As legend tells it, the Old-New Synagogue in Prague was built by angels, and later was home to a golem who remains locked away in the building to this day. In lyrical prose, Mark Podwal shares the story of the world's oldest active synagogue, which was completed in 1270. Throughout the years, this sacred place of prayer and celebration has endured plagues, wars, and the Nazi regime. Its story is part legend, part history, and one that stands as a testament to the perseverance of the Jewish people. Includes an author's note and bibliography.

My Personal Review:
Podwal conveys the history and legends associated with the Old-New Synagogue (the Alteneuschul) in Prague, the oldest surviving synagogue in Europe built in 1270. The lyrical text evokes lovely images, describing the "square stones, round stones, stone doors, stone floors, stones carved like leaves, others like grapes, all brought by angels." The spare, poetic style creates a sense of mystery; this may be appropriate to the setting but can also leave the reader bewildered by a lack of substance. For instance, Podwal mentions an afikomen that hangs in the synagogue which is said to have special protective powers and also mentions but does not describe the many miracles that have saved the synagogue from ruin over the years. The story of the Golem gets only minimal coverage. These hints at deeper stories leave the book with an unresolved feeling. Podwal's surreal paintings are full of rich color and a great sense of movement. However, they do little to enhance the text or to create a sense of place. The descriptions of the synagogue's stones and interior decorations would have been better served by more realistic and detailed pictures of this unusual setting. An author's note at the end of the book disentangles some of the myths and history associated with the Old-New Synagogue, and provides additional information. A short bibliography suggests adult sources for further reading. There are few picture books that focus on synagogues. Although the text and illustrations within this book fall short in some instances, both are created with skill. The title will be a welcome
addition to Judaic collections. In terms of format the book is well suited to grades K-3, but the combination of history and legend may also appeal to older children and even teens. Heidi Estrin

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Built by Angels: The Story of the Old-New Synagogue by Mark Podwal MD - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!