



NAJAF: A HISTORICAL CENTER OF POWER & ECONOMY: 1500 - 1920

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Abstract

Most scholarly focus on Najaf has centered on its religious significance in Shi'i Islam or on its political roles throughout its history. This study is the first to analyze the role of economics on political and religious institutions during the period 1500-1920.

Sources of Data

- Travel Narratives
- Ottoman, British and Indian Administrative Records
- Personal Memoirs
- Biographical Dictionaries and Encyclopedias in Arabic and Farsi

Burial and Religious Pilgrimage

Awadh Bequest (India)

Awqaf (Pious Endowments)



Najaf, Iraq
1500-1920

Khums and Other Pious Financial Donations

Land-Owning Aristocracies and Iranian Leadership



Thesis

With the wealth concentrated in the religious institutions in Najaf, and the international traffic through the city, this enabled it to grow from 1500-1920 to prominence in the region as a political and economic center. A careful historical analysis of sources from that time period should confirm this thesis.

Major Conclusions

- Funding and the entire financial system in Najaf with regard to Shi'i religious leaders and institutions was never systematically organized and administered by a government, each student was forced to find his own patron.
- Network-building became a major preoccupation among both teachers and students and a source of rivalries.
- Personalized system centered around individual scholar-teachers, who patronized their protégés through the reception of individual contributions from believers or stipends from foreign dignitaries and endowments.
- Financial system had a major impact on the development of religious patrimonialism in Najaf as well as on leadership and local politics.