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Saskia Coenen Snyder. *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. 360 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-05989-4.

Reviewed by Barry L. Stiefel (College of Charleston)
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Synagogues and Jewish Identity: Berlin, London, Amsterdam, and Paris in the Nineteenth Century

This work is a revision of Saskia Coenen Snyder's doctoral dissertation "Acculturation and Particularism in the Modern City: Synagogue Building and Jewish Identity in Northern Europe," completed in 2008 at the University of Michigan. It is a survey of synagogue development in four European capital cities–Berlin, London, Amsterdam, and Paris–and takes the reader beyond the previous scholarship of the "architecture of emancipation."[1] Within *Building a Public Judaism* is a deeper examination of Jews, synagogues, architecture, and society during the nineteenth century, as well as comparative analysis. According to Coenen Snyder, Berlin, London, Amsterdam, and Paris "proved particularly well-suited case studies. These capitals stood in relatively close proximity to each other and witnessed similar trends that paved the way for a new synagogue architecture" (p. 7). However, this reader was left perplexed why other European metropolises–including those that were national capitals, such as Turin, Copenhagen, Vienna, or St. Petersburg, where monumental synagogues also arose during the same period–did not make for good case studies. Were the circumstances in these capitals parallel to or too different from what occurred in Berlin, London, Amsterdam, and Paris? Are the latter cities representative of four distinct synagogue development paradigms that were merely replicated in other European capitals? If so, knowing which other capitals were similar to Berlin, London, Amsterdam, and Paris (say, Copenhagen or Turin akin to the Berlin model) would have brought a greater understanding of synagogues and Jewish identity across nineteenth-century Europe without having additional case studies. The four case studies Coenen Snyder covers are the same as in her dissertation.

Coenen Snyder begins her first case study in Berlin, where she questions the paradigm first proposed by L. Scott Lerner, arguing that monumental synagogue development during the nineteenth century was not always about announcing emancipation since not all Jews were fully emancipated. The case in point is the Jews in what became Germany at the time the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue (1859-66) was built in Berlin. Emancipation for all of German Jewry did not come about until 1869-71. Coenen Snyder argues that in Germany, monumental synagogue edifices instead represented an "architecture of separation." This building, as well as other synagogues, symbolized the degree of Jewish integration into German society. Proponents argued that "Jews had kept their end of the bargain: they had discarded the shackles of the medieval ghetto and become 'true Germans' and they therefore deserved full legal and social emancipation" (p. 16). The colossal synagogue represented the cultural and socioeconomic achievement Berlin's Jews had made. However, critics contended that Jews in Germany were still too different from Germans, who were by nature Christian (represented historically by Gothic and Romanesque architecture). The Jews were exotic foreigners (despite residing in Central Europe since ancient Roman times), as evidenced by the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue and its Moorish style. The method by which Coenen Snyder analyzes the sociopolitical ways architecture can culturally separate and integrate is truly insightful.

The second chapter, on Victorian London, examines a very different approach to synagogue development by British Jewry (represented by the United Synagogue). Instead of a singular monumental synagogue of colossal size, the paradigm for the organized Jewish community was medium- to small-sized houses of worship that serviced each London neighborhood on a demand basis, akin to a parish system under a central authority. This avoided the maintenance costs that plagued many large buildings like the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue where attendance was low except during the High Hol-

idays, as well as created a more meaningful community atmosphere for those who attended synagogue on a regular basis. Underperforming synagogues could also more easily be closed and new ones built under the community umbrella organization, though there was dissidence amongst more recent Eastern European arrivals who perceived the United Synagogue as too anglicized and formed their own *hevrot*. There was also a constituency within London Jewry that desired a monumental Oranienburgerstraße of its own. Within this study Coenen Snyder adds to our understanding of synagogues in nineteenth-century London, although, regrettably, she only gives minimal attention to the scholarship of Sharman Kadish, who has done extensive research on this subject.[2]

As a native of the Netherlands Coenen Snyder does a superb job of describing why monumental synagogue in Amsterdam was the phenomenon of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (the Ashkenazic Great Synagogue and New Synagogue, built in 1670-71 and 1750-52, respectively; and the Sephardic Portuguese Synagogue, built in 1671-75). Since 1796, Amsterdam Jewry had known full emancipation. They were socially and politically in a much better position than their co-religious in Berlin and London, for much of the nineteenth century. However, unlike Victorian London and Berlin, Amsterdam was in an economic rut. The community could barely afford to maintain, let alone heat, its large synagogues during the cold months. Small *hevrot* became religiously, economically, and politically desirable over new, monumental buildings. According to Coenen Snyder, Jewish life in Amsterdam, which was remarkably traditional in its orthodoxy, was very different from the experimentations of progressive Orthodoxy or Reform Judaism in more affluent Berlin and London.

Last is the case of Paris, where Jews were the first in Europe to be emancipated in 1792; however, monumental synagogue development was not so easy. Within the *Ville Lumière,* as well as across the country, French Jewry was presided over by a government-sponsored consistory system. Thus a synagogue undertaking also became a governmental one, which was highly bureaucratized under the rule and administration of Napoleon III and Georges-Eugène Haussmann. Site location, architectural design, funding (a significant amount of which came from the government), etc., became highly politicized at the proposal level, well prior to a spade of sod being turned. Also, as in Germany, French Jewry was contending with an "otherness" that was not too different. Within the media this made the politics of monumental synagogue development contentious among the non-Jewish population. Also, according to Coenen Snyder, "synagogue building in Paris also suggests that acculturation did not necessarily require a break from Judaism or the loss of Jewish identity. Jews could be French citizens and remain, at various levels of intensity, faithful to Jewish traditions" (p. 250).

In her conclusion Coenen Snyder's eloquently declares: "Synagogues are great storytellers. While their brick-and-mortar exteriors appear silent, if one is willing to listen they tell lively tales about themselves, their audience, and their surrounding. The size, architectural style, location, and interior design of purpose-built synagogues reflect the economic status, aesthetic preferences, and sociopolitical ambitions of the local congregation" (p. 253). Despite the small number of shortcomings identified by the reviewer, *Building a Public Judaism* is a fantastically well-researched and -written study on synagogue development in nineteenth-century Berlin, London, Amsterdam, and Paris. It goes well beyond earlier surveys such as Carol Krinsky's *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (1985) and Rachel Wischnitzer's *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (1964) by providing a deeper analysis of the political, cultural, religious, and artistic (through architecture) context surrounding these very important buildings. Coenen Snyder has taken synagogue architecture scholarship to a new level, beyond the typical building description that most architectural historians so often become mired in. Other scholars as well as students taking classes on Jewish, European, or architectural social history will find this an excellent resource.

Notes

[1]. See L. Scott Lerner, "The Narrating Architecture of Emancipation," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 3 (2000): 1-30.

[2]. Coenen Snyder cites Kadish's article "Constructing Identity: Anglo-Jewry and Synagogue Architecture," *Architectural History: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain* 45 (2002): 393. No mention is made of other works by Kadish, such as *The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland: An Architectural and Social History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); *Building Jerusalem: Jewish Architecture in Britain* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996); or *Jewish Heritage in England: An Architectural Guide* (Swindon, UK: English Heritage, 2006).

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