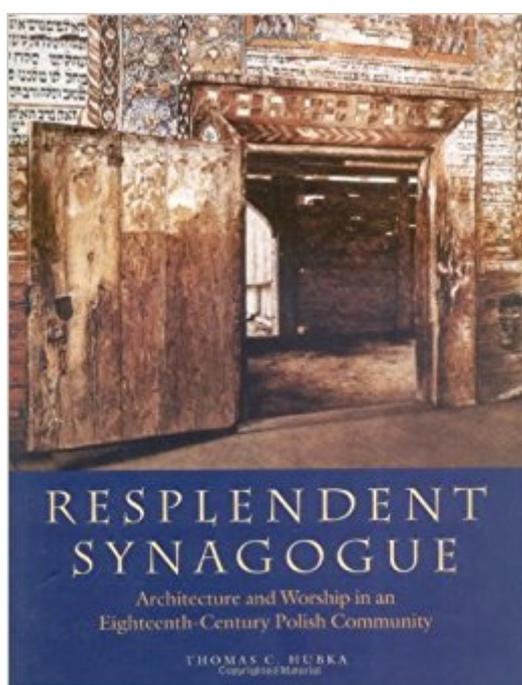


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Resplendent Synagogue: Architecture And Worship In An Eighteenth-Century Polish Community (The Tauber Institute Series For The Study Of European Jewry)



Synopsis

Thomas C. Hubka, an architectural historian known for his work on American vernacular architecture, immersed himself in medieval and early-modern Jewish history, religion, and culture to prepare for this remarkable study of the eighteenth-century Polish synagogue in the town of Gwozdziec, now in present Ukraine. Hubka selected the Gwozdziec Synagogue - one of the finest examples of a small-town wooden synagogue from the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth - because of the completeness of its photographic and historical records. This truly resplendent synagogue exemplified a high point in Jewish architectural art and religious painting, a tradition that was later abandoned by Eastern-European Jewish communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because the Gwozdziec Synagogue, like so many others, was destroyed by the Nazis, this book revives a spiritual community lost to history. Graced with more than 150 historical photographs, architectural drawings, maps, diagrams, and color illustrations, *Resplendent Synagogue* vividly recreates the spiritual heart of a once-vibrant Jewish community. Hubka "reads" the synagogue both as a historical document and as a cultural artifact. His interpretation of its art and architecture - and its liturgy - enables him to recreate a pre-modern Jewish community seen in relation to both its internal traditions of worship and its external relations with Gentile neighbors. Hubka demonstrates that while the architectural exterior of the synagogue was largely the product of non-Jewish, regional influences, the interior design and elaborate wall-paintings signified a distinctly Jewish art form. The collaboration of Jewish and Gentile builders, craftsmen, and artists in the creation of this magnificent wooden structure attests to an eighteenth-century period of relative prosperity and community well-being for the Jews of Gwozdziec. This unique exploration of a lost religious and cultural artifact breathes new life into a forgotten but fascinating aspect of eighteenth-century Polish Jewry and is certain to elicit discussion and debate among modern readers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wonderful in its whole! Lovely illustrations, reasonable commentary as to both objective history and subjective interpretation all contributing to a jewel of a work. People may argue with some of the conclusions made by the author, but I can find no better ones at the present. Considering all of the tracts on the architecture of Churches, more really should be available on Synagogues. Most of what is currently available on such construction is limited to modern works and certainly very little can be noted of the largely-destroyed buildings of Europe in the wake of WWII. Some areas of structures' vestiges has been shown in pictures in Silent Places, but with no intent to reconstruct them. For those who want to understand Jewish Culture of the Shtetl, at least in the microcosm, a work such as this is essential. The fact that it is achieved in such a thorough manner is a major plus here! If you think that you might be interested in this area, you really are remiss in not getting, or at least reading, this work.

A stunning volume, well-researched, and an excellent addition to a more wide-ranging Jewish library. Most of the synagogues of eastern Europe were made of wood: almost none survived the war. But the extraordinary workmanship in carpentry and painting is worth studying. This is a memory of a shattered world, and the memory should be kept alive like the eternal light over the bimah. Life was lived in these buildings, themselves built from living materials. They were earthy, substantial, ornate and an amazing tribute to those who built them.

I found this beautiful book while looking for more information on the lost world of my ancestors. I got my answer, one of them is mentioned twice in this book, as the young Rabbi of the newly built synagogue in Gwozdziec, around 1731. The text is very accessible, detailed and extremely informative, the illustrations and drawings are amazing; one can only imagine the years of meticulous research that went into recreating the lost art of wooden houses of worship and the accurate description of daily life and interaction between the various ethnicities of the region. Recommended to everyone interested in the art and history of Europe (Poland, Ukraine and

vicinity), religious buildings and Judaism. Congratulations to Professor Hubka, the result is a resplendent art book.

This book is beautifully illustrated and unusually readable and well-written for a scholarly historical work. It is the perfect complement to the seminal work by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka, which is out of print.

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