The *Commentaries* clearly originate in a diary kept by the author and provide valuable information on a whole range of interesting topics. The difficulties of travel, at sea and on land, and how to overcome these, are a recurring theme. Silva y Figueroa also inserts into his narrative several noteworthy digressions: on the city of Goa and its hinterland, in all its fascinating diversity (160–243); on the "Regions of the Persian Empire" (508–630), which is unsurpassed as a contemporary view of Shāh 'Abbās's territories; and on his negotiations with the emperor—when he finally runs him to ground—highlighting especially the latter's quixotic personality (677–707).

Silva y Figueroa's ethnographic approach has recently commended itself to scholars, and this primarily underpins the noted revival of interest in his writings. The introduction makes some very large claims indeed for the text's importance, rather more than it will comfortably bear, and most readers will want to reach their own assessment of its value. It is also disappointingly silent on the author's own intellectual world, on which the *Commentaries* offers numerous clues, while the account of Silva y Figueroa's background in the Spanish nobility also has shortcomings. Nevertheless, the value of a reliable and comprehensive English text of this key work far eclipses any limitations in the editorial introduction.

Hamish Scott, *Jesus College, University of Oxford*
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Formation of a Religious Landscape: Shi'i Higher Learning in Safavid Iran. Maryam Moazzen.
Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 151. Leiden: Brill, 2018. xiv + 290 pp. $149.

Shi'ism is not just any sectarian uber-phenomenon. It is arguably the most philosophically charged movement in Islamic history. Its philosophical developments and dynamic epochs of transformation find their kernel, their real beginning, not in its earliest days, but rather in its then newly founded Persianized form during the reign of the Safavids (1488–1722). It is quite remarkable that any foreign incursion that manifested itself physically (by force) or ideologically into the borders of Iran was always more influenced by their host culture (Iran and Iranians) than the other way around. Similarly, Shi'ism's passionately dogmatic philosophical and legal parameters were reimagined into a social cognizance that was to be a modus vivendi and modus operandi for Iranians and those who emulated them for centuries after.

Shi'ism's parameters were reintroduced in toto during the reign of the Safavids in the sixteenth century and of course, as part of any successful all-encompassing takeover, education was the watershed. As the author articulately puts it: "Indeed, the rise of Twelver Shi'ism to imperial-sponsored dominance was not without precedent, yet the transformation of Shi'ism to a state religion at the turn of the sixteenth century proved to be a long

lasting and fundamental development" (1). This book does an excellent job of sticking to its proverbial guns and does what it sets out to do. For me, and, I am sure, any audience out there, this is a prelude for an overall five-star review of this book. I would even venture to say this is a seminal work on Shi'ism, as it articulately outlines the paradigms of Islamic education and the hermeneutics therein in Iran during the Safavids, all while avoiding verbosity and jargon, and allows the reader to further investigate and cogitate based on their own background in the subject. A superficial understanding of Shi'ism and Shi'ism in Iran would be helpful; however, it is not necessary.

In 238 pages of actual text (content), the author has fit in a wealth of information, as, again, she does not wander into unnecessary verbosity. Beginning with an interesting section that speaks to "imperializing Twelver Shi'ism and its impact on higher learning," which sets the stage for an undeterred journey into Safavid Shi'ism, the book then moves on to several pertinent sections on the dichotomy of mosque vs. madrasa; the endowments that made them possible; the social coherence of these centers of higher Shi'ite learning; the curriculum—with an important subsection treating the *ijāzas*—and finally ventures into the last two (large) sections which methodically treat "Dialogical and Hermeneutical Modes of Transmission" and "Theories, Application, Practices and Critiques" in these centers.

The author presents a concise and well-documented discourse on the theme. As space does not allow, I will focus on one particular section that I found to be especially interesting. The last section of the book, which was prudently placed last and is truly a crowning of the book's structure, engages "Safavid Pedagogical Approaches." Here the author introduces theories and applications in real time, as it were, by dissecting some of the works in their own times: works of scholars such as Mullā Ṣadrā, Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muḥaqqiq Sabzawārī, and Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī. An impressive motley of scholars is presented here, whose brilliance this work truly highlights in a hermeneutically prudent—and not to mention in a thematically conscious—manner. In this last section, the author should be specially applauded for her learnedness, which proves to be far and wide, covering both Eastern and Western scholarship. Not only does she easily meander through the difficulties manifest in these works, but she also provides her own hypothesis quite articulately, making this otherwise polemically knotty section accessible.

In conclusion she articulately writes, "In principle Safavid Madrasas had no substantial impact on the way knowledge was authenticated; yet the increase in the number of madrasas during the Safavid period led to a new form of scholarly orthodoxy as had already been achieved in Sunni societies" (247). Up to this point, no one has crystallized this phenomenon as has Moazzen. She is aware, in the truest scholarly sense and essence of the word, of the doctrinal legitimacy provided for Shi'ite higher learning by the Safavids. I found this to be an impressive and no-nonsense work of scholarship, and on this subject, it is the book to beat.

Alireza Korangy, *American University of Beirut*
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