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Religious Authority and the Politics of Islamic Endowments in Iraq

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+ CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Islamic Endowments and the Restructuring of the Religious Field	1
Confessionalization of Islamic Endowments	3
Islamic Endowments and the Restructuring of the Sunni Religious Field	6
Islamic Endowments and Shia Religious Authority	10
Conclusion	14
About the Author	15
Notes	15

Introduction

Islamic endowments are key components of Iraq's religious field. They can be divided into two main categories. First, mosques, shrines, and other public religious sites. Second, lands, real estate, and any kind of property declared as such by their original owners. The way they are governed and structured is essential in shaping the experience of lived Islam and in defining the relative positions and roles of religious authorities. Mosques and shrines are key nodes of public gatherings, giving those in charge of them platforms to disseminate their messages and assert themselves in the religious domain. They often have facilities that can be used for commercial purposes or as real estate, and they receive donations and charities from pilgrims and philanthropists. Together with other endowments, they generate revenue that provides the authorities that control them with the means to sustain themselves. Some, especially the shrines of Shia imams and leading Sunni figures, also boost the social status and religious authority of those supervising them.

The terrain of Islamic endowments has seen a major restructuring after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, which resulted in significant changes that had an impact on the roles and relative positions of religious authorities. This led to the growing confessionalization of the religious field and to opposing effects on the Sunni and Shia religious authorities. It led to fragmentation and deepened rivalries among religious actors in the Sunni religious field, while resulting in the consolidation and centralization of Najaf's religious authority in the Shia religious field.

Islamic Endowments and the Restructuring of the Religious Field

Prior to 2003, the government controlled most of the important Islamic endowments in Iraq through the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA), which was the main official tool to strictly watch over the religious domain and propagate a unified, state-sanctioned message in mosques.¹ Shia shrines and Sunni mosques were run by administrators appointed by MERA, often selected based on their demonstrated loyalty to the regime. Imams and preachers were mostly state employees or licensed by MERA and the local Baath Party branch, and the party and other security organs monitored their sermons.² Clerics and imams who did not follow the instructions of the government or whose sermons contained messages inconsistent with the official version were labeled as “noncooperative” or “disloyal” elements.³ They were often sacked or arrested—or even executed.⁴

Shia parties and religious authorities considered the Baathi state anti-Shia by virtue of its oppression of the Shia population and clergy (especially after the 1991 uprising), the execution and assassination of prominent Shia clerics, and the restrictions imposed on the performance of Shia rituals. Although the Baath Party was secular, the regime came to be dominated by Sunni Arabs who were suspicious

of the autonomy of the Shia clergy and clashed with Shia Islamists who opposed the regime.⁵ Following the fall of the regime, Shia parties and religious authorities sought to alter what they perceived as an oppressive policy designed to obscure Shia identity, of which MERA was seen as one key tool. Yet, even Sunni Islamist parties, primarily the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), were critical of the former regime's secular tendencies and saw its fall as an opportunity to reassert the position of religion in the public life.⁶

Therefore, the post-2003 official policy adopted a new model that recognized the autonomy of religious institutions and their right to operate independently in the public sphere. The first step in implementing this model was the decision made in August 2003 by the Provisional Governing Council (formed by the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority to include members of Iraqi political factions in decisionmaking) to abolish MERA.⁷ The decision, which was promoted by Shia Islamist parties, in coordination with the IIP, replaced the ministry with confessional offices of endowments: the Office of Shia Endowment (OSHE), the Office of Sunni Endowment (OSE), and the Office of Christian, Ezidian and Sabeian Mandaean Endowments. This was meant to end the state's control over the religious field and allow Iraq's multiple sects and religions more freedom to express their identities and beliefs within a new political framework that asserted plurality and the representation of ethnoreligious communities. Yet, this shift in the field of Islamic endowments generated new struggles over the identity of Islamic sites and the jurisdiction of the new confessional endowments. It accelerated the confessionalization of the religious domain and the rivalry among religious actors—between the two confessions and within each one—for status, revenue, and economic profits.

In the context of the turmoil and lawlessness that followed the U.S. invasion, several religious groups competed to control Islamic endowments,⁸ which further justified the effort to restructure them institutionally. Yet, assigning mosques, religious sites, and other endowments to the OSHE or the OSE was not an easy task, given that it required setting acceptable criteria to decide what belonged to either office. Many Shia Islamists and clerics were convinced that the former regime had built Sunni mosques and forced philanthropists and donors to register their endowments as Sunni ones, as part of its strategy to obscure the Shia identity.⁹ On its website, the OSHE argued that the regime had created many obstacles to prevent donors from endowing resources for Shia mosques or Hussaniyyas,¹⁰ and it said that the office had found documents proving the existence of a deliberate policy to neglect and minimize Shia endowments and religious sites.¹¹ OSE officials did not agree with this characterization. They argued that MERA had already made a useful distinction between Sunni and Shia endowments in its institutional structure, and that it was possible to rely on this in developing the new structure.¹²

An advisory committee including Shia and Sunni clerics and experts was formed in 2004 to distribute Islamic endowments. According to an OSE official, it made progress in the allocation of

personnel, endowments, and most religious sites to the two offices. Still, problems remained with regard to the endowments that the representatives of the two sides claimed to be part of their jurisdiction or disagreed on determining their confessional identity.¹³ A Committee of Separation and Isolation (*lijnata al-Fak wal-'Azl*) was then formed in 2008, with among its members a judge, an official of the Property Claims Commission, a representative of the Directorate of Land Registry, and representatives of the OSE and the OSHE. Initially, the committee agreed on four main criteria to determine the identity of endowments and religious sites: the endowment registry title, the confessional identity of the donor, the donor's documented will with regard to which confessional group the revenue or services targeted, and any other evidence that could help determining the confessional identity of the donor. However, this was not enough to solve all disputes between the OSHE and the OSE as they did not agree on a unified method to apply these criteria with regard to hundreds of mosques, buildings, and land plots. Therefore, they decided to resort to the courts in order to determine the identity of disputed endowments. But even this was not enough to solve the disputes, especially given that in many cases there was a lack of documentation as well as unwillingness, by the OSHE and Shia groups in particular, to recognize some of the documents that they argued had been forged by the former regime. As a result, the meetings of the committee rarely ended with a clear agreement on the points of contention.¹⁴

Confessionalization of Islamic Endowments

The restructuring of the Islamic endowments domain accelerated the process of confessionalization of the religious field in Iraq, which was reinforced by the deepening sectarian divide, violence, and rise of ethnosectarian politics after 2003. As a result, the boundary between the two Islamic confessions has been further solidified and neutral spaces became points of contention rather than of cohabitation. The “Shiazation” or “Sunnization” of religious sites reflected the new dynamic that reshaped the Islamic endowments domain and the urban space in which these sites functioned as markers of collective culture and identity.

One significant example of the process of confessionalization is the shrine of the tenth and eleventh Shia imams in Samarra, a predominantly Sunni city. The shrine was historically administered by a Sunni family with a Sufi background. In December 2005, the parliament passed a law for the management of Shia shrines, commonly known as *'atabat*, that assigned the responsibility for their administration to the OSHE. Several Sunni religious authorities and Samarra residents objected to this arrangement. The first OSE president, Sheikh Abdul Ghafur as-Samara'i, a native of the city, publicly criticized it, arguing that Samarra was a Sunni city and its inhabitants had always held the shrine in respect and protected it.¹⁵ In 2012, the federal court rejected a lawsuit presented by the OSE regarding the legal basis upon which the jurisdiction of the OSHE was extended to the

shrine.¹⁶ Attacks on the shrine by Sunni jihadists in 2006 only reinforced the Shia belief that it was located in an unfriendly environment and needed special care and protection. This is why Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his Saraya as-Salam militia to be deployed to Samarra to protect the shrine when the self-proclaimed Islamic State began to march toward the city in 2014. Recently, some residents and Sunni officials have accused the OSHE and Shia militias of orchestrating a campaign to illegally control commercial and residential buildings surrounding the shrine as part of a policy to cause demographic change in the area.¹⁷

Likewise, some of Baghdad's historical mosques have been contested as the OSE and the OSHE claimed the right to manage them. These disputes have been driven by attempts on each side to assert its narrative about the history and identity of each mosque and its surrounding area. One example is al-Assiffiyya mosque in the center of the city. Built in 1017 and renovated in the nineteenth century, the OSHE claims it contains the grave of the prominent Shia theologian Muhammed bin Ya'qub al-Kullaini (846–941), while Sunni authorities claim the mosque, which for a long time was associated with the Sufi order of al-Mawlawiyya, contains the grave of the Sufi scholar al-Harith al-Muhassibi. Both the OSHE and OSE claimed the right to supervise the mosque until this dispute was resolved in favor of the former a few years ago.

Other disagreements took place with regard to the historical al-Khillani mosque in the center of Baghdad, which the OSHE appropriated based on the common Shia belief that it contains the grave of Muhammed bin Osman al-Omairi, one of the four deputies of the twelfth Shia imam, a claim that the OSE and other Sunni clerics dispute.¹⁸ Both mosques came under the supervision of the OSHE despite the continuous objections of OSE officials, which reflects a pattern in post-2003 sectarianization and assertion of Shia hegemony in Baghdad. This hegemony became possible partly because of the dominance of Shia groups in state institutions and partly because of the success of Shia militias in quelling their Sunni counterparts.

A similar dispute emerged with regard to several Islamic endowments in Mosul and was exacerbated after the liberation of the city from the Islamic State. The OSHE demanded that twenty mosques in the city, some carrying the names of Shia historical figures, be placed under its jurisdiction, but the then governor of Mosul, Atheel al-Nujaifi, refused this request and emphasized their Sunni identity.¹⁹ When the Shia militias gained more influence after the liberation of the city, they sought to take over these mosques or to assert the OSHE's authority over them. The OSE and Sunni politicians complained, deeming this an attempt to change Mosul's identity.²⁰

Another dimension for these disputes was the location of Islamic endowments. Most historical mosques are found in commercial areas and are part of endowments that have stores, residences, or garages attached to them.²¹ These extras often provide revenue to the institution or groups managing them, especially in the form of rent paid by tenants or investors who occupy them. Hence, these

disputes were not purely religious but also largely linked to economic motives.²² This dimension is particularly clear in the disputes over the so-called presidential mosques, about fourteen mosques with large facilities whose construction was ordered by Saddam Hussein. Some OSHE officials disputed their classification as Sunni and demanded their distribution equally between the OSHE and the OSE. Another disagreement emerged as to what qualifies a mosque as “presidential.” The OSHE extended this definition to almost all mosques built during the Baathi era, an interpretation rejected by the OSE. In Baghdad, the OSHE eventually accepted the assignment of custodianship of presidential mosques to the OSE (given that most of them had Sunni imams appointed by the government or were located in Sunni areas) with the exception of Ar-Rahman mosque, which is located in the commercial al-Mansour area and is occupied by a Shia group following Sheikh Muhammed al-Ya’qubi, although it is legally assigned to the OSHE.²³ This mosque contains a large garage and land plot that secures good revenue for the institution that controls it. Elsewhere, the presidential mosques were assigned according to the nature of the sectarian majority in each province.

Additionally, the 2006–2007 sectarian fighting that was triggered by the attack on the Samarra shrine led to retaliatory attacks on Sunni mosques by Shia militias, especially in Baghdad. Some of these mosques were taken over by these militias, as was the case with al-Qibaa mosque in the as-Shaab district, al-Muthana mosque in the Cairo neighborhood, and al-Mudalal mosque in al-Atafiyya. According to Sunni sources, Shia militias forced Sunni clerics to abandon these mosques or simply took over when their Sunni imams ceased to show up out of fear. This was not limited to mosques and other places of worship, but extended to commercial sites and agricultural lands that, according to these sources, belonged to the OSE and were taken over by the OSHE, with the help of militias or security forces.²⁴ In its defense, the OSHE argued that most of these Islamic endowments were in Shia areas and that the former regime had assigned to them Sunni clerics as part of its anti-Shia policy.²⁵ This is particularly true with mosques such as ar-Rashad, which is located in Sadr City and was contested in the 1990s between the Sadrists and the Salafists. After 2003, the Sadrists controlled the mosque and renamed it al-Sadrayn mosque.

In sum, the confessionalization of Islamic endowments has been part of a broader dynamic of sectarianization that accelerated after 2003. On the one hand, it reinforced the segregation of religious identities and minimized the shared Islamic memory and public spaces that would otherwise serve as points of reference for cross-sectarian solidarity. On the other hand, this separation gave public recognition to Iraq’s multi-confessional fabric, allowing a space for different religious identities to be freely expressed in the public sphere. Yet, in the context of sectarian polarization and the competition of narratives and memories, this display of “differences” was in many cases a cause for tension, or even violent clashes. While there are indicators that, following the defeat of the Islamic State, sectarianism has become less dominant in shaping sociopolitical polarization, Iraq still faces the difficult challenge of reaching a balance between the need to recognize its multi-

confessional fabric and the need to reconstruct a cross-sectarian identity, which means cultivating shared collective memories in the public space.

Islamic Endowments and the Restructuring of the Sunni Religious Field

The disputes and rivalries triggered by the confessionalization of the Islamic endowments' management were not only inter-confessional but also intra-confessional. This was particularly obvious in the case of Sunni endowments, given the fragmentation of the Sunni religious field and the absence of a dominant religious authority within it. Unlike the Shia field, which has a discernible clerical hierarchy presided by the grand marja', there is no such hierarchy in Sunnism. This can be partly attributed to the long history of identification with the state among Sunni religious authorities, and the fact that MERA had effectively controlled Sunni religious institutions and that most Sunni clerics were state employees. MERA played the leading role in the management of Sunni endowments and religious schools and institutions, but it failed to exert the same degree of control over the Shia religious sites, as well as schools and seminaries (known as *hawza*). The *hawza* have a long tradition of autonomy from the state, a more informal setting of teaching and knowledge production, and a stronger presence of non-Iraqi, primarily Iranian, senior clerics who have a transnational base of support.

The creation of the OSE generated a new dynamic within the Sunni religious field, leading to rivalries among different groups. Initially, the Provisional Governing Council in place in 2003–2004, in which the IIP was the largest Sunni party, selected Adnan al-Dulaimi, an Islamic scholar who once was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, to be the OSE president (a ministerial-level position). This kicked off a competition between the IIP and other groups such as the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), led by Harith al-Dhari, as each claimed to be the true representative of the Sunni community. However, the opposition of the AMS to the U.S. occupation and the nascent new state institutions ultimately weakened its position and played into the hands of more pragmatic elements. Eventually, other clerical networks and institutions entered the competition, sometimes by promising to decouple the management of Islamic endowments from political interests.

In August 2005, the Transitional Iraqi Government (in place in 2005–2006) appointed Abdul Ghafur al-Samara'i, a moderate cleric with Sufi roots, as the new president of the OSE, while Dulaimi became the head of the Sunni block in the parliament and took stances that were critical of the government, accusing it of collaboration with—or indifference to—Shia militias that targeted Sunni communities.²⁶ Samara'i had to deal with a difficult scene, given the fragmentation of the Sunni religious field and the influence of radical forces in a context of sectarian polarization and rampant violence. To gain political support, he coordinated with the IIP, and was accused by

hardline groups, including the AMS and jihadi factions, of being a puppet of the Shia-dominated government. This criticism escalated when in 2007 he forced the AMS to close its office in the large Um al-Qura mosque in al-Karkh in Baghdad and hand it to the OSE.²⁷ In August 2011, Samara'i survived a suicide attack, likely perpetrated by the group that called itself the Islamic State of Iraq. The attack, which happened when Samara'i and several IIP members were attending a collective prayer, caused several casualties, including the death of an IIP member of parliament.

In 2012, the parliament passed a law for the Office of Sunni Endowment.²⁸ The law gave it several responsibilities such as the management of endowments, investing their revenues, and supporting Sunni religious and philanthropic institutions. According to Article 4.2 of the law, the OSE president shall be nominated by the Council of Ministers and his nomination approved by the Iraqi Jurisprudential Congregation (IJC), an institution formed by the Council of Senior Scholars of Iraq and consisting of five Sufi and five Salafi scholars, headquartered in the prominent al-Imam al-A'zam (Abu Hanifa) mosque in Baghdad. The IIP helped create this institution to partly counter the AMS and partly serve as a collective supreme religious authority for Sunni communities. The law, which the IIP played a key role in drafting and was certified simultaneously with a law for the Office of Shia Endowments, aimed to add more structure to the Sunni religious field.

Samara'i was forced out of office in 2013 after facing accusations of corruption, mainly from his Sunni rivals. As Sunni factions failed to agree on a replacement, then prime minister Haider al-Abadi appointed Abdul Latif al-Humeim as acting president of the OSE in 2015. His nomination was supported by the then speaker of parliament and leading member of the IIP, Salim al-Jubouri, despite the objection of Sunni clerical institutions, such as the IJC, that demanded to be consulted in the selection as stipulated by the OSE law.²⁹ Humeim, an Islamic scholar and former associate of the Baathi regime from Anbar, led a small group of moderate Sunni clerics and personalities named the Association of Iraq's Ulama and Intellectuals. Other Sunni religious groups, such as the AMS and the IJC, saw him as the choice of the Shia-dominated government, rather than of the legitimate Sunni authorities.

Despite criticism, Humeim went to assert his authority, adopting a moderate discourse and several initiatives for reconstruction and social reconciliation in post-Islamic State Sunni areas.³⁰ He continued Samara'i's approach of targeting radical imams and preachers, trying to exert further control over Friday sermons. He announced a campaign to fight extremism and intolerance, and he advocated the professionalization of the production of legal opinions by limiting it to only well-established and certified Islamic jurists.³¹

Nevertheless, Humeim faced competition for power and legitimacy from other Sunni religious institutions, including the IJC, headed by Sheikh Ahmed Hasan al-Taha, who previously was an AMS member. Al-Taha and Abdul Wahab al-Samara'i, his son and a leading member of IJC, have

complained that their institution was ignored in the appointment of the OSE president, which has weakened the officeholder and made him susceptible to pressures from interest and political groups.³² As a result, there seems to be an increasing tension between the OSE and IJC.³³

The Shia-dominated government has used its power to appoint the OSE president as a means to strengthen loyalist or nonhostile elements within the Sunni religious field. It was concerned that a critical or disloyal OSE president would ally with Sunni insurgents. This can be understood as a policy aiming to reshape the Sunni religious field by directing OSE-related patronage to the government's allies and pushing out disloyal elements.

Likely, the fact that some of IJC members, primarily Sheikh Rafi' al-Rifa'i, who also carries the title of *mufti ad-diyar al-Iraqiyya* (the mufti of Iraqi territories), adopted an antigovernmental stance and even supported the Sunni protests against the government of former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki (2006–2014), played a role in deepening the suspicion of the government and other Shia groups toward the IJC. Yet, this governmental policy posed a problem regarding the legitimacy and representativeness of the OSE president, stressing the belief among many Sunni scholars and clerics that the government was biased and had an interest in weakening their independence. As a result, the opponents of the government's handling of this matter have often argued they are driven by a genuine commitment to defending and preserving Sunni identity, which they feel is under attack. Abdul Wahab al-Samara'i says: "We want to avoid extremism, without seeing our identity fully absorbed by the other (referring to the Shia sect)."³⁴ The first OSE president, Adnan al-Dulaimi, who died in 2017, went as far as saying that there is a systematic effort to achieve the "Shiazation" of Iraq. He said that the government and Shia parties led this effort by controlling Sunni mosques and turning Baghdad's Sunni legacy into a Shia one.³⁵

One of the institutions that adopted a different approach by allying with Shia groups to improve its position within the Sunni religious field was Dar al-Iftaa', which is led by Mahdi al-Sumaida'i, who calls himself the grand mufti. Dar al-Iftaa' presented itself as a restoration of the Ottoman-era institution of Iraq's mufti, which lost its prominence after the foundation of the modern state and was abolished by the Baathi government in the 1970s.³⁶ Neither the OSE nor the IJC accept this. Some made the point that Dar al-iftaa' was in fact a one-man institution and that Sumaida'i was not qualified for the position of grand mufti. The IJC contested him at the Majlis Shura ad-Dawla (an administrative judiciary to resolve disputes between state institutions), resulting in the annulment of his attempt to legalize the institution.³⁷ This has not prevented Sumaida'i from continuing to present himself as the mufti.

Sumaida'i is a Salafi sheikh who grew critical of jihadi groups, replacing his previous anti-Shia stance with a quietist and pro-government Salafism that won him the support of Nuri al-Maliki's government and Iranian-backed Shia groups.³⁸ He and his followers managed to take over the

mosque of Um at-Tubuul, one of the grandest mosques in the west of Baghdad, in 2013. Sumaida'i initiated a failed attempt to rename the mosque after Ibn Taimiyya, the controversial medieval Hanbali theologian, while acting as its self-appointed imam. The mosque contains 132 apartments that, according to an OSE official,³⁹ Sumaida'i seized in order to fund his activities. The OSE contested these steps and resorted to the courts to reclaim authority over the mosque and its residential facilities. Sumaida'i reacted by sending a letter to the OSHE requesting to link the mosque to it, which the OSE considered an attempt to challenge its authority and an unjustifiable move to drag Shia religious authorities into the conflict.⁴⁰ Sumaida'i went as far as forming a militia under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), named Harakat Ahrar al-Iraq.⁴¹ The likely objective of this move was to use the war against the Islamic State and the affiliation with the PMF to gain more leverage vis-à-vis his Sunni rivals. He frequently met with representatives of Iranian-backed PMF factions and appeared publicly with General Qassim Suleimani, the head of Iran's Quds Force.⁴²

The spread of Salafism had an impact not only on Sunni-Shia relations, but on relations within Sunni communities too. This is primarily because of Salafi hostility to Sufism. Iraq includes some of the most ancient and prominent Sufi traditions, such as the Qadiri and Naqshabandi orders. In the 1990s, Saddam Hussein's regime increased its support for Sufi orders as a way to counter Saudi influence and the spread of Salafism and as part of its "faith campaign." This policy continued after 2003, with Sufi groups gaining more freedom and even support from the state and influential political groups. For example, former president Jalal Talabani, in office from 2006 to 2014, who was from a prominent family with a Sufi background, supported the Qadiri order and even appointed the custodian of its main mosque in Baghdad, al-Ghailani mosque.⁴³ Members of a prominent family in the Kasnazani order, which has noticeable Shia leanings, became involved in politics after 2003, gaining seats in the parliament and joining the government.⁴⁴

Yet, Salafism seems to have gained more ground, especially in the context of the sectarian divide and radicalization that characterized the period after 2003. Some Salafi groups controlled several Sunni mosques in areas such as Fallujah and Baghdad's periphery and used them to propagate anti-U.S. and anti-Shia messages. When the Islamic State controlled major Sunni cities and destroyed Sufi mosques and other Sunni religious sites,⁴⁵ it put in action a version of "Sunnism" that challenged a long tradition, which had already been weakened by decades of state secularization and modernization. Even after the defeat of the Islamic State, some mosques in peripheral areas are either controlled by Salafists or host their informal gatherings. According to Hisham al-Hashimi, a scholar of Salafism in Iraq, the OSE and traditional Sunni institutions control mosques in the urban centers, while Salafists have undisputed presence in the mosques located in Baghdad's periphery and other urban peripheries.⁴⁶ Most Salafi networks today are quietist, avoiding involvement in politics and focusing their activism on religious matters and ethics. Generally, they offer a more egalitarian Islam than Sufi institutions, attracting the youth who are in search of a plain and less hierarchical religion.

Yet, the spread of Salafism reflects the deeper crisis faced by the Sunni religious authorities as they struggle to strike a balance between the radicalizing effect of Salafism and the pressure to moderate the Sunni religious field.

The Sunni religious field will continue to be divided, with the OSE as a key player and a subject for rivalry. The consolidation of its control over religious institutions and endowments will strengthen its authority. Yet, in a domain manipulated by patronage and exclusionary practices, several other actors are concerned that this consolidation will harm their interests and marginalize them materially and ideologically. After the formation of the government of Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi in 2018, several Sunni political and religious factions demanded to have a say in the nomination of the OSE president. Still, they find it difficult to agree on a single nominee, especially since the post attracts several nonreligiously oriented entrepreneurs aspiring to gain a portion of the resources and patronage opportunities that the OSE could provide. This could produce a deal between these factions to apportion the senior positions, and hence the benefits, of the OSE among themselves, which will require placing a compromise figure as the head of the institution. At the same time, the Shia-dominated government will continue to prefer a moderate and conciliatory figure, viewing the OSE as an important tool to weaken radical Sunni elements. In the long term, given the multiplicity of actors and the differences between them, the fragmentation of authority within Iraq's Sunni Islam is likely to continue and the legitimacy and social acceptability of the OSE is likely to remain limited.

Islamic Endowments and Shia Religious Authority

While the management of Sunni endowments failed to overcome the fragmentation and crisis of authority in Sunnism, the new institutional arrangements for the Shia Islamic endowments were instrumental in the consolidation of religious authority in Shiism. This can be seen in the way its main religious shrines (*atabat*) have been managed during the last decade.

In the initial period following the creation of the OSHE, there was a competition among Shia factions similar to that among Sunni groups to control Islamic endowments. Several religious groups sought unilaterally to benefit from the symbolic and material resources of religious sites, including highly important places such as the shrines of Shia imams in Najaf, Karbala, Kazimiyya, and Samarra. During the 2004 battle between the U.S. army and Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi, many Sadrist fighters took sanctuary in the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, with the intention of using its symbolic power to propagate their message of resistance and its facilities to treat the injured and store arms. Around the same time, a Sadrist offshoot group led by Mahmood Hasani al-Sarkhi sought to invade the shrine of Imam Hussein in Karbala. A heterodox Shia group, Jund al-Samaa

(Soldiers of the Sky), attempted to march on the shrine of Imam Ali in 2007, which led to military clashes with government security forces and ended with a great number of casualties and the death of the group's leader.⁴⁷

Hussein as-Shami, a cleric and an associate of the Da'wa Party, was selected to be the OSHE's first president, through a deal between Da'wa and the other major Shia party, the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq (SICI), which obtained another key religious position, that of the head of the Haj and 'Umra Commission. However, Shami's management of the OSHE was strongly criticized by other Shia groups, primarily the SICI and the Sadrist movement.⁴⁸ Najaf's religious authority, the *marji'yya*, was not satisfied with his role either, especially after accusations of corruption and mismanagement.⁴⁹ Shami was replaced in 2005 by Salih Muhammed al-Haidari, the imam of Khillani mosque, who occupied the position until 2015.

One of the OSHE's main functions is to administer the *'atabat* that attract millions of pilgrims every year and represent key pillars in the construction of the collective Shia memory and identity. In 2005, the parliament passed a new law for the management of the *'atabat* and Shia pilgrimage sites, which gave the OSHE president the authority to appoint the top administrators of the *'atabat* after obtaining the approval of the grand marja',⁵⁰ Ali al-Sistani, who represents the highest authority in the Shia religious hierarchy. This was the first time in Iraq's modern history that the role of the grand marja' in supervising the *'atabat* was clearly recognized and legalized, which helped in answering the question of authority that is still unresolved in the Sunni case. Yet, this was only possible because the *marji'yya* managed to maintain its autonomy from the state, including by depending on funding from Shia communities and wealthy individuals in Iraq and from abroad, and by sustaining an autonomous tradition of learning and status-building that proved to be resilient despite the former regime's attempts at infiltration. This allowed it to emerge as the ultimate authority in Shia communities after 2003, thus forcing Shia parties to try to appeal to it and derive legitimacy from the identification with its leadership.⁵¹

The 2005 law created the position of secretary general in each of the five major shrines in Iraq (the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf, the Imam Hussein and Imam Abbas shrines in Karbala, the Imam Kazim shrine in Kazimiyya, and the al-Askariyayn shrine in Samarra). The office of the grand marja' was involved in the nomination of the secretaries general, some of whom were representatives of Sistani. Among them were two close associates of Najaf's religious hierarchy who grew to be influential figures, Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalai, who became the secretary general and later the "legitimate custodian" of the shrine of Imam Hussein, and Ahmed as-Safi,⁵² the secretary general and later the legitimate custodian of the shrine of Imam Abbas.

Within a few years, the *'atabat* administrations emerged as powerful entities, presiding over large operations that extended from expanding the shrines' courtyards and building new facilities for

pilgrims to supervising the construction and operation of new hospitals, schools, and universities. In doing so, they partly imitated the model of the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad in Iran, which is administered by a foundation whose current chairman, Ebrahim Raisi, was appointed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and was the main rival to Hassan Rouhani in the 2017 presidential election. The *'atabat* administrations benefited from the tax exemption status and other allowances given to them as “religious institutions” beside the government funding for their operational expenses as part of the OSHE budget. This enabled them to undertake several projects of a “worldly” nature. For example, the administration of the Imam Abbas shrine founded companies operating in the fields of food, farming, and construction, whose revenue goes to the administration or is invested in new projects.⁵³ The administration of the Imam Hussein shrine signed a contract with an Iraqi-British company to build what is intended to be the largest airport in Iraq, despite the reservations of the governor of Karbala about the procedures.⁵⁴ Such projects are often decided on and managed by the central or local government, yet the *'atabat* administrations were able to lead these efforts in the shrine cities, largely because of their special status and unaccountability. Although legally they are part of the OSHE, and hence are considered public institutions, their dealings with the sacred space and their connection to the grand marja', who emerged as an extra-constitutional authority after 2003, liberated them from restrictions imposed on other public institutions.

Moreover, schools and universities run by *'atabat* administrations in Karbala attracted an increasing number of middle-class families who preferred to send their children to these paying establishments rather than the free public schools because they offered better quality education.⁵⁵ Further, following the 2014 fatwa by Sistani that called on civilians to join the security forces in the fight against the Islamic State, which was announced by the secretary general of the Imam Hussein shrine, the *'atabat* administrations formed new paramilitary groups that participated in the military operations. Among these groups were Firqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyya and Liwaa Ali al-Akbar. Such groups were sometimes labeled as Sistani's Hashd (Popular Mobilization) to distinguish them from groups backed by the Iranian government.⁵⁶

Many residents in Karbala prefer projects and services conducted by these administrations over those of national and local state institutions that are notorious for their corruption and inefficiency.⁵⁷ This is not to say that there have not been accusations of corruption against shrines administrations.⁵⁸ Some, including state officials, think that these administrations artificially amplify their personnel and activities in order to serve private interests, and that their actual funding is from the public purse despite their possession of resources that could self-sustain them.⁵⁹

The activities and projects of the *'atabat* administrations have created new networks with differentiated interests and increasing social, economic, and political leverage.⁶⁰ Shia shrines possess great symbolic and material weight that can boost the sociopolitical status of those in charge of them. Besides, the Friday sermons given by Sistani's representative in Karbala became occasions to

deliver his teachings to the public and to project his authority beyond the religious seminaries in Najaf. Consequently, by excluding any other clerical voice from the most significant religious platform, the undisputed authority of Sistani as a formally recognized grand marja' was legalized.

For these reasons, it is possible that those networks of status and interest that were created through the new institutional arrangements of Shia endowments will have strong leverage in the selection of the next grand marja' and in resisting attempts to drastically change the existing arrangements for the management of Islamic endowments. Those administrations that exemplify the overlap between the formal (the state-affiliated OSHE) and the informal (the grand marja') are the perfect embodiment of the unique processes through which Shia clerical authority became a key player in the reconfiguration of the sociopolitical order in post-2003 Iraq.⁶¹ This reconfiguration was further legalized and institutionalized in the law of the OSHE of 2012, of which Sistani's office was the key drafter.⁶² According to the law, the OSHE president must be nominated by the prime minister after consultation with the grand marja'.⁶³ Article 13 of the law stipulates that the OSHE is responsible for the management of any endowment that does not have a designated manager or that was transferred to its authority by its founder or by the grand marja'. Article 14 obliges the OSHE to follow Shia jurisprudence and the grand marja''s opinion in the appointment of managers of the shrines and endowments. Moreover, Article 15 stipulates that the OSHE has no authority over religious schools and seminaries and cannot interfere in their affairs without the consent of the grand marja'.

This does not mean that there are no other forces that share the authority over OSHE and *'atabat* with Sistani and his office. Indeed, the latter sought to achieve a consensus among senior clerics regarding some of these decisions. Among them was Muhammed Said al-Hakeem, who is the only Arab among the four main maraji' (plural of marja') in Najaf and is widely seen as a potential heir to Sistani.⁶⁴ He belongs to a prominent clerical family in Najaf, and his Arab-ness and Iraqi-ness boost his claim to authority, given that the *marji'yya* has been undergoing a process of "Iraqization" that the new arrangements for the Islamic endowments accelerated. Hakeem played a role in the appointment of the new OSHE president, Ala' al-Mussawi, in 2015 as well as in that of Ahmed as-Safi as secretary general and later legitimate custodian of Imam Abbas shrine. Both are followers of Hakeem. According to an informed source in Najaf, Hakeem's office pressured the OSHE to dismiss Nizar Habl al-Mateen as secretary general of Imam Ali shrine because he did not have friendly relations with the Hakeem's office.⁶⁵ Saleem al-Hassani, a Shia commentator, argues that the Islamic endowments terrain in Najaf and Karbala is increasingly polarized between administrators loyal to Sistani and those connected to Hakeem.⁶⁶ This indicates that while their restructuring has further asserted the authority of Najaf's religious hierarchy in the Shia religious field, it did not stop internal rivalries. Indeed, these are likely to intensify as a result of the expansion of the social, political, and economic powers of the *'atabat*. At the same time, these rivalries, which are largely contained by the supremacy and cautious leadership of Sistani, underline the role that the management of Islamic

endowments is going to play in determining the positions of Shia senior clerics, especially following the eventual death of Sistani.

Conclusion

Iraq moved after 2003 from a state policy of domination over the religious field to one granting religious actors and institutions more freedom from the state. MERA, the Baathi regime's main tool to control religious affairs, was replaced by confessional offices of endowments. This was seen as a step toward decentralization, democratization, and a more equitable distribution of religious commodities. However, this shift created new conflicts and rivalries. First, between the newly created OSHE and OSE after they inherited MERA's powers and some of its functions as they sought to identify what belonged to each one of them. Second, between the multiple religious and confessional players who recognized that gaining more authority in the management of religious sites and endowments would strengthen their positions vis-à-vis their rivals.

One can see these dynamics as part of a negotiation between the state and religious actors about sharing the management of the religious field. At the same time, given that the state is not a neutral body and its key decisions are made by political actors seeking to promote their interests and worldviews, these dynamics also reflected power struggles in which the weight of the state was often thrown behind forces that had more leverage over decisionmakers and legislators. Accordingly, the OSHE has been in a better position to advance its claims, given the support it has enjoyed from Shia Islamist parties that dominated the government and parliament after 2005.

The confessionalization of Islamic endowments was part of a broader process of sectarianization, which entailed the solidification of boundaries between the two confessions and the formation of religious centers in each sectarian group. This process managed to assert the position of the *marji'yya* as the highest authority in the Shia religious field, formalizing and legalizing its role in the administration of Shia endowments and shrines. This is likely to assert the "Iraqi-ness" of the *marji'yya* and Najaf as the center of the Shia religious hierarchy while significantly reshaping the structure of this hierarchy and the process of legitimizing the authority of the future grand marja'. In contrast, the new institutional arrangement for Sunni endowments has failed so far to overcome the fragmentation of authority in Sunnism. Evidently, the building of a Sunni authority similar to the Shia *marji'yya*, an objective propagated by some Sunni religious and political actors, is still far from being realized. The intra-Sunni rivalries are likely to continue and to revolve around ideological differences and patron-client networks, allowing the state to be a key arbiter in the restructuring of the Sunni religious field.

About the Author

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Notes

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- ¹ On the Baathi government's religious policy, see Samuel Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam and, the Roots on Insurgencies in Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
 - ² MERA contained a department dealing with endowments and another with the 'atabat (Shi'a holy shrines). In 1993, the Endowment Department gained more administrative and financial autonomy but remained under the supervision of the minister of endowments and religious affairs. There was also a department responsible for mosques, including for the selection of imams.
 - ³ In my research at the Baath Party Archive at the Hoover Institution, I found regular correspondence between the provincial branches of the party and its central leadership (al-Qiyyada al-Qutriyya), in which the branches reported on the imams' adherence to the government's and the party's instructions regarding the content of their sermons. Based on these reports, imams were placed into three categories: Baathi clerics (group A), good clerics (divided into group A and group B), and noncooperative (or bad clerics).
 - ⁴ One of these cases was that of Aws al-Khafaji, who led the prayer in one of Nassiriyya's mosques and was one of Muhammed al-Sadr's followers. He followed his leader's instructions in delivering Friday sermons, refusing to praise Saddam Hussein (which was one of the government's instructions). He was arrested in 1998, which resulted in clashes between security forces and members of the Sadrist movement. Muhammed al-Sadr's escalation of his criticism of the government after this incident led to a series of events that ended with his assassination in 1999.
 - ⁵ Abbas Khadhim, *Hawza Under Siege: A Study in the Baath Party Archive* (Boston University: Institute for Iraqi Studies, 2013).
 - ⁶ This paper covers only Islamic endowments in the Arab part of Iraq and does not discuss the Kurdistan region, which has its own distinct form of management for religious affairs and endowments.
 - ⁷ Order No. 2, issued by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in August 2003, which dissolved the entities that were militarily and ideologically essential to the Baathi regime, did not include MERA. Likely due to the sensitivity of the religious issue, the CPA preferred to let Iraqis deal with this subject.
 - ⁸ For example, a group linked to Sheikh Muhammed al-Ya'qubi, a Shi'a cleric, occupied the large ar-Rahman mosque, which the Baathi government had built in al-Mansour, an upper-class neighborhood. Eventually, the mosque became the main headquarters of al-Ya'qubi and his political party, al-Fadila, in Baghdad. Similarly, in 2003 the newly formed Association of Muslim Scholars, a Sunni group, occupied the other large mosque of Um al-Ma'arik, renaming it Um al-Qura. This move was later contested by the OSE, which managed to reclaim its custody of it.
 - ⁹ Author interview with an official at the OSE, Baghdad, February 9, 2019.
 - ¹⁰ Hussaniyya is a congregation hall in which rituals of commemoration of Shi'a imams are practiced and is also used for prayer and for holding mourning gatherings.

- ¹¹ The Office of Shi'i Endowment, <http://www.al-awqaf.net/webpages/dewan/anjazat/n2.htm> (accessed February 20, 2019).
- ¹² Author interview with Salim Salih Mahdi, a general director at the OSE, Baghdad, February 9, 2019.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Asharqalawsat, March 3, 2006, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=351080&issueno=9957#.XFB8Cy3Mx0s>.
- ¹⁶ The verdict is available at <https://www.iraqfsc.iq/krarat/1/2012/62.pdf> (accessed February 21, 2019).
- ¹⁷ Author interview with Taha az-Zaidi, member of the Sunni Jurisprudential Congregation, Baghdad, February 8, 2019. A man from Samarra who is now living in Baghdad told me that he owns a building near the shrine but that since 2006 he has been denied access to it due to the security procedures enforced by the security forces and Shi'a militias in the area. The objective, he thinks, is to force him and other landowners to sell their buildings and lands to the OSHE and those allied with Shi'a groups for very low prices.
- ¹⁸ Al-Khulassa, "*al-Istela' ala amlak al-waqf al-Sunni: harb wujud wa hawiyya*, [The taking over Sunni endowments: the war of existence and identity]" June 2, 2016, <https://www.alkulasa.net/artical/1553/الاستيلاء-على-املاك-الوقف-السني-حرب-و> (accessed January 12, 2019).
- ¹⁹ Al-Khaleej Online, "*Al-Iraq: Shakwa lil waqf al-Shi'i taqud al-Nujaifi ila as-sijn thalath sanawat*" [a charge by OSHE leads Nujeifi to the prison for three years], January 26, 2018, <https://alkhaleejonline.net/%D8>
- ²⁰ Yaqeen News Agency, "*Al-Waqf al-Shi'i yas'a lil-saytara 'ala 'iqarat al-waqf al-Sunni fi Ninewa*" [OSHE takes over possessions of OSE in Nienwa], February 13, 2019, <https://yaqein.net/reports/176808>.
- ²¹ Conversation with local residents, Baghdad, February 8-10, 2019.
- ²² An example is an endowment of about thirty buildings, donated a long time ago by a deceased woman from Samarra in al-Jumhuriyya Street and al-Shorja, the main commercial areas in central Baghdad. Given that the donor descended from Sunni-majority Samarra, the OSE considered the endowment a Sunni one, while the OSHE argued that the donor was of Alawi descent and likely to be Shi'a. According to an OSE official, the OSHE unilaterally decided to deal with these buildings as part of its own jurisdiction by contracting people who occupied them. Author Interview, Baghdad, February 9, 2018. The story was also told to the author by Abd al-Wahab al-Samara'i, a member of the Sunni Jurisprudential Congregation, February 8, 2018.
- ²³ Hossam Khaiallah, "*Lijnat al-Fak wal-zl wa Hurub al-Awqaf*" [The committee for separation and isolation], Iraq al-Qanun, March, 28, 2014, <http://www.qanon302.net/articles/2014/03/28/15350>.
- ²⁴ The OSHE has been accused of illegally appropriating 247 plots and commercial sites. Al-Khulassa, "*al-Istela' ala amlak al-waqf al-Sunni* [The taking over the possessions of the Sunni endowment]" <https://www.alkulasa.net/artical/1553/الاستيلاء-على-املاك-الوقف-السني-حرب-و>.
- ²⁵ Conversations with Shi'a clerics, Najaf, 4-5 March 2018.
- ²⁶ See, for example, this interview with Adnan al-Dulaimi in which he accused the Iraqi government of helping Shi'a militias control Sunni mosques. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYvEhhh3BsA> (accessed February 20, 2019).
- ²⁷ Samara'i stated on this occasion that the "AMS was one of the causes of the murdering, destruction and displacement that inflicted our society." See Almoslim, "*as-Samara'i wal harb ala ha'iat ulama al-muslimeen: man al-mustafid*" [Samara'i and the war on the Association of Muslim Scholars: who is benefiting?], <http://almoslim.net/node/86002> (accessed February 19, 2019).
- ²⁸ Iraqi Council of Representatives, "The law of the Office of Sunni Endowments, No.56, 2012," <http://arb.parliament.iq/archive/2012/07/26/القانون-ديوان-الوقف-السني> (accessed on February 19, 2019).
- ²⁹ Author Interview with a member of the IJC, Baghdad, February 9, 2019.

- ³⁰ The Office of Sunni Endowment, “*al-Humaim utliq hamla kubra li i’adat al-naziheen*” [Humeim initiates a large campaign to return displaced people], October 4, 2016 <http://sunniaffairs.gov.iq/ar/-الدكتور-الهيميم-يطلق-حملة-كبرى-لإعادة-الدين>.
- ³¹ The Office of Sunni Endowment, “*Dhimna al-Hamla al-wataniyya limunahadbat al-ghilow wal- tataruf wal-irhab*” [As part of the national campaign to fight bigotry, extremism and terrorism], November 11, 2016, <http://sunniaffairs.gov.iq/ar/ضمن-الحملة-الوطنية-الاسلامية-لمناهضة>.
- ³² Author interview, Baghdad, February 8, 2019.
- ³³ According to sources working closely with the IJC, the OSE rejected a Turkish offer to renovate the mosque of al-Imam al-A’zam, where the IJC headquarters are. Their interpretation was that Humeim wants to impose his full control over the prominent mosque before allowing such renovation.
- ³⁴ Author interview with Abdul Wahab al-Samara’i, member of the IJC, Baghdad, February 8, 2019.
- ³⁵ Interview with Adnan al-Dulaimi, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYvEh3BsA> (accessed February 20, 2019).
- ³⁶ See Dar al-Iftaa’s description of its own history, <http://www.h-iftaa.com> (accessed February 19, 2019)
- ³⁷ Author conversation with Ahmed Mahmoud at-Taha, head of the IJC, Baghdad, February 8, 2019.
- ³⁸ Author interview with Hisham al-Hashimi, an expert on Sunni Salafi groups, Baghdad, February 9, 2019.
- ³⁹ Author interview, Baghdad, February 9, 2019.
- ⁴⁰ Author interview with an OSE official, February 9, 2019. See also Ar-Rawabit, “*Niza’ tadhamuhu al-watha’iq: um at-tubuul*” [A dispute supported by documents: um at-tubbul], January 30, 2017, <http://rawabetcenter.com/archives/39899>.
- ⁴¹ For details, see Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, “Hashd Formations of Iraq: Interview with Harakat Ahrar al-Iraq,” January 18, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/01/hashd-formations-of-iraq-interview-with-harakat>.
- ⁴² Al-Kawthar, “*Al-liwa’ Qassim Suleimani yaltaqi mufti ahl as-Sunna*” [General Qassim Suleimani meets the mufti], December 4, 2018, <http://www.alkawthartv.com/news/177239>.
- ⁴³ Author interview with Hisham al-Hashimi, an expert on Sunni Salafi groups, Baghdad, February 9, 2019.
- ⁴⁴ Among them were Ghandi Abdul-Karim and Nihru Abdul-Karim, the sons of the order’s leader, Sheikh Muhammed Abdul-Karim al-Kasnazan. A third son, Malas, became the first minister of trade in Haider al-Abadi’s government, before being forced to resign due to corruption charges.
- ⁴⁵ RT, “ISIS jihadists demolish mosques, shrines in northern Iraq,” July 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/170652-jihadists-destroy-mosques-iraq/>.
- ⁴⁶ Author interview, Baghdad, February 9, 2019.
- ⁴⁷ BBC News, “*Maqtal za’eem jund a;-sama’ fi ishtibakat al-Najaf*” [The leader of jund al-Sama’ was killed in Najaf clashes], January 29, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/middle_east_news/newsid_6307000/6307349.stm (Accessed January 3, 2019).
- ⁴⁸ See as an example this article published by a website owned by a SICI leader, Jalal Ad-Din al-Saghir, on September 11, 2009, <http://burathanews.com/arabic/articles/7525>.
- ⁴⁹ A well-known case is the accusation that Shami exploited his position to purchase the military Bakr University and turn it into the University of Imam Sadiq, where he was main shareholder and president of the board. He denied this and said the university was owned by a philanthropic institution. Buratha News Agency, “*as-Shami yarud ‘la itihat al-A’raji*” [Shami responds to A’raji’s accusations], April 21, 2011, <http://burathanews.com/arabic/news/122923>.
- ⁵⁰ Marja’, which is often translated as “the source of emulation,” is a religious title given to Islamic scholars who obtained the credentials to exert *ijtihad*, that is, deducing Islamic rulings through rational methods. A scholar who obtained the faculty of *ijtihad* and hence became a *mujtahid* is referred to as a marja’ too

because lay people are instructed to emulate him and follow his instructions and fatwas. The grand marja' is a relatively modern institution and it is often given to the *mujtahid* with the largest number of emulators. Adnan Farhan Al Qassim, *Al-Ijtihad 'inda al-Shi'a al-imamiyya: adwar wa atwar* [Ijtihad and the Imami Shi'a: roles and stages] (Beirut: Dar al-Salam, 2008), 241-276; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991), 40.

⁵¹ As was manifested in 2004 election of the Transitional Assembly and the 2005 election of the first Council of Representatives in which the Shi'a coalition used Sistani's pictures to appeal to voters. For further details, see Babak Rahimi, "Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of the Post-Ba'athIraq," United States Institute of Peace, June 2007, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr187.pdf>

⁵² After the end of their terms as secretaries general, the new position of legitimate custodian (*al-Mutawali al-Shar'i*) was created to keep them in charge of these 'atabat, which some criticized as an illegal arrangement, as was communicated to me in conversations with legal experts and people knowledgeable about the subject.

⁵³ The main company is named al-Kafeel, and it opened branches in several parts of Iraq, including al-A'zamiyya, a main Sunni neighborhood in Baghdad.

⁵⁴ In a rare public manifestation of the competition and disagreements between the formal authority in the city and the 'atabat administrations, the governor of Karbala, Akeel al-Turaihi, spoke about his reservations in a TV interview, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t76Wun5FpVI&t=1354s> (accessed February 20, 2019).

⁵⁵ The main school that offers classes at the primary and secondary levels is called al-Kafeel. Recently, a new university called al-Warith, run by the administration of the Imam Hussein shrine, was opened in Karbala.

⁵⁶ For more details on PMF factions, see Renad Mansour and Faleh A. Jabar, "The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's Future," Carnegie Middle East Center, April, 2017, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_63_Mansour_PMF_Final_Web.pdf; Adel al-Gabouri, "The Role of Popular Mobilization Forces in the Iraqi Political Process", Fikra, October 1, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-role-of-the-popular-mobilization-forces-in-the-iraqi-political-process>;

⁵⁷ Authors interviews with residents.

⁵⁸ This point was confirmed to me by an adviser of the government who works on budgetary matters. Despite a common positive perception, some people also point to favoritism and nepotism in the way the shrines and their resources are administered.

⁵⁹ Not-for-attribution conversation with a legal adviser of the Iraqi government, Baghdad, February 2017.

⁶⁰ Harith Hasan, "The 'Formal' Marja': Shi'i Clerical Authority and the State in Post-2003 Iraq," *British Journal for Middle East Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2018.1429988.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Not-for-attribution, interview with an associate of Sistani, 2016.

⁶³ Al-Waqa' Al-Iraqiyya, "The Law of the Bureau of Shi'i Endowments, No. 57, 2012."

⁶⁴ The other three are Sistani, Muhammed Isaak al-Fayyadh (an Afghan), and Basheer al-Najafi (a Pakistani).

⁶⁵ Interview with the author, Baghdad, February 11, 2019.

⁶⁶ Saleem al-Hassani, "*Mushkilat Marji'yyat al-Sistani ma'a al-Mu'amameen al-thalatha*" [The problems of Sistani's marji'yya with the three Maraji'], Al-Badeel al-Iraqi, November 2, 2011, <http://www.albadeeliraq.com/ar/node/985>.



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