Fahmida Suleman (ed.), *People of the Prophet's House: Artistic and Ritual Expressions of Shi'i Islam*. London: Azimuth Editions in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies in collaboration with the British Museum's Department of the Middle East, 2015. ISBN 9781898592327. 275 pages.

This volume is the product of a three-day conference, "People of the Prophet's House: Art, Architecture and Shi'ism in the Islamic World", which was held at the British Museum in March 2009, with sponsorship from the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Comprising twenty-two essays, the volume benefits from a wide range of approaches, with contributions from art and architectural history, anthropology, Islamic studies, numismatics, film studies, and contemporary art. Like the conference, the volume covers a broad sweep in terms of geography and time period, featuring dynasties such as the Buyids, the Bavandids, the Idrisids, the Fatimids, the Safavids, the Qajars, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The essays are grouped according to major themes: pilgrimage and patronage; inscriptions; iconography; and ritual expressions.

In the introduction to the volume, Fahmida Suleman and Shainool Jiwa highlight further key themes which become apparent through the collection of essays. One is the use of Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* as proof texts; the second is the prevalence of the Battle of Karbala; the third is art and architecture associated with the Imams and their descendants; and the last is the way in which love for *ahl al-bayt* transcends the Sunni-Shii divide. The two authors also reject the existence of an "orthodox Islam" from which Shii Islam can be seen as deviating.

In a second introductory essay, Oleg Grabar asks the question which echoes throughout the volume: Are there Shii forms of art? He goes on to set out four "broad principles, hypotheses, or premises" before the reader. Grabar proposes that art can be specifically Shii through labelling, i.e. inscriptions, or it can be innately Shii in some way, like the prayer tablet (Ar. *turba*) used only by Shii Muslims. He then goes on to examine whether specific artistic forms and features can be explicitly or inherently Shii, namely funerary domes and geometric surface decoration. While the first two proposals—concerning labelling and functionality—are plausible, Grabar's arguments regarding the Shii character of the funerary dome and geometric decoration are less convincing.

The book's first section on pilgrimage and patronage comprises essays by James Allan, Yasser Tabaa, Jonathan Bloom, Robert Hillenbrand, and the late Melanie Michailidis. A number of these articles address the ways in which architectural forms, features, and patronage, as well as pilgrimage practices, defy easy definition as Shii. Allan's article focuses on the seemingly most Shii of sites, the major shrines at Najaf, Karbala, Kazimayn, and Samarra. However,

his article shows that Sunni rulers were also major patrons of these sites. Yasser Tabbaa's study of the Shii shrines of Syria responds to the questions posed in the volume by demonstrating that without insisting on inherently Shii architectural forms and features, it is possible to approach these buildings by studying their discursive relationship with Shii thought. Tabbaa argues that we should view these buildings from a less strictly formalist perspective and instead take Shii beliefs into account.

In the second section, Sheila Canby, Sheila Blair, Hussein Keshani, and Luke Treadwell address inscriptions. Canby questions the existence of distinctively Shii styles in her essay on Qur'āns bearing *imāmī* signatures. While she is quick to point out that Qur'āns of the ninth and tenth centuries CE do not display any sectarian leanings in their styles, the Qur'āns which bear the putative signatures of Imams are important objects for Shii Muslims nonetheless. Blair continues the focus on the Qur'ān but in the context of inscriptions. She largely concentrates on buildings from the tenth to sixteenth centuries in Iran, addressing the question of whether certain forms and features are reserved purely for Shii use. She rejects the claims that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century lustre tilework had specifically Shii connotations by considering the case of the shrine of the Suhrawardī shaykh Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ṣamad at Natanz in central Iran. He is likely to have followed the Shāfi'ī school but also to have held Imam 'Alī and his descendants in particularly high esteem.

The third section, on iconography, includes essays by Massumeh Farhad, Maryam Ekhtiar, Venetia Porter, Zeynep Yürekli, and Fahmida Suleman. Yürekli investigates the significance of the *dhū l-faḡār* as a symbol not in a Shii setting, but rather in the Sunni, and specifically Ottoman, context. Yürekli demonstrates how the Sunni Ottomans co-opted this symbol of *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet Muḥammad), depicting it more frequently than their Shii Safavid counterparts did throughout the sixteenth century.

The final group of articles, from Peter Chelkowski, Ingvild Flakerud, Nacim Pak-Shiraz, Tryna Lyons, Amier Saidula, and Mara Leichtman, focus on the performative and ritualistic expression of Shiism. Ingvild Flakerud provides an illuminating study of the ritual performance of the *'arūs-i qāsim*. This theatrical expression of piety is part of the *ta'ziyya* genre, but it depicts the little-known episode of the marriage of Imam Ḥasan's son, Qāsim, to his cousin Fāṭima.

In all, the volume is considerably more comprehensive than *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism*, edited by Pedram Khosronejad (London, 2012), and builds on James Allan's earlier *The Art and Architecture of Twelver Shi'ism* (London, 2012). The articles are accompanied by a full glossary, as well as useful maps and genealogical tables. The contributions are lavishly illustrated with more than two hundred high-quality colour images.

But how much closer does the volume get us to answering Grabar's question regarding the existence of specifically Shii forms of art? It demonstrates that while studies of potentially Shii objects or buildings are viable and can be highly fruitful, it is often difficult to state definitively that any given artistic form or feature is distinctively or inherently Shii. Indeed, the contributions to this volume demonstrate that Grabar's question may not be the most productive way of approaching the material studied here. Many of the objects or buildings in question have, or had, meaning and importance to Sunni Muslims, too, but studying them through a Shii lens yields interesting insights either about the objects themselves or, conversely, about the Shii milieu in which they were produced or used. As Tabbaa shows, a search for evidence of Shiism in formalistic studies is often in vain. However, when approached within a framework built on Shii belief, law, or practice, many of the objects and buildings discussed in this volume can be described as distinctly Shii.

Just as Shii studies is a nascent field, so is the study of the arts and material culture of Shiism. In general, this wide-ranging and well-produced volume provides a much-needed counterweight to the prevalence of scholarship on the art and architecture of Sunni dynasties and contexts. This volume should be of great use and interest to those who research Shiism and its history but are less well versed in the material culture which often facilitates or aids key aspects of thought and practice.

Fuchsia Hart

Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

fuchsia.hart@orinst.ox.ac.uk