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ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Female Religious Authority in *Shi‘i* Islam”

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This paper gives an overview of forms of, and changes in, female religious authority in *Shi‘i* Islam. The significant role of women in participating in, and shaping, the scholarly tradition through the centuries is still hardly reflected in either Western scholarly or public perceptions. Nearly all classic accounts of religious authority in Islam proceed from the assumption that this authority is male. The possibility that women might exercise various aspects of religious authority is usually not discussed. Yet, when we dissect religious authority into its various manifestations (leading prayer, preaching, providing religious counseling, issuing *fatawa*, transmitting *Hadith*, judging in court, shaping the Islamic scholarly tradition), nuances emerge that call the exclusively male character of religious authority in Islam into question. Based on biographical collections and oral histories, this paper tries to identify which conditions and developments (theological, jurisprudential, social, economic, political) particularly enhanced, promoted, and, conversely, stifled the phenomenon of female religious authority in *Shi‘i* Islam.