

A 'new clue': Ruskin's *Guide to the Principal Pictures in the Academy of Fine Arts at Venice* (1877), the history of Venetian art and the idea of the museum

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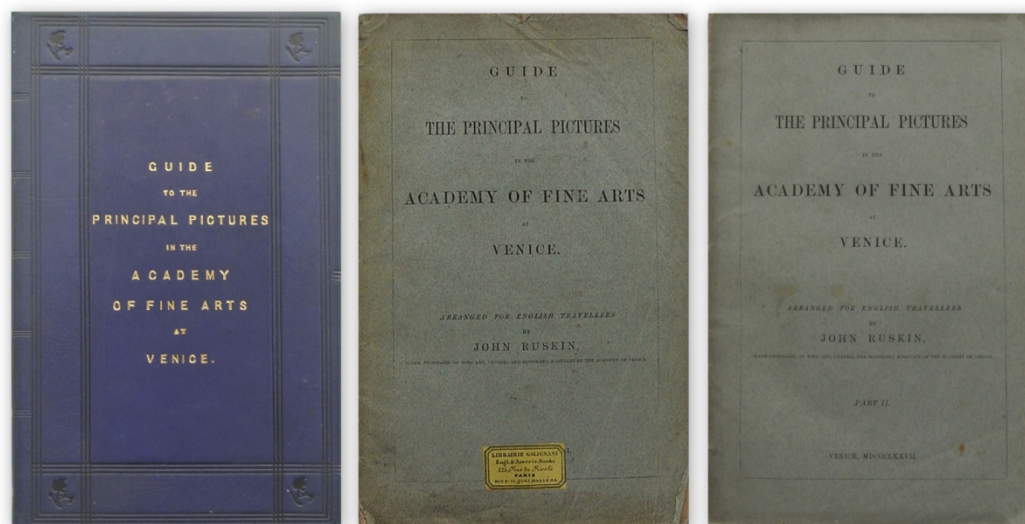


Figure 1 John Ruskin, *Guide to the Principal Pictures in the Academy of Fine Arts at Venice. Arranged for English Travellers*, Venice, 1877. Parts I and II in original mottled grey paper covers; Part I as bound by W.J. Mansell in Ruskin's 'official Purple – lettered in gold – for the members of the Venetian Academy' (J. Ruskin to G. Allen, 7 April 1877, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 255). Collection of the author. Photo © Paul Tucker

On 22 March 1877 John Ruskin wrote from Venice to his cousin Joan Severn, 'I've just done up the nicest little explosive torpedo I've ever concocted, to my own mind; and am in good hope of pitching it into the Academy of Venice, and the general Artistic Mind, for an Easter-Egg. I'm licking my lips over it considerable [sic].'¹ The incendiary confection referred to was his *Guide to the Principal Pictures in the Academy of Fine Arts at Venice* (Fig. 1),* written, or *Arranged for English Travellers*, as its subtitle states, and published soon afterwards, so that visitors coming up from Rome after Easter (1 April) might find it on sale at the Accademia di Belle Arti itself,

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* The illustrations to this text may be found by clicking this link: [Illustrations](#).

¹ J. Ruskin to J. Severn, 22 March 1877, in Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds, *The Works of John Ruskin*, London: George Allen / New York: Longman, Green, and Co, 1903–12, 39 vols [cited hereafter as *Works of John Ruskin*], XXXVII, 221.

where Ruskin had arranged that the porter who sold the entrance tickets and official catalogues to the collection should set up a 'little bookstall' for him.²

Ruskin's ballistic metaphor was perhaps suggested by the fact that the first effective self-propelled underwater explosive known as a 'torpedo'³ had been developed in 1866 not very far from Venice. Its inventor, the British engineer Robert Whitehead (1823-1905), had at that time been manager of the Stabilimento Tecnico Fiumano in Fiume (now Rijeka) on the Dalmatian coast. His ear as always on the ground, Ruskin had perhaps heard tell that in 1875 Whitehead, now its owner, had turned the Stabilimento into the world's first torpedo factory.

Of course, the choice of metaphor also reflects Ruskin's native inclination to polemic and provocation. Yet since the early 1870s in particular he had been pursuing a general offensive, aiming at moral, social and aesthetic reform, and this was now intensifying. That the *Guide* was integral to such an offensive has been obscured by a failure adequately to read this text, especially in conjunction with other thematically and genetically related Ruskinian texts of the period, which it is no exaggeration to define its 'intertexts'. It has too often been dismissed as betraying mental instability, distraction, private obsession and inconsistency.⁴

More specifically, Ruskin's assault on the Accademia typifies a particular phase in his lifelong criticism of art institutions, and in particular of museums,⁵ as material indices of art knowledge and appreciation and so crucial to the political and didactic economy of art. Such criticism, always in ebullient evolution, was itself now intensifying, in correspondence to Ruskin's current financial and ideological investment in the creation of his own museum, at Walkley, just outside of Sheffield, under the aegis of St George's Company.⁶

² J. Ruskin to George Allen, 27 September 1876, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 138. References to 'MSS' held by the Bodleian Libraries are to the transcripts of Ruskin's correspondence made for E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn in preparation of *Works of John Ruskin*. I am grateful to The Ruskin, Lancaster University and to the Bodleian Libraries for permission to quote from these. George Allen (1832-1907) a former joiner and pupil of Ruskin's at the Working Men's College in London, had worked in various capacities for him for around two decades. He had been appointed Ruskin's general agent in 1871 and his publisher the following year.

³ Less egg- than cigar-shaped, but at any rate sharing with the recently launched chocolate Easter-egg a hollow case or shell, though differently filled.

⁴ See, e.g., Jeanne Clegg, *Ruskin and Venice*, London: Junction Books, 1981, 167-171; Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin. The Later Years*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, 347, 350-351; Robert Hewison, *Ruskin on Venice. 'The Paradise of Cities'*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, 331. A recent exception is Emma Sdegno, 'Latent in darkness: John Ruskin's virtual guide to the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice', in Rosella Mamoli Zorzi and Katherine Manthorne, eds, *From Darkness to Light: Writers in Museums 1798-1898*, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019, 87-97.

⁵ See Donata Levi, 'Ruskin's gates. Dentro e fuori il museo', in Roberto Balzani, ed., *Collezioni, musei, identità fra XVIII e XIX secolo*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007, 69-106.

⁶ The official aim of St George's Company (or Society, later renamed the Guild of St George) was '[t]o determine, and institute in practice, the wholesome laws of laborious (especially agricultural) life and economy, and to instruct first the agricultural, and, as opportunity may serve, other labourers or craftsmen, in such science, art, and literature as are conducive to good husbandry and craftsmanship' (*Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 5).

This article will attempt to explain why the Accademia should have drawn critical fire from Ruskin at this time and what form his attack on it took; how this was part of the general offensive just referred to; and what place it has in the complex history of Ruskin's idea of the museum.

'Little red books'

What then motivated Ruskin to target this Venetian picture gallery in particular and to choose a guide to it as his weapon – the only guide to a public collection which he ever published? Important clues lie in the connections, patent and implicit, between the at first sight disparate selection of Ruskinian texts laid out for the perusal of English travellers on the porter's table at the entrance to the gallery of the Accademia.

Ruskin's scheme for a bookstall here had been announced to his publisher only a few weeks after his arrival in the city the previous September, when he had requested Allen to send out a hundred copies of an earlier critical petard, the controversial lecture on 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret', which as Slade Professor of Fine Art Ruskin had delivered at Oxford in June 1871. From early in the spring of 1877 also available to English visitors to the Accademia was 'The relation of engraving to other arts in Florence';⁷ while printed copies of the first part of the *Guide* reached its author on 31 March and a first consignment was made to the gallery porter on 7 April. Over the following months these three texts were supplemented by a further five: the three letters of *Fors Clavigera*, to which Ruskin referred readers of Part I of the *Guide* and which they were advised were 'now purchasable of [his] agent in Venice';⁸ Part I of the major product of this long Venetian stay, *St. Mark's Rest* (1877–84), published on 25 April (the patron saint's feast-day); and Part II of the *Guide*, issued in June.

The bookstall would immediately have caught the English visitor's eye thanks to the covers uniform to the majority of the eight pamphlets on display. Allen had been instructed to bind 'The relation of engraving to other arts in Florence' as he had the five parts already published of Ruskin's Florentine guide, *Mornings in*

⁷ The second lecture in the course on 'Sandro Botticelli and the Florentine schools of engraving', delivered in the autumn of 1872 and published under the title *Ariadne Fiorentina* between 1873 and 1876. See J. Ruskin to G. Allen, 13 February 1877, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 216.

⁸ Letters 20, 71 and 75 (not 71, 72, 73 as stated in *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 163n); see J. Ruskin to G. Allen, Easter Day 77, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 252–253). A note by Ruskin (*Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 163n) identifies the agent as his former pupil and occasional copyist and assistant, the English painter John Wharltton Bunney (1828–82), now resident in Venice. However, Bunney did not offer to take on this responsibility until 1 May (private communication from Sarah Bunney, 8 June 2012) and in the first edition of Part I the 'agent' is not named; see John Ruskin, *Guida ai principali dipinti nell'Accademia di Belle Arti a Venezia*, ed. Paul Tucker, trans. Emma Sdegno, Milano: Electa, 2014, 84n, 204. The Accademia's porter continued to sell Ruskin's texts even after May: Bunney took him additional copies of several of the texts on sale on 27 September (private communication from Sarah Bunney, 8 June 2012). The porter received a small commission on each copy sold, e.g. ¼ lira (about 3 pence) on 1 ½ lire (about 14 pence) in the case of Part I of the *Guide* (J. Ruskin to G. Allen, 7 April 1877, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 255).

Florence (1875–77) – in red leatherette with their titles lettered in gilt on the front;⁹ and the three letters from *Fors Clavigera* and Part I of *St. Mark's Rest* were then all bound in the same way. The pamphlets would have looked familiar to travellers who had made use of *Mornings in Florence* in Tuscany, and equally comparable to guidebooks they inevitably also consulted. For, like the individual parts of *Mornings in Florence*, the pamphlets on sale in Venice were clearly intended to evoke the ubiquitous 'little red books' which Henry James not many years later recognized (along with 'money') as the defining attribute of the crowds of 'irresponsible visitors' to this 'most beautiful of tombs':¹⁰ the characteristically portable, red-covered and gilt-lettered *Handbooks for Travellers* published since the mid-1830s by John Murray in London and subsequently imitated by the Leipzig firm of Karl Baedeker.

Like other travellers of his time and class Ruskin had himself long made use of Murray's *Handbooks*.¹¹ Indeed, in response to a personal invitation from the publisher, he had contributed to the revision of one: in the course of the six-month-long study tour of Italy undertaken in 1845 he had sent seven long letters to Murray enumerating errors and omissions in the accounts of Lucca, Pisa, Florence and Pistoia given in the first edition of the *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy* (1842, 1843). In part extracted from his own notebooks, passages from these letters were then incorporated into the *Handbook's* third edition (1847). In many, if not in all, instances they were enclosed within inverted commas and followed by the bracketed initial 'R.' – an oblique reference to the as yet anonymous 'author of *Modern Painters*'.¹² Ruskin was thus admitted, albeit semi-anonymously, among those 'authors of celebrity' whose 'subjective and singular reactions to places [were] regularly cited by the *Hand-Book* as an essential component of its descriptions'.¹³

⁹ J. Ruskin to G. Allen, 13 February 1877, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 216. It was indeed from one of these ('mince livre rouge et or') that the small platoon of *voyageuses* observed by Robert de la Sizeranne in S. Maria Novella one spring prior to 1897 intently read or intoned (Robert de la Sizeranne, *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté*, Paris: Hachette, 1897, 1–4).

¹⁰ Henry James, 'Venice' (1882), in *Italian Hours*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909, 44.

¹¹ See e.g. J. G. Links, *The Ruskins in Normandy. A Tour with Murray's Hand-book*, London: John Murray, 1968, especially 7–12; and cf. Denis Cosgrove, *Geography & Vision*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008, 139, where in mistaken reference to this book and to the *Hand-book for Travellers in France*, it is stated that Ruskin himself wrote Murray's 'guidebook to Normandy'. See also Elsa Damien, 'Ruskin vs. Murray: battles for tourist guidance in Italy, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 32:1, 2010, 19–30.

¹² *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, London: John Murray, 1847, x. See Paul Tucker, "'Right conclusions": seven unpublished letters (1845–46) from John Ruskin to John Murray', *Annali d'Italianistica* 16, 1996, 582–621; and John Ruskin, 'Résumé' of *Italian Art and Architecture* (1845), ed. Paul Tucker, Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 2003, LIV–LXVII. Cf. *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXVIII, 326–30, which lists many fewer such passages than were actually incorporated.

¹³ Esther Allen, "'Money and little red books": romanticism, tourism and the rise of the guidebook', *LIT* 7, 1996, 213–26: 214.

Though in dwindling numbers, such passages were retained in editions issued up to 1892.¹⁴

As a young man Ruskin had thus participated in the collective construction-in-progress of the *Handbooks'* knowledge base, predicated on repression – the above exceptions aside – of the individual authorial voice, in favour of corporate anonymity. And with his declared commitment to empirically ascertained fact, 'scientific accuracy'¹⁵ and faithfulness of representation, he would no doubt have applauded the publisher's practice of availing himself of the 'personal knowledge' of friends and correspondents in order to provide travellers 'on the spot' with information as comprehensive, correct and practically useful as possible.¹⁶

By the 1870s, however, the young critic's collaborative correction of the 'deficiencies' of a specific *Handbook*, in a specific edition, had given way to the Slade Professor's disparagement of the series as a whole and of the travel ethos they had so successfully and so widely fostered. For, as Esther Allen has indicated, in the course of the century they played a key role in constructing 'an experience of place that was unique to travellers':

travellers began to depend on the hand-books to mediate between them and the places they were visiting ... The books were, indeed, to be used as dictionaries; the traveller's function was to attach the definitions in the book to the objects they defined ...

Carrying out the task of verifying tautologies ... gave travellers something to do, distracting them from the necessity of contemplating the objects they were seeing, replacing contemplation with information, and thus reassuring them that they were gaining knowledge from their journeys. It may also have had the result of making the places they visited into mere visual aids to the hand-books ... Abstracted from their political and human dimension, places were presented by guidebooks as spectacles for travellers. Travellers no longer needed to communicate, only to consume ... Guidebook in hand, travellers [could] immediately and directly convert the material presence of a place into a verbal presence. The experience of a place [was] rendered identical to the experience of a text.¹⁷

This assessment of the *Handbooks'* part in forging 'a traveller's viewpoint as a marketable commodity'¹⁸ helps contextualize the passing shots fired at the series by Ruskin in his Oxford lectures and other publications of the 1870s. In the series entitled 'Val d'Arno in the thirteenth century', given in the autumn of 1873,¹⁹ Ruskin had challenged his audience to read place and artwork in a morally

¹⁴ In editions of the *Handbook for Travellers to North Italy* and, following the redistribution of Tuscany, in that to *Central Italy*.

¹⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, III, 48.

¹⁶ A 'Notice' soliciting 'corrections of any mistakes or omissions', especially if 'founded upon personal knowledge', was printed opposite the title-page of each *Handbook*.

¹⁷ Allen, "'Money and little red books'", 218–19.

¹⁸ Allen, "'Money and little red books'", 222.

¹⁹ And published as *Val d'Arno* the following year.

penetrative sense diametrically opposed to that outlined above, one explicitly contrasted by him with the mode promoted by the *Handbooks*:

Fix that in your minds, then. Niccola Pisano is the Master of Naturalism in Italy, therefore elsewhere: of Naturalism, and all that follows. Generally of truth, common-sense, simplicity, vitality, and of all these, with consummate power. A man to be inquired about, is not he? and will it not make a difference to you whether you look, when you travel in Italy, in his rough early marbles for this fountain of life, or only glance at them because your Murray's Guide tells you, and think them 'odd old things'?²⁰

Again, a year later, in a lecture on Cimabue given as part of the series on 'The aesthetic and mathematic schools of art in Florence', his account of the painter's activity at Assisi was introduced by a remark polemically and programmatically distinguishing his own sense of knowledge useful for the purpose from that to which the traveller typically and unthinkingly had recourse:

And now I must tell you quickly what will be useful to you to know in visiting Assisi – my staying-at-home hearers must be patient with me, for it is really necessary now to give travellers some clue better than their Murray's Guide.²¹

More explicit and categorical was the criticism voiced in his Preface to Alice Owen's *The Art Schools of Mediæval Christendom* (1876):

The books of reference published by Mr. Murray, though of extreme value to travellers, who make it their object to see (in his, and their, sense of the word) whatever is to be seen, are of none whatever, or may perhaps be considered, justly, as even of quite the reverse of value, to travellers who wish to see only what they may in simplicity understand, and with pleasure remember ...²²

Meanwhile Ruskin had acted on his suggestion that it was time to provide travellers with a 'clue' to their experience that improved on the *Handbooks*: in 1875 he had issued the first four parts of *Mornings in Florence*. As he had written to his American friend and correspondent, Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908), this was intended to 'cut out Mr Murray a little'²³ and, as its subtitle (*Being Simple Studies of Christian Art for English Traveller*) declared, was dedicated to 'the English

²⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIII, 19.

²¹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIII, 205. The series was published for the first time in this posthumous edition.

²² *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXIV, 129.

²³ J. Ruskin to C.E. Norton, 7 September, 16 September 1874, in John Bradley and Ian Ousby, eds, *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 333, 334. Shortly before this Ruskin had recorded in his diary how he had lain 'long awake dividing days and planning attack on Mr Murray's guides' (entry for 31 August 1874, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. misc. c 227, 32).

Respectable Tourist', guidance of whom while in Italy its Preface moreover declared integral to his 'real duty' as Slade Professor.²⁴

Not that *Mornings in Florence* was the first of Ruskin's publications to be written with the tourist or visitor in mind, or to be conceived as some form of guidebook. Its title echoes that of the series of pamphlets in which from 1855 Ruskin had reviewed the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy and which are generally cited as his *Academy Notes: Notes on Some of the Principal Pictures Exhibited in the Rooms of the Royal Academy*.²⁵ *Stones of Venice* had not infrequently invoked the figure of 'the traveller' and had artfully suggested the conflation of that figure with that of the reader.²⁶ Moreover, the final volume's extensive 'Venetian Index' had expressly aimed to supply 'as complete a guide' as possible to the most important buildings in the city, as well as to its Tintoretts – 'much injured, difficult to read, and entirely neglected by other writers on art'.²⁷ However, it had not abandoned an alphabetically arranged dictionary-like format or – for the most part – mere invocation of the traveller; while at the same time it eschewed not only 'received opinions' concerning art but also subjects admitted to be of particular interest to its intended users.²⁸ Ruskin's 'added directions', though purportedly 'such as [he] should have given to any private friend visiting the city',²⁹ did not compose a visit as such, but merely indicated the degree to which individual objects merited the traveller's attention and which of their features were especially worthy of note.

Mornings in Florence was differently arranged and in a manner distinguishing it more explicitly from a Murray-style 'dictionary of places'.³⁰ It did propose actual visits, yet these were not presented abstractly, as in a *Handbook*, as so many rationally devised 'tours' or 'routes', but as a sequence of 'Mornings' or 'Walks', whose programmes or itineraries must be discovered experimentally by giving up one's time and entrusting oneself to the author as it were in person. For, rather than by a 'public voice ... characterized by the first person plural and the present tense',³¹ here was a guidebook whose tone was intensely, even importunately, personal,³² one directly addressed to the individual reader-traveller it situated and manoeuvred 'on the spot', being from its third paragraph characteristically couched in the imperative mood:

²⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIII, 293.

²⁵ See *Works of John Ruskin*, XIV.

²⁶ See, e.g., *Works of John Ruskin*, IX, 412–15.

²⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, IX, 360; see Emma Sdegno, in *Tintoretto secondo John Ruskin. Un'antologia veneziana*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2018, 38–44.

²⁸ For both of which the reader is referred to 'Lazari's small guide' (*Works of John Ruskin*, XI, 355), i.e., Vincenzo Lazari and Pietro Selvatico, *Guida di Venezia e delle isole circonvicine*, Paolo Ripamonti Carpano: Venezia, Milano and Verona, 1852.

²⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, IX, 355.

³⁰ Allen, "'Money and little red books'", 214.

³¹ Allen, "'Money and little red books'", 216.

³² Henry James ('Venice', *Italian Hours*, 2) would characterize Ruskin's 'queer late-coming prose' as apparently 'addressed to children of a tender age. It is pitched in the nursery-key, and might be supposed to emanate from an angry governess.'

Wait then for an entirely bright morning; rise with the sun, and go to Santa Croce, with a good opera-glass in your pocket, with which you shall for once, at any rate, see an "opus"; and, if you have time, several opera. Walk straight to the chapel on the right of the choir ("k" in your Murray's Guide). When you first get into it, you will see nothing but a modern window of glaring glass, with a red-hot cardinal in one pane – which piece of modern manufacture takes away at least seven-eighths of the light (little enough before) by which you might have seen what is worth sight. Wait patiently till you get used to the gloom. Then, guarding your eyes from the accursed modern window as best you may, take your opera-glass, and look to the right, at the uppermost of the two figures beside it.³³

The passage is suggestive of the relation Ruskin intended his guide should hold to Murray's (which it strategically places in the reader-traveller's hands) – a relation which the term 'Morning' itself hints at. *Mornings in Florence* was not a substitute for the *Handbook* but a contrastive supplement to it. Its readers are supposed by Ruskin routinely to consult their Murray and to be hastily engaged in 'seeings' and 'shopping' outside of the hours they dedicate to him.³⁴ He does not indeed require them to give up their whole day to him, only, should they choose, its first and best part, and so share with him a radically different experience of place. Here was a guidebook that acknowledged 'ordinary conditions of tourist hurry'³⁵ but that met them with an urgency less of compression than of concentration. It made no claim to be exhaustive or expeditious. The six Mornings issued by Ruskin are not to be weighed against the 'Plan for visiting the sights in Florence and its vicinity in a week' proposed in a *Handbook* of 1861. The four days allotted to the city in that 'Plan' comprise visits to over sixty churches, palaces, museums, gardens, etc.³⁶ On the most generous count *Mornings in Florence* takes in only seven,³⁷ focusing, moreover, largely on three: the mendicant churches of S. Croce and S. Maria Novella (above all its Spanish Chapel) and Giotto's Bell Tower. Ruskin's radical selectiveness corresponds in part to his personal habits of study: 'I can only examine one or two pictures in a day,' he informs readers, 'and never begin with one till I have done with another'.³⁸ Above all, however, it corresponds to his characteristic concern, especially in these years, with essential or 'central' manifestations and statements of religious, ethical and aesthetic principles, and in particular of their unity. Florence for Ruskin is now the geographical and historical locus of 'central Christian art'; the Baptistery of Florence the 'central building of Etrurian Christianity', the link between the pre-Christian and Christian worlds, hence 'of European Christianity'; the Franciscan and Dominican churches close by embodiments of 'the two great religious Powers and Reformers of the thirteenth

³³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIII, 296–97.

³⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXIII, 325, 408.

³⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIII, 302.

³⁶ *Handbook of Florence and its Environs*, London: John Murray, 1861, 96–7.

³⁷ The churches of S. Croce, S. Maria Novella, the Duomo and the Baptistery, the Uffizi gallery and Giotto's Bell Tower.

³⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIII, 361.

century; St. Francis, who taught Christian men how they should behave, and St. Dominic, who taught Christian men what they should think.'³⁹

This thematic structure is explicitly expressed in Ruskin's earliest, fast ramifying schemes for the work, set out in personal letters of September 1874. To Norton, for instance, he had first written of 'a "Walk in Florence"' explanatory of 'Giotto's frescos of S^t Francis in S^ta Croce – and the Gospel of Works; and Simon Memmis Frescoes of S^t Dominic [in S. Maria Novella] and the Gospel of Faith'. A week later this single Walk had become 'three cheap Walks or mornings in Florence', two dedicated to the subjects already specified and a third to the Baptistery.⁴⁰ And only a few days after this he had informed his cousin Joan there would be 'four Mornings (or Walks) in Florence':

1. The Golden Gate
2. Before the Soldan
3. Before the Emperor
4. The Bronze Gate.

I think this will be quaint and nice.

"The Soldan" is Giotto's greatest fresco in Santa Croce.

"The Emperor" principal figure in Spanish Chapel.

The Bronze Gate, Ghiberti's, but dwelling, not on it – but on old Etruscan bronze and the Baptistery ...⁴¹

In the event no separate Morning was dedicated to the Baptistery, which however is evoked throughout as a literally central presence; whereas two each were given over to S. Croce and the Spanish Chapel, with another devoted to further parts of S. Maria Novella (the Ghirlandaio cycle in the choir and some Giottesque frescoes in the Green Cloister); and the last in the sequence as published by Ruskin – the sixth Morning, issued in 1877 – was devoted to Giotto's Bell Tower, for the sake of its sculpture, illustrative of the development of 'human art under heavenly guidance'.⁴²

A 'pilgrim's guide to Venice'

In directing George Allen, in February 1877, to send to Venice copies of 'The relation of engraving to other arts in Florence' 'bound in red like the Walks in Florence', so that like 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret' it might be placed on sale at the Accademia, Ruskin expressed the hope that sales 'of M. Angelo – of that [the lecture on engraving] – and of the New Guides' would together suffice to balance the printers' bills, about which Allen had evidently expressed concern.⁴³ By

³⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIII, 240, 298, 299.

⁴⁰ J. Ruskin to C.E. Norton, 7 September, 16 September 1874, *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 333, 334.

⁴¹ J. Ruskin to J. Severn, 20 September 1874, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 33.

⁴² *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIII, 415.

⁴³ J. Ruskin to G. Allen, 13 February 1877, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 216.

'New Guides' he almost certainly intended, not two or more works, but multiple copies or parts of one. Nor, in referring to this work in these terms, was he quoting its title. For rather than to the *Guide to the Accademia*, to which neither diary, correspondence nor writings had yet made explicit reference, the allusion must have been to *St. Mark's Rest*. In Letter 75 of *Fors Clavigera*, written at the beginning of that month, he had referred readers to its opening chapter, then in press, calling it his 'little Venetian guide'.⁴⁴ And it was no doubt also *St. Mark's Rest* he had intended when the previous month he had written to Charles Eliot Norton that he was now at work on a 'new history and guide in Venice'.⁴⁵ Indeed, *St. Mark's Rest's* subtitle – *The History of Venice, Written for the Help of the Few Travellers who still Care for her Monuments* – shows that, like the 'Venetian Index' to *Stones of Venice* and like *Mornings in Florence*, it was meant for use by the tourist.⁴⁶ Indeed, a glance at its opening sentences proves it to be a guide very much in the vein of *Mornings in Florence*, whose small (crown octavo) format as well as whose red covers it shared. Here too was a text directly addressed to the individual traveller in the imperative mood, in avowed competition with Murray and expressing a vigorously selective sense of purpose:

Go first into the Piazzetta, and stand anywhere in the shade, where you can well see its two granite pillars.

Your Murray tells you that they are "famous," and that the one is "surmounted by the bronze lion of St. Mark, the other by the statue of St. Theodore, the Protector of the Republic."

It does not, however, tell you why, or for what the pillars are "famous."

No less than its Florentine predecessor, this was a guide that rejected the model promulgated by the *Handbooks*, a characteristic of which was the relegation of material illustrative of historical context to optionally consulted introductory sections.⁴⁷ Here, by contrast, as in *Mornings in Florence*, the text simulated direction of the actual experience and observation of place and its defining objects; and such directive language was integrated into discourse of a more general tenor, whose broad historical and aesthetic considerations was meant to inform and lend coherence to the reader-traveller's experience as it unfolded. As its own subtitle declared, *Mornings in Florence* was at once a guide to the city and a series of *Simple Studies in Christian Art*; while, as John Wharltton Bunney accurately remarked towards the end of February, the work in hand was to be 'a guide to Venice which will comprise the history as well, of course a short one more in reference to the

⁴⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIX, 61.

⁴⁵ J. Ruskin to C.E. Norton, 16 January 1877, *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 389.

⁴⁶ A first version ('The History of Venice / Written for the guidance of / English Travellers / While they visit her ruins') was fixed on by 21 January (J. Ruskin to G. Allen, 21 January 1877, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 201–02).

⁴⁷ Or indeed, as in the case of Ruskin's own 'Venetian Index', preliminary 'Explanatory Note' (*Works of John Ruskin*, XI, 355–58).

monuments than anything else'.⁴⁸ Here indeed was a guide in which 'reference to the monuments' assumed a new and still more urgent directness and importance, summed up in Jeanne Clegg's apt definition of this late work as Ruskin's 'pilgrim's guide to Venice'⁴⁹ and deriving from the peculiar circumstances of its genesis and production.

Ruskin had come to Venice the previous September intending to work towards the new edition of *The Stones of Venice* which his friend, the antiquarian and historian Rawdon Brown,⁵⁰ encouraged by Queen Victoria's youngest son, Prince Leopold, had urged him to undertake.⁵¹ Ruskin himself had long included the book in plans to publish radically revised editions of his early writings. In 1871 a new series of his Collected Work had been inaugurated with this aim and *The Stones of Venice* was to have appeared there in 1873–74. In the event, however, Ruskin authorized Smith, Elder and Co., the original publishers, to issue a new three-volume edition (the so-called Autograph Edition, 1874), promising in the Preface that 'some portions ... [would] ultimately be published in such abstract as [would] make at once the first purpose of the book apparent, and its final statements conclusive'.⁵² A year later, in *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin committed himself to extending the series of 'school books' or 'grammars' he was then producing for St George's Company so as to include his former writings on art: 'the giving of clear and separate directions for elementary art-practice' was now 'an imperative duty' and would complement his 'other school books on the Earth and its Flowers' (i.e. *Deucalion* and *Proserpina*). *Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Elements of Drawing*, he would 'cut ... to pieces', retaining only what he desired 'to ratify, and fasten with nails in a sure place, with instant applicability to school and university exercises'.⁵³ The first part of his revised grammar of drawing would be issued in September 1877.⁵⁴

In the course of the autumn his idea of the new edition of *Stones* altered incessantly. On his very first day in the city he reported to his cousin, 'I have been

⁴⁸ J.W. Bunney to C.F. Murray, 27 February 1877, English Manuscript 1281, The University of Manchester Library, Manchester. I am grateful to Sarah Bunney and to the University of Manchester Library for permission to quote from this letter.

⁴⁹ Clegg, *Ruskin and Venice*, 174.

⁵⁰ Rawdon Lubbock Brown (1806–83) had been resident in Venice since 1833. From 1862 he had been employed by the Master of the Rolls, then head of the Public Record Office, to transcribe and edit Venetian state papers concerning Britain.

⁵¹ J. Ruskin to Prince Leopold, 10 May 1876 (*Works of John Ruskin*, XXXVII, 198–99). Prince Leopold, later Duke of Albany (1853–1884), studied at Christ Church, Oxford, from 1872 to 1876. He attended the lectures Ruskin gave there as Slade Professor of Fine Art and became his friend and supporter. He was a Trustee of Ruskin's Drawing School and Art Collection, made over to the University by deed of gift in 1875.

⁵² *Works of John Ruskin*, IX, 15.

⁵³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 444n.

⁵⁴ *The Laws of Féssole. A Familiar Treatise on the Elementary Principles and Practice of Drawing and Painting. As Determined the Tuscan Masters. Arranged for the Use of Schools*, I, George Allen: Sunnyside, Orpington, Kent, 1877. Three further parts, issued between 1878 and 1879, completed the first volume. The second was to have dealt with colour and to have looked to Venice rather than to Tuscany, as may be seen from its projected Venetian title, *The Laws of Rivo Alto* (i.e. Rialto, the central district of Venice) (*Works of John Ruskin*, XV, xxvii).

correcting my Stones, for printer; and find it mostly all right.' He was astonished, however, at 'the advance of [his] mind' since he wrote it.⁵⁵ A day later, in a letter to Thomas Carlyle, he outlined his plan for 'recasting the Stones of Venice' into a book worthy of the writer he called his 'Master': 'I shall throw off at least half of the present text, and add what I now better know of the real sources of Venetian energy, and what I – worse – know of the causes of Venetian ruin – with some notes on modern Italy which I eagerly hope you will be satisfied with'.⁵⁶ And in letters to his friend Susan Beever and to George Allen written a day later still he compared the prospective edition to her recently published volume of selections from *Modern Painters, Frondes Agrestes* and to a jar of pickled walnuts or cherries in brandy, with 'all the "eloquent" bits in the second and third volume served up ... in sauce of a very different flavour'.⁵⁷ But after a month's work he was writing to Charles Eliot Norton of a 'new fourth vol of stones of Venice';⁵⁸ while in early November he complained to Sir Robert Collins⁵⁹ of the old work's weak grasp of Venetian history and 'sectarian prejudice', calling for some 'lopping away, and the addition of a few cardinal matters, and such summary as now in [his] wider thoughts [would] be more or less clear'.⁶⁰

Yet the task of revision had already acquired fresh significance for Ruskin. In another letter to Carlyle, written not long afterwards, he wrote of the 'new claims' made on him by his old work. Though he had come to Venice 'only to put [himself] into some temper of fancy, in recasting the Stones of Venice', he had 'got a new clue, utterly unseen' by him when he wrote it and which would entail, he foresaw, 'many hours of added toil'. He now conceived of the projected fourth volume of *Stones* as a separate book, 'a short history of Venice for the schools of St George', of which he had already sent the opening part to be set up in type.⁶¹ In December George Allen announced the publication of a new edition of *Stones of Venice* in three volumes, to appear as volumes X, XI and XII of the Collected Work Series. Yet this plan too underwent revision, or rather complication, and within a month Ruskin was planning another new book, 'a little one for travellers, extracts only, not to supersede the big edition – but a sop in the pan meanwhile', as he explained to Allen, who was advised that both this and *St. Mark's Rest* were to be issued in the format used for *Mornings in Florence*. In the event, the first volume of the so-called 'Travellers' Edition' of *Stones of Venice* would not be published until 1879; whereas the revised three-volume edition was never to appear, Allen being directed in mid-

⁵⁵ J. Ruskin to J. Severn, 7/8 September 1876, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, xxxv.

⁵⁶ J. Ruskin to T. Carlyle, 9 September 1876, George Allan Cate, ed., *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1982, 232.

⁵⁷ J. Ruskin to S. Beever and J. Ruskin to G. Allen, 10 September 1876, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXVII, 208.

⁵⁸ J. Ruskin to C.E. Norton, 5 October 1876, *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 387.

⁵⁹ Sir Robert Hawthorn Collins (1841–1908), former tutor to Prince Leopold and subsequently 'Comptroller' of his household.

⁶⁰ J. Ruskin to R. Collins, 12 November 1877, Hewison, *Ruskin on Venice*, 330.

⁶¹ J. Ruskin to T. Carlyle, 15 November 1876, *Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin*, 234.

March to 'continue the numbers of the great series [of the Collected Works] – leaving Stones of Venice till it [was] ready'.⁶²

The title of Ruskin's new history of Venice alludes to the city's founding legend, encapsulated in the 'motto' inscribed on the open book on which the winged lion symbolizing its patron saint and the Republic rests a paw: *Pax tibi Marce evangelista meus* (Peace be unto you, Mark my evangelist). In Venetian tradition these words, spoken by an angel to the apostle while his ship lay moored off the islands or mudbanks from which Venice would later rise, foretold the transportation there from Alexandria of his martyred remains.

Ruskin's choice of title indicates the nature of the 'new clue' he was now following.⁶³ It signalled rejection of the complacent anti-Catholicism of the old *Stones*; and it obliquely announced the self-criticism that later opened the chapter devoted to the basilica of St Mark's, 'The Requiem' (1879). Ruskin there writes that on rereading the account of the church given in *Stones*, he was 'struck, almost into silence, by wonder at [his] own pert little Protestant mind, which never thought for a moment of asking what the Church had been built for!' ⁶⁴ He had stated that the saint's body had certainly been brought to Venice and placed in the first church of St Mark's, but also that it had 'without doubt' perished in the fire that destroyed that church. He had gone on to dismiss the supposed recovery of the saint's body, at the time of the existing church's consecration, as 'what [appeared] to have been one of the best arranged and most successful impostures ever attempted by the clergy of the Romish Church', bent, in his view, on securing the revenues consequent on possession of the relics and fomenting a 'peculiar solemnity ... in the minds of the Venetian people'.⁶⁵ In 'The Requiem' it is precisely the solemn and imaginative character of the *habitus* common to those minds that concerns Ruskin, the lived rather than veridical truth of the tradition and its various expression:

Whether God ever gave the Venetians what they thought He had given, does not matter to us; He gave them at least joy and peace in their imagined treasure, more than we have in our real ones.

And He gave them the good heart to build this chapel over the cherished grave, and to write on the walls of it, St. Mark's gospel, for all eyes, and, so far as their power went, for all time.⁶⁶

St. Mark's Rest was to be 'a Catholic history of Venice'.⁶⁷ Throwing off Protestant scruple, it would open itself to the shared trust in tradition distinctive of

⁶² J. Ruskin to G. Allen, [17 March 1877], Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 240; see also James S. Dearden, 'John Ruskin's Venetian ghost', *The Book Collector*, 60/1, 2011, 67–80.

⁶³ It also illustrates the intertextual relations of the writings in hand that winter. The angelic prediction had come into his head on 31 December in connection with the projected second volume of his new drawing manual (see note 54). Ruskin noted in his diary the traditional motto's possible 'use and bearing on the peace given by Venetian colour to piety' (Diary, 31 December 1876 [*Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, xlii–iiin]).

⁶⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 2

⁶⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, X, 74.

⁶⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 278.

the Catholic mind and illustrate, even participate in, the common language of legend, image and ornament which that trust sustained. It is perhaps best understood as a practical exercise in 'historical theology', in Ruskin's broad, iconomythographic sense of the term.⁶⁸ It would not provide dictionary-like lists of 'dates and Doges to be learned off by rote'.⁶⁹ It would trace the rise and fall of Venice, not so much as political power, but as collective formative witness to the 'imagined treasure' of its spiritual faith. 'Great nations,' Ruskin stated in the Preface, 'write their autobiographies in three manuscripts: – the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art':

Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others; but of the three, the only quite trustworthy one is the last. The acts of a nation may be triumphant by its good fortune; and its words mighty by the genius of a few of its children: but its art, only by the general gifts and common sympathies.

Again, the policy of a nation may be compelled, and, therefore, not indicative of its true character. Its words may be false, while yet the race remain unconscious of their falsehood; and no historian can assuredly detect the hypocrisy. But art is always instinctive; and the honesty or pretence of it is therefore open to the day ...

The evidence, therefore, of the third book is the most vital to our knowledge of any nation's life; and the history of Venice is chiefly written in such manuscript.⁷⁰

Thus, in its concern to discover and morally salvage such vital evidence, *St. Mark's Rest* would literally guide the traveller to the monuments and institutions that had embodied it, in statues and pictures, in relics and stories of martyrdom and miracle, in churches and confraternities or *scuole*, with their emblems and *mariegole*, the corporate statutes and rule-books that Ruskin, with the assistance of Rawdon Brown and his circle of librarians and archivists, began to seek out, in the *Museo Correr* and in the city's Archives, early in the New Year.⁷¹

Here was a guide that forcibly converted 'the English respectable Tourist' into nothing less indeed than a pilgrim, a latter-day acolyte, in Ruskin's aspiration, of the saint and martyr Ursula, held up as a model in the foregoing months to readers of *Fors Clavigera*. In Letter 71, dated 4 October 1876 – one of the three added after Easter to the stock of pamphlets forming the 'little bookstall' at the Accademia – Ruskin had published a version of the saint's legend especially compiled for him by an Oxford graduate and disciple, James Reddie Anderson, on the basis of research carried out in Venice that autumn.⁷² It told how Ursula, a Christian princess of

⁶⁷ J. Ruskin to S. Beever, 23 January 1877, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXVII, 217.

⁶⁸ J. Ruskin to J.R. Anderson, 3 January 1877, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 760n.

⁶⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 268.

⁷⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 203.

⁷¹ See Ruskin, *Guida ai principali dipinti*, 22 and n.

⁷² Anderson (1850-1907) was born in Glasgow and had matriculated at Glasgow University in 1865. As a student he was among the organizers of an unsuccessful attempt to have Ruskin elected Rector in 1868. The following year he entered Balliol College, Oxford, though

'Britain',⁷³ had been demanded in marriage by the heathen prince of England and had accepted him on three conditions; first, that together with his parents he be baptized; second, that she might be granted three years 'to go to and fro upon the sea', to 'visit the bodies of the Saints in Rome, and the blessed places of the Holy Land'; and third, 'that he choose ten fair maidens of his kingdom, and with each of these a thousand more, all of gentle blood' to accompany her 'in gladness' on her 'holy pilgrimage'.⁷⁴ Then in Letter 73, dated 20 November 1876, Ruskin had partly fulfilled a promise made the previous month, to compare 'the unrejoicing manner of travel adopted by the sagacious modern tourist, and his objects of contemplation', with St Ursula's.⁷⁵ For the aim of the education he was trying to provide for his readers was, he now explained, to teach them 'how to be rightly amused': 'indeed, all real education', he specified, begins in baptism and 'goes on into an entirely merry and amused life, like St. Ursula's; and ends in a delightful death'. And yet

to be amused like St. Ursula you must feel like her, and become interested in the distinct nature of Bad and Good. Above all, you must learn to know faithful and good men from miscreants. Then you will be amused by knowing the histories of the good ones – and very greatly entertained by visiting their tombs, and seeing their statues. You will even feel yourselves pleased, some day, in walking considerable distances, with that and other objects, and so

the death of his father prevented him from matriculating until April 1870. Poor health undermined his academic career and he took a pass degree in 1874. That same year, having meanwhile attended Ruskin's lectures and made his personal acquaintance, he was entrusted, in the Professor's absence, with the job of organizing the troop of undergraduates who, responding to the suggestion 'that one's chief exercise ought to be in useful work, not in cricket or rowing merely' (*Works of John Ruskin*, XXXVII, 735), volunteered for Ruskin's road-making and green-tending project at North Hinksey. Following his graduation Anderson settled in Edinburgh, to study for the Scottish Bar, but in this he was again thwarted by ill health. After spending the autumn of 1876 in Venice with Ruskin, he settled in Keswick, marrying a cousin in 1882. For his 'Story of St Ursula' Anderson drew principally on a vernacular version of her legend contained in two codices in the *Biblioteca Nazionale* in Florence (*Fondo Magliabechiano*), published in Francesco Zambrini, *Collezioni di leggende inedite scritte nel buon secolo della lingua italiana*. Vol. 1. Bologna: Società Tipografica Bolognese e Ditta Sassi, 1855. This he combined with elements from a twelfth-century revision of the *Passio sanctorum undecim millium virginum*, which incorporated the visionary 'Revelations' of Elizabeth of Schönau and Hermann Joseph (first published by Johann Hubert Kessel in 1863), and from Jacopo da Varazze's *Golden Legend* (among them the detail of Ursula's martyrdom by being shot by an arrow, not present in Zambrini).

⁷³ In Anderson's main source, the vernacular version of the legend published by Zambrini in 1855, Ursula is the daughter of the King of Hungary and her suitor the son of a *re di pagania d'oltremare* ('a heathen' king 'of over-seas'). Anderson here preferred a tradition deriving from the early German and British sources (and followed by Jacopo da Varazze), whereby Ursula was princess of 'Britain' (Anderson's translation of *Britannia*, which could signify either Britain or Brittany) and her suitor prince of England.

⁷⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 740–42.

⁷⁵ Letter 72, dated 9 November 1876, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 766.

truly seeing foreign countries, and the shrines of the holy men who are alive in them, as well as the shrines of the dead.⁷⁶

'Two separate little guides'

It was precisely on account of her legendary pilgrimage that St Ursula – and not, for instance, St Theodore, like her a martyr and titular saint of a *scuola*, whose story was recounted in another of the three letters from *Fors Clavigera* available for purchase at the Accademia from the spring of 1877⁷⁷ – was the principal tutelary spirit of this long and strenuous Venetian stay. But it was also because her story had found pictorial form in a cycle of paintings created at the close of the fifteenth century by the Venetian painter Vittore Carpaccio, to make a thorough study of whose work had been Ruskin's second main purpose in coming to Venice. However, this programme of work had also undergone revision since his arrival. He had intended to discover 'everything that could be known of the circumstances which led to the building, and determined style' of 'Carpaccio's chapel'⁷⁸ – the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni – with its representations by the painter of the lives of St George, St Jerome and St Tryphonius. Yet it had been the cycle illustrating the legend of St Ursula, painted for the Scuola di S. Orsola but exhibited in the Accademia since 1828, which had dominated the first months of his stay. This was in part a consequence of the opportunity accorded him by the authorities for prolonged private study of two of the canvases comprising the cycle, representing respectively *The Dream of St Ursula* (Fig. 2) and her *Martyrdom and Funeral*. These had been taken down from the walls and placed, one at a time, at his disposal in a secluded and well-lit room.⁷⁹

So far as its position high on the wall and the general lack of light in the gallery had permitted, he had studied the *Dream* on a visit to Venice in 1872, and he had published an interpretation of it in *Fors Clavigera*, in a letter which would be the third of the group he had bound in red and placed on sale at the Accademia in 1877.⁸⁰

The image had painful personal significance for him, on account of his association of the figure of St Ursula with Rose La Touche, the Irish girl whom in 1866, when she was eighteen, he had asked to marry him. Like Ursula, she had requested her suitor wait three years, the prelude, as it turned out, to nine marked recurrently by estrangement, illness and hopelessness, as they were forced apart, by the active opposition of her parents, but more especially by Rose's frantic response to her own and Ruskin's love, crushed between his (to her) deplorable 'paganism' and terror of disobedience to her father.

⁷⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIX, 23–24.

⁷⁷ Letter 75, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIX, 61–65.

⁷⁸ J. Ruskin to C.E. Norton, 2 August [1876], *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 384.

⁷⁹ The so-called Sala delle statue, one of the first-floor rooms created within the disused church of S. Maria della Carità when it had been assigned to the Accademia by the Napoleonic government. Containing casts (*Works of John Ruskin*, XXXIII, 315), it was illuminated by a large octagonal sky-light.

⁸⁰ Letter 20, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVII, 334–51.

It has been pointed out that Ruskin's description of the painting in *Fors* bears the same date (5 July 1872) as that on which, drawing in 'Carpaccio's chapel', he received a telegram from friends in England to whom Rose had turned in despair, urging him to come home to meet her.⁸¹ Ruskin's grim response⁸² reflects the stress and pain of the foregoing years. It also sheds a poignant light on his own representation of Carpaccio's martyr saint as a paragon of 'happy industry' and self-command, seen elsewhere in the series, he notes, quietly discussing the question of her marriage with her 'moody and sorrowful' father.⁸³ This representation was less perhaps 'an image of his hopes for the moment'⁸⁴, as Jeanne Clegg has suggested, than one of what Rose and her religion might have been, an epitome of quiet diligence and delight, and above all of 'sacred imagination of things that are not', exercised in serenity.⁸⁵

Certainly, as Clegg has also remarked, Ruskin's reading of the *Dream* later altered significantly on account of Rose's tragic death in 1875.⁸⁶ Its intense scrutiny in the light of the 'new clue' revealed to him in the winter of 1876–77 also transformed Ruskin's understanding of the painting and of Carpaccio's work in general: he came to recognize the artist as bearing equivocal witness to the 'imagined treasure' of spiritual reality and thus crucial to understanding the potentially dubious character of the 'sacred imagination of things that are not' whose history was recorded in the book of Venice's art, and in particular of its painting.⁸⁷

There had of course been only occasional reference to Venetian painting in the main body of *The Stones of Venice*; while its 'Venetian Index', though supplying 'somewhat copious notices'⁸⁸ of the paintings of Tintoretto, had referred the reader-traveller to a very limited number of pictures, mostly by the artists recommended in its initial note: Giovanni Bellini, Veronese and Titian. It had contained a very summary account of the principal collection of Venetian painting, the gallery of the Accademia. After calling attention to the sculptures over the entrance (Fig. 3) – 'remarkable for their rude cutting at so late a date, 1377' – Ruskin had questioned

⁸¹ See J. Ruskin to J. Severn, 26 December 1876, Van Akin Burd, ed., *Christmas Story. John Ruskin's Venetian Letters of 1876-1877*, Newark: University of Delaware Press / London and Toronto: Associate University Presses, 1990, 209, according to which Ruskin was drawing 'St Jerome's [actually St Augustine's] chair' in Carpaccio's *Death of St Jerome*. The drawing is now at The Ruskin, Lancaster University (RF 1996P0889). See also Clegg, *Ruskin and Venice*, 150; Hewison, *Ruskin on Venice*, 311.

⁸² 'I will come home, but I cannot instantly, and when I come it will not be to talk'. In answer to a request to know his wishes, he wrote: 'I wish that I could recover lost years, – and raise the dead. But not much more. I do not wish Rose to die. What can in any wise be done for her peace – or – if she still be capable of it – happiness – I am ready to do – for my part, if she will make up her mind, and tell me when she has, face to face. (I will hear her no otherwise)' (J. Ruskin to G. MacDonald, 8 July 1872, parts quoted in Burd, *Christmas Story*, 210n and Hewison, *Ruskin on Venice*, 310.

⁸³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVII, 347.

⁸⁴ Clegg, *Ruskin and Venice*, 150.

⁸⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVII, 346.

⁸⁶ Clegg, *Ruskin and Venice*, 150.

⁸⁷ See Ruskin, *Guida ai principali dipinti*, 42–46.

⁸⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XI, 360.

conventional admiration of Titian's *Assumption* (Fig. 4), encouraging the traveller rather to 'discover the merit of the more profound and solemn works of Bellini and Tintoret'. Among the latter he had singled out *The Death of Abel* and *Adam and Eve* (Figs 5 and 6), hung either side of the Titian, as 'characteristic examples of the master, and in many respects better pictures, than the much vaunted "Miracle of St. Mark"'. He had also recommended that in 'the great room' (then numbered XIX)

the traveller should examine carefully all the pictures by Vittor Carpaccio and Gentile Bellini, which represent scenes in ancient Venice; they are full of interesting architecture and costume. Marco Basaiti's *Agony in the Garden* is a lovely example of the religious school. The Tintorets in this room are all second rate, but most of the Veroneses are good, and the large ones are magnificent.⁸⁹

When, at the start of 1877, he began to revise the 'Venetian Index' for the projected Travellers' Edition, Ruskin must have seen that the shortcomings of this account, and especially its very limited reference to Carpaccio, required more than mere amendment. In a note appended to this entry and dated '1877' he declared his decision to let it stand, in that 'careful notice of as many pictures as travellers [were] likely to have time to look at' might be found in the sixth chapter of *St. Mark's Rest*.⁹⁰ Given that this chapter as published in October 1877 ('Red and White Clouds') does not contain any such notice, this can only be an uncorrected reference to an early draft, written before the end of February, by which point Ruskin had decided to devote a separate guide to the Accademia.⁹¹ Indeed, in the Preface to *St. Mark's Rest*, he would announce that '[t]wo] separate little guides, one to the Academy, the other to San Giorgio de' Schiavoni' were in preparation and that he hoped to issue them together with the history's opening numbers,⁹² in time for the Easter influx of English tourists. In the event, Part I of the *Guide* to the Accademia, written within a month, preceded by at least a fortnight the arrival on the porter's table of Part I of *St. Mark's Rest*. A single guide to San Giorgio degli Schiavoni was never published as such, but rather in the form of two Supplements to *St. Mark's Rest*, first issued in December 1877 and April 1879.⁹³

⁸⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XI, 361.

⁹⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XI, 361.

⁹¹ Ruskin's first mention of the *Guide* to the Accademia as a distinct project appears to be in a letter to Joan Severn of 24 February 1877, The Ruskin, Lancaster University, L 41: 'I've got five chapters of my new history written; and shall have a guide to the Venetian Academy out by Easter'. I am grateful to The Ruskin, Lancaster University for permission to quote this extract.

⁹² *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 204–05.

⁹³ Respectively, 'The shrine of the slaves: being a guide to the principal pictures of Victor Carpaccio in Venice' and 'The place of dragons', in later editions Chs X and XI of *St. Mark's Rest*. The second, written for Ruskin by James Reddie Anderson was apparently completed around the time he began work on the *Guide* to the Accademia and may well have stimulated his decision to give this separate form. In his letter to Joan Severn of 24 February (see note 91), Ruskin told her how 'Jamie Anderson has done such a glorious piece of work for me! people will be delighted'. Ruskin however had not yet read Anderson's MS, which must have arrived the next day. He responded enthusiastically on 26 February: 'It is so

The *Guide*, like *St. Mark's Rest*, immediately declares its dissociation from the dictionary-style model of the Murray *Handbooks*, opening with as peremptory an indication of priorities. Indeed, in its first edition it began with the provoking exaction: 'In the first place, if the weather is fine, go outside the gate you have just come in at, and look above it.'⁹⁴ Clearly, this was not to be a casually or conventionally ordered visit. What the traveller was literally to go out of his/her way to observe were the sculptures to which Ruskin had previously drawn attention in the 'Venetian Index' (Fig. 3). Only now their retarded rudeness is presented as of positive historical significance and value: they are quite simply 'three of the most precious pieces of sculpture in Venice; her native work, dated; and belonging to the school of severe Gothic which indicates the beginning of her Christian life in understanding of its real claims upon her'⁹⁵ – where the allusion to the 'real claims upon' Venice of her religion of course echoes Ruskin's recent sense of its 'new claims' on himself. The sculptures are read as an index of the quality which from the start marked the city's independent artistic efforts as distinctively Venetian. Referring to the central group of the *Virgin and Child* (Fig. 7), Ruskin prompts:

You see the infant sprawls on her knee in an ungainly manner: she herself sits with quiet maiden dignity, but in no manner of sentimental adoration.

That is Venetian naturalism; showing their henceforward steady desire to represent things as they really (according to the workman's notions) might have existed. It begins first in this century, separating itself from the Byzantine formalism, the movement being the same which was led by Giotto in Florence fifty years earlier.⁹⁶

This object lesson in Venetian naturalism will serve to orient the traveller's visit to the collection of Venetian painting, the development of which art at Venice, Ruskin stresses, was preceded by that of sculpture:

Clearly, until we know how to do better than this, in perspective and such matters, our painting cannot come to much. Accordingly, all the Venetian painting of any importance you are now to see in the Academy is subsequent to these sculptures. But these are, fortunately, dated 1378 and 1384. Twenty years more will bring us out of the fourteenth century. And therefore, broadly,

wonderful – so beautiful – all that you have discovered; – a very treasure of heart jewels – Beautifully done, as far as I have read – faultlessly;' and he further expounded his plan to publish Anderson's essay together with an Introduction of his own as 'a separate number of *St. Mark's Rest*'. Anderson was to deal with the 'mythologic parts' of the cycles, Ruskin with the 'artistic and sentimental': his Introduction would be Anderson's essay, he hoped, 'just what the landscape [was] to the figures, in the pictures themselves' (J. Ruskin to J.R. Anderson, 25 and 26 February 1877, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 224, 225).

⁹⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 149.

⁹⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 149.

⁹⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 149.

all the painter's art of Venice begins in the fifteenth ...⁹⁷

The uncompromisingly selective character of the visit is clearly signalled in this prelude's sharp, categorical close: 'and we may as well at once take note that it [the painter's art of Venice] ends with the sixteenth. There are only these two hundred years of painting in Venice.'⁹⁸

The *Guide* does not enter into open contest with Murray's 'little red books'. Though Ruskin does mock the traveller's anxious self-subjection to the tyranny of the 'railroad station' clock,⁹⁹ he makes no explicit reference to 'Mr. Murray' as coadjutant. Nor indeed does he cite the *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy* at all, but only the official catalogue¹⁰⁰ – which, however, as the *Handbook* perhaps complacently specified, gave merely 'the name of the painter, the subject, the locality where the painting originally stood, and its dimensions'.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, though indirectly and in part, the *Guide* may be seen as corrective of the account of the Accademia given in the *Handbook* – in ways manifestly driven by that same effort to reform his 'Art teaching' which motivated Ruskin's 'Venice business' and attendant 'gulph of new work' that winter.¹⁰² And its manner of correction helps explain the presence on the Accademia porter's table of the two booklets whose relation to the others still remains to be examined – booklets apparently not of immediate pertinence but nevertheless the first to be sent out to Venice: 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret' and 'The relation of engraving to other arts in Florence', which we must now consider.

'The deadly change'

Delivered, as stated earlier, at Oxford in June 1871, the lecture on Michelangelo and Tintoretto had been published as a pamphlet the following year. Its title-page had described it as 'Seventh of the Course of Lectures on Sculpture', i.e. the series given in the autumn of 1870 and revised and published as *Aratra Pentelici* in 1871. The editors of the Library Edition viewed this as 'inaccurate and misleading',¹⁰³ since the lecture had been delivered 'in another connexion and for another purpose'.¹⁰⁴ Though overlooking the fact that in the lecture itself Ruskin specifically referred to it as 'concluding' the previous autumn's series, and that he had there deployed a typically wide-angled conception of sculpture,¹⁰⁵ they were nevertheless right to

⁹⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 150.

⁹⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 150.

⁹⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 152.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 151.

¹⁰¹ *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, thirteenth edition, London: John Murray, 1874, 371. For Ruskin's use of this edition see *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 207 and n.

¹⁰² J. Ruskin to G. Allen, 13 February 1877, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 216.

¹⁰³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXII, 75.

¹⁰⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 150.

¹⁰⁵ He had indeed begun the series by affirming the essential unity of sculpture and painting, a unity reiterated at the start of this lecture, dedicated to 'the works of the two masters who accomplished or implied the unity of these arts' (*Works of John Ruskin*, XX, 199–219; XXII, 77).

separate the lecture from the preceding course. Not, however, that they were wholly justified in this by the 'purpose' they alluded to – a critical review, for the benefit of 'strangers' and students, of the important group of drawings by Michelangelo and Raphael acquired for the newly erected University Galleries by public subscription in 1846. Ruskin's declared intention to state the mode in which these might be 'useful or dangerous to [his] pupils' does not seem adequately to motivate his choice of subject and its treatment.¹⁰⁶ It fails fully to explain the fact that this lecture marks the beginning of a new phase in Ruskin's teaching of art at Oxford, as regards both its general approach and its specific content.

In the summer of 1870 Ruskin had thought to devote the course of lectures which was to follow his inaugural series on 'The limits and elementary practice of art', held the previous spring, to one painting, Tintoretto's *Paradise*, of which he made a close study in Venice in June.¹⁰⁷ His subsequent decision to dedicate this course to 'The elementary principles of sculpture' appears more consistent with the theoretical framework and programme set out in that inaugural series and encapsulated in a diagram displayed in the lecture on 'Line' delivered on 9 March (Fig. 8). This presented 'a broad historical division of schools'¹⁰⁸ whose distinctions were at once chronological or progressive and formal, defined as they were in terms of the primary formative elements of art – line, light and shade, colour, mass – and their combinations across various media and forms. As may be seen, in this scheme Venetian painting of the sixteenth century, in particular that of Titian, represented the full summation of elements and the acme of formal expression. The lecture on Michelangelo and Tintoretto asserted (or reasserted) a different, indeed conflicting, understanding of the historic progression of art, one whose logic was not formal but moral.

It was the 'historic value' in this sense, not only of the University Galleries' prestigious collection of Old Master drawings, but of sixteenth-century Italian art in general which Ruskin set out to explain in this lecture. He first sketched the general 'course of Art' common to 'all nations of the world who have practised it successfully', dividing this into three periods of moral development. A preliminary, 'savage' phase of unformed conscience gives way to one characterized by discovery of and sincere adherence to 'the true laws of social order and personal virtue' and in which '[a]ll the Arts advance steadily ... and are lovely, even in their deficiencies'. In a third and final period the conscience succumbs to complacency and compromise and religion becomes 'pompous'; 'so that a magnificent display of the powers of art it has gained by sincerity, takes place for a few years, and is then followed by their extinction, rapid and complete exactly in the degree in which the nation resigns itself to hypocrisy'.¹⁰⁹

Ruskin focuses on five artists – Giovanni Bellini, Titian, Tintoretto, Raphael and Michelangelo – the first three representative of the arts of Venice, the other two,

¹⁰⁶ *Works of John Ruskin* XXII, 77. A scholarly catalogue by John Charles Robinson had been published by the University Press in 1870, the first year of Ruskin's Professorship, and this may have prompted him to express his own critical opinion of the drawings of Michelangelo in particular.

¹⁰⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XX, li.

¹⁰⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XX, 125.

¹⁰⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXII, 79–80.

somewhat inaccurately, of those of Florence. Only the first belongs (essentially) to the second period, whereas the others variously represent the third's 'iridescence of dying statemanship' and 'magnificence of hollow piety'. Ruskin homes in on a critical interval of forty years, 1480–1520, which sees a fatal fourfold transition: between '[f]aultless and perfect' and 'bad workmanship'; between '[s]erenity of state or action' and 'violence of transitional action'; between a focus on the 'face' and '[p]hysical instead of mental interest'; and lastly, between representation of the face as 'free from either vice or pain' and '[e]vil chosen rather than good'.¹¹⁰ The chronological relations between the above five artists are first 'mapped out', then glossed, as follows:

John Bellini precedes the change, meets, and resists it victoriously to his death. Nothing of flaw or failure is ever to be discerned in him.

Then Raphael, Michael Angelo, and Titian, together, bring about the deadly change, playing into each other's hands – Michael Angelo being the chief captain in evil; Titian, in natural force.

Then Tintoret, himself alone nearly as strong as all the three, stands up for a last fight; for Venice, and the old time. He all but wins it at first; but the three together are too strong for him. Michael Angelo strikes him down; and the arts are ended. "Il disegno di Michael Agnolo." That fatal motto was his death-warrant.¹¹¹

The outline of the 'general course of art' which frames this analysis of 'the deadly change' of 1480–1520 had a recent precedent in the division into three chronologically ordered series of the drawings and photographs exhibited by Ruskin in conjunction with his lecture on 'Verona and its rivers', delivered at the Royal Institution on 4 February 1870. The series were illustrative of 'so-called Lombard architecture ... of Gothic ... [and] of the early period of Revival, with its connected painting'.¹¹² These were chronological but not merely formal or stylistic divisions. They named periods of (broadly) Veronese moral history characterized respectively by 'the introduction of Christianity into barbaric minds'; by 'vital Christianity' and 'the development of the laws of chivalry, and forms of imagination, which are founded on Christianity'; and, lastly, by 'poetical Christianity, rendered such by the return of 'the arts of Greece, and some of its religion'.¹¹³ This third period, also termed 'the Age of the Masters', was characterized by Ruskin as a 'wonderful fifty years' space' of 'perfect work', of which the painting of Giovanni Bellini, and in particular his *Assassination of St Peter Martyr* (Fig. 9), was presented as emblematic.¹¹⁴ A subsequent, fourth period, not represented in the exhibition, was that in which 'even this poetical Christianity expires. The arts become devoted to the pursuit of pleasure: and in that they perish,

¹¹⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXII, 85–86: 'On the face itself, instead of joy or virtue, at the best, sadness, probably pride, often sensuality, and always, by preference, vice or agony as the subject of thought.'

¹¹¹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXII, 83.

¹¹² *Works of John Ruskin*, XIX, 434.

¹¹³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XIX, 434–35.

¹¹⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XIX, 443–45.

except where they are saved by a healthy naturalism, or domesticity'.¹¹⁵

In 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret' Bellini's *Assassination of St Peter Martyr* was again presented as emblematic, this time of the central second phase of the 'general course of art' as realized in early Italian and specifically in Venetian and 'Florentine' history. A comparison of the two accounts of the painting, separated by only one year, provides a measure of the degree to which Ruskin's novel sense of the history of art underwent not only generalization but radicalization at this time. In 'Verona and its rivers' the painting showed

that it mattered not in the least to John ... whether people are martyred or not, so long as one can make a pretty grey of their gowns, and a nice white of their sleeves, and infinite decoration of forest leaves behind, and a divine picture at last out of all. Everything in the world was done and made only that it might be rightly painted – that is the true master's creed.¹¹⁶

In the later lecture, on the other hand, the painting demonstrated how, even where his subject prevented literal observation of the condition of '[s]erenity of state or action', Bellini adopted a principle of 'quiet action or none':

The soldier is indeed striking the sword down into his breast; but in the face of the Saint is only resignation, and faintness of death, not pain – that of the executioner is impassive; and, while a painter of the later schools would have covered breast and sword with blood, Bellini allows no stain of it; but pleases himself by the most elaborate and exquisite painting of a soft crimson feather in the executioner's helmet.¹¹⁷

From an example of blithe absorption in pictorial work – such that 'the entire soul so spent [was] healthy and happy, and [could not] vex itself with questions, cares, or pain'¹¹⁸ – Bellini's painting had come to indicate by contrast the moral 'catastrophe' provoked by Michael Angelo – 'and permitted, or persisted in calamitously, by Tintoret'.¹¹⁹

The divergence of this reading of the *St Peter Martyr* from that proposed in 'Verona and its rivers' was indirectly due to the decision, alluded to earlier, to devote the course of lectures scheduled for the autumn of 1870 to Tintoretto's *Paradise*. This plan had entailed an extension of Ruskin's stay in Italy that summer: from Venice he went on to revisit Florence, after an absence of twenty-five years, in order to re-examine, for comparison with the later Venetian, the early painters of the Tuscan school. Renewed study of and empathy with that school then informed the rather different comparison to which the last of his lectures on sculpture (previous, that is, to 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret') was devoted, namely that between the ancient Greek and Christian Florentine schools – the enumeration of qualities characterizing the latter and rendering it so different from the former –

¹¹⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XIX, 435.

¹¹⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XIX, 445

¹¹⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXII, 85.

¹¹⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XIX, 445.

¹¹⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXII, 85.

'Enthusiasm', 'Obedience', 'Courage', 'Love' and 'Spiritual Imagination' – reading in part like a rehearsal of the 'deadly change', but with the chronology reversed. The 'wonderful fifty years' space' of 'Verona and its rivers' was thus substituted as an object of attention by the fatefully transitional forty of 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret'. In various subsequent courses – 'Sandro Botticelli and the Florentine schools of engraving' (given in 1872 and revised and published as *Ariadne Florentina* between 1873 and 1876); 'Val d'Arno in the thirteenth century' (given in 1873 and published as *Val d'Arno* in 1874); and 'The æsthetic and mathematic schools of art in Florence' (given in 1874 and first published posthumously in the Library Edition) – it was again the earlier Tuscan schools that claimed the attention of Ruskin and his students. In the lectures on engraving, for instance, the chronological divisions were essentially only two, falling either side of the 'change of conscientious and didactic art, into that which proposes to itself no duty beyond technical skill, and no object but the pleasure of the beholder'.¹²⁰ The period of 'deadly change' was here the *terminus ante quem* of an extended 'Age of the Masters', stretching roughly from 1200 to 1500. Ruskin's students were to restrict their study to a select group of twenty-five artists, mostly Florentine, from this time, their names and chronological relations represented graphically in two diagrams (Figs 10 and 11), reproduced in the published version of 'The relation of engraving to other Arts in Florence'.¹²¹ And it was for the sake of these diagrams – its 'classification' as he called them in his letter of instructions to Allen – that in mid-February 1877 this pamphlet too was made available for purchase, duly bound in red, at the Accademia.

An 'easy grip of the whole history of Venetian art'

If the disgust Ruskin felt 'with reading the new edition of Murray's guide', as he reported to his cousin Joan on 22 September 1876, was in the first place due to its evocation of 'the whole London world' and 'hateful English',¹²² it was no doubt exacerbated when he came to peruse the pages dedicated to the Accademia. For here he would have found himself graduated to the status of named 'author of celebrity': for the first time, in the edition consulted,¹²³ the *Handbook for Travellers to Northern Italy* had incorporated some of Ruskin's critical judgements on the Accademia's paintings from the 'Venetian Index' to *Stones of Venice*. Indeed, apart from its negative remarks on Titian's *Assumption* (Fig. 4), almost the whole of the entry on the Accademia was quoted, broken up into short commendatory if generic comments on Tintoretto's *The Death of Abel* and *Adam and Eve* (Figs 5 and 6), on Basaiti's *Agony in the Garden* and on Gentile Bellini and Carpaccio's views of ancient Venice.

The discovery must have sharpened Ruskin's sense that with specific reference to Venetian art the subversive account of sixteenth-century Italian art advanced in 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret' required

¹²⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXII, 325.

¹²¹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXII, facing 330, 333.

¹²² J. Ruskin to J. Severn, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 41, 137.

¹²³ *Handbook for Travellers in North Italy*, thirteenth edition, London: John Murray, 1874.

reasserting. Placing the pamphlet on sale at the Accademia had been a first step in this direction; for in doing so he surely did not intend solely to encourage visitors to the gallery, as he had readers of the 'Venetian Index',¹²⁴ to take the trouble to 'read' this '*chef-d'œuvre*' of the artist he still regarded as Venice's 'noblest son'.¹²⁵ Yet he must also have felt that in this respect the lecture had not been subversive enough or at any rate was in need of supplementation, just as the lecture had been supplemented by subsequent Oxford lectures, centred on early Tuscan art. The *Guide* aimed to effect this by emphatically quoting the passage from the 'Venetian Index' on Titian's *Assumption* which the *Handbook* had omitted (preferring to retain the short eulogy by Thomas Phillips, R.A. already found in editions of the 1850s¹²⁶) and in which Ruskin had irreverently suggested that the high regard in which it was generally held was simply due to its being 'larger than any other [painting] in the room' and containing 'bright masses of red and blue'.¹²⁷ Not only did he quote this passage, however, but he intensified its criticism of the painting:

I wrote this, I have said, *very* rightly, not *quite* rightly. For if a picture is good, it is better for being large, because it is more difficult to paint large than small; and if colour is good, it may be better for being bright.

Nay, the fault of this picture, as I read it now, is in not being bright enough. A large piece of scarlet, two large pieces of crimson, and some very beautiful blue, occupy about a fifth part of it; but the rest is mostly fox colour or dark brown: majority of the apostles under total eclipse of brown. St. John, there being nobody else handsome to look at, is therefore seen to advantage; also St. Peter and his beard but the rest of the lower canvas is filled with; little more than flourishings of arms and flingings of cloaks, in shadow and light.¹²⁸

The broader corrective aim of this self-quotation comes to light if we consider it in its strategic context. It occurs as the dubious culmination of a practical demonstration of the 'whole history of Venetian art',¹²⁹ which, analogously to the lecture on Michelangelo and Tintoretto, identifies the 'perfected results' in particular of Venetian painting with Titian and Tintoretto, while at the same time questioning – on ethical and religious grounds – the very notion of artistic perfection as a

¹²⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XI, 371.

¹²⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXI, 22.

¹²⁶ See e.g. *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, fourth edition, London: John Murray, 1852, 341.

¹²⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XI, 361.

¹²⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 152–53. Cf. Thomas Phillips on the painting: 'In this picture Titian has employed the whole power of his palette, from its brightest and purest light to its richest and deepest tone. The composition divides itself into 3 compartments of unequal size; the largest in the centre, where is the subject of it, the Blessed Virgin. Her action is grand and devout, her character maternal, the arrangement of her drapery such as to produce a full and fine form. It is a glorious work, its power of colour is immense: far beyond that of any other picture of Titian that I have seen' (*Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, thirteenth edition, 1874, 372). In earlier editions the passage had continued: 'and it is painted with great bravura. I wish I could say more of its sentiment, but that is a quality to which it can lay little claim' (*Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, fourth edition, 1852, 341).

¹²⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 156.

progressive principle. This history is succinctly illustrated in the very first pages of Part I, by means of a brief itinerary taking in only six pictures – then all displayed in the first two rooms – and grounded, as stated earlier, in the preliminary pause to observe the three representative fourteenth-century sculptures placed above the entrance 'gate'. This pause prepares the reader-traveller to trace, not so much the advance of artistic perfection as the gradual overwhelming of symbolic figuration by more or less exclusive concern with pictorial excellence and naturalistic 'realization', thus marking a significant qualification of the principle of 'healthy naturalism' cited in 'Verona and its rivers' as having on occasion prevented the giving way of 'poetical Christianity' to the 'pursuit of pleasure' in the fourth and final period of historical development outlined.

The itinerary starts systematically enough with the earliest dated panel in the collection at that time – a *Coronation of the Virgin* (1381) by Stefanus Plebanus (Fig. 12):

Symmetrical, orderly, gay, and in the heart of it nobly grave, this work of the old Plebanus has much in it of the future methods of Venetian composition. The two angels peeping over the arms of the throne may remind you to look at its cusped arches, for we are here in central Gothic time, thirty years after the sea-façade of the Ducal Palace had been built.¹³⁰

The next two paintings exemplify the luminous amalgam of symbolism and naturalism prefigured in the entrance sculptures. A polyptych by Bartolomeo Vivarini (Fig. 13), also dated,¹³¹ shows 'what advance had been made in eighty years' and though 'not of any supreme genius', is nevertheless a 'noble picture ... completely containing the essence of Venetian art':

The figures still hard in outline, thin (except the Madonna's throat, which always, in Venice, is strong as a pillar and much marked in sinew and bone (studied from life, mind you, not by dissection); exquisitely delicate and careful in pure colour; in character, portraits of holy men and women, such as then were. There is no idealism here whatever. Monks and nuns had indeed faces and mien like these saints, when they desired to have the saints painted for them.¹³²

The reader-traveller is now instructed to pass from Room I, containing paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, into Room II, the prestigious Sala dell'Assunta or 'Hall of the Assumption of Titian', to cross this 'quietly to the window opposite' and to look, though with great difficulty, 'hung as it is against the light', at 'a large picture' on the left of it. This, Ruskin asserts, is 'the best John Bellini in the Academy of Venice; the third best in Venice, and probably in the world' (Fig. 14):¹³³

¹³⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 150–51.

¹³¹ *The Virgin and Child; St Andrew; St John the Baptist; St Dominic; St Peter*, 1459, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. Ruskin follows the official catalogue in dating the painting to 1464.

¹³² *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 151.

¹³³ *San Giobbe Altarpiece*, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Repainted, the right-hand angel, and somewhat elsewhere; but on the whole perfect; unspeakably good, and right in all ways. Not inspired with any high religious passion; a good man's work, not an enthusiast's. It is, in principle, merely the perfecting of Vivarini's; the saints, mere portraits of existing men and women; the Madonna, idealized only in that squareness of face and throat, not in anywise the prettier for it, otherwise a quite commonplace Venetian woman. Such, and far lovelier, you may see living to-day, if you can see and may make manifest, if you can paint.¹³⁴

The reader-traveller is now given leave to turn to the Titian (Fig. 4). Informed of what Ruskin had written of it in the 'Venetian Index', and of how he now rates his former opinion, he/she is permitted to estimate it artistically 'unsurpassable', but is alerted (in a way again analogous to 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret') of its true 'place in the history of Venetian art',¹³⁵ summed in 'three points' comparing the *Assumption* with the earlier paintings previously considered.

First: the 'throned Madonnas of Vivarini and Bellini' were '[n]ot at all supposed to *be* ... Madonnas', but were 'symbols' by help of which her presence was conceived:

But this picture of Titian's does not profess to symbolize any Virgin here with us, but only to show how the Virgin was taken away from us a long time ago. And professing to represent this, he does not in the least believe his own representation, nor expect anybody else to believe it. He does not, in his heart, believe the Assumption ever took place at all. He is merely putting together a stage decoration of clouds, little boys, with wings stuck into them, and pantomime actors, in studied positions, to amuse his Venice and himself.¹³⁶

Second: an Ursuline point on the nature of right amusement:

Though desirous of nothing but amusement, he is not, at heart, half so much amused by his work as John Bellini, or one quarter so much amused as the innocent old vicar. On the contrary, a strange gloom has been cast over him, he knows not why; but he likes all his colours dark, and puts great spaces of brown, and crimson passing into black, where the older painters would have made all lively. Painters call this "chiaroscuro." So also they may call a thunder-cloud in the sky of spring; but it means more than light and shade.¹³⁷

Third: the reader-traveller is referred to 'The relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret' for general explanation of the fact that 'in all the three earlier pictures everybody is quiet' whereas in the Titian 'everybody is in a bustle'.¹³⁸ His/her attention is then brusquely diverted to the two paintings by Tintoretto hanging

¹³⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 151–52.

¹³⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 152.

¹³⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 153.

¹³⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 153–54.

¹³⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 154.

either side (Figs 5 and 6).¹³⁹ First gnomically and ominously characterized – 'Darkness visible, with flashes of lightning through it. The thunder-cloud upon us, rent with fire' – these are then glossed in a way that stoically implicates Tintoretto in the 'deadly change':

Nothing comes near Tintoret for colossal painter's power, as such. But you need not think to get any good of these pictures; it would take you twenty years' work to understand the fineness of them as painting; and for the rest, there is little good in them to be got. Adam and Eve no more sat in that warm-weather picnic manner, helping each other politely to apples, on the occasion of their fall, than the Madonna went up all bending about in her red and blue cloak on the occasion of her Assumption. But of the wrong and the truth, the error and the glory of these pictures, I have no time to speak now; nor you to hear. All that you have to notice is that painting has now become a dark instead of bright art, and in many ways a frightful and unpleasant art, or else I will add once for all, referring you for proof of it to the general examples of Venetian work at this late epoch, supplied as a luxury to foreign courts, – a lascivious art.¹⁴⁰

This initial conspectus of Venetian painting, of whose end the death of Tintoretto in 1594 is taken as 'external sign', terminates, in a way reminiscent of 'Verona and its rivers', 'The relation between Michael Angello and Tintoret' and 'The relation of engraving to other arts in Florence', with a summary definition of the three epochs it comprises and a mnemonically motivated shuffling of dates:

essentially, you observe, three. The first we may call the Vivarini epoch, bright, innocent, more or less elementary, entirely religious art, reaching from 1400 to 1480 ; the second (which for reasons presently to be shown, we will call the Carpaccian epoch), sometimes classic and mythic, as well as religious, 1480-1520; the third, supremely powerful art corrupted by taint of death, 1520-1600, which we will call the Tintoret epoch.

Of course the lives of the painters run in and out across these limits; yet if you fasten these firmly in your mind, 80, 40, 80, you will find you have an immense advantage and easy grip of the whole history of Venetian art.¹⁴¹

And the three epochs, thus distinguished, then evaluatively structure the 'more complete [though still highly selective] review'¹⁴² of the Accademia's rooms on which Ruskin conducts the reader-traveller in the remainder of Part I. Representative works of the first and second epochs – by Niccolò Semitecolo, Mantegna, Cima da Conegliano, Carpaccio and Gentile Bellini – are valued for their 'sincerity', nobility and modesty, as well as for their power to restore to the spectator a 'vision of living Venice' characterized by a lost civic and architectural

¹³⁹ Tintoretto, *Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel*, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

¹⁴⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 154–55.

¹⁴¹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 155–56.

¹⁴² *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 157.

'harmony of work and life'.¹⁴³ To these are opposed the admittedly 'splendid' but for the most part morally worthless works of the third epoch – by Bonfacio de' Pitati, Veronese, Titian and Tintoretto – typically dismissed as 'artist's picture[s]' or 'interesting to artists'.¹⁴⁴

In intent and structure the initial survey of the first two rooms of the Accademia forms a close parallel to the 'walk' across Venice required of the reader-traveller in the fourth chapter of *St. Mark's Rest*,¹⁴⁵ a peripatetic 'lesson' in the history of the city as written in her art, specifically in her sculpture.

Moving from St Mark's straight down the Merceria to the Ponte dei Bareteri, on to Campo San Salvador and finally, by gondola from the Riva del Carbon, to the Canale di Cannaregio, Ruskin halts to examine just five carvings, or groups of carvings, mostly reliefs and ranging in date from the Byzantine to the early modern periods. The first two – the seventh- or eighth-century relief on the north façade of St Mark's showing the Apostles as twelve lambs either side of the 'empty' or 'prepared' throne of the Second Coming and the thirteenth-century relief of the seated St George on the west façade of the basilica – are stated to be 'the earliest pieces of real Venetian work' known to him.¹⁴⁶ The third is the relief of *St George and the Dragon* (c. 1500) (Fig. 15) then still set into the wall of a house overlooking the Ponte dei Bareteri;¹⁴⁷ the fourth the mid-seventeenth-century sculptures by Bernardo Falconi¹⁴⁸ atop the façade of San Salvador, formerly the Scuola Grande di San Teodoro, and representing St Theodore and four angels; and the fifth the masks decorating the Ponte delle Guglie (built in 1580 and restored in 1777) over the Canale di Cannaregio.

The city's 'art progress', Ruskin stresses, exhibits the growth of a living organism and must be traced not in mere 'external classification' into 'grouped system' of its products, so much as through a morally penetrative 'power of reading' apt to discern in them and in the phases they epitomize the corresponding 'state of the nation's heart'. Indeed, the walk is explicitly proposed as a test of such power in the traveller.¹⁴⁹ And this too finds its equivalent in the *Guide*, where Carpaccio's *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* (Fig. 16), one of the highlights of the 'more complete review' of Part I, is presented as a standard, in its technical and moral dedication, restraint and harmony, enabling the visitor to take the measure of him/herself, 'outside and in' – in virtue, that is, not only of 'knowledge of art' and 'taste' but also of 'religion' and 'knowledge of men and things'.¹⁵⁰

Like the pictorial survey the sculptural walk serves to illustrate a distinction between epochs or 'cardinal divisions': as there each painting, so here each carving selected is a 'general type' of a given stage of development and affords a lesson in

¹⁴³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 162, 165.

¹⁴⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 157, 158.

¹⁴⁵ Published in October 1877 as the opening number of its second Part, but already written and set up in type by the time Part I of the *Guide* came out.

¹⁴⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 241.

¹⁴⁷ It is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (53 to B-1884).

¹⁴⁸ Or Falcone, otherwise known as Bernardino da Lugano.

¹⁴⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 240–41.

¹⁵⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 159.

'elementary principle'.¹⁵¹ Again as in the survey, the lessons regard the vital but perilous dialectic of Symbolism and Naturalism.

The *scuola* as museum

Following the clues offered by the pamphlets laid out for sale on Ruskin's 'little bookstall' we have uncovered a number of reasons why in the spring of 1877 he should have fixed on the Accademia as target of a critically 'explosive' *Guide* to its pictures, reasons having to do with revisionary understanding of the history of Venice and more generally of the history and function of art. There remains, however, one last factor to be considered, namely the Accademia's status as a public museum.

Donata Levi has suggested that the startling opening of the *Guide*, with its enforced exit and re-entry of the gallery, may be read not only in connection with the critical conviction that sculpture, in Venice as elsewhere, was 'the foundation and school of painting' – a conviction significantly expressed five years later in remarks concerning the prospective 'design for St. George's Museum at Sheffield'¹⁵² – but also as emblematic of Ruskin's native ambivalence towards museums and art galleries as such, in so far as they tended to impoverish, by rendering abstract, both the experience and the knowledge of art.¹⁵³ This interpretation is validated by the fact that, as clearly emerges later in the *Guide*, the sculptures over its entrance are 'precious' not only because dated but because remnants of the former convent and Scuola Grande di S. Maria della Carità, the first and major flagellant confraternity of medieval Venice, of which the Accademia was now the fortuitous occupant. This coincidence, in contrastive conjunction with the Accademia's modern function as chief repository of Venetian painting, raised many, unresolved questions regarding the nature and use of museums and in particular of how they should relate to and represent the history of art.

At one level Ruskin's criticism of the Accademia as a museum, as set out in the *Guide*, was in line with his contributions, from the late 1840s, to the public debate on national museums and in particular on the National Gallery. His interest in the topic had been fuelled and his opinions forged as a result especially of two important opportunities of the later 1850s: his involvement in cataloguing works from the Turner Bequest and his participation in the educational experiment conducted by the Christian Socialists at the Working Men's College in London. These prompted him respectively to elaborate his ideal of the picture gallery and to distinguish sharply between national and local or educational collections, the function of the former being to treasure, that of the latter to teach.¹⁵⁴ Consideration of the 'national museum' had tended to focus on principles of exhibition, summarized in 'the two imperative requirements – that every picture in the gallery should be perfectly seen and perfectly safe'.¹⁵⁵ Consideration of local or educational

¹⁵¹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 246, 280.

¹⁵² *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 51.

¹⁵³ Levi, 'Ruskin's Gates', 69.

¹⁵⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XIX, 219.

¹⁵⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 410.

collections, on the other hand, had mainly concerned complementary principles of selection.

Much criticism in the *Guide* invokes the requirement of visibility. There is repeated reference to the lack of space and light, or to light, where present, as being wasted on pictures of 'negative value, and effectual mischief', so that 'fine pictures' were kept 'invisibly out of the way'.¹⁵⁶ A 'lovely little Tintoret', for instance, 'purest work of his heart and fairest of his faculty', was hung 'high beyond sight of all its delicious painting'.¹⁵⁷ There is even oblique allusion to Ruskin's most extreme museological proposal, first expressed privately in a letter to his father of 1852, namely that in an ideal gallery each picture should not only be hung 'on the line' but might have 'its light properly disposed for it alone – in its little recess or chamber'.¹⁵⁸ He thus now denounced the fact that Bellini's San Giobbe altarpiece (Fig. 14) was effectively eclipsed by the light from an adjacent window, its finer qualities remaining

latent in that darkness, which is all the honour that the kings, nobles, and artists of Europe care to bestow on one of the greatest pictures ever painted by Christendom in her central art-power. Alone worth an entire modern exhibition-building, hired fiddlers, and all; here you have it jammed on a back wall, utterly unserviceable to human kind, the little angels of it fiddling unseen, unheard by anybody's heart.¹⁵⁹

The *Guide* not only exposed such defects but pointed the way to positive correction. This is especially true of its account, albeit incomplete,¹⁶⁰ of the gallery's paintings by Carpaccio. In Part II the reader-traveller is afforded assistance in making sense of the pictures originally forming the St Ursula series – in 1877 still hung out of order, on different walls and at different levels, in what was then Room XVI – so as 'with better patience to trace the order of their subjects, and such character or story as their treatment [might] develop'.¹⁶¹

Yet, as shown in the last section, the *Guide* also effected another kind of textual reordering of the collection, one regarding principles of selection rather than exhibition and entailing not only reconsideration of the criterion of goodness or excellence, to which Ruskin had repeatedly declared subordinate both the 'archaeological' aims of national museums and the educational aims of local,¹⁶² but also radical revision of the historical rationale peculiar to a 'great' or 'national' museum – and by analogy to a gallery such as that of the Accademia, largely

¹⁵⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 180.

¹⁵⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 184. The Tintoretto in question was his *Madonna of Mercy*.

¹⁵⁸ J. Ruskin to J.J. Ruskin, 1 January 1852, *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, xxviii–xxix. The proposal was obliquely reiterated in *Notes on the Turner Gallery* (1856; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 95–181) and more explicitly, in limited reference to large pictures, in Ruskin's evidence before the National Gallery Site Commission (1857; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 539–53).

¹⁵⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 151.

¹⁶⁰ See Ruskin, *Guida ai principali dipinti*, 40–46.

¹⁶¹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 167. On the eventual reuniting of the series in the 1890s and the influence of Ruskin's example on the process, see Ruskin, *Guida ai principali dipinti*, 64.

¹⁶² *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 545–46; XXVIII, 407; XXIX, 560; XXX, 305.

dedicated to one regional school. Ruskin's earlier conception of the function of a national gallery was not only to treasure and preserve great art, but to arrange and exhibit it in 'a perfectly consecutive chronological arrangement', which should usefully include 'the earlier essays of any school of art', whatever their 'intrinsic power, interest, or artistical utility'. For it could not be disputed, he had written in 1847,

that characteristic examples of every one of its most important phases should form part of a national collection: granting them of little value individually, their collective teaching [was] of irrefragable authority, and the exhibition of perfected results alone, while the course of national progress through which these were reached [was] altogether concealed, [was] more likely to discourage than to assist the efforts of an undeveloped school.¹⁶³

The *Guide* offers an example of such 'irrefragable authority': a pause before Mantegna's *St George* (Fig. 17) in the 'more complete review' of the collection undertaken in Part I is justified in that the painting 'shows more clearly than any other through what tremendous work the Italian masters obtained their power' – that 'precision of drawing' without whose 'inherited strength ... neither Titian nor Tintoret could have existed'.¹⁶⁴ However, as we saw, that pause formed part of an itinerary whose purpose was to trace and illustrate a concise chronological series illustrative of the history of Venetian art – not in the strict sense consecutive, but rather selectively representative and, above all, didactically and morally charged. That such an itinerary was traced within the collection and yet served to illustrate a history alternative and opposed to one founded on the concept of artistic perfectibility marks its divergence from the in many ways analogous idea of a 'supplementary exhibition' at Trafalgar Square, hypothetically thrown out by a member of the National Gallery Site Commission in 1857 and enthusiastically taken up by Ruskin in his evidence:

Do you think that a very interesting supplementary exhibition might be got up, say at Trafalgar Square, and retained there? – Yes, and all the more useful because you would put few works, and you could make it complete in series – and because, on a small scale, you would have the entire series. By selecting a few works, you would have an epitome of the Grand Gallery, the divisions of the chronology being all within the compartment of a wall, which in the great Gallery would be in a separate division of the building.¹⁶⁵

Such an epitome would not have been disruptive of the design of the 'Grand Gallery', but would have served to bring it into sharper focus. The epitome of the history of Venetian art on which the *Guide* so forcibly insisted was, rather, 'explosive' of the received version of that history, which ideally informed the rationale of the collection as such. The formerly distinguished categories of

¹⁶³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 403.

¹⁶⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 157.

¹⁶⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 548.

'national' museum, serving primarily to 'treasure' and preserve great art for advanced artistic and 'philosophical' study, and 'local' museum, intended for elementary and popular education, now jostled or interfered with one another in Ruskin's thinking and practice.

'A domestic treasury'

Further evidence that this was so is offered by a formal precedent for both pictorial and sculptural epitomes of the history of Venetian art proffered in the *Guide* and *St. Mark's Rest*, one moreover that hints at the part played in this process by Ruskin's evolving plans for St George's Museum at Walkley.

That precedent was represented by the four 'Lesson Photographs' issued to readers of *Fors Clavigera* between November 1875 and September 1876, in initiation of the specifically artistic educational programme to which St George's Company was committed. In the late 1850s Ruskin had allowed the possibility of admitting photographs – though not copies, of which he professed 'a horror' – of paintings to 'local' or 'educational' museums; and he seems to have been willing even to admit photographs of 'great buildings' in national museums, whose purpose, as we saw, was not to educate but to 'treasure'.¹⁶⁶ In partial divergence from this position, photographs of works of art were now proposed as the means whereby the notion of the museum as 'treasury' was extended, not only from national to local, but also from public to private spheres. The 'Lesson Photographs' were explicitly presented as forming the basis of private but standard 'domestic treasur[ies]' of 'beautiful art',¹⁶⁷ intended to complement the scheme for domestic libraries of 'classic authors', initiated in this period under the title of *Bibliotheca Pastorum*, the first volume of which, a translation of Xenophon's *Economist*, was issued in July 1876.¹⁶⁸ The prospective 'domestic treasury' was thus distinguished from 'the greatest treasury in that kind, belonging to St. George's Company'. This, Ruskin stressed, would be 'public', and indeed (though in a quite novel sense) national 'property'.¹⁶⁹

This chronologically arranged tetrad of images – not, Stephen Wildman has stressed, 'a random exercise in art history', but a vehicle for broad 'thoughts on religion and society, "symbols of the laws of life", as he puts it'¹⁷⁰ – offered a handy visual history of 'the noble religious art of the world'¹⁷¹ spanning twenty centuries (though in fact limited to Europe) and comprising one sculpture and three paintings. In chronological order these were: 1) an archaic bas-relief in the Villa Albani, considered by Ruskin to be Etruscan work and to represent the sea-goddess Leucothea and the infant Dionysus (Fig. 18);¹⁷² 2) *The Virgin and Child with Angels*

¹⁶⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 549–50.

¹⁶⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 444–45.

¹⁶⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXI, 4–98.

¹⁶⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 445.

¹⁷⁰ Stephen Wildman, "'Our household catalogue of reference": Ruskin's Lesson Photographs of 1875–76', in Valerie Purton, ed., *John Ruskin and Nineteenth-Century Education*, London: Anthem Press, 2018, 101.

¹⁷¹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 626.

¹⁷² The relief had been assigned to the Etruscan school and described as representing Leucothea by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (*Monumenti antichi inediti*, Roma, 1767, 2 vols, I,

(c.1465) by Filippo Lippi (Fig. 19);¹⁷³ 3) Titian's *Madonna with the Cherries* (1515) (Fig. 20);¹⁷⁴ and 4) a portrait by Velasquez (1659), which Ruskin believed to be of the Infanta Margherita and her dog (Fig. 21).¹⁷⁵

The photographs were 'treasures' primarily because they were to be of use. The first to be issued, the Filippo Lippi, like the 'Leucothea' after it, was commended to readers of *Fors* as the subject of an elementary drawing exercise: according to the Ruskinian genealogy of Tuscan art it exemplified the 'decision of line' characteristic of 'purely-descended Etruscan work'. But it also showed an 'unusually positive realism of representation' combined with the concern to make 'that reality noble' and with an 'unusually mystic spiritualism of conception'.¹⁷⁶ In this sense the Lippi is the central or key work of the series, its peculiar combination of qualities providing the measure of mixed progress and decline which the series as a whole is intended demonstratively to encapsulate. The 'Leucothea' is included not only in illustration of Ruskin's notion of the Tuscan 'survival' of the Etruscan tradition but also of 'a nobler Catholic faith than Athanasius wrote', a faith of which that essentially graphic continuity was the pledge. It is stated to be 'entirely noble religious art, of the fifth or sixth century B.C., full of various meaning and mystery ... myths and symbols of the laws of life, only to be traced by those who know much both of life and death'. The Lippi is 'nobly religious art of the fifteenth century of Christ, – an example of the most perfect unison of religious myth with faithful realism of human nature yet produced in this world'. By contrast, the Titian 'represents the last phase of the noble religious art of the world, in which realization has become consummate; but all supernatural aspect is refused, and mythic teaching is given only in obedience to former tradition, but with no anxiety for acceptance'. The Velasquez, finally, is

an example of the highest reach of technical perfection yet reached in art; all effort and labour seeming to cease in the radiant peace and simplicity of consummated human power. But all belief in supernatural things, all hope of a future state, all effort to teach, have passed away from the artist's mind. The Child and her Dog are to him equally real, equally royal, equally mortal.¹⁷⁷

Once issued, Ruskin sent the four 'Lesson Photographs' to Walkley.¹⁷⁸ And this suggests the blurring not only of the distinction between national treasures and

pl. 56; II, 71). Its description by the photographer, John Henry Parker (1806–84) (*Historical Photographs Illustrative of the Archæology of Rome and Italy*, Part II, Rome: Phelps and Co., 1873, 6) gives the subject as 'Leucothea and Bacchus', but does not identify the relief as Etruscan. In the later nineteenth century it was recognized as a fifth-century BCE Attic grave monument. Cf. *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 574n.

¹⁷³ Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

¹⁷⁴ Kunsthistorischesmuseum, Vienna.

¹⁷⁵ It is actually a portrait of the Infante Felipe Próspero, Kunsthistorischesmuseum, Vienna. On Ruskin's appreciation of Velasquez, see Wildman "'Our household catalogue of reference'".

¹⁷⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 446.

¹⁷⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 626–27.

¹⁷⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, xix.

local or educational museums, but even that between 'domestic' and 'public' treasuries, a distinction specific to the St George's Company project. It was probably at Walkley that one of Ruskin's 'Sheffield men', puzzled as to its significance, discussed the 'Leucothea' with the curator of the newly founded St George's Museum, Henry Swan, as reported by Ruskin in Letter 69 of *For Clavigera*.¹⁷⁹

Epilogue: from Venice to Walkley

That Letter, issued in September 1876, would have been written shortly before Ruskin's arrival in Venice. Here, as we have seen, a 'new clue' to the history of the city and to 'the wrong and the truth, the error and the glory', perplexingly intertwined, of its art – a clue 'unforeseen' not only during the composition of *Stones of Venice*, but even now on the eve of his departure – would exasperate the tone and radicalize the judgements of the 'explosive' epitome of the history of Venetian painting pitched into the Accademia and 'the general Artistic mind' the following spring.

We have thus come full circle. In closing, it may be asked, how did Ruskin's 'Venetian business' of 1876–77, and in particular his *Guide* to the Accademia, contribute to or affect his plans for the museum at Walkley?

Certainly, Ruskin's long and productive Venetian stay of 1876–1877 left its mark on the growing Sheffield collection. Not least, it resulted in the purchase for the museum, from the Manfrin collection and through the agency of Charles Fairfax Murray, of what has come to be known as the 'Ruskin Madonna', a *Virgin Adoring the Christ Child* attributed by Murray to Verrocchio.¹⁸⁰ It also led to the acquisition of a large number of copies and photographs after paintings by Vittore Carpaccio, the intensive, collaborative study of whose work dominated the entire stay. Murray alone was responsible for a total of sixteen copies in watercolour; Bunney for another seven (or eight), as well as a full size study in oil of the right-hand opening of the window in the *Dream of St Ursula*.¹⁸¹ One at least of the seven Ruskin himself produced – his much reduced copy of the entire *Dream* – was for a time exhibited at Sheffield.¹⁸² But what kind of a museum was it that these works were acquired to form part of (but only a selection of which it could and did actually accommodate)?

The simple and obvious answer is that St George's Museum was, or was to be, of the 'educational' kind. In his 1882 Report as Master of what was now termed St George's Guild, Ruskin alluded to and seemed to uphold his former museological distinction, specifically defining the Guild's museum as 'directed to the purposes of

¹⁷⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 698–99.

¹⁸⁰ It is now in the National Galleries of Scotland (NG 2338). On the circumstances of its purchase see Paul Tucker, ed., 'A connoisseur and his clients: the correspondence of Charles Fairfax Murray with Frederic Burton, Wilhelm Bode and Julius Meyer (1867–1914)', *Walpole Society*, 79, 2017, 33–34, 193–94.

¹⁸¹ Museums Sheffield, Collection of the Guild of St George (CGS00264). For further details see Ruskin, *Guida ai principali dipinti*, 29, 40–41.

¹⁸² *Works of John Ruskin*, XXI, 300; XXX, 159. It was later moved by Ruskin to the collection of artworks compiled for the use of his students at Oxford (Ashmolean Museum, WA.RS.WAL.09).

ethic as well as scientific education'.¹⁸³ Two years later, he would speak of the 'total collection' as 'illustrative of the principles of labour, and laws of judgment, which [would] be found, in the body of [his] works, if read with attention'.¹⁸⁴

Yet if we try to see how these statements can be filled out so as to give some indication of the 'design' whose 'completion' Ruskin saw as the 'consummation of all that hitherto [had] been endeavoured in [his] writings',¹⁸⁵ we find ourselves in difficulty. For Ruskin never did complete or fully state its design and no general catalogue of the museum's contents, at whatever stage of development, was ever published by him. A catalogue of its minerals was taken to a point nearing completion,¹⁸⁶ but of the remainder of the collection – which by 1886 in his estimate included 'upwards of two thousand pounds' worth of drawings executed for the Guild'¹⁸⁷ – all that Ruskin produced in this sort are the five pages of a pamphlet listing the *Contents of Large Sliding Frames* (1879)¹⁸⁸ and the *Catalogue of a Series of Drawings Made for St. George's Guild under the Direction of Mr. Ruskin* (1886), compiled for exhibition in London of a selected forty-four out of 'between two and three hundred'.¹⁸⁹ In addition, in the *Collected Notes on Some of the Pictures in the St George's Museum, Sheffield* compiled by its curator in 1879, Henry Swan printed an extensive note by Ruskin on a pair of watercolour copies by Charles Fairfax Murray of fifteenth-century Italian paintings,¹⁹⁰ 'the first pictures sent by the Master to the Museum':¹⁹¹ one after Carpaccio of the detail of St Ursula's consultation with her father in *The Arrival of the Ambassadors* from the St Ursula series in the Accademia (Fig. 22);¹⁹² the other after the Lippi *Virgin and Child* (Fig. 23) issued as a Lesson Photograph in November 1875.

The classes or 'compartments' into which Ruskin grouped the contents of the sliding frames were:

- 'Illustrations of Early Italian Religious Art';
- 'Illustrations by Photograph of the Sculpture of Venice in her Commercial Power and Religious Faith';
- 'Treatment of Foliage in Sculpture'; and
- 'Illustrations of the Construction of the Plumage of Birds, for Decorative Purposes Only, and without Reference to Purposes of Defence, Warmth, or Flight'.¹⁹³

¹⁸³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 53.

¹⁸⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 70.

¹⁸⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 51.

¹⁸⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVI, 415–56.

¹⁸⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 98.

¹⁸⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 173–76.

¹⁸⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 177–80.

¹⁹⁰ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 451–54.

¹⁹¹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 160.

¹⁹² *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 160. 'The King's Consent' (Collection of the Guild of St George, Museums Sheffield) was the first of fifteen studies after this artist made for Ruskin by Charles Fairfax Murray between 1876 and 1877 (see Ruskin, *Guida ai principali dipinti*, 40–41).

¹⁹³ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 173–76.

It is not clear whether or not these groupings and their contents still stood three years later, when, in presenting his plans for additions to the Walkley museum Ruskin specified that the frames were to illustrate or supplement the study of sculpture for which the new Art Gallery, then envisaged but never built, was chiefly to be designed.¹⁹⁴

What is clear, however, is that the groupings do at least hint at a 'consummation of all that hitherto [had] been endeavoured in [his] writings', in so far as they comprise a number of dominant themes: the relation between natural form and architectural ornament; the anti-anatomical interest in the external and non-functional aspects of animal forms; as well of course as the history of early Italian religious art and the history of Venetian sculpture as a book in which to read the history of the city. And what most requires stressing here is the conspicuous presence of historical and what, in formerly discussing the ideal form of National Gallery, Ruskin had termed 'ethnological' components.¹⁹⁵ And this commixture of interests is compatible not only with the subsequent intended focus on the study of sculpture (which had itself displaced Ruskin's initial idea for 'a museum arranged first for workers in iron, and extended into illustration of the natural history of the neighbourhood of Sheffield'¹⁹⁶), as well as with later, generic descriptions of the purpose and contents of the collection, such as this: 'a museum, – and if the means were given me, a series of museums, – for the English people, in which, whether by cast, photograph, or skilled drawing, they should be shown examples of all the most beautiful art of the Christian world'.¹⁹⁷

St George's Museum, then, was to be an educational museum one of whose aims would be to tell the history of 'beautiful art', but in its own terms, that is from 'ethic', 'ethnological' and even 'scientific', as well as artistic points of view. Such a history would be told using the means specific to the educational museum, not in a 'grand', homogeneous arrangement of unique, original works but in multiple series of images which 'by cast, photograph, or skilled drawing' refracted those works into an interdependent plurality of meaning components – a kaleidoscope at once of critical comment and conservative record – multiple series potentially intersecting with one another through the use of multiple reproductive versions of originals.

This much is suggested, for example, by the co-existence in the collection of the chronological series of 'Lesson Photographs', on the one hand, and the above instanced pair of watercolour copies by Murray, on the other. Partly coincident as representations, the two groups well illustrate a typically Ruskinian interchange of broadly historiographical and critical purposes. In Ruskin's notes on them the two watercolours are characteristically presented as variant standard specimens. Their comparison, both as images and as copies, and comparison of the watercolour of the Lippi with the corresponding photograph, afford numerous lessons. They exemplify the distinction between the Florentine and Sienese (or 'Etruscan') and the Venetian sense and use of colour, in painting and architecture, and their relation to the schools' respective native landscapes. They also embody the contrast between the

¹⁹⁴ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 56–57.

¹⁹⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 413.

¹⁹⁶ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 395.

¹⁹⁷ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 96.

'exquisite fineness of draughtsmanship' and 'precision of form' of the one and the chromatic lyricism and formal 'mystery' of the other. They demonstrate the civic origins of a 'specially Venetian manner of head-dress'; illustrate the schools' distinct use of black; and evidence the 'uses and weaknesses' of watercolour drawing as compared with photography in reproducing paintings.¹⁹⁸ Lastly, the coupling of the Carpaccio with the Lippi enhances or complicates the history of 'the noble religious art of the world' summarized in the series of Lesson Photographs. A moment of synthesis represented in the series by a single work – the photograph of the Lippi – is as it were split into a contrasting pair of watercolours, each in its own specific manner epitomizing the concept of 'noble religious art':

Of these two pictures the Florentine one represents the highest reach of pure or ideal religious art, next to Angelico; the Venetian one represents the highest reach of religious art, accepting the weakness of human nature, believing in it, abiding by it, and becoming greater therefrom.

The Lippi, therefore, is of the school called 'Purist' in *Modern Painters*; the Carpaccio of the school called 'Naturalist'.¹⁹⁹

And to this end – and in a clear tendency to 'consummation' – it recovers and revises a distinction advanced in Ruskin's former writings.

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¹⁹⁸ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 451–54.

¹⁹⁹ *Works of John Ruskin*, XXIV, 451.