

REVIEWS

A Torch at Midnight: A Study of John Ruskin's The Seven Lamps of Architecture by Robert Brownell. London: Pallas Athene, 2017. 510 pp. + 1 colour plate, 21 b/w illus. ISBN 978 1 84368 142 7. Paperback ISBN 978 1 84368 077 2. £19.99; \$34.00.

This lengthy study of John Ruskin's aesthetics unfolds via a set of interlocking themes concerning Evangelicalism in England, ancient European and Eastern mythologies, and pre-Copernican astrology. These topics are recognized as important platforms for any discussion of Ruskin's views on art and architecture. Robert Brownell pursues a grand thesis about Ruskin's developing approach to aesthetics in the late 1840s. Marked by a rich use of metaphor, symbolism, allegory, and an appreciation of biblical typology, the approach blossomed coherently in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849). An interest in viewing Ruskin in this way is not new, having been richly explored by George Landow in *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (1971), and subsequently by many others. What is new, perhaps, is the emphasis placed on astrology and its alleged influence on Ruskin's book, particularly as this was a topic seldom explored directly in his many works. The suggestion that astrology was the basis of the old pre-Copernican astronomy is a quite acceptable and proper historical concept to use in any attempt to decode *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

The Seven Lamps came about accidentally as a result of Ruskin's extended trips to Venice in 1846 and thereafter. The first two volumes of *Modern Painters* completed, Ruskin's new interest in Venetian architecture issued from threats to the city during the 1848 revolutions and the destructive nature of ongoing restoration work. He published his opinions as a new book rather than as part of the third volume of *Modern Painters*. Even though his indulgent father was not pleased by this diversion, such architectural analysis continued, resulting in another masterpiece a few years later, *The Stones of Venice*. Only in 1856 did the third volume of *Modern Painters* appear.

Brownell sees the period from 1846 to 1853 as crucial to Ruskin's broadening aesthetics, owing not just to his improving knowledge of European art and architecture but also to his withdrawal from the narrower tenets of his Evangelical upbringing, a rebellion that dates from as early as 1841. Chapter one admirably gives the background to the contentious range of English religious opinions which had beset England anew since the 1829 Roman Catholic Relief Act. As a close student of geology, Ruskin was well aware