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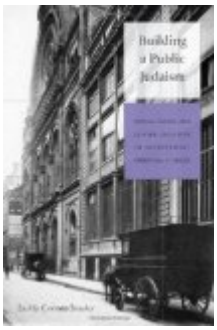

Saskia Coenen Snyder. *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. 360 pp. $49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-05989-4.

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Published on H-Urban (February, 2014)

Commissioned by Alexander Vari (Marywood University)

For the last half-century, the study of Jewish history has benefited from the insights of other academic disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, gender studies, musicology, art history, and now urban planning and architecture. Indeed, one of the central contributions of this engaging, richly textured, meticulously researched book is to bring architectural questions to bear in a way that is accessible to nonspecialists by not overusing terminology that often segregates the technical from the overall historical analysis. This book is not only an exposition of a few impressive synagogues but also a methodological tour de force that opens a new axis of analysis for Jewish historiography.

From the outset, Saskia Coenen Snyder's dual focus pays homage to the scholarly oeuvre of her mentor, Todd M. Endelman.[1] The author explains that her choice of subjects--the main synagogues in Berlin, London, Amsterdam, and Paris--underlines the importance of sophisticated comparative analysis while reiterating the limited value of a once predominant German-Jewish centric historical scholarship. Thus, while the author begins with the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue in Berlin as an important case study in the larger implications of synagogue construction, she points out that "the Berlin landmark did not become the ideal ... or the architectural norm but formed instead one example out of a potpourri of Jewish aesthetic representations" (p. 2). More specifically, the author unseats a heretofore premise by showing that the grand "Oriental" style of such synagogues as the Oranienburgerstrasse, though fashionable, was one of a myriad of ways that Jews in nineteenth-century Europe adopted to express their faith aesthetically and openly.

From this point on, Snyder constructs a typology of Jewish synagogue design and construction, immersing the four case studies in the dual context of urban space and place; and in the disparate political and social conditions that led each of the four Jewish communities along a distinct path to civic equality and entrance into the social mainstream. Appropriately Snyder begins this typology in Berlin, by noting the disjunction be-

tween the timing of the construction of a massive new synagogue and a putative claim that this project was born out of a surging self-confidence that resulted from a sense that political emancipation and social acceptance were imminent. Instead, she explains, the construction of the Oranienburgerstrasse began during the 1850s, and is thus better understood as "part and parcel of the prolific intellectual, cultural, and literary milieu of nineteenth-century German Jewry" and "a powerful weapon in which to fight for emancipation" (p. 28). In other words, for well-to-do, acculturated German Jews, constructing an impressive, modern, new synagogue was another way to display publicly and proudly the synergy between a progressive Jewish outlook and worthiness of citizenship.

Yet Snyder presses further, using this Berlin ***Prachttempel*** (magnificent temple) as a venue to further the recent reconsideration, by Marion Kaplan and others, of the putative connection between emancipation and assimilation.[2] Snyder brushes aside the dated notion that German Jews abandoned their Jewishness in exchange for civic equality. Instead she notes that "by integrating classical elements into an Oriental exterior, by installing an organ behind the ark, by having a non-Jew play the instrument on the Sabbath and the High Holidays, and by wearing fashionable top hats during services, members of the community proclaimed both their German ***Verbürglichung*** and their Jewishness, their acculturation and their distinctiveness" (p. 85).

Turning from Berlin to London and Amsterdam, Snyder deploys an instructive comparative analysis. "London Jews," she notes, "as opposed to their Berlin coreligionists, did not feel compelled to 'modernize' Judaism" (p. 108). Unlike Berlin Jews, London Jews lived in "a booming world city where religious liberty was the norm, where economic opportunities were plenty, and where emancipation ... was unconditional" (p. 105). Elsewhere she contrasts the Jews of London and Amsterdam, noting that "while Dutch Jews were overwhelmingly poor and working class ... London Jewry fared much better much earlier" (p. 107). The result, she adduces, were synagogues that reflected economic upward mobility coupled with the un-self-conscious religious outlook of a Jewish community comfortably not beset by a protracted, public debate over the legal emancipation of Jews--a pivotal difference between Anglo-Jewry and Continental Jews.

Alongside this comparative framework, Snyder notes distinctly English dimensions. She underlines the inconspicuous nature of London synagogues, then adds: "This does not mean that synagogues were purposely designed to be inconspicuous--they were not--but that their unpretentiousness was considered a cultural virtue" (p. 91). Noting the importance of looking "beyond the quiet exterior of the buildings" and "listening more closely to the conversations surrounding their establishment," she states that whereas in Berlin "the quest for personal ***Bildung*** suffused the sermon, London sermons seemed to focus ... on lifting up the working classes by example rather than on cultivating the inner self," an engaging Jewish variation on the contrast between English pragmatism and Continental idealism (pp. 92, 113). The ongoing tension between individualistically minded congregations and the centralizing tendencies of the United Synagogue was a hallmark of the Anglo-Jewish experience.

In contrast to London and Berlin, Snyder points out, "the synagogue in Amsterdam was rather peripheral to the formation and public projection of modern Jewish identity" and "continued to play a relatively modest role in announcing Jewish ***embourgeoisement***" (p. 161). This the author attributes to local context: the late economic development of the Jews of Amsterdam; a preference for smaller, more intimate ***hevra*** (voluntary association) synagogues; and the fact that, in Amsterdam, Jews had already constructed impressive synagogues a century or more earlier, precluding

the need for construction of new synagogues later on. In this sense, the synagogue construction of the seventeenth century paralleled the privileges that the Estates General of the Netherlands gave Jews in 1657: each defined a key aspect of Dutch Jewry for the next century or two. As in London, the author shows further, there was little angst regarding emancipation or acceptance, so innovation and reform were modest and introduced gradually. The upshot is, as Snyder succinctly concludes, "Amsterdam Jewry was not in need of an architecture of emancipation" (p. 203).

The author adds the final layer of this tapestry of Jewish identities by introducing the particular situation of Paris. Up to this point in the book, Snyder makes little mention of government involvement in synagogue construction and activity beyond granting permits. In Paris, though, various city and state government ministries and agencies oscillated between active involvement and shameless intrusion into what elsewhere was largely an internal Jewish matter--much like the involvement and intrusion of the state in every other facet of French life. As with other aspects of public Jewish life in Paris, synagogue construction reflected the give and take between the preferences and outlook of the Jewish community, on the one hand, and the broader aims and self-interest of local and state government, on the other hand.

If there is anything lacking in this work, it is the book's limited "northern European" scope. True, the author disclaims this limited scope at the outset. Yet inclusion or at least mention in passing of the great synagogues of Warsaw, Budapest, Szeged, Vienna, Odessa, and one or more Italian cities could have rounded out the book more completely; at the very least, Snyder could have cited or mentioned the work of Rudolf Klein or others who have made important contributions to this subject.[3] Yet this is a minor lacuna, and perhaps a premature one, since this fine work will surely encourage future studies of synagogues elsewhere, facilitated by the author's contribution to making architecture and urban planning a fixture of Jewish historical inquiry.

Notes

[1]. Todd M. Endelman, "Introduction: Comparing Jewish Societies," in *Comparing Jewish Societies*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 1-21; and Todd M. Endelman, "The Englishness of Jewish Modernity in England," in *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, ed. by Jacob Katz (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), 65-81.

[2]. Marion Kaplan, "Redefining Judaism in Imperial Germany: Practices, Mentalities, and Community," *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 1 (2002): 1-33; Robin Judd, "Moral, Clean Men of the Jewish Faith: Jewish Rituals and Their Male Practitioners, 1843-1914," in *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews, Gender, and History*, ed. Benjamin Maria Baader, Sharon Gillerman, and Paul Lerner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 72-89; and Till van Rahden, "Juden und die Ambivalenzen der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in Deutschland von 1800 bis 1933," *Transversal* 5, no. 1 (2004): 33-61.

[3]. Rudolf Klein, *Zsinagógák Magyarországon 1782-1918: Fejlődéstörténet, tipológia és építészeti jelentőség* [Synagogues in Hungary, 1782-1918: Genealogy, typology and architectural significance] (Budapest: TERC 2011); Pierre Genée, Ruth Burstyn, and Walter Lindner, *Wiener Synagogen 1825-1938* [Synagogues of Vienna, 1825-1938] (Vienna: Löcker, 1987); and Alexander Guterman, *Me-hitbolelut li-leumiyut: Perakim betoldot bet-ha-keneset ha-gadol ha-Sinagogah be-Varshah 1806-1943* [From Assimilation to Nationalism: Chapters in the history of the great synagogue in Warsaw, 1806-1943] (Jerusalem: Karmel, 1993).

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Citation: Howard N. Lupovitch. Review of Coenen Snyder, Saskia. *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. February, 2014.

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