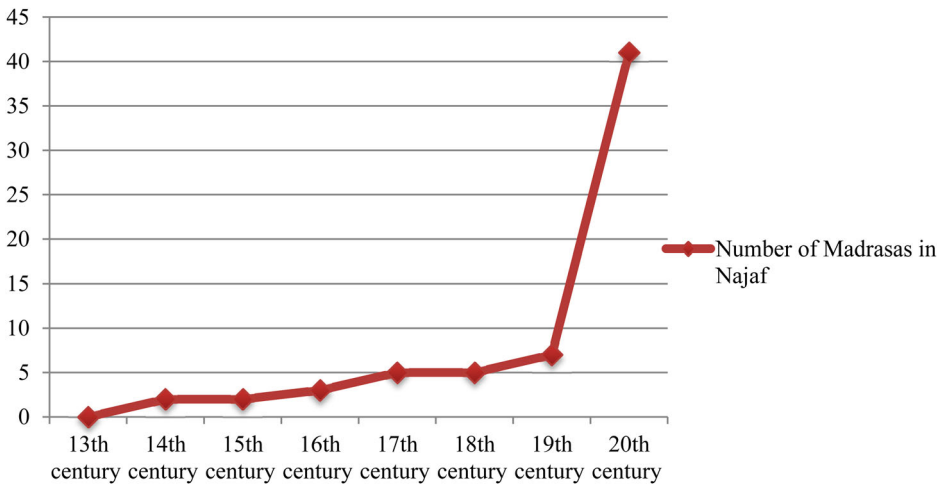
This data shows that the number of scholars in Najaf *did* increase after Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's arrival in Najaf. However, during the following four centuries (seventh/

Figure 1.



thirteenth–tenth/sixteenth), the numbers were not sustained. Toward the end of the tenth/sixteenth century, the number of scholars in Najaf resurged, which was partially the result of the activities of al-Muqaddas al-Ardabilī (d. 993/1585) and support from the Safavid dynasty. However, the main center of Shi'i scholarship during this period was the capital of the Safavids in Isfahan as well as Shiraz, not Najaf. The real jump in activity came in the thirteenth/nineteenth century, when the increase in scholars was a 350 percent growth from the previous century. This is the period in which Najaf emerged as the most powerful international center of Shi'i learning for the first

Figure 2.



time since its establishment in the fifth/eleventh century. It is also a period that witnessed a proliferation of Shi'i scholars throughout the Shi'i world, largely as a result of the spread of Usuli Shi'ism.

The statistics above demonstrate that even during the pre-modern period, when little scholarship was produced in Najaf, scholarly activity was sustained, even if at a relatively low rate. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Najaf has indeed been a center of Shi'i learning for the past 1,000 years—even if it has rarely been the most important center. In addition to Najaf, the most dominant Shi'i intellectual centers include Jabal 'Amil, Hilla, Isfahan, and Qom. It is incredibly significant to note here that none of these cities has been the most dominant center of Shi'ism for more than a few centuries. This fact points to the historical rise and fall of Shi'i patronage in these localities. It also indicates the willingness of Shi'i scholars to move in order to preserve their tradition or to gain the support of patrons.

### *Early Islamic Education in Najaf (First/Seventh–Sixth/Twelfth Centuries)*

In the remainder of this paper, I outline a short history of Shi'i scholarly activity in Najaf from the origins of Islam to modern times. In doing so, I propose three general periods: the early period (first/seventh–sixth/twelfth centuries), the middle period (sixth/twelfth–tenth/sixteenth centuries), and the modern period (tenth/sixteenth–fifteenth/twenty-first centuries). After the towering figure of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) was the only major scholar to visit Najaf until al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī in the tenth/sixteenth century. Al-Ardabīlī was able to attract a few young scholars, who sustained Shi'i scholarship in Najaf for a few decades. Subsequently, Najaf was revived by Muḥammad Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm (d. 1211/1797) and other students of Wahīd Bihbihānī at the end of the twelfth/eighteenth century. Since Baḥr al-'Ulūm's arrival in Najaf, the city has been a regular fixture of Shi'i scholarship and the primary residence of many of the most influential Shi'i scholars. The shrine city also attracted Shi'i scholars for varying periods of time as it developed the most extensive *hawza* system in the Shi'i world.

The Islamic tradition generally suggests that the Prophet Muḥammad established the first center of Islamic learning. Shi'i historians largely agree that the seed for the *hawza* was planted when Muḥammad dedicated the courtyard of the mosque in Mecca to teaching and learning. A number of reports indicate that the courtyard was specifically intended for teaching (*tabliḡh*).<sup>77</sup> Therefore, part of the original function of mosques was educational.

After 'Alī became caliph, he moved the Islamic capital to Kufa in 35/656, which meant that the center of Islamic learning moved with him.<sup>78</sup> Most Shi'is accept that 'Alī was buried in Najaf after his assassination in 41/661, although some traditions claim that he was buried in Kufa, while others say Medina.<sup>79</sup> The 'Abbasid Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) was the first to build a structure over 'Alī's resting place—solidifying the idea that his remains are in Najaf. The shrine of 'Alī was the single attraction that would eventually encourage students

and scholars to seek and produce knowledge in Najaf. In Muḥammad Jawād Fakhr al-Dīn's words, "the *mashhad al-sharīf* was the first kernel towards the establishment of the *hawza* of Najaf."<sup>80</sup>

Marshall Hodgson famously referred to the period from the end of the minor occultation (333/945) to the fall of the Buyid dynasty (447/1055) as the "Shi'i century."<sup>81</sup> During this period, several Shi'i dynasties (Fatimids, Buyids, Hamdanids, Barīdīs, and Carmathians) controlled much of the Islamic world. As indicated already, the Buyid dynasty played a significant role in patronizing the Twelver Shi'i renaissance. The Buyid ruler 'Aḍud al-Dawla (d. 373/983) is reported to have enhanced the shrine of 'Alī in Najaf. He also became the first to be buried there after 'Alī.<sup>82</sup> The combination of the recent occultation of the 12th Imam and Buyid support propelled Shi'i scholars to define Twelver Shi'i thought and theology more clearly during this period. The four *riwā'iyya* books as well as the four *rijāl* books (including Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's *Fihrist* and *rijāl* works) were compiled during this historical moment. Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā developed a rationalist (*ijtihādī*) view of Shi'i law associated with Mu'tazilī thought. It was in this context that Shaykh al-Ṭūsī migrated from Iran to Baghdad in 408/1017 to study with these scholars and was therefore trained in the rationalist approach to Shi'i law. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's migration, in fact, indicates that Shi'i education in Baghdad had a far-reaching reputation during this period. Al-Kulaynī (d. 337/949) was also an important scholar in Baghdad at this time. According to 'Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Ṣāliḥī, the "*hawza* of Baghdad" was the center of the great theological and legalistic renaissance of Shi'ism.<sup>83</sup> It is precisely because Shi'i learning was sustained in Najaf and did not continue in Baghdad, therefore, that Shi'is place the origins of the *hawza* in Najaf instead of Baghdad.

Virtually all Shi'i sources agree that Najaf became an important place of Shi'i learning as a result of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's migration there. Shi'i scholars disagree, however, when considering the question of whether or not there was an institution of learning in Najaf prior to Shaykh al-Ṭūsī. A number of scholars suggest that an "intellectual movement" existed in Najaf before Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's arrival. Others suggest that al-Ṭūsī and his predecessors also presided over a *hawza* or *madrasa* in Baghdad. Muḥammad Jawād Fakhr al-Dīn argues that "denial of an intellectual movement in Najaf prior to Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's arrival there is unacceptable."<sup>84</sup> This statement is in response to Muḥammad Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm's claim that "Najaf was intellectually dry when Shaykh al-Ṭūsī migrated there and founded an intellectual movement."<sup>85</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn bases his argument on three pieces of evidence. First, he cites a travelogue which reports that a handful of people were living near 'Alī's shrine, engaged in studying and teaching in 378/988.<sup>86</sup> Second, Fakhr al-Dīn presents a fourth/tenth-century poem that refers to Najafis as "people of peace and people of knowledge and honor."<sup>87</sup> Additionally, he cites the authority of 'Alī Kāshif al-Ghitā', who claims that there was an intellectual movement in Najaf starting in the third/ninth century. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Ṣāliḥī agrees with Fakhr al-Dīn that Najaf was a center of learning prior to al-Ṭūsī's arrival because it had all the ingredients of a center of learning.<sup>88</sup>

Although there seems to have been some scholarly activity in Najaf prior to Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, he was the first great scholar to reside there.<sup>89</sup> The question that is still

unsettled, though, is whether Shaykh al-Ṭūsī established an educational institution in Najaf. Unfortunately, we only have documentary evidence with which to answer this question. Shi'i sources generally indicate that Shaykh al-Ṭūsī did establish an institution of higher learning. Muḥammad Mahdī al-Āṣafī argues that Shaykh al-Ṭūsī established a building for the *hawza* of Najaf, and claims that it was simply known as the university of Najaf.<sup>90</sup> Al-Āṣafī also argues that scholars in al-Ṭūsī's school enjoyed great academic freedom and studied new subjects that had not previously been studied in Baghdad, including math, engineering, and philosophy.<sup>91</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn suggests that the original *madrasa* in Najaf was referred to as the *hawza* of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī.<sup>92</sup> Finally, Sabrina Mervin indicates that Shaykh al-Ṭūsī founded a "ville de science" (*dār al-'ilm*) once he arrived in Najaf.<sup>93</sup> However, I have not found primary source evidence to support the claim that Shaykh al-Ṭūsī established a physical building dedicated to educational pursuits.

#### *Four Hundred Years of Silence in Najaf (Sixth/Twelfth–Tenth/Sixteenth Centuries)*

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī died in 459/1067, thirteen years after his arrival in Najaf. He is reported to have left 300 students behind, some of whom were Sunnis. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's most prominent successor was his son (Shaykh Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, d. 508/1114), often referred to as al-Mufid al-Thānī. Shaykh al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī was intellectually active, producing serious scholarly works, and Aqa Bozorg Tehrani suggests that he had thirty-six students.<sup>94</sup> However, his son (Abū al-Naṣr al-Ṭūsī al-Najafī) was the final scholarly descendant of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī to reside in Najaf.<sup>95</sup> The fact that Abū al-Naṣr al-Ṭūsī is not generally mentioned in biographical dictionaries suggests that he was not a scholar of great import. Therefore, after Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's son, no significant scholarship occurred in Najaf for several centuries, resulting from Sunni-Seljuq dominance and a lack of Shi'i patronage.

Ibn Ṭāwūs confirms that Najaf was not an important center of scholarship in the seventh/thirteenth century.<sup>96</sup> He was a direct descendant of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, but was initially educated in his hometown of Hilla, where he studied the works of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, Shaykh al-Mufid, and others. From Hilla, Ibn Ṭāwūs moved to Baghdad and then to Najaf and Karbalā'. Ibn Ṭāwūs writes that he moved to Najaf for a quieter life, where he would be far from Baghdad, which he referred to as the "place of the Devil's snares."<sup>97</sup> Therefore, he seems to have moved to Najaf not because it was a bustling center of learning, but because it was a quiet place for him to write. Ibn Ṭāwūs only stayed in Najaf for three years (645/1247–648/1250) and he does not appear to have taught in Najaf. However, Ibn Ṭāwūs's residence in Najaf does increase the visibility of scholarly activity in the shrine city during the seventh/thirteenth century.

In terms of non-Shi'i sources, there is one significant reference written nearly a hundred years after Ibn Ṭāwūs's stint in Najaf. This reference is from none other than Ibn Battuta, whose famous *al-Rihla* mentions the existence of a "great college" (*madrasa 'azīma*) in Najaf, which was attended by Shi'i students. *Al-Rihla* claims

that Ibn Battuta visited Najaf in 733/1333.<sup>98</sup> There is serious doubt regarding Ibn Battuta's chronology and whether he actually visited Najaf at all. Recent scholars have proven that large portions of *al-Rihla* were plagiarized and not necessarily based on first-hand accounts.<sup>99</sup> Even if Ibn Battuta's reference is second-hand knowledge, it is a contemporary source, and there is no discernable reason that Ibn Battuta would have fabricated the notion that there was a *madrasa* in Najaf.

Ibn Battuta's reference to Shi'i learning in Najaf in the eighth/fourteenth century presents an interesting question. If Najaf was home to a "great college," why is there no significant scholarship from this period? The most plausible answer seems to be that no groundbreaking scholarship was written in Najaf during this period. Most critical Shi'i works were penned in other centers, such as Hilla. However, it is likely that some level of teaching and learning continued during this period without significantly impacting the direction of Shi'i studies.

#### *Najaf in the Modern World (Tenth/Sixteenth–Fifteenth/Twenty-First Centuries)*

From the tenth/sixteenth to twelfth/eighteenth centuries, Shi'ism was transformed into the state religion of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722). The number of Shi'i adherents and scholars dramatically increased during this period as a result of forced and willing conversions within the Safavid realm.<sup>100</sup> Largely because of Safavid patronage, the most significant developments in Shi'i scholarship took place in Iran (especially Isfahan and Shiraz) during this period. In the Arab world, Najaf and Karbalā' grew in importance, primarily as pilgrimage sites, while other centers of learning, including Hilla and Aleppo, declined. During the tenth/sixteenth and early eleventh/seventeenth centuries, most Shi'i scholars were from Jabal 'Amil and Bahrain, but several were from Najaf. By the late eleventh/seventeenth century, however, most prominent Shi'i scholars were from Isfahan and only one was from Najaf.

The tenth/sixteenth century was a critical period for the development of scholarship in Najaf. During the early period of the Safavid dynasty, a number of scholars moved to Najaf from Iran and revitalized it as a center of learning. As Yitzhak Nakash argues, "Shi'i madrasas were built in Iraq in large numbers only after the rise of the Safavids in Iran in 1501."<sup>101</sup> The result of patronage during the Safavid era was that significant scholarship was produced in Najaf for the first time since Ibn Ṭāwūs, though scholarly developments in Najaf would remain eclipsed by Isfahan and other centers during this period.

Al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī (d. 993/1585) was the first major scholar in Najaf since Ibn Ṭāwūs. Unlike Ibn Ṭāwūs, al-Ardabīlī attracted students from Iran, Jabal 'Amil, and elsewhere. The fact that the Safavids made repairs to the shrines and colleges also accounted for the revival of Najaf. Among the students of al-Ardabīlī were Ṣāhib al-Ma'ālim (d. 1011/1602) and Mulla 'Abdullah Shūstārī (d. 1021/1612). The existence of Ṣāhib al-Mudārak (d. 1100/1689) in Najaf also indicates that the city continued as a center of learning after al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī was long gone. Evidence

exists, however, that 'Alī's shrine was in disrepair in the early eleventh/seventeenth century. Pedro Texeira (d. 1051/1641), a Portuguese traveler, made his way through Najaf in 1013/1604, and states that 'Alī's shrine "has suffered not a little in appearance and condition."<sup>102</sup>

With the collapse of the Safavids after 1722, the center of Shi'ism shifted from Iran to southern Iraq. The shrine cities became prominent centers of learning after Shi'i scholarly families fled Iran as the Safavid dynasty met its demise in the first half of the twelfth/eighteenth century. Meir Litvak maintains that "the eighteenth century was a turning point in the history of the shrine cities" as a result of the fall of the Safavids, the weakness of the Ottoman-Mamluk regime in Baghdad, and the rise of Usulism.<sup>103</sup> Juan Cole argues that Shi'is were a persecuted religious minority under the Ottomans, who "actually favored Jews" over Shi'is. The Iraqi Shi'i community, therefore, "often benefited from times of Ottoman weakness and decentralization and felt greater restrictions during times of renewed Ottoman strength."<sup>104</sup> The twelfth/eighteenth century was perhaps the most important period of Ottoman decentralization, and Iraq was located on the periphery of the Ottoman realm. For those in Istanbul, Baghdad "became a metaphor for anything that was extremely far away."<sup>105</sup> Najaf and Karbalā', then, were located on the frontier of the Ottoman empire, and Shi'i leaders enjoyed unprecedented autonomy in the late twelfth/eighteenth and early thirteenth/nineteenth centuries.

After the demise of the Safavids, Karbalā' initially became the most important center of Shi'i learning. The development of the neo-Usuli movement in Karbalā'—associated with Wahīd Bihbihānī (1118/1706-1207/1792)—resulted in profound intellectual, social, and economic changes in the Shi'i community.<sup>106</sup> One significant change was that Shi'i scholars greatly enhanced their socio-religious power, which was sustained without direct state sponsorship. Usuli *mujtahids* forged alliances with local political players and the merchant class. Therefore, once the Qajar dynasty consolidated power in Iran and re-established Shi'ism as the state religion, many Shi'i scholars elected to remain in southern Iraq. Khalid Sindawi concludes that the development of *hawza* institutions was a direct result of the victory of Usulism over the Akhbari school, which resulted in the need for more schools to train *mujtahids*.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the proliferation of *hawzas* in the thirteenth/nineteenth century was largely caused by the rise of the neo-Usuli movement, which enhanced the socio-legal status of *mujtahids*.

The consolidation of Najaf as the preeminent center of Shi'i scholarship was associated with Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm, who revitalized the Usuli school of thought in Najaf after Wahīd Bihbihānī's victory over the Akhbari establishment in Karbalā'.<sup>108</sup> Additional notable scholars who were based in Najaf include Jawād al-'Āmili, Kāshif al-Ghitā', and Ḥasan al-Najafī. The most outstanding Shi'i figure of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, Shaykh Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī, who was the first sole supreme exemplar (*marja' al-taqlid*) accepted by the majority of the Shi'i world, initially studied in Karbalā', but eventually moved to Najaf.<sup>109</sup> Anṣārī's residence in Najaf was among the most important reasons that the city remained



the center of the Shi'i world in the mid-1800s.<sup>110</sup> Najaf continued as the center of the Shi'i world and was partially eclipsed by Qom in the mid-fourteenth/twentieth century.

The proliferation of Shi'i *madrasas* in Najaf and Karbalā' in the thirteenth/nineteenth century produced far-reaching implications and must be considered as a turning point in the history of Shi'ism in Iraq. As Yitzhak Nakash rightly argues, in addition to its role as a center of learning, Najaf was "a base for dissemination of Shi'i ideas and political action."<sup>111</sup> Najaf and Karbalā' were also magnets for Shi'is outside of Iraq, attracting roughly 100,000 visitors annually by the end of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, which was significantly more than previous centuries.<sup>112</sup> Usuli *mujtabids* and their supporters emerged as a powerful socio-political force in southern Iraq, challenging the authority of the Qajars in Iran as well as Ottoman and eventually British officials in Iraq.<sup>113</sup>

By the end of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, hundreds of Shi'i scholars and over 10,000 students were associated with more than forty *madrasas* in Najaf.<sup>114</sup> This religious community was instrumental in converting to Shi'ism tribesmen in southern Iraq, who had settled on the fertile land near the shrine cities to engage in agriculture.<sup>115</sup> The expansion of Shi'ism occurred at a historical moment in which Shi'is experienced unprecedented autonomy in southern Iraq and the fortunes of Ottoman Sunnism were waning.<sup>116</sup> Although Tanzimat reforms may have benefited Christians more than Shi'is, as Juan Cole argues, Tanzimat policies also resulted in a decline of the Sunni establishment in the empire, associated with government confiscation of *waqf* property related to Sunni *madrasas*, Sufi orders, and other educational institutions.<sup>117</sup> Throughout much of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, Karbalā' and Najaf operated as centers of Ottoman opposition, and Ottomans only established direct rule in the cities in the middle of the century. Abubekir Ceylan argues that Ottoman officials viewed the shrine cities as a potential fifth column because of the sizable Iranian Shi'i community, and Ottoman governors would not enter the cities, partially because they harbored "runaway malefactors and gangs."<sup>118</sup> Shi'i expansion in Iraq was of great concern to Sultan Abdulhamid, who made several unsuccessful attempts to convert Shi'is to Sunnism and limit Shi'i advances in the Ottoman realm. Gohkan Cetinsaya concludes that Abdulhamid's policy of pan-Islamism must be understood within the context of "the Shi'i problem in Iraq."<sup>119</sup> In response to the mass conversion of southern Iraqis to Shi'ism, Ottoman officials argued that the surest method of curbing the expansion of Shi'ism was for the state to revive Sunni *madrasas*.<sup>120</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The city of Najaf is, in fact, home to a 1,000-year tradition of Islamic education, making it one of the oldest scholarly towns in world history. Throughout Islamic history Najaf has been a bastion of Shi'ism, but is not the oldest center of Twelver

Shi'i learning. Shi'is and the Buyid dynasty had already built intellectual institutions in Baghdad. Shi'i control of Baghdad, however, was short-lived. After heavy persecution and the Seljuq invasion of Baghdad, Shi'i scholars were forced to seek refuge elsewhere. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, the most prominent Shi'i scholar of his time, moved to Najaf, and Baghdad was never revived as a center of Shi'i scholarship. Najaf, therefore, became the partial inheritor of the tradition of scholarship that had developed in Baghdad in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries.

It was the shrine of Imam 'Alī that drew Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and future scholars to Najaf, and the shrine guaranteed that Najaf would continue to attract faithful Shi'i Muslims. However, it did not ensure that scholarly activities would be sustained in Najaf for the entirety of its 1,000-year history. Because of the authority that great scholars carry in Islamic studies, the intellectual tradition in Najaf largely rested on scholars themselves. Therefore, when Shaykh al-Ṭūsī arrived in Najaf, he attracted students, which allowed him to establish circles of study and possibly a center of learning. However, after Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's son, the momentum of Shi'i education in Najaf slowed greatly until the tenth/sixteenth century when al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī revived Najaf as a center of learning with the help of the Safavids. Najaf became the preeminent center of Shi'ism in the thirteenth/nineteenth century—after the collapse of the Safavid dynasty forced Shi'i scholars from Isfahan to seek refuge in Karbalā', Najaf, and elsewhere. The proliferation of *hawzas* and *mujtahids* during this period resulted from the rise of neo-USulism, which advocated that Shi'i scholars play a more central role in the realms of society, economics, law, politics, and education.

## Notes

1. For the history of Najaf, see Balaghi, *Tarikh-e Najaf-e ashraf*; Uqaylī, *Tārīkh al-Najaf al-ashraf*; Āl Maḥbūba, *Māḍī al-Najaf wa-ḥāḍiruhā*; Marjānī, *al-Najaf al-ashraf*; Amīnī, *Mu'jam al-maṭbū'āt al-Najafīyya*.
2. For more on 'Alī's grave, see Aslan, *From Body to Shrine*; Muḥammad, *Mashhad al-Imām 'Alī*.
3. Aslan, *From Body to Shrine*, 99-103.
4. See, for example, Markaz Karbalā' lil-Buḥūth wa-al-Dirāsāt, *al-Najaf al-ashraf*.
5. <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/14/200704.html> (Accessed July 12, 2012).
6. For more on the contemporary *hawza*, see Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*; Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction." al-Qazwini, Jawdat. "The School of Najaf." On the *hawza* curriculum, see Mottahedeh, "The Najaf Ḥawzah Curriculum."
7. Stewart, "Portrayal of an Academic Rivalry," 217.
8. For a history of thought in Najaf, see Amīnī, *Mu'jam rijāl*.
9. al-Āṣafī, *Madrasat al-Najaf*, 4.
10. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī is also known as Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa (Chief of the Shi'i Sect). His given name is Abī Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Alī al-Ṭūsī. I will refer to him as Shaykh al-Ṭūsī throughout this paper.
11. Akhtar, *Early Shi'ite Imāmiyyah Thinkers*, 205-6.
12. For more on Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, see Ramyar, *Shaykh Ṭūsī*; Marcinkowski, "Rapprochement and Fealty"; al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī*; Tehrani, *Zendeginameh-ye Shaykh-e Tusi*.
13. Gleave, "Shi'i Jurisprudence."
14. Tabaa and Mervin, *Najaf: The Gate of Wisdom*, 110.
15. Mottahedeh, "Najaf Ḥawzah Curriculum," 341.

16. For more on *ijāzas*, see Schmidtke, "Forms and Functions."
17. Ibn Manzūr, *al-Rubāʿī*.
18. Wehr, *A Dictionary*.
19. al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Ḥawzāt*, 21.
20. al-Bahādilī, *Muʿālam al-ḥawza*, 176.
21. Louer, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 73-4.
22. Litvak, *Shīʿi Scholars*, 22.
23. Stewart, "Academic Rivalry," 217.
24. For more on the *ḥawza*, see Gharawī, *al-Ḥawza al-ʿilmiyya fī al-Najaf*; al-Mashhadī, *al-Ḥawza al-ʿilmiyya tudīn*; al-Ghurayfī, *Fikra ʿan al-ḥawza*; Abtahi, *Ashnaʿi ba howzeha-ye ʿelmiyyeh-ye Shīʿa*; Rifāʿī, *Tatawwur al-dars*.
25. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Nihāya fī mujarrad*, 290.
26. Dodge, *Muslim Education in Medieval Times*, 19.
27. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*; Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 7.
28. See Dodge, *Muslim Education*, 4, 10, and Berkey, *Formation of Islam*, 44, 47.
29. Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 22; see also, Ephrat, "Madhhab and Madrasa," 79; Tibawi, "Origins and Character."
30. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 47. For more on the *khānaqāh* and *madrasa*, see Safi, *Politics of Knowledge*, 82-104, and Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 44-94.
31. Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 8.
32. Dodge, *Muslim Education*, 15.
33. Dodge cites the *madrasa* at Nishapur, established in the first quarter of the fifth/eleventh century, while Makdisi cites Niẓāmiyya (1067) as the earliest since it is the earliest *madrasa* for which a deed is extant. Dodge, *Muslim Education*, 19; Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 28, 35. See also Kraemer, *Humanism*, 56; Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 3, 7, 25, 104; Tibawi, "Origins and Character."
34. Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 32.
35. Arjomand, "Law, Agency, and Policy."
36. Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 2-9.
37. See, for example, Dodge, *Muslim Education*, 24.
38. Aslan, *From Body to Shrine*, 10-11; Kraemer, *Humanism*, 280.
39. Haider, *Origins of the Shīʿa*, 246.
40. Aslan, *From Body to Shrine*, 189-96.
41. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 53-60.
42. al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Khitāṭ al-Maqrīziyya*, 156-7. See also Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 12; and Walker, "Fatimid Institutions of Learning," 186-9.
43. See, for example, Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlis*, 159, 177; Dodge, *Al-Azhar*.
44. Walker, "Fatimid Institutions," 179-200.
45. *Ibid.*, 182-6.
46. For more on al-Ḥākim's Dār al-Hikma, see Halm, *The Fatimids*.
47. al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Ḥawzāt al-ʿilmiyya*, 27.
48. Cahen, "Buyyids or Būyids."
49. Dodge, *Muslim Education*, 19.
50. Nashabe, *Muslim Educational Institutions*, 10.
51. Kraemer, *Humanism*.
52. al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Ḥawzāt al-ʿilmiyya*, 124. Kraemer (*Humanism*, 8-9) suggests that the curriculum of the Buyid period was rooted in Aristotelian classification of the sciences and included "(1) grammar, poetry, and rhetoric; (2) logic, and (3) philosophy; the latter consisting of ethics, politics, physics, mathematics, and metaphysics." Mathematics included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.
53. Kraemer, *Humanism*, 57.
54. Lassner, "Massignon and Baghdad," 22-6; Kraemer, *Humanism*, 57.
55. Kraemer, *Humanism*, 272-85.

56. For more on Ibn Nadīm's *Fihrist*, see Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadim*; Stewart, "Structure of the Fihrist."
57. Kraemer, *Humanism*, 278.
58. Cahen, "Buwayhids."
59. Kraemer, *Humanism*, 51.
60. Akhtar, *Early Shi'ite*, 211.
61. al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Hawzāt al-'ilmiyya*, 126.
62. Peacock, *Early Seljuq History*, 99.
63. See, for example, al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Hawzāt al-'ilmiyya*, 25.
64. Safi, *Politics of Knowledge*, 92
65. Lambton, "Internal Structure," 214-15; Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions of Learning," 3. Additionally, Gary Leiser argues that the Seljuqs used *madrāsas* to Islamize non-Muslims as a "means to undermine their power and compel them to convert." See Leiser, "Madrasa and the Islamization."
66. Safi, *Politics of Knowledge*, xxx, xxiv.
67. Peacock, *Early Seljuq*, 101; For more on Seljuqs and Shi'ism, see Peacock, *Early Seljuq*, 119-21; Peacock, *Great Seljuk Empire*, 258-66; Gleave, "Shi'i Jurisprudence."
68. Peacock, *Great Seljuk Empire*, 213.
69. Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 2-3.
70. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*. See also Momen, *Introduction*, 84-5.
71. Tehrani, *Ṭabaqāt a'lām al-Shi'a* (5th century). See also, Momen, *Introduction*, 83-4.
72. Tehrani, *Ṭabaqāt a'lām al-Shi'a* (6th century), 313.
73. Tehrani, *Ṭabaqāt a'lām al-Shi'a* (7th and 8th centuries). See also Momen, *Introduction*, 97.
74. See Kashmīrī, *Nujūm al-samā' fi tarājim*, See also Momen, *Introduction*, 123.
75. Momen, *Introduction*, Appendix III, 320-23.
76. On Najafi scholars, see Gharawī, *Mā'a 'ulamā' al-Najaf*. See also Amīnī, *Mu'jam rijāl al-fikr*.
77. al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Hawzāt al-'ilmiyya*, 23-4.
78. For more on early Shi'ism, see Jafri, *Origins and Early Development*; Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*; Newman, *Formative Period*; Takim, *Heirs of the Prophet*; Dakake, *Charismatic Community*; Haider, *Origins of the Shi'a*.
79. Momen, *Introduction*, 26. For a more extensive discussion on the location of 'Alī's grave, see Aslan, "From Body to Shrine," 112-84.
80. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Tārīkh al-Najaf*, 287.
81. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*.
82. Cahen, "Buwayhids."
83. al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Hawzāt al-'ilmiyya*, 121.
84. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Tārīkh al-Najaf*, 292.
85. Bahr al-'Ulūm, *al-Dirāsa wa tārīkhūha fi al-Najaf*, 11-12.
86. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Tārīkh al-Najaf*, 293.
87. *Ibid.*, 294; Fakhr al-Dīn cites that this poem was found in al-Raḥīm, *Tārīkh al-jāma'at al-Islāmiyya*, 49.
88. al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Hawzāt al-'ilmiyya*.
89. This is clear based on the biographical information we have on Shi'i scholars. See also al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Hawzāt al-'ilmiyya*, 129.
90. al-Āṣafī, *Madrāsāt al-Najaf*, 5.
91. *Ibid.*, 6-7.
92. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Tārīkh al-Najaf*, 291.
93. Mervin, "La quiete du savoir," 169.
94. Akhtar, *Early Shi'ite*, 208-9.
95. *Ibid.*, 213.
96. Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Scholar*.
97. *Ibid.*, 9.
98. Ibn Battuta, *Travels of Ibn Battuta*.
99. See Chapter 1 of Wainess, *Odyssey of Ibn Battuta*.

100. See Abisaab, *Converting Persia*.
101. Nakash, *Shī'is of Iraq*, 239.
102. Teixeira, *Travels of Pedro Teixeira*, 47-8.
103. Litvak, *Shī'i Scholars*, 17.
104. Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War*, 17, 20.
105. Ceylan, *Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 26-9.
106. Heern, *Emergence of Modern Shī'ism*.
107. Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction," 850.
108. For more on Baḥr al-'Ulūm, see Gleave, "The ijāza from Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī."
109. For more on *marja' al-taqlīd*, see Walbridge, *Most Learned of the Shī'i*; Moussavi, "Institutionalization of Marja'-i Taqlid."
110. Heern, "Thou Shalt Emulate."
111. Nakash, *Shī'is of Iraq*, 246-7.
112. Nakash, "Visitation of the Imams," 157.
113. For Shī'ism in Iran and Iraq during this period, see Algar, *Religion and State in Iran*; Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*; Gleave, *Religion and Society*; Hairī, *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism*; Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*; Nakash, *Shī'is of Iraq*; Litvak, *Shī'i Scholars*.
114. Litvak, "Continuity and Change"; al-Bahādilī, *al-Najaf*, 31; Nakash, *Shī'is of Iraq*, 241.
115. Nakash, *Shī'is of Iraq*, 25-48; Litvak, *Shī'i Scholars*, 129-34; Nakash, "Conversion of Iraq's Tribes."
116. Heern, *Emergence of Modern Shī'ism*, 58-65.
117. Cole, *Sacred Space*, 30; Barnes, *Introduction*, 67-153.
118. Ceylan, *Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 53-4; see also Cole and Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shiism."
119. Cetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 126.
120. *Ibid.*, 109, 125.

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