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Thomas Seddon's "Moriah" and His *Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehosophat*

According to Allen Staley, Thomas Seddon's *Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehosophat* was the first—and for a long time, the only—Pre-Raphaelite picture in a public collection. It therefore attracted a degree of attention that otherwise it would hardly have deserved, and in books such as Richard and Samuel Redgraves' *Century of Painters of the English School*, published in 1866, or Philip Gilbert Hamerton's *Life of Turner*, published in 1878, it stood for the movement.¹ After surveying the artist's brief career, Staley concludes: "Despite disclaimers, and despite the limited and derivative nature of the works themselves, Seddon was the purest Pre-Raphaelite landscape painter,"² by which I take it he means that Seddon produced the purest (or most extreme) examples of landscape in hard-edge Pre-Raphaelite style characteristic of the early brotherhood.

New manuscript evidence in the form of "Moriah, where God stayed faith's hand upraised," a poem that the artist wrote and planned to append to *Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehosophat*, suggests that his most famous work exemplifies early Pre-Raphaelitism in a second, equally important sense. This poem shows that while at work on his Jerusalem landscape the artist shared Hunt's conceptions of a Pre-Raphaelite symbolical realism. Like Hunt, Millais, Rossetti, and Collins, Seddon understood early Pre-Raphaelitism as necessarily combining hard-edge style with symbolical programs ultimately based upon biblical typology that generated an integrated or magical realism.³

Before examining this manuscript evidence, I briefly look at the painter's relationship with Hunt and at his own religious expe-

rience of the landscape he painted. Finally, I consider several explanations why Seddon did not finally append to *Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehosophat* this poem that would both have made clear his aesthetic and iconological program and have aligned his art with Hunt's.

As previous discussions of their relationship have pointed out, Hunt considered Seddon to be a student working more or less under his supervision.⁴ A letter now in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester reveals that Hunt influenced Seddon's religious as well as his artistic beliefs. Indeed, as he wrote his sister Mary in a letter from Jerusalem: "I want to know what you think of Hunt's pictures. He is a thoroughly worthy fellow & in other respects than painting it is a great privilege to have been with him. Tell John it has knocked some of my pooh-pooing skepticism out of me."⁵ For a time Hunt's earnestness seems to have had a great influence on Seddon, affecting both his notions of painting and his reactions to the Bible lands.

Like Hunt, Seddon believed that his visit to the Middle East had provided him with invaluable access to visible truths unavailable to those without first-hand knowledge of the landscape. Experiencing the landscapes that had provided the setting for the events of sacred history itself made that history appear more authentic and more believable. As he wrote from Jerusalem on 10 June 1854, "Besides the beauty of this land, one cannot help feeling that one is treading upon holy ground; and it is impossible to tread the same soil which our Lord trod, and wander over His favourite walks with the apostles,