

# The Thread of Muawiya: The Making of a Marja Taqlid



The marja'at or grand ayatollahs are the scholars who sit at the pinnacle of the Shi'a religious hierarchy. Normally learned and reclusive men, they nonetheless wield enormous authority through their religious prestige and the funds generated by religious taxes. From their modest homes in the Shi'ite shrines cities of Iraq and Iran, their influence reaches across the Shi'a world carried by networks of sons, sons-in-law, students, and local clerics. This book reveals the process by which a handful of religious scholars become recognized as grand ayatollahs, the way their influence is exercised, and how they relate to other Shi'a clerics and to ordinary believers. Based on scores of interviews with Shi'a clerics, this book gives a detailed and human portrait of the inner world of the Shi'ite clerical hierarchy. The late Linda Walbridge was an anthropologist of religion specializing in minorities in the Islamic world. Her other works include *Without Forgetting the Imam: Shi'ism in an American Community*, *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja'at Taqlid*, and *The Christians of Pakistan: The Passion of Bishop John Joseph*.

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