

Lee I. Levine, editor, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press; Jerusalem, Israel Exploration Society, 1982, 2 maps, 4 colour plates, many black-and-white illus., 199 pp., \$39.00 (cloth)

Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (The Architectural History Foundation). Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1985, maps on end papers, 253 black-and-white illus., 457 pp., \$70.00 (cloth)

Sheila D. Campbell

Volume 15, Number 1, 1988

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073439ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073439ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Campbell, S. D. (1988). Review of [Lee I. Levine, editor, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press; Jerusalem, Israel Exploration Society, 1982, 2 maps, 4 colour plates, many black-and-white illus., 199 pp., \$39.00 (cloth) / Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (The Architectural History Foundation). Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1985, maps on end papers, 253 black-and-white illus., 457 pp., \$70.00 (cloth)]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 15(1), 75–77. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073439ar>

Tous droits réservés © UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada), 1988

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

(cf. G. Passavant, *Verrocchio* [1969], p. 13). If these observations are correct, then the funeral associations of this bed-sarcophagus-bier would indicate that the former Seilern picture is most likely to be the *Annunciation of the Death of the Virgin*.

The section devoted to the *Assumption of the Virgin* is the most extensive in Dr. Freedberg's volume. It includes twenty-five catalogue entries, preceded by a six-page essay. Perhaps the most interesting entry is no. 46, for the oil sketch *The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*. This sketch, now in Leningrad, was probably one of the two *modelli* that Rubens submitted to the Antwerp Cathedral Chapter in 1611 in connection with the commission for the High Altar there. This composition differs from the standard Netherlandish way of representing the coronation (by the Trinity) by showing Christ alone. The source for this is the illustrated supplement to Jerome Nadal's *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, first published in Antwerp in 1595.

Dr. Freedberg first published his identification of the connection between the Leningrad panel and Nadal's book in the *Burlington Magazine* (July 1978, pp. 432-41). As he said then, the connection "in itself . . . is not an especially significant discovery; but the immediate context of the print has wide-ranging implications" (p. 433). For Nadal's book (originally written for Jesuit novices) is concerned with the responses of the beholder to images. In his article, Dr. Freedberg analyzed these in great detail and concluded that "one could scarcely wish for fuller evidence of the possible range of associations available to the beholder of the images of the *Assumption*" (p. 436). Unfortunately, in the volume under review, Dr. Freedberg makes no comment about these fascinating discoveries concerning the "response of the viewer" and the marvellous "range of associations." This seems a great pity because of the importance of this material, not only for students of Flemish seventeenth-century painting, but also for anyone interested in the wider historical "meaning" of pictures.

To the very thorough entry on the Antwerp Cathedral *Assumption* (no. 43) I would like to add an observation. The apostle with raised arms at the left seems to derive from Titian's *Descent of the Holy Spirit* in Santa Maria della Salute, Venice. Dr. Freedberg does note the possible connection between this Titian and Rubens's own picture of this theme, now at Munich (p. 107, note 5).

Most of the pictures Dr. Freedberg catalogues in this volume were designed as altarpieces. A few were also intended as epitaph monuments. Dr. Freedberg studied Rubens's epitaph paintings as a group in a long article in a Flemish journal in 1978. It is good to have this material in a more accessible place. The best-known of the epitaph paintings is the Rockox triptych, painted for the Church of the Recollets about 1612-15 but now in the Antwerp Museum. Its central panel is the so-called *Incredulity of St. Thomas*. How often has Rubens's "classical" treatment of this theme been contrasted with Caravaggio's. Such comparisons stress Caravaggio's "realism," in part because he shows Saint Thomas placing his finger in Christ's side. This motif, which Rubens eschews, is also found in later, more "baroque" representations of the theme such as Guercino's in the National Gallery, London. But Rubens's avoidance of the fingering episode turns out to be a positive act. As Dr. Freedberg

notes, "It was probably intended to evoke a theme traditionally connected with the account of Thomas's incredulity, that of belief in the Resurrection of Christ which does not need to depend on the evidence of sight . . . a brilliantly concise expression of an idea which transcended the specifically narrational [*sic*] moment and was self-evidently appropriate for a funeral monument" (p. 83).

Many of the new insights in this volume have to do with iconography. But there are also some interesting new proposals for visual sources. One is the identification of the strong compositional similarity between Rubens's *Glorification of the Eucharist* (no. 17a), an oil-sketch in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and Marten de Vos's 1590 *Christ Triumphant*, formerly in Antwerp Cathedral and now in the Museum of Fine Arts. The recognition of this link underlines Rubens's debt to his northern predecessors. However, as Dr. Freedberg also points out, as if to redress the balance, "the figure of Christ may well have been derived from Giovanni da Bologna's Christ on the Altar of Liberty in the Duomo at Lucca" (p. 76).

The architectural framework of the Metropolitan Museum oil sketch presents alternatives: a corinthian column at the left and a Solomonic column at the right. The latter, as Dr. Freedberg suggests, "may have been proposed here because of their traditional fitness for the decoration of ciboria" (p. 77). After all, the Shrine of Old Saint Peter's contained the original Solomonic columns that were almost certainly the gift of the Emperor Constantine. But in addition, the Solomonic column, with its motif of putti clambering over grape-vines, is always an apt reference when the Eucharist is of special concern.

This is a fine volume. The scholarship and splendid plates are in the best traditions of this great series.

J. DOUGLAS STEWART
Department of Art and Art History
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6

LEE I. LEVINE, editor *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press; Jerusalem, Israel Exploration Society, 1982, 2 maps, 4 colour plates, many black-and-white illus., 199 pp., \$39.00 (cloth).

CAROL HERSELLE KRINSKY *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (The Architectural History Foundation). Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1985, maps on end papers, 253 black-and-white illus., 457 pp., \$70.00 (cloth).

The history of the early synagogue is important for Jewish history, but it is also a significant feature in architectural history for its influence on the development of the Christian church and the Islamic mosque. The intention of *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* is to provide for an English-speaking audience a reasonably comprehensive survey of recent archaeological discoveries and some of the major controversies surrounding the history of synagogues. Levine points out that the origins

of the synagogue as an official locus of worship outside of the temple are an important area of investigation. However, beyond mentioning the fact that the earliest known literary sources and archaeological data for synagogues date from the first century B.C.E. while some scholars date the origins to the seventh century B.C.E., he does not deal further with this question in his book. The consensus settles on the period after 586 B.C.E., the date of the destruction of the first Temple and the Babylonian exile. Relevant bibliography is provided for those who wish to pursue the question.

Krinsky's work, on the other hand, has an entirely different intention. *Synagogues of Europe* is organized in two sections. The first part consists of a discussion of the synagogue, its requirements and function, comparisons with churches and mosques, and a chronological discussion of synagogues from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. In particular, the chapter on Ritual Arrangements (Chapter 2) explains the interaction of the people with the building. The second part is a catalogue of selected examples from across Europe.

Levine's work covers a much earlier period. The book was planned as a sequel to *Jerusalem Revealed*, edited by Yigael Yadin (Yale University Press and The Israel Exploration Society, 1975) and reviewed by this writer in *RACAR* (v, 2 [1978], p. 149), but has been compiled from a wider variety of sources, not just translations from the Hebrew archaeological periodical *Qadmoniot*. As in *Jerusalem Revealed*, the text consists of short articles (38), here an average of five or six pages in length, by several different contributors. There are two introductory essays, one for the Palestine/Israel section and one for the Diaspora. The organization of the material is basically geographical, with some grouping by topics. The first division separates synagogues of Roman Palestine and synagogues of the Diaspora. Within the first category, there are enough structures in close geographical proximity for it to be possible to establish some typology: the "Galilean type," the "Byzantine type," and an intermediate fourth- or fifth-century type. The development of decoration, which includes specifically Jewish symbols, is a feature of the Byzantine period synagogues. Inscriptions and small finds are dealt with separately. The reader should note especially the astonishing 29-line mosaic inscription at Rehob, which consists mainly of a list of the fruits and vegetables forbidden or permitted in the Seventh Year in particular regions and of other locations where they were forbidden or permitted. This inscription is unique in mosaic pavements since it provides a glimpse of the community at large rather than simply a detail about that particular building, as is usually the case with such inscriptions. Several of the well-known large mosaic pavements in synagogues are illustrated. One article is devoted to the mosaics at Misis Mopsuestia, another to the paintings at Dura Europas, and two to the use of sculpted lintels.

Krinsky describes how later synagogue architecture developed in accordance with the political climate of any given area and in relation to any changes in orthodoxy in religious practice. Therefore synagogue architecture does not represent a distinct style. It does not follow contemporary architectural history for reasons of function and/or persecution. For example, the plan of a Gothic church is appropriate to Christian worship, with

the provision of aisles for processions and the focus on an altar. This is not the case for Jewish worship where there are no processions and where the focus of the building—the *bimah*, the place for the reading of the Torah scrolls—may be in the centre, at the east end, or the west end, according to the particular rite in use. The problem then is manifold. Assuming that the political climate allows the construction of synagogues, Jews do not want to use an architecture strongly associated with Christianity. At the same time, the style should not be so "different" as to draw attention (usually unfavourable) to itself. The style must maintain a dignity and symbolic meaning, yet not suggest that the people using the building are "foreign" and not assimilated to local culture. This description of "tightrope walking" is the main theme of the book. The confusion of styles that results may produce buildings where the public exterior and the private interior are vastly different. Indeed, even the existence of a pronounced façade has a history of restrictions: at times, a noticeable façade was forbidden entirely or allowed only on a side street.

The frequent use of Near Eastern styles of domes and stylized plant motifs in decoration, usually associated with Islam or Byzantium, is rather startling in the light of more recent Jewish-Muslim relations. But this was intended to reinforce the Near Eastern origins of the Jews. The results, however, were not always immediately understood by Jews who considered themselves Europeans, as is demonstrated by a quote from a comment published in 1932 on a 1906 synagogue design:

Jewish is eastern. Byzantine is also eastern. Thus, Byzantine style in synagogues . . . and in the crypt under the apse, instead of the tomb of one or another saint, a central heating system under the ark (p. 80).

The frequent lack of Jewish architects as a result of educational restrictions for Jews often meant that the buildings would be designed by Christians, who may or may not have understood the requirements of the Jewish community. All of this adds to the impression of a line of development lurching from one extreme to another. Krinsky also provides a comprehensive catalogue that samples buildings (approximately 75) from across Europe. Many of these buildings no longer exist and are described from photographs or drawings. Each entry is a summary of the history of the building concerned, and the architecture in each case is related to the political and financial conditions of the members of the particular synagogue. This is very condensed, but extensive documentation and bibliography are provided for anyone wanting further information. Wherever possible, an illustration of each building is provided. There is also one appendix of a selected list of architects and another listing extant pre-war synagogues in Poland and their current use.

The editor and contributors to *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* have presented a clear picture of the current state of archaeological research and the major questions under investigation, even though each excavation season produces new finds and the number of known synagogues in antiquity is increasing rapidly.

To anyone even remotely aware of the extent and nature of archaeological discoveries in Israel during this century, a presentation of the remains of ancient synagogues requires little

explanation. Such remnants are ubiquitous, scattered over the length and breadth of the country. To date, over 100 synagogal remains have been recorded in Israel alone, and even more in the Diaspora.

This quote from the foreword explains the difficulty of deciding just when is the right time to produce a book of this nature. Levine's volume strikes a happy balance between scholarship and popularity. The lay reader will not be overwhelmed with unsifted archaeological data. At the same time, a scholar who is not a specialist in the archaeology of Israel and the early architectural history of the synagogue will find this a very useful compendium of excavation results, with both specific and general bibliographies for further investigation, if desired.

Together, these two books cover a period of almost 2,500 years. Krinsky picks up where Levine leaves off in the discussion of Diaspora synagogues. The only building on which they overlap is the first- to fourth-century synagogue at Ostia, Italy.

In summary, it may be said that Levine's book is a general overview of work in progress. The questions are sufficiently large-scale that the answers can come only with a slow accumulation of archaeological data so there is little chance that the book will be obsolete in the immediate future. Rather, it will be a useful reference for several years to come. Krinsky's work is an encyclopedia of synagogues since approximately 400 C.E.—those that remain and, so far as they can be reconstructed from archives and photographs, those that no longer exist. Her book may not be the final word on the subject, but it will certainly remain the main reference work for documentation on European synagogues.

SHEILA D. CAMPBELL
Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1

TIM HILTON *John Ruskin: The Early Years*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, 301 + xvi pp., 23 illus., \$22.50 (cloth).

John Ruskin was England's first art critic, as that profession is understood in the modern sense. Richardson, Reynolds, Fuseli, and Hazlitt had evaluated the merits of paintings and had deduced principles of composition and genre. But Ruskin extended the discussion of painting into the psychology of perception, struggled with the emergence of wider knowledge about national and historical schools of painting, wrote the catalogue of the Turner Bequest, studied techniques of preservation and restoration, and offered the first, tentative studies in what we now may think of as the sociology of the arts. Why, therefore, does talk about Ruskin the art critic seem to startle many professional art historians? Why does Ruskin continue to be less attentively read, reprinted, and commented on than his "amateur" predecessors?

The major obstacle to Ruskin's thought and writing has always been his difficult, vacillating personality, which marks all his work with a distinctive rhetorical tone: diffident or supercilious, self-abasing or full of public effrontery, innocently naive or sexually repressed and sublime, dutiful and admiring or cold and

"aesthetically" detached. A biographical understanding of Ruskin has always seemed to be the necessary first step to an intellectual understanding of his art criticism. Until recent years, it appeared that there were only biographical studies of Ruskin, with the exception of the important work of Henry Ladd in the 1940s. The biographical studies have ranged from John Rosenberg's modest portrait of Ruskin's "genius" to R. H. Wilenski's hostile psychoanalytic study. In between, there have been specialized studies: Jeanne Clegg on Ruskin and Venice; Mary Lutyens on Ruskin's disastrous marriage; and Helen Gill Viljoen's projected exhaustive study of Ruskin that, alas, exhausted itself by the time it had documented Ruskin's Scottish background and prematurely breaks off at the point of his birth!

Tim Hilton now joins the company of those wishing to make sense of Ruskin's strained personality. Let us hope that he does not exhaust himself, for the volume under review here is the product of a truly Victorian amount of labour and research. Hilton is probably the only person who can claim to have read all of Ruskin: not just the thirty-nine volumes of the Library Edition and the published diaries and correspondence, but the tens of volumes of unpublished manuscripts in the Bodleian, plus all the notebooks and drawings in the Bembridge Collection. So far, he has been able to work this into an account of the "Early Years": Ruskin's work on *Modern Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and *The Stones of Venice*, the years of his marriage, college days at Christ Church, Oxford, as a gentlemen commoner, his defence of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the work on the Oxford Museum, and of course the numerous continental tours from which Ruskin took the visual stimulation he needed for his writing and occasionally the mental solace his nervous personality demanded. The story of the later years—the years of Ruskin's insanity, his Oxford Professorship of Art, his paedophilia, and his involvement with schemes for improving the education of the working class—remains to be told.

Has Hilton spent his time well? How much more do we need to know about Ruskin the person? Surprisingly, all Hilton's archival research changes little of what is already known about Ruskin. None of the dates, places, itineraries, tutors and drawing masters, dinner guests, relatives, and servants—all meticulously recorded by Hilton—is new to Ruskinians. Hilton has unearthed no new "facts." But, to use a Ruskinian distinction, facts are one thing, "truths" another. Perhaps no biographer has gotten so close to Ruskin, or become so immersed in his subject. Hilton's biographical narrative plods methodically along, treating Ruskin's life in chapters carefully limited to blocks of two or three years, until the reader is suddenly struck by the uncanny tone of familiarity in Hilton's description. It is uncanny because at these moments Hilton gives the impression of knowing Ruskin more intimately than, say, even his virgin-wife did. A good example may be found in the chapter entitled "1852-54," which concerns the love triangle of Ruskin, his wife Effie, and John Everett Millais, the Pre-Raphaelite patronized by Ruskin who fell in love with Effie and eventually married her once the marriage to Ruskin was annulled:

Effie and Millais could not speak together of their love. Ruskin now suspected that Effie had beguiled Millais, but did not say this to his parents; and the etiquette did not exist which would