

The School of Ḥillah in Islamic History
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The School of Ḥillah (and the formation of an Imāmī Shī‘ī *madhhab*) is intertwined with the wider history of the region. I argue that particular relationships of power played as much of a role in shaping the Imāmī Shī‘ism of Ḥillah as did individual scholars and curricular texts. To that end, this chapter provides readers with the essential historical context in which the School of Ḥillah arose and held the reins of Imāmī Shī‘ism for more than 200 years. The chapter comprises four sections: the Saljūqs and late ‘Abbāsids; the Ilkhānids; the Jalāyirids and Qarā-Qoyūnlū; and the Mazyadids and Ḥillah. In the first three sections, the political history of the region is narrated from the vantage point of Baghdad and Lower Iraq. A major theme running through these sections is that, while the Saljūqs succeeded in reestablishing the political supremacy of Sunnism after the conclusion of “the Shī‘ī century,” Shī‘ism and Shī‘ī ideals gradually gained currency on the ground, culminating in a series of explosive messianic movements in the 9th/15th century. The Mongol invasion and Ilkhānid rule were the most important factors driving this complex historical process, but it was aided by political, social, and cultural dynamics that emerged in the early middle period of Islamic history and persisted long after the demise of the Ilkhānate. In the fourth and final section of the chapter, I zoom in on the history of Ḥillah itself, paying particular attention to the religious topography of the city, including formal institutions of learning and sacred geography. To show readers how the School of Ḥillah shaped and was shaped by the gradual transformation of the region, I highlight important connections between the School of Ḥillah and the history of the period throughout the chapter. I conclude the chapter by arguing that, over the course of this tumultuous history, the School of Ḥillah succeeded in institutionalizing a framework for coherence that guided the trajectory of Imāmī Shī‘ism and projected stability in a way that the ruling dynasties of the Shī‘ī century never could.