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**Review of: Lara, Jaime. *City, temple, stage : eschatological architecture and liturgical theatrics in New Spain***

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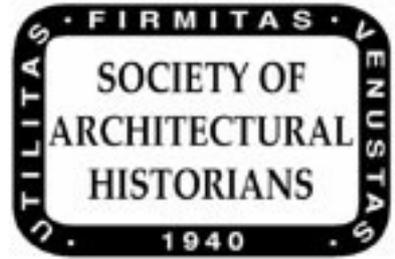
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**City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain** by Jaime Lara

Review by: Barbara E. Mundy

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what it was for a long time and in many ways still is: for the makers of images, a standard and almost universal set of rules; adopted by consumers of images, a standard and almost universal visual convention.

As some authors in this volume point out, conventions are arbitrary. Euclidean geometry may be arbitrary too, but it is an axiomatic discipline, and within its compass, some constructions are right, some are not, and some work better than others. Within the Euclidean field, which is where Renaissance perspective resided, errors as well as emendations and even progress occur, and it does not help to gloss that over, or to list all as equals. This is one point where the methods of art history and those of the history of mathematics are at odds.

For architectural historians, this learned and stimulating book invites some additional lines of inquiry. The rise of perspectival treatises in the Renaissance is often parallel to, and sometimes coincides with, the history of Renaissance architectural treatises. Right from the Albertian start, some of the most prominent theoreticians wrote on both perspective and architecture and, starting with Serlio, within the same book. Yet the apparent conflation of architectural and perspectival matters in many Renaissance treatises leaves some issues unsolved. As Margaret D. Davis recalls (265), Vignola pointed out in the preface to his *Regola delli cinque ordini*, his architectural treatise, that architects need to know the rules of perspective in order to better calculate optical corrections that may alter the proportions of the orders. Yet, exception made for that specific purpose, many Renaissance theories of architectural design—again, right from the Albertian start, but not discussed here—emphasize that architects should avoid perspective, as perspectival drawings do not record actual measurements. Architects' designs and surveys alike should be drawn in plan, elevation, and section or, as we would say today, in parallel projections. Parallel projections, however, did not exist as such before Gaspard Monge formalized them—with a few exceptions

that await further scrutiny. This is a highly controversial matter, but crucial for the history of architectural design. Parallel projections were for centuries a practice without a theory, and suggestions that Piero della Francesca and others before him (277 n. 23, 294–96) may have “invented” orthogonal projections open a Pandora's box of epistemological issues. Architectural historians should be grateful to this collection of mostly art historical essays for having brought some such issues without solving them once again to the forefront, in a new and often thought-provoking context.

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Jaime Lara

**City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain**

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004, xii + 299 pp., 237 color illus. \$65, ISBN 0-268-03364-1

The sixteenth-century churches of central Mexico have been described as “the most monumental yet unheralded building campaign and decoration program ever conceived and carried out on so short a period in so large an area anytime on earth.”<sup>1</sup> These extraordinary buildings were masterminded by the small group of mendicant friars sent out by the Spanish crown to evangelize newly conquered territories. Twelve Franciscans first arrived in Mexico in 1524, with Dominicans and Augustinians following. In barely sixty years, a small cadre of friars pushed through the densely populated indigenous heartland of central Mexico, reorganizing towns, building hundreds of churches, and proselytizing to conquered indigenes as they went.

What served as the architectural inspiration for these indefatigable men, few of whom were trained architects? Visual evidence points to shared sources, since so many mendicant complexes contain similar elements: the single-nave church; an auditorium-like space called an open chapel; a large walled patio or

atrium with small chapels at its corners (called *posas*); and a central stone cross. Spiro Kostof captured the prevailing opinion when he wrote that the friars “[achieved] a dignified monumental form without relying on theory or stylistic consistency. They did so by remembering eclectically the moods and modes of Christian architecture.”<sup>2</sup> Practical men with a daunting task at hand, the friars took what they could from European architectural treatises, rolled up their sleeves, and set about building, aided by scores of indigenous masons and woodworkers, and maybe even architects.

In his carefully researched and copiously illustrated study of sixteenth-century monastic complexes, Jaime Lara lays out a different view of the mendicants' architectural theory. He argues that the mendicants were steeped in apocalyptic thinking, their urban and architectural ambitions fueled by a belief that Christ's glorious Second Coming was close at hand. The conversion of the New World was one divinely ordained prerequisite for its realization. Another was the creation of a New Jerusalem here on earth, where, as predicted by the Book of Revelation, the end-time events would unfold. As a result, the friars engineered both their cities and monastic complexes to evoke “the heavenly Jerusalem [that] was about to descend” (43).

“New Jerusalem” is a standard evocation in the medieval cathedral, but the friars' sense that the Second Coming was immanent added urgency and shape to their building programs in Mexico. Rejecting loose eclecticism, Lara locates the friars' models in biblical descriptions in Ezekiel and Revelation, and also demonstrates that representations of the Temple were close at hand in widely circulating books like the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493) or Francois Vatable's *Biblia latina* (1546). Given the prevalence and wide variety of Jerusalems and Temples discussed throughout Europe, it takes a certain bravado to pin sources down, but Lara does so. He argues that the origin of the ubiquitous grid plan used in Mexican towns, which is most commonly ascribed to Vitruvian or mil-

itary models, is to be found in the writings of the Joachite Franciscan Eiximenis (1340–1409). Eiximenis' encyclopedia *Christendom (Lo Crestià)*, published in 1499, advocated a grid plan with a church at the center, similar to what is today found in Mexico. Lara ties this model neatly to millennial idealism: "With its twelve gates and the mountainous scenery, [Eiximenis'] plan cannot have any model except that of the New Jerusalem of Ezekiel and Revelation" (101). Another way the friars recreated Jerusalem was by copying or evoking specific buildings. For instance, Lara identifies the Islamic *qubba* built on the Temple Mount as the source of the Mexican *posa*. Like the *qubba*, the *posa* was used as a contemplative stop along the route of a religious procession.

Architectural sculpture lies at the center of Lara's argument. His close and impressive reading of the iconography of Franciscan complexes at Cholula, Calpan, and Huexotzingo offers abundant evidence of millennial idealism. In addition, the stone crosses that stand at the center of so many church patios offer more evidence of the eschatological mind-set, Lara argues, since they often bear symbols of Christ's passion (called the *Arma Christi*) "associated with the Sibylline prophecies of the Last World Emperor and the final apocalyptic battle before Christ's second advent" (151).

In the final chapter of the work, Lara continues his exploration of the complexes by arguing that the open chapels—usually seen as an architectural solution for offering outdoor mass to recent converts—were actually conceived of as stage sets "that almost invariably are representations of the Temple of Jerusalem" (181). Just as European painters used the Temple as a backdrop for the unfolding of Christ's life in static pictures, the mendicants used the open chapel as a stage where newly converted Christians would enact Passion plays and other edifying dramas.

As a study about the ways that theological ideas shape buildings, Lara's book cannot ignore indigenous religion, and he is clear from the beginning about a fun-

damental premise: "It was my instinct in approaching this material, and now my sincere conviction, that the friars' worldview and symbols were much closer to the native imagination and metaphors (and vice versa) than had previously been thought" (6). Thus he can conclude, after a survey of the subject, that "Aztec cosmology was so similar to medieval Christianity that the friars did not attempt to change it" (93). But Lara might have acknowledged that his conclusions rest on an unstable foundation: most of our textual sources on Aztec religion were authored by the friars themselves, and to make sense of this alien world of belief, they often saw Aztec religious phenomenon in terms of their own. And, while Lara emphasizes how the Aztecs' own eschatology meshed with that of the Franciscans, we simply don't know how much other native peoples had absorbed of the particular millennial worldview of their recent Aztec conquerors.

While the eschatological thesis orients the book's interpretations, it is also the product of narrowly chosen evidence: most substantial architectural examples come from a handful of Franciscan missions in a twenty-mile cluster. At times, conclusions seem overdetermined. Lara's discussion of the grid plan is instructive. Such a generic plan could have had a plethora of sources; the one that Lara chooses, from the work of Eiximenis, has the added virtue of having millennial overtones, but there is little evidence that this plan was more prominent in the friars' minds than any other. (The friars' writings are usually silent on their inspirations.) Moreover, the grid was used not just by mendicants, but by rough-hewn conquistadores—were they thinking of Eiximenis?—and the Aztecs as well. To bolster the likelihood of Eiximenis as the source, Lara dismisses the Vitruvian grid plan as not likely to have been carried into Catholic Spain's colonies because it was too much a product of "the secular-minded [Renaissance] in Italy" (99), a surprising characterization of the Italian Renaissance. In other cases, contradictory evidence is simply overlooked. For instance, in laying out Cholula, the Franciscans,

Lara argues, "divided [it] into seven barrios [neighborhoods], each with its own church, like the seven churches in the book of Revelation" (104). But the 1580 map of Cholula (drawn by an indigenous artist) shows only six barrios (called *cabeceras*), numbered carefully; the map is reproduced (unfortunately cropped) on page 100, but its visual evidence is overlooked. (This particular parish count of Cholula is not singular to the 1580 map alone: documents of 1564 and 1593 also confirm it as six; by the time the Franciscans gave up control of the city in 1640, it was down to four.)

While the seven-versus-six count of Cholula's barrios may seem an impossibly small quibble, a much larger question of indigenous agency is at stake here. In a brief but influential article published forty years ago, George Kubler argued that the six barrios of colonial Cholula, in their number and arrangement, were the enduring legacy of pre-Hispanic social arrangements that carried into the colonial period.<sup>3</sup> Kubler's article anticipated two generations of scholarship that have highlighted the role of indigenous people in shaping the local politics and religious practice in colonial Mexico. For Lara to cite the Franciscan reading of the Book of Revelation as Cholula's ordering principle is to restore to a handful of men the extraordinary power that recent scholarship has denied them. The revisionism continues in the epilogue: "Today, ninety-eight percent of all Latin Americans identify themselves as Christians. . . . It seems fair to say that Christianity has had success on the continent." Lara attributes this success in part to the "dynamic equivalence and ritual substitution" that the mendicants offered their indigenous congregations in the churches they built in the sixteenth century (204). Downplayed is force: native peoples had little choice about whether to be Christians or not. Politics, however, are not the main concern of this carefully focused book on the relationship of theology and architecture in colonial Mexico.

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## Notes

1. Samuel Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion* (Albuquerque, N. Mex, 2001), 35–37.
2. Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford, England, 1995), 447.
3. George Kubler, “The Colonial Plan of Cholula,” in *Studies in Ancient American and European Art: The Collected Essays of George Kubler*, ed. Thomas Reese (New Haven, 1985), 92–101; published in Spanish as “La traza colonial de Cholula,” *Estudios de Historia Novohispano* 2 (Mexico, 1968), 111–27.

Richard Longstreth, editor

**The Charnley House: Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Making of Chicago’s Gold Coast**

Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004, xxi + 249 pp., 178 b/w illus. 2004, \$55, ISBN 0-226-4927-45

The Charnley House (1891–92) entered the canon of modern architecture late—and, by some recent accounts, under false pretenses. Sigfried Giedion initially highlighted the building’s importance in *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), attributing the design to Frank Lloyd Wright rather than the architects of record, Adler and Sullivan. Giedion based this attribution on Wright’s claim to authorship in his autobiography (1932) and the acceptance of that claim by Hugh Morrison in his 1935 study of Sullivan. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Nikolaus Pevsner, and others soon followed suit. Occasioned by the gift of the house to the Society of Architectural Historians in 1995 and building on a revisionist line going back at least to Brendan Gill’s questioning of Wright’s claim in his 1987 biography of the architect, a collection of essays edited by Richard Longstreth, comprising the first book-length study of the work, offers new perspectives and insights into what Gill referred to as the “unresolvable mystery”<sup>1</sup> and Longstreth the “enigma” (1) of the Chicago residence. The mystery and enigma, however, are not merely an issue of authorship. The real problem with the Charnley House, which Longstreth correctly points to as quite

unique in the history of modern architecture, is the complete lack of any primary documentation regarding the building’s inception, design, and construction. There are no drawings, no construction documents, no letters, no contemporaneous accounts or reports, no early interior photographs—no nothing. So where to begin?

In the first of his two contributions to the book, Longstreth begins at the most logical and intelligent place, with a carefully researched and judiciously presented discussion of what can be pieced together about the clients, their family histories, and their lives before and after commissioning the house. While much new information is brought forth about James Charnley, precious little, unfortunately, seems to be available about Helen Douglas Charnley, and even less about the couple’s social life and how they may have used their home. Still, we learn a great deal about the Charnleys and also about the later occupants and history of the house until the SAH moved in. An equally valuable part of Longstreth’s introductory essay is its extremely sensitive and perceptive reading of the building’s interior, especially its extraordinary entrance stair hall. Less known than the exterior, this space is analyzed in depth and fully revealed through a sequence of carefully calibrated photographs, most unpublished until now.

The three following essays, by Daniel Bluestone, Paul Kruty, and Elizabeth Collins Cromley, contextualize the house in urban, economic, and sociological terms. Bluestone’s text is a model of its kind, densely researched, well illustrated, and fascinating in what it tells us about the development of the Gold Coast from the 1880s through the 1920s, businessman Potter Palmer’s instrumental role in that development, and how the Charnley House—the family’s second and smaller dwelling in the area—fit into the neighborhood. Focusing on the peculiarities of its narrow corner lot, Bluestone explains the somewhat unusual type of the free-standing party-wall corner house that resulted, with its entrance on the long side clearly distinguishing it from the

more common attached row house typical of the area.

Kruty covers much of the same ground as Bluestone in his discussion of the architectural and urban context, adding valuable information on the pre-1880s period and Potter Palmer’s activities. He gives more emphasis to issues of style than Bluestone, noting the importance of the classical revival at the time and its influence on the Charnley design. Yet, Kruty also returns to issues of typology and siting, pointing out that Sullivan (to whom he ascribes the design) responded to the “unusual [angled] orientation” of the lot lines to produce the only detached corner house on the Gold Coast facing a major north-south street (98). Although he does not say so, this fundamental siting decision might be the cause for what he sees as the abnormally “cramped” disposition of the building (*ibid.*).

The essay by Cromley takes up the charge of describing how the interior spaces of the house may have been used. Given the uncommon layout of the plan compounded by the near total dearth of remaining evidence, this would seem to be an almost impossible task. The author relies on comparative materials from the period, such as writings on domestic design and plans of other houses, often much larger and grander. However, these can only take one so far, especially when dealing with an atypical design. The discussion of the nonpublic areas bring out much that is new, but such spaces leave less room for speculation than the public ones. And since much of the interpretive strategy regarding function is based on the names of rooms indicated on plans, all is really guesswork with the Charnley House since there are no original plans. Aside from the location of the dining room, nothing else about the main floor is obvious. Comparisons with contemporaneous houses by Sullivan and Wright might have been useful, but the author curiously chose to disregard them.

In what apparently were meant to be the culminating chapters of the book, Paul Sprague and Narciso Menocal tackle the problem of attribution. The resulting “strong divergence” of their views on the