SECTARIANISM AND ARCHITECTURE: 
THE FOUNDATION AND DESTRUCTION 
OF SHI’I SHRINES IN SYRIA AND IRAQ 
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Public Lecture
Tuesday, April 7
5:00 p.m.
Robbins Library, University of Rochester
(Rush Rhees Library, Room 416)
Refreshments will be served

Abstract:
The late 20th and early 21st centuries have witnessed the massive building, expansion, and revival of Shi’i shrines in Syria and Iraq, largely due to Iranian patronage but with important contributions by other Shi’i groups. Dozens of important and quite obscure shrines in Syria, such as the shrine of Ruqayya in Damascus, were built at a grand scale and now attract many thousand visitors yearly. But the ongoing civil wars in Syria and Iraq and the rise of extremist groups, including al-Nusra and ISIS, have caused tremendous damage to cultural patrimony in both countries and more specifically to Shi’i shrines. The paper addresses the theological and political motives behind these phenomena—building and destruction—in which the legitimacy of shrines and intercession play a significant role.

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