

..

RUSKIN, ARCHITECTURE, AND THE BIBLE:  
PROPHETIC INTERTEXT IN  
*THE SEVEN LAMPS OF ARCHITECTURE AND  
THE STONES OF VENICE*

Joshua R. Held

Two of the liveliest areas of Ruskin criticism that have attracted critics now for several decades concern his views on architecture and on religion. From Kristine Garrigan to John Unrau in the 1970s, through Michael Brooks and Elizabeth Helsinger in the 1980s, to Robert Hewison in 2009 and Lars Spuybroek in 2011, critics have attended closely to John Ruskin's theories of architecture.<sup>1</sup> Other Ruskin scholars recently have examined Ruskin's approaches to religion at various times in his life, an enterprise closely connected to the even more prominent interest in his biography which has been near the centre of Ruskin studies for decades.<sup>2</sup> But despite the abundance of studies on architecture and religion in Ruskin, few critics have connected these two aspects. Dina Birch, in a recent study of Ruskin's religious dissent, begins to link these topics when she claims that Ruskin

popularized Gothic as the dominant architectural form of the mid-nineteenth century, but was vehemently opposed to the national ecclesiasticism that it came to represent. It is tempting, but mistaken, to think of these as distinctly opposed currents in the direction of his thought. In fact, they flow from the same source, and both can be understood in terms of the nature of his dissent. ("Who wants authority" 66)

After this opening claim in which she recognizes the connection between Ruskin's ideas on architecture and religion, however, Birch largely neglects architecture in her illuminating study, focusing instead on the phases of Ruskin's religious views.<sup>3</sup> As a way of addressing this gap in Ruskin scholarship, I argue that while Ruskin alludes to scripture throughout his works, he demonstrates in his two most important architectural treatises – *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1850-53) – that a building's "voicefulness" can imitate and amplify the voice of the Bible.

The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies, 22 (Fall 2013)