

Mr Cameron Zargar – Near Eastern Languages & Culture



Mr Cameron Zargar received his BA in Near Eastern Studies from U.C. Berkeley in 2003. His areas of interest include Arabic and Islamic history. Upon completion of his BA degree, Cameron pursued studies in the ḥawzas of Iran, spending one year in Tehran at the ḥawza of Ayatollah Mujtahidī and eight years in Qum. He also received another BA from Jami'at al-Mustafa. After completing the *suṭūḥ*, He participated in *dars-e khārij* for two years, working with Ayatollah Shahīdīpūr, Ayatollah Ganjī and Ayatollah Shubayrī Zanjānī. In 2012, Cameron returned to the U.S., and received an MA in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from the Ohio State University in 2014. Currently, Mr Zargar is a PhD student in NELC at UCLA where his research is based on the authority of the *marāji'* as understood through the lens of their followers.

ABSTRACT: “The authority of the *muqallid*: a bottom-up approach to *taqlid* in Imami law”

Taqlīd in Imami Shi'ism is usually evaluated in terms of the authority of the *marāji'*. These Imami jurists provide opinions for millions of followers on essentially all religious aspects of life, including worship, marriage, eating and conducting business. In scholarship on Imami Shi'ism in European languages, the *marāji'* are described as holding power over *muqallids* by way of their charisma. This charisma is oftentimes described as being derived from the Twelve Imams, and framed within the context of Max Weber's model of genuine or revolutionary charismatic authority. Scholars in academic institutions turn to such theory because the influence of the *marāji'* cannot be assessed in terms of state or official power, as they have neither a bureaucracy, a formal election, or means of coercion or enforcement. The problem with this approach is that stating the authority of the *marāji'* in terms of charisma and personal appeal implies that *muqallids* do not make a rational decision when they decide to adhere to the opinions of a *marja'*, which is simply not the case. Rather, *muqallids* refer to the *marāji'* because they believe they are most qualified to interpret Islamic sources, and that by doing they can avoid blame on the Day of Judgment for not sufficiently pursuing God's law. Furthermore it is the *muqallids* who choose to self-impose the fatwas of Imami jurists, meaning, in essence, the authority of the *marāji'* is derived from their followers. Thus, it is worth evaluating the authority these followers have in the process of *taqlīd*. This authority includes: 1. the *muqallids'* freedom to choose from among *marāji'*; 2. their role in determining who becomes a *marja'*; and 3. their responsibilities in the application of fatwas. The first and third aspects of the *muqallids'* authority is stated in Imami legal theory and reinforced in my interviews with members of the Imami community in Iran. The second aspect can be understood by way of a historical survey of the institution of *marja'iyya*; the building of patronage networks and establishing relationships with lay members of the Imami community allowed for nineteenth century jurists in Iraq to be recognized as transregional legal authorities in Iran and elsewhere in the Muslim world. Thus, this paper will demonstrate that the *muqallids* play an active role in the process of *taqlīd* and that the authority of the *marāji'* is dependent upon the Imami community at large.