

Arnold Brunner's Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue and the Emergence of "Jewish Art" in Early Twentieth-Century America

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A widely held truism during the latter nineteenth and twentieth centuries held that art was antithetical to Judaism.¹ If Athens was exemplified by its aesthetics, Jerusalem, most people thought, was known for its obedience to the Divine Word. Some thought that Jews were genetically deficient when it came to art, and most believed that the very phrase "Jewish art" was "a contradiction in terms." This construction was not merely of academic interest. Since the possession of a national art was considered an essential characteristic of a national spirit, Jews interested in maintaining Jewish peoplehood (including though not exclusively Zionists) often strove to construct "Jewish art." Others, mainly though not exclusively of the more assimilationist streams, asserted the superiority of Judaism specifically because it was construed as a noniconic religion (thus locating



*The Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue in 2000
(courtesy Albert Einstein Healthcare Network)*

Judaism closer to Protestantism than to Catholicism). Jews internalized and sometimes glorified the general culture's prejudice against Jewish visual culture. This article attempts a thick description of one American building that well expresses trends in Jewish attitudes toward their own visual culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. Built by noted American architect Arnold W. Brunner in 1901 on the grounds of Philadelphia's Jewish Hospital, the Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue exemplified American trends in the construction of Jewish art at the turn of the twentieth century. The Frank Synagogue was modeled upon a late-antique Galilean synagogue that was explored and published by British scholars a few decades earlier. Through Brunner's writings, we will see an example of how Protestant and Catholic perspectives affected Jewish perceptions of their ancient art. We will see ways that the German-Jewish elite of turn-of-the-century America sought to write a new narrative of Jewish artistic continuity through the medium of ancient synagogue discoveries in the Land of Israel.

Beginning near the turn of the twentieth century, the pro-"Jewish art" camp set out to change the cultural narrative regarding Judaism and art. This battle was fought using the tools of then-regnant academic scholarship and through popular dissemination. At first this included both the preparation of scholarly studies (particularly of medieval Hebrew manuscripts), archaeological excavations, and expeditions to collect folk art—all of which provided the legitimization and patina of objective scholarship, especially when carried out by non-Jews.² Just as importantly, it set out to change popular conceptions through profusely illustrated popular and semipopular publications, the establishment of Jewish museums, and especially through contemporary synagogue architecture.

Modern constructions of the place of art in Judaism have recently become the subject of scholarly reappraisal. In a recent monograph, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual*, intellectual historian Kalman Bland addressed the philosophical construction of Jewish aniconism in nineteenth-century Germany.³ Bland focused upon the place of art in Judaism as developed by Immanuel Kant, who praised Jews for being aniconic and of Frederik Hegel, who damned them for the same supposed aniconism. Art historians too have focused their criticism upon the aniconic paradigm. Annabelle Wharton has explored some of the ways the Dura Europos synagogue was and is treated by art historians, who tend to minimize both the significance of this building and its Jewish context.⁴ The breadth of ways that Jewish aniconism is presumed by art history is expressed in Catherine Soussloff's *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History* (1999).⁵ This volume suggests the

absolute ambivalence (if not contempt) that art historical scholarship, often carried out by Jews, has shown toward Judaism and “Jewish art.” Finally, Margaret Olin’s recent volume *The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* describes German art’s historical prejudice against Jewish art and its implications for the rise of Zionist art, as well as Nazi influence on the development of “Jewish art.”⁶

The Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue was dedicated on September 12, 1901, in a grand celebration on the grounds of the Jewish Hospital of Philadelphia.⁷ In attendance was the leadership of Philadelphia Jewry, lay and Rabbinic, traditionalist, and Reformers alike. The assembly entered the new synagogue as the hospital reader chanted in Hebrew, “Open to me the gates of the righteous that I may enter them and praise the Lord.” From within the synagogue, Cantor Leon Elmaleh and the boys’ choir of Congregation Mikve Israel responded, “This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous may enter” (Ps. 118: 19-20).⁸

Measuring thirty-three feet by thirty-seven feet, the Frank Memorial Synagogue drew its inspiration from ancient synagogues preserved in the Galilee. At the thirty-sixth annual meeting of the Jewish Hospital Board, President William Bowers



*Jewish Hospital, Philadelphia, 1938. The Frank Memorial Synagogue is on the bluff to the right.
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)*

Hackenburg, who himself was “largely responsible for its development into a major public institution,”⁹ assured the board and membership that the “little synagogue will be one of the most beautiful and completely furnished houses of worship in the country.” The design was to be “after the style of architecture...in the synagogues of Palestine in the first and second centuries...The inscription over the outer entrance is literally copied from one of these.”¹⁰ The models for the Frank Memorial Synagogue were drawn

from the well-preserved large synagogue in the Upper Galilean village of Kefar Baram, near the present border with Lebanon, from a smaller synagogue at Kefar Baram, and from the close-by synagogue of Nabratein. The gray Indiana limestone and granite used, very popular in turn-of-the-century America, vaguely resembles weathered Palestinian limestone, particularly as it appears in contemporary photographs. These synagogues had been explored and published by the British Palestine Exploration Fund,¹¹ and a full-page plate of the large Baram Synagogue was published in that pride of American Jewry, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*.¹² The main portal of the large Baram synagogue was in fact the inspiration for the main portal of the Frank Memorial Synagogue and for the window frames of the building. Within the round Syrian arch of the Baram synagogue the architect placed a menorah encircled by a wreath, based upon an image from Nabratein. On the architrave the architect placed a Hebrew inscription (written in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Hebrew script) that was discovered on the lintel of the small Baram synagogue. Now in the Louvre, the inscription reads: "Peace be on the place, and on all the places of Israel."¹³ On each side of the ark were placed seven-branched menorahs. The candlesticks were loosely modeled upon the menorah on the Arch of Titus in Rome.¹⁴ The ark flanked by menorahs finds parallels on gold glasses from Rome that are illustrated in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*.¹⁵ Arnold W. Brunner in effect built an ancient synagogue in what was then suburban Philadelphia. This was an amazing feat, one that was not repeated anywhere else in the world. What prompted Brunner to design such a building, and the Jews of Philadelphia to construct it? An answer to this question will provide us with a sense of the complexities involved in the ways that Jews and non-Jews alike viewed the place of the visual in Jewish life as the twentieth century dawned.

Arnold W. Brunner (1857–1925) was among the most accomplished architects of his day and perhaps the first American-born Jewish architect.¹⁶ He was a member of the German-Jewish elite at a time when Philadelphia was the "capitol of Jewish America."¹⁷ Brunner's projects included, as Felix M. Warburg eulogized in the *Proceedings of the American Historical Society*, "the most beautiful private homes, school buildings, playgrounds, stadiums, university buildings, state capitols, synagogues, temples, halls for music, etc."¹⁸ Brunner's early synagogue projects were neo-Romanesque buildings

with Islamic and Byzantine elements. Throughout the 1890s Brunner accomplished major synagogue projects using this style, as evidenced by his buildings for Beth El (1891) and Shaaray Tefila (1894) congregations in New York and Mishkan Israel in New Haven (1897). By the end of the century, however, he had grown increasingly uncomfortable with contemporary reliance upon Christian and Moslem models for synagogue architecture. Implicit in Brunner's problem was the emancipation dilemma of creating monumental synagogues where few had existed before.¹⁹ No longer satisfied with adapting Christian and Moorish architecture and decoration, Brunner sought out a medium that was drawn neither from church nor mosque, but would somehow uniquely express Jewish conceptions. He found this medium in the then *au courant neoclassical* architecture, which he considered preeminently appropriate for synagogue buildings. Brunner's first neoclassical synagogue was built for Shearith Israel Congregation in New York in 1897, followed by the Frank Memorial Synagogue in 1901.

Brunner wrote two major essays and one shorter piece on synagogue architecture, both from the standpoint of a practicing architect. These articles document the development of Brunner's conception of synagogue architecture away from church and mosque forms and toward neoclassicism. This transition reflects more than architectural development. It represents a complete reassessment of Jewish aesthetics.

Brunner's first article on "Synagogue Architecture" appeared with numerous illustrations in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* in 1902.²⁰ There he surveyed synagogue architecture, described building types, and assessed their continued validity. Brunner is particularly harsh toward the use of what he calls "Pseudo-Moorish" buildings as "presenting in many cases a grotesque appearance rather than the dignity and simplicity that should have been attained."²¹ By contrast, he writes that "the use of Classic orders seems especially adapted to the synagogue, and many variations in design are possible."²² Brunner begins his survey with an evaluation of synagogue architecture which, as we shall see later, fits well within the spirit of other *Jewish Encyclopedia* articles:

Ancient Jewish art is mainly represented by the Temple and its fittings, of which all that is left to contemplate is the lower

portion of the fortified wall. Even if this overstates the fact, it is most probable that very little distinctively Jewish art ever flourished for an extended period. The position of Judea and its history naturally discouraged the development of art, however vigorous its beginnings may have been. The remains of the ancient synagogues that are now extant present very meager data, and the best preserved of the ancient ones, such as the great synagogue in Kafr Bir'im, while containing much of interest and many characteristic forms, gives but little inspiration to the synagogue builder.

Brunner seems to be generally disappointed that the Baram synagogue provides “so little inspiration.” Between his penning of this article and its publication in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* in 1902, however, he seems to have undergone something of a change of heart—resulting in his plan for the Frank Memorial Synagogue. In this building our author drew more than a “little inspiration” from the Baram synagogue.



Jewish hospital interns, 1940.
(courtesy Steven Fine)

Brunner’s evaluation of Baram is more enthusiastic in his two-part article “Synagogue Architecture,” which appeared in 1907 in a general architectural journal known as *The Brickbuilder: Devoted to the Interests of Architecture in Materials of Clay*.²³ There he provides a broad program for synagogue architecture, again praising neoclassicism over other contemporary styles. In designing the Frank Memorial Synagogue, Brunner followed his own sense, presented in *The Brickbuilder*, of “the many laws governing synagogue architecture”:

The door of the synagogue faced the west; the ark was at the eastern end; the desk, from which the law was read, was approximately in the center of the building; the space on either side contained benches for the men, and a gallery was constructed for the exclusive use of women. This plan taken as a basis was developed and improved, but there was no

deviation from the main ideal. The building was always rectangular,²⁴ with or without columns. There was no transept, the plan of the basilica being invariably adopted. The ark at the eastern end was erected on a platform reached by steps and the perpetual lamp was suspended in front of it....²⁵

Brunner maintained his prescribed rectangular form in the Frank Memorial Synagogue.²⁶

Brunner's essay begins by broadly attacking the proposition that "It is generally stated that there is no Jewish architecture."²⁷ He only then turns to the details of synagogue design. His initial polemic is directed against the French architectural historian Julien Gaudet in his 1905 *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture*. Brunner paraphrases:²⁸

It was to have been expected that the Israelites, with a religion older than Christianity, would have produced an architecture with a history, but they did not. Accordingly, the synagogue to-day, the direct descendant of the Temple, is to us a modern problem not materially different from that of the contemporary churches.²⁹



The front entrance of the Frank Memorial Synagogue (courtesy Steven Fine)

Brunner sets out to explain the apparent lack of a Jewish architectural tradition differently:³⁰

The reason for this lies in the history of the Jewish people. That there were expressions of art in ancient Judea and aspirations for beauty and a fine sense of form are not to be doubted. The use of colors and their combinations was understood, and embroidery, engraving on metals and other ornamental work were extensively practiced. We know, not alone from the scriptures and from the detailed descriptions of the Temple in Josephus, but from the results of actual

explorations in Palestine, that the beginnings of Jewish art were vigorous and promising. The state of Judea, however, was not allowed to pursue the arts of peace for any considerable period of time, and the dispersion of the Jews was necessarily fatal to any continuance or development of native art.

Brunner goes on to describe with great enthusiasm the remains of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where

the stones are laid perfectly true, without mortar. The remains of the great arch that connected the Temple are to be seen, and we find that ancient Judaic architecture employed not only the arch, but vaults, moldings, and sculptured decorations, and there are many other evidences of advanced architectural skill.³¹

This statement is amazingly positive toward Jewish archaeological remains, especially when compared to Brunner's comments in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* article. Brunner then moves on to ancient synagogue architecture, toward which he expresses considerable sympathy. Even as he granted that "the exterior of the majority of the ancient synagogues possessed very little architectural interest and what we call interior decoration hardly existed,"³² Brunner writes that

Among the remains of the early synagogues that we know, those in Galilee, described by the Palestine Exploration Society, are among the best preserved, but they give us only scant information. However, there are many details of ornamentation and construction that are most suggestive. The so-called Great Synagogue at Kifr Birim presents, perhaps, the best indication of the early style of architecture employed for these structures.³³

Our author goes on to describe the architectural features of the Kefar Baram synagogue, concluding with a perceptive dating of this building that has only been recently accepted by most scholars.

We must be impressed by the characteristic and distinctive

treatment of sculptured palms, garlands, discs, grapes suspended from knotted cords, olive and vine leaves all cut with a crispness suggesting Byzantine work of the fifth or sixth century.³⁴

Brunner drew support for his revised position on Jewish architecture from Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc, the most significant historian of architecture in nineteenth-century France. Viollet-Le-Duc was responsible for the restoration (some today would say violation) of numerous medieval churches, including the abbey church at Saint-Denis, the cathedrals of Amiens, and Notre Dame de Paris. In his extremely influential work *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (1858-72), cited by Brunner from the English translation,³⁵ Viollet-Le-Duc, says Brunner, "contends that early Jewish art provided inspiration from the Greeks, whom he believes borrowed many details from these primitive buildings...."³⁶ There is reason why Brunner paraphrases Viollet-Le-Duc's comments. Viollet-Le-Duc does not single out Judeans alone for this early influence on the Greeks. His rather odd comments also include Phoenicians as an influence upon the Greeks.³⁷

During this period [of the Peloponnesian War]—so short and brilliant—the arts of the Greeks radiated far and wide, and their influence extended to the Bosphorus, and probably over a part of the coast of Syria. There, however long previous to that glorious epoch, there existed a powerful civilisation, possessing arts marked by a vigour altogether primitive. Phoenicia and Judaea built, traded and colonized, long anterior to the historic times of the Hellenic Peninsula.

Viollet-Le-Duc is clearly pro-Jewish in orientation, attributing Roman architecture to Phoenician and Judaeian influence³⁸ and Byzantine architecture to the influence of Second Temple-period Jewish architecture.³⁹ Brunner's reference to Viollet-Le-Duc's work is used to rhetorical advantage by our author, even as he is himself unconvinced by Viollet-Le-Duc's thesis.

Upon examining the ruined remains that exist today [of ancient synagogues and tombs] it is evident that whether this

art inspired the Greek, or was inspired by the Greeks, it was serious and important, and if circumstances had allowed it to develop, it would have probably continued on much the same lines as the art of Greece.

For Arnold Brunner, neoclassicism had become a distinctly Jewish architectural form, reflecting ancient Jewish architectural principles. Brunner went still further. Based upon the remains of the Temple and later synagogue ruins, Brunner developed his own rather odd notion of interrupted continuity between ancient classicism and modern neoclassicism. He believed that had Jews not been exiled from Palestine,

As far as one may see, the style of the early Judean buildings, if it had been allowed to progress and develop, might not unreasonably have become to-day what we may call modern classic architecture, the type which is being used very generally for churches in America and elsewhere.

For Brunner, the arrested Jewish architecture of late antiquity would surely have developed into the neoclassicism of his own day. This claim is as naïve as it is ingenious. It provides a seal of authenticity for the only historicized architectural form that Brunner believed could reasonably be used for contemporary synagogue buildings. Brunner's *Brickbuilder* article is prescriptive:

In selecting a style [of synagogue architecture] to-day, I believe firmly that we should either go back to the early Judean architecture, or follow the general custom that prevailed in building synagogues since the dispersion of the Jews, and conform to the style that is in vogue in the land in which the synagogue is erected.

Brunner here articulates a new vision for his work, which he first expressed, as we have seen, in New York's Shearith Israel Congregation (1897).⁴⁰ He was to never again build a Romanesque synagogue. Brunner designed a "classically styled" home for the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in 1903, though there he used no specifically Jewish iconography,⁴¹ and again used it in the

neoclassical Union Temple in Brooklyn (1926).⁴² In Philadelphia Arnold Brunner experimented with specifically Jewish iconography, building the Frank Memorial Synagogue based upon principles that he later laid out in *The Brickbuilder*. In the chapel of the Jewish Hospital of Philadelphia, Brunner created a Judaized neoclassical iconography.

Brunner's Judaized neoclassicism was a fitting addition to the religious landscape of late-nineteenth – and early-twentieth-century America, where neo-Gothic buildings, each designed in accord with the specific theology of its denomination, were ubiquitous. The Jews built a neoclassical building in their "own" vernacular form on the campus of the Jewish hospital.

The sophistication of the Frank Memorial Synagogue project fits well with the high level of both Jewish and secular sophistication that was to be found among the German-Jewish elite in turn-of-the-century Philadelphia. Mayer Sulzberger, jurist, communal leader, and "patriarch" of Philadelphia Jewry,⁴⁵ for example, intended to receive the synagogue on behalf of the hospital at the dedication ceremony.⁴⁴ Rabbi Marcus Jastrow, the renowned Talmudist and rabbi of Philadelphia's Rodeph Shalom Congregation, spoke. His son, Morris Jastrow, a librarian and research professor of Assyriology at the University of Pennsylvania, led High Holy Day services in the synagogue in 1901. Brunner was in close contact with Philadelphian Cyrus Adler, who himself authored the entry on Brunner in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. In 1913 Adler described Brunner as "his advisor on all matters of art and antiquity."⁴⁵ As we have mentioned, Brunner was eulogized by Felix M. Warburg, who himself financed the Harvard excavations of Samaria.⁴⁶ Warburg concludes his obituary for Brunner with the rhetorical question: "Is it any wonder that he was beloved, and his untimely death mourned by so many?" The Jewishly and secularly learned, often traditionally observant, German-Jewish elite of late-nineteenth – and early-twentieth-century Philadelphia provided rich soil for the construction of the Frank Memorial Synagogue. Jonathan D. Sarna describes the sense of purposefulness that this Jewish elite felt as "they attempted, through works of culture, to promote a sense of Jewish identity"

However much they argued among themselves over religious and other issues, they nevertheless championed the idea of a

unified Jewish cultural tradition, rooted in history, ideas, values, and sacred texts, that linked American Jews one to another, as well as backward through time.⁴⁷

Built on Jewishly neutral ground, at a site belonging to the entire Jewish community but to no one stream of Judaism, the Frank Memorial Synagogue was an ideal context through which to express this unity. The Frank Memorial Synagogue bespoke a shared religious tradition, but in an idiom that was detached from traditional and well-known Jewish iconography or the traditional textual canon of Jewish knowledge. Its architecture was in some measure an expression of traditional religion that stemmed ultimately from nontraditional sources.

In terms of ancient Judaism, this shared tradition, cleaned of many of its more “folkish” (and thus embarrassing) European elements, was called the religion of “Catholic Israel” by Solomon Schechter⁴⁸ and later “Normative Judaism” by American Protestant scholar George Foot Moore.⁴⁹ The Frank Memorial Synagogue represented the religion of “Catholic Israel” in brick and mortar. In scholarly terms, this shared tradition was not the religion of traditional Orthodoxy, even for the Orthodox. Rather, it was Jewish tradition as read through the shared agency of modern academic scholarship, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, a renewed, modernized study of the ancient world that invested Jewish scholarship and motivated Jewish scholars in America and in Western Europe of the time. This dedication to a shared, ancient tradition studied in new ways was expressed through support of Palestinian archaeology. This is expressed well in a 1929 letter encouraging funding of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society. Instructively, the letter was signed by the presidents of all American rabbinical seminaries, each of whom were accomplished *Wissenschaft* scholars in their own right: Cyrus Adler of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Stephen S. Wise of the Jewish Institute of Religion (which later merged with Hebrew Union College), Julian Morgenstern of the Hebrew Union College, and Bernard Revel representing Yeshiva University.⁵⁰ Adler, Wise, and Morgenstern were all involved in financing Hebrew University of Jerusalem excavations. Morgenstern and Wise were engaged in a Hebrew University plan to purchase and excavate ancient synagogues.⁵¹ It is worthy to note that while the Rabbi Isaac Elkhanan Seminary of Yeshiva University (1928) was built

in a modernized Moorish repertory, the floor of the southern Amsterdam Avenue entrance was paved with a zodiac. One wonders whether this was done as a reference to the Na'aran synagogue mosaic and its zodiac (discovered near Jericho in 1918).⁵² Just as the American Jewish elite strove to meld a modernized pan-Jewish tradition with Americanism, Brunner's Frank Memorial Synagogue consciously melds Jewish and classical architectural traditions with a new concern for what later came to be called "Jewish Archaeology."⁵³

Some Jews looked to archaeology for a model of Jewish normality that they believed existed before the much-maligned medieval period. In 1924 Hungarian scholar Ludwig Blau made this explicit in the course of a discussion of Jewish languages in the inaugural volume of the *Hebrew Union College Annual*.

In every age the Jews adopted the language and customs of the peoples with whom they dwelt, without, however, losing their identity among them. This fact, the most important which history can confirm regarding the Jewish people, shall not be elaborated on in detail in this article, but we shall content ourselves merely with observing that the same statement may be made and confirmed with reference to Jewish script, if we leave out of consideration the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries in Eastern Europe, i.e. Poland and the contiguous countries. The Jews originally were not a Ghetto people, and did not become one until they were driven to it. Accordingly the script and language they employ are infallible witnesses as to their environment and condition...⁵⁴

Blau's agenda, shared to some extent, I believe, by all of the American Jews that we have discussed above, was the search for a pre-medieval balance between participation in the general culture and Jewish particularity that could serve as a model for the present. The dichotomy between "Hellenism" and "Hebraism," so common in contemporaneous thought, finds no quarter here, as it did not in the Frank Memorial Synagogue.⁵⁵ The obvious Greek styling of the Frank Memorial Synagogue exterior (which only initiates would know really comes from ancient synagogues) is in harmony with the extended Hebrew inscription from the Baram synagogue on the cornice. By

virtue of this inscription, Jews and non-Jews who could not read Hebrew would certainly recognize this to be a Jewish building, and those with Jewish knowledge would recognize the prayer book like phraseology. Once again, the initiates—people like the Jastrows and Adler—would know that this inscription was derived from an ancient synagogue ruin in Palestine. The Frank Memorial Synagogue is an architectural projection of the old yet new hybrid Jewish-Americanism that Jews within Brunner's social sphere so thoroughly cherished and sought to build.⁵⁶ It is both "Hellenic" and "Hebraic" at the same time.

Brunner's apologetics for Jewish architecture goes much deeper, though, than these local or even national considerations. Brunner's attitude is in marked contrast to that expressed in the actual reports of the Palestine Exploration Society, which he clearly studied in detail. Their *Surveys of Western Palestine* presented an accurate description of the state of Jewish material culture in Palestine, depicting not only the great monumental remains throughout Palestine, including the Upper Galilee, but smaller remains as well. The principle investigator of the synagogue, H. H. Kitchener, concluded as early as 1878 that the Galilean-type synagogues whose remains he meticulously described at Capernaum, Chorazin, Kefar Baram, Meiron, and elsewhere were constructed by Romans on behalf of the Jewish community.⁵⁷

The Jews themselves, having taken to commercial pursuits, were unable to perform works of this sort, and by using Roman workmen obtained much finer results than we are led to think they would themselves be capable of....We may therefore suppose that they were forced upon the people by the local Roman rulers at a time when they were completely submissive to that power, and that [as] directly [as] they were able, they deserted such Pagan buildings, a disloyalty to their religion.

This evaluation was repeated in *The Survey of Western Palestine, Special Papers* in 1881.⁵⁸ Brunner clearly did not accept Kitchener's historical conclusion, which he passed over in damning silence in both of his articles. Kitchener assumed a religious and economic rationale for the perceived lack of "works of this sort" made by Jews, projecting into antiquity antisemitic stereotypes regarding Jewish business acumen and nonparticipation in arts and crafts. Kitchener's model for



*Bar Mitzvah in the Frank Synagogue, 1948
(courtesy Albert Einstein Healthcare Network)*

interpreting ancient synagogues was carried on by two of the most esteemed archaeologists of turn-of-the-century Germany, Heinrich Kohl and Karl Watzinger. Between 1905 and 1907 Kohl and Watzinger explored and partially excavated many of the

Galilean synagogues that the Palestine Exploration Society had previously examined. They essentially adopted Kitchener's position as a given. Perhaps this interpretation is not so odd when we consider that between 1790 and 1840 a series of round synagogues were built in Germany that reflected a relationship to local authority that parallels Kitchener's approach. These were built on the property of local rulers in conformity with "the worldly taste of the Christian rulers and the Jewish elite who commissioned them from Christian architects."⁵⁹ Perhaps the best example is the synagogue of Wörlitz in Germany. Carole Krinsky's description of the relation of the Jews to the local rulers is reminiscent of Kitchener's evaluation of ancient Galilean Jews. According to Krinsky, this synagogue

built in 1789-90 by court architect Friedrich Wilhelm von Erdmannsdorf was a round pavilion in the gardens of the Jews' patron; the synagogue was also known as the Temple of Vesta—which shows the congregation's position before emancipation as the private domain of the Grand Duke of Anhalt-Dessau."⁶⁰

The strands that come together in Brunner's treatise and ultimately in the Frank Memorial Synagogue reflect a century of Western reflection on the place of art in Judaism. This reflection was recently surveyed by Margaret Olin and by Kalman P. Bland.⁶¹ Bland distinguishes between attitudes toward art and Judaism in Protestant

and Catholic contexts. Bland shows that in Protestant Germany, pivotal thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and Fredrick Hegel constructed the notion that Jews are “artless” as part of their continuing “protest” against Catholicism.⁶² Seeing themselves as the true Israel, Protestants bashed Catholic iconicism by positing an aniconic Judaism that was the model of Biblical truth. This originally German-Protestant attitude was thoroughly absorbed by leading elements within Western Jewry. In an article published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* in London in July 1901, for example, British painter Solomon J. Solomon aligned Judaism firmly with Protestantism, stating that “a great part of Israel’s mission is fulfilled in the teaching of the Protestant Church.”⁶³ He continues that “it is clear that in religious thought Israel is more closely allied to the Protestant than to any other sect.” By “sect” Solomon refers to Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, which he believed were on the wane.⁶⁴ For this author, the similarity between Judaism and Puritanical Protestantism is expressed in attitudes toward the visual, our author asserting that in both “art plays no part” in the ideal forms of either tradition.⁶⁵

For German Protestants, the aniconic evaluation of Judaism contained within it a troublingly nationalistic aspect. The artlessness of the Jews mirrored German doubts as to the viability of their own national art, especially when compared with French art. Self doubts as to the quality and depth of German national culture, especially art, sets an important context for understanding how German Protestants assessed Jewish art. The useful Jews of necessity fared badly when set up as the alter-ego of the self-critical Germans. As Hans Belting notes in his *The Germans and their Art: A Troublesome Relationship*, “Nationalistic overtones had always functioned to exaggerate the importance of [German] art in order to compensate for the public’s lack of conviction in it. When German art did not seem to measure up, it was raised to symbolizing a national ideal in constant struggle against an antagonistic modern movement.”⁶⁶

The Protestant assessment pervades the central articles on the visual within *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. It is expressed, as we have seen, by Brunner in his “Synagogue Architecture.” This notion was so thoroughly engrained that *The Jewish Encyclopedia* affords veracity to a pseudo-scientific evaluation of this supposed lack of artistic capacity. The German Protestant theologian and orientalist Immanuel Benzinger wrote in his “Art Among the Ancient Hebrews” that

Such a command as that of the Decalogue (Ex. xx. 4; Deut. v.) would have been impossible to a nation possessed of such artistic gifts as the Greeks, and was carried to its ultimate consequences—as to-day in Islam—only because the people lacked artistic inclination, with its creative power and imagination....The same reason, to which is to be added a defective sense of color, prevented any development of painting.⁶⁷

On the next page of the same volume, the noted Reform scholar Kaufmann Kohler, steeped in the intellectual culture of German Protestantism, takes virtually the same approach. Kohler suggests that due to the Second Commandment, "it is...somewhat incorrect to speak of Jewish art."⁶⁸

Yet within the *Jewish Encyclopedia* another voice is heard, though not textually. Within the pages of the encyclopedia the editors placed and showcased literally thousands of "illustrations." This vast resource (developed cumulatively with the serial publication of the sixteen volumes), constitutes one of the finest repositories of Jewish material culture to this day. The editors clearly considered "one of the special aims of the Encyclopedia to bring together as full a body of illustrative material as possible."⁶⁹ Still, by using only "illustrations" — significantly not called art—the editors, led by Cyrus Adler, believed that this assemblage would "prove of great educational value in every Jewish household." The illustrations are the last feature of the encyclopedia to be discussed in the preface to volume 1. They are the only area of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* that appeals to "the Jewish household" for legitimization and not to scholarship. Nevertheless, the illustrations clearly belie the anti-Jewish art arguments bespoken in various academic articles. The illustrations of *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, many of them in color, present what might be construed as a counter-voice to the academic arguments. While the articles argued that Jewish art is a contradiction in terms, the illustrations shout out its vitality.⁷⁰ This second voice, the nonliterary one, parallels the celebration of ancient Jewish architecture expressed in Brunner's Frank Memorial Synagogue in 1901. It is a harbinger of a change in Jewish self-awareness that would only reach written form later in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Brunner does not resort to the German Protestant model in his

Brickbuilder article. He rather rejects it through omission. It is not the German intellectual tradition, exemplified in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* articles, that resulted in Brunner's ancient synagogue on the Delaware. Brunner found support in the intellectual oeuvre of French Catholic scholarship. Bland has shown that Catholics took a position diametrically opposed to that of Protestant scholarship. Seeing themselves and not the Protestants as the "true Israel," Catholics retorted that Jews in Biblical times had a rich visual culture, drawing their proof from descriptions of the Biblical Tabernacle and Temple.

Viollet-Le-Duc's assertions that Greek and Roman architecture are indebted to Phoenicians and Judaeans, and his claim that Byzantine architecture is influenced not by Roman but by ancient Jewish architecture, as preserved in Jerusalem, reflects this Catholic response to attacks on church art:

Psychological considerations therefore combine with the investigations of monumental remains, to render it probable that Byzantine Art derived some of its decorative constituents from Palestine. I am aware of the prejudices that oppose this hypothesis: we have none of us forgotten the opinions of Voltaire respecting the Jewish people; but Voltaire had no conception of the nature and value of the primitive arts of Syria; and I suggest that his very persistence in endeavouring to depreciate that people and the wit he employs in making it ridiculous, should put us on our guard against his views on the question. One does not take so much pains to destroy that which has no veritable basis; and the warmth of Voltaire's attack on this inconsiderable Jewish people is an indication of its real importance.⁷¹

Voltaire's anti-Judaism is well known. It was deeply intertwined with his disdain of Christianity and particularly of Roman Catholicism.⁷² Viollet-Le-Duc is responding to Voltaire's oft-repeated and reformulated position that the Jews "were a wretched Arabic tribe without art or science, hidden in a small, hilly and ignorant land."⁷³ By defending the Jews and particularly ancient Jewish artistic creativity, Viollet-Le-Duc is also defending the visual traditions of the Catholic Church. Asserting the Jewish rather than classical origins of Byzantine art, Viollet-Le-Duc further removes Christian art from the claim that it was idolatrous. In adopting Viollet-Le-Duc's platform,

Brunner adopts the positive Catholic evaluation of "Jewish art" over the negative Protestant assessment that he himself had accepted in his *Jewish Encyclopedia* article. This transformation within Brunner is striking and is related to a trend toward greater Jewish awareness and a less assimilationist attitude within American Jewry as the new century dawned. Brunner has done nothing less than rewrite in stone the narrative of Jewish art-lessness.

Through the focusing lens of the Frank Memorial Synagogue, we have provided a thick description of the process by which Arnold Brunner rewrote the story of Jewish architecture, bringing to the fore ancient, yet new, Jewish sources to mold a neoclassical Jewish



*The Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue
(courtesy Steven Fine)*

architecture, one that was revolutionary in its "traditionalism."⁷⁴ Brunner's personal development, evidenced in his writings as in his architecture, reflects a reevaluation among Jews of his social circle of their artistic heritage. Although in the text of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* Jews were willing to posit their own artlessness, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth

century American Jews were questioning this approach and their own assimilationist tendencies. In Brunner's case, this transformation resulted from rejection of German Protestant conceptions of Jewish artlessness and his embrace of French Catholic positive attitudes toward Jewish art. A new "Jewish art" was developing, or to be more exact, a new Jewish evaluation of traditional Jewish artistic production and the possibilities resonating within it. This interest in art was not merely aesthetic or academic—the existence of Jewish art was essential for the acceptance of Judaism and the Jews in the company of twentieth-century religions and nations.

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NOTES:

1. I am indebted to my student, Libby K. White, for her archival research into the Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue and its builders, undertaken as part of my "Seminar on Art and Judaism During the Greco-Roman Period," Baltimore Hebrew University (Spring 2000). This essay is dedicated to Professor George Berlin.

2. *Jewish Art*, edited by Z. Ephron and C. Roth (Tel Aviv: Masadah, 1956/57), 18, [Hebrew]; (in English) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 11. This volume was slightly revised by Bezalel Narkiss in 1971 (London: Vallentine, Mitchell), and edited singly by Roth. See my discussion in "Review of Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Jewish Art, H-Judaic* (August 1999), <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=11729935681955>.

3. See most prominently Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger's *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea* (Leipzig, Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung 1916), Heinrich Müller and Julius von Schlosser, *Die Haggadah von Sarajevo* (Vienna: Hölder, 1898), and Heinrich Frauberger, *Über Alte Kuntusgegenstände in Synagoge und Haus* (Frankfort: Gesellschaft zur Erforschung Jüdischer Kunstdenkmäler, 1903).

4. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

5. "Good and Bad Images from the Synagogue of Dura Europos: Contexts, Subtexts, Intertexts," *Art History* 17.1 (1994), 1-25; idem, *Refiguring the Post Classical City: Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem, and Ravenna* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38-51.

6. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

7. Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

8. Today, the Albert Einstein Medical Center.

9. See L. K. White, *The Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue: Rekindling the Ner Tamid* (Baltimore: Baltimore Hebrew University, unpublished seminar paper, 2000), 12.

10. S. D. Temkin, "Hackenburg, William Bowers," *EJ* 7: 1037-38.

11. Jewish Hospital Association of Philadelphia. *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report For the Year Ending April 1901* (Philadelphia: Jewish Hospital Association of Philadelphia, n.d.), 16, cited by White, *The Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue*, 10.

12. On the Palestine Exploration Fund's exploration of ancient synagogues, see F. Vitto, "Synagogues in Cupboards," *Eretz Magazine* 52 (1997), 36-42.

13. *JE*, 11: 621.

14. Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* [Hebrew] (Israel: Maariv, 1978), 19-20.

15. R. Tabak, *The Frank Memorial Synagogue: Structure and Symbol* (Philadelphia: Albert Einstein Healthcare Network, 2001), 7. Candlesticks fashioned after the Arch of Titus menorah were widely distributed in both Europe and America.

16. *JE* 2: 107, 108.

17. See J. Kestenbaum, "Arnold W. Brunner and His Jewish Milieu," (forthcoming). R. Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 7, 8, 86, 89, 95, 96, 101, 104, 106, 110, 120. Wischnitzer was the first to recognize the significance of ancient synagogue architecture in the formulation of Brunner's neoclassicism. See also David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue Center" in American Jewish History* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press and University Press of New England, 1999), 70, 104, 186, 260; "Arnold Brunner," *American Jewish Year Book* edited by Cyrus Adler and Henrietta

Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1904), 71–72; F. N. Levy, "Arnold W. Brunner," *American Art Magazine* 16 (1925): 253–59; C. Adler, "Brunner, Arnold William," *JE*, 3, 404. F. M. Warburg, "Arnold W. Brunner," *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 31 (1928), 253–55.

18. This apt designation is credited to Daniel Elazar. See M. Freedman, "Introduction: The Philadelphia Group—A Collective Spirit," *When Philadelphia Was the Capitol of Jewish America*, edited by Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 9–21. See J. D. Sarna, "The Making of an American Jewish Culture," *idem*, 144–55.

19. Warburg, "Arnold W. Brunner," 253–54.

20. See L. S. Lerner, "Narrating the Architecture of Emancipation," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 3 (2000), especially 9–10.

21. A. W. Brunner and J. Jacobs, "Synagogue Architecture," *JE* 11: 630–40. On the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, see S. Ruben Schwartz, *The Emergence of Jewish Scholarship in America: The Publication of the Jewish Encyclopedia* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1991).

22. Brunner and Jacobs, "Synagogue Architecture," 632.

23. *Ibid.*, 636.

24. *Ibid.*, *The Brickbuilder: Devoted to the Interests of Architecture in Materials of Clay* 16, nos. 2–3 (1907), 20.

25. See C. W. Wilson and H. H. Kitchener, "Synagogues," *Survey of Ancient Palestine Special Papers on Topography, Archaeology, Manners and Customs, Etc.* (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1881), 294.

26. *Ibid.*, 14.

27. Wilson and Kitchener, "Synagogues," 299, describes the interior dimensions of the large Baram synagogue as sixty feet, six inches by forty-six feet, six inches. Note that no balcony was built in the Frank Synagogue, apparently owing to its small size.

28. Brunner, "Synagogue Architecture," 20.

29. J. Gaudet, *Elements et Theorie de l'Architecture* 3 (Paris: Librairie de la Construction Moderne, 1905), 608.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.* Brunner apparently, following Viollet-Le-Duc, attributes all of this to Solomon's Temple, with no mention of Herod, undoubtedly in the service of his polemical objective.

33. *Ibid.*, 24.

34. *Ibid.*, 21.

35. *Ibid.*

36. E.-E. Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens sur l'architecture (Lectures Architecture)* (Paris: A. Morel, 1863–72), translated by B. Bucknall (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1877–81).

37. *Ibid.*, 24. See A. Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 303–4.

38. *Ibid.*, 213.

39. *Ibid.*, 213–14.

40. *Ibid.*, 224–25.

41. Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States*, 7, 8, 86, 89, 95, 96, 101, 104, 106, 110, 120.

42. J. Weismann Joselit, "By Design: Building the Campus of the Jewish Theological Seminary," *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America*, edited by J. Wertheimer 1 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1997), 274.

43. Kaufmann, *Shul*, 260–61.

44. D. G. Dalin, "The Patriarch: The Life and Legacy of Mayer Sulzberger," *When Philadelphia Was the Capitol of Jewish America*, edited by M. Friedman (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 58–74.

45. This was preempted by illness.

46. *Ibid.*, 288, n. 15.

47. Hebrew University Archives, "Institute of Archaeology," file 144. Significantly, Warburg insisted upon the inclusion of the newly founded Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the dig, though not as a full partner.

48. Sarna, "The Making of an American Jewish Culture," 152.

49. S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1909).

50. G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927–30).

51. In a 1929 letter Judah L. Magnes, president of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, suggested to Congregation Emanu-El of New York that a stone from a Palestinian synagogue serve as cornerstone for the new synagogue on Fifth and Sixty-fifth Streets. See Hebrew University Archives, "Institute of Archaeology," file 144. This suggestion was not acted upon. On Congregation Emanu-El, see Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in America*, 125–30.

52. See my "The Redemption of Ancient Synagogues: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, American Jewry and the Creation of 'Jewish Archaeology,'" [Hebrew] *Archaeology and Religion in Modern Israel*, edited by Z. Shiloni and M. Feige (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, forthcoming).

53. Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in America*, 125. Today this floor is covered with a carpet. University officials with whom I spoke describe the carpet as a protection against slippage. One wonders whether this covering of the zodiac is also part of a trend toward greater stridency in the Orthodox community (parallel to the larger *mezuzot* that in recent years have replaced the original smaller ones).

54. I find no evidence of European funding in the interwar years, which is certainly a function of the economic situation following World War I and to Magnes's personal connections in the United States.

55. L. Blau, "Early Christian Epigraphy, Considered from the Jewish Point of View," *HUCA* 1 (1924), 225.

56. See T. Rajak, "Jews and Greeks: the invention and exploitation of polarities in the nineteenth century," *The Uses and Abuses of Antiquity* edited by M. Biddiss and M. Wyke (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 57–77.

57. A literary parallel to the Frank Synagogue is *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. Roughly the same elite, reflecting the entire spectrum of Jewish opinion on religion, participated in the production of the *JE*. See Schwartz, *Emergence of Jewish Scholarship in America*. On similar themes in exhibition design, including exhibitions organized by Cyrus Adler, see B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 79–128. A significant

predecessor of the Frank Synagogue is Moses Jacob Ezekiel's sculpture *Religious Liberty*, sponsored by the Independent Order Benai Berith for the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. Also constructed in a neoclassical style, this sculpture bespeaks a more assimilationist attitude. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (88) notes: "One of six American ethnic and religious groups to erect monuments on the fairgrounds, Jews were the only group to make no explicit reference to their own history and historical figures."

58. H. H. Kitchener, "Synagogues of Galilee," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1878), 128. See also E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1934), 62–63.

59. Wilson and Kitchner, "Synagogue," 304. See Bland, *The Artless Jew*, 26–27.

60. C. H. Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe* (New York: The Architectural History Foundation and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 72. See also 48, 73. This approach is rejected by Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, 61–63. Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of European Synagogues*, 159–60.

61. Krinsky, *Synagogues in Europe*, 72.

62. Olin, *The Nation Without Art*; Bland, *The Artless Jew*, 13–70.

63. Bland, *The Artless Jew*, 13–70.

64. S. J. Solomon, "Art and Judaism," *JQR* (old series), 13 (1901), 560.

65. Solomon, *Art*, 564. See Bland, *The Artless Jew*, 36–37.

66. Similar in content, see the responsa of Louis Ginzberg regarding "Art in the Synagogue," reprinted in L. Ginzberg, *The Responsa of Professor Louis Ginzberg*, edited by D. Golinkin (New York and Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1996), 155–63.

67. H. Belting, *The Germans and their Art: A Troublesome Relationship*, translated by S. Kleager (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 10–11.

68. *JE* 2: 141. On Benzinger, see M. Avi-Yonah, "Benzinger, Immanuel," *EJ* 4: 574.

69. *JE* 2: 142 and the bibliography of nineteenth-century studies cited there. See Bland, *The Artless Jew*, 5.

70. *JE* 1: xvii.

71. This approach was not solely the purview of Western Jews. Avner Holtzman has recently shown how thoroughly this German scholarly critique influenced, for example, Hebrew authors throughout Eastern Europe, and how slowly it gave way. See Holtzman, *Aesthetics and National Revival*, especially 11–92.

72. Viollet-Le-Duc, *Entretiens sur l'architecture*, 224.

73. See Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, 4, 255–56; 380, especially 303–4.

74. Cited by Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, 304. Compare Bland's conclusions in *The Artless Jew*, 68. Bland, note 40, surveys Voltaire's various statements on this subject.

75. While Brunner's interest in Jewish neoclassicism is idiosyncratic among published documents, Judah L. Magnes too was interested in this approach. In a manuscript titled "The Hebrew University Search for Antiquities in Palestine" (Hebrew University Archive, Institute of Archaeology file, 1934), Judah L. Magnes adopts a similar stance. After describing Palestinian synagogue discoveries, Magnes writes

It is therefore a mistake to think that Synagogue architecture must necessarily be Arabesque and Moorish. Some of the ancient wooden

Synagogues of Poland and Russia look somewhat like pagodas at first sight. The Roman tradition of Synagogue interior construction is continued in part—consciously or not, I do not know—in the Synagogue,—now a church—at Toledo, Spain, and in the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue at New York. There is the ark at the one end with seats at the sides of the building, and a broad space down the center from one end to the other. In the Roman basilica structure great columns lined both sides of this central space, dividing the ground floor into three parts. In the Capernaum synagogue separate steps to the women's gallery have been found, and there is here also an outer court with steps leading down to the street. The pavement of the synagogue here is intact in many places, as are some of the seats and a portion of one of the outer walls....

Magnes's comment that continuities between the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue (that is, Shearith Israel) and ancient synagogues may have occurred "consciously" suggests that he had no firsthand knowledge of Brunner's work. Magnes's membership in the American Jewish elite, including Louis Marshall (who was his brother-in-law) and Cyrus Adler, is probably accountable for his knowledge of the approach suggested by Brunner.