

الشهابي، قتيبة. مشيدات دمشق نوات الأضرحة و عناصرها الجمالية: بحث ميداني بعدسة المؤلف. دمشق: وزارة الثقافة في الجمهورية العربية السورية، ١٩٩٥، ٦٧٨ص.

Shihabi, Qutaibah. *Mushaiyyadat Dimashq Dhawat al-Adrihah wa- 'Anasiruha al-Jamaliyyah: Bahth Maydani bi- 'Adasat al-Mu'allif*. Damascus: Wizarat al-Thaqafah fi al-Jumhuriyyah al-'Arabiyyah al-Suriyyah, 1995, 678pp.

ABSTRACT

Monumental Shrines in Damascus and their Aesthetics: Field Research Through the Author's Lens

مشيدات دمشق نوات الأضرحة و عناصرها الجمالية: بحث ميداني بعدسة المؤلف

Through this book, the author seeks to compile an inclusive reference of the monumental shrines in Damascus along with their aesthetics which showcase the characteristics of Muslim architecture and its decorative and ornamental elements. It begins with a brief introduction to the shrines, including their different names, characteristics, and models, organised according to period and function. There follows a brief survey shedding light on the predominant decorative and ornamental elements. This is accompanied by illustrative drawings and visual evidence from Damascus, and regions such as Egypt and Iraq, in order to clarify the differences between these shrines and contemporary examples within other Islamic centres.

The bulk of the work comprises a study of shrines organised according to their functions. Their exterior appearance is also described in minute detail, supported by photographs and

historical information, as well as descriptions of current functions and restorations and changes they have undergone.

The book is distinguished by its excellent historical and architectural documentation on a number of shrines in Damascus drawing upon observations and pictures from the author's field research. In addition, the author has relied upon historical and architectural documents which he contrasts to historical texts and engravings on the shrines. The latter are considered to be more reliable than the conflicting writings of historians in many cases. The author argues that at a point in time where previous research has failed to provide an accurate description of shrines, his study is able to more accurately convey their details thanks to the use of photo-documentation. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the technical and logistical difficulties which accompanied his fieldwork, and affected the extent to which he has been able to convey reality.

The book's rich contents and its inclusion of a great number of monumental shrines in Damascus makes it a good reference for a wide range of readers interested in this subject. However, sometimes the content matter is merely descriptive as it does not explore all the characteristics of certain shrines. Despite the layout and the clear methodology and providing the relevant concepts and terminology, the descriptive historiographical approach to studying the shrines has resulted in some repetition as many shrines are architecturally and decoratively similar.

The book has succeeded in depicting an overview of shrines in Damascus without, however, delving deeper into their features. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the author

had intended his study as a reference book more than as a serious architectural or decorative study of these shrines.

Shirin Khidr

Translated by Hugh Lovatt