Q. Hirst continue to remind us that spatial relations in constructed spaces, as forms of subjectification, are significant to the enframing or embodying of our ideas about our personal, gender, ethnic, cultural, social, political, and national as well as spiritual identities.

Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses and American Sanctuary reveal the dialogic relationship that users and viewers have with the spaces and objects they delineate as sacred. Both books focus on the societal forces that help us understand the sacred’s changing meanings. Further scholarship ought to continue studying the affects that sacred architectures, as ideas shaped and solidified in built form, have on the bodies, personal relations, and spatial values that reciprocally define and construct experiences of “the sacred.”

PAUL ELI IVEY
University of Arizona

Jessica Joyce Christie and Patricia Joan Sarro, editors

Palaces and Power in the Americas: From Peru to the Northwest Coast
Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006, 432 pp., 126 b/w illus. $50, ISBN 9780292712447

“Palaces in the United States? Perhaps for colonial governors or railroad barons or newspaper moguls, but surely not for pre-Columbian natives” (99). So begins Stephen Lekson’s provocative essay in Palaces and Power in the Americas that passionately critiques scholarly assumptions about Native American people and their architecture. Palaces, he argues, are seen as material expressions of powerful states, and the term is widely applied to a diverse range of structures found in many parts of the world. But rarely is “palace” used when discussing Native American structures because, Lekson maintains, it is frequently assumed that Native Americans did not have states—“no states, therefore no palaces” (99).

Of course, there were native states in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans, and Lekson singles out as an example the vibrant Mississippian state whose bustling metropolis of Cahokia thrived between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries near what is today St. Louis, Missouri. Although Lekson’s essay, like many in this volume, is directed at an anthropological audience, it raises key issues about how architectural historians classify native architecture of the Americas, the role of palaces in Native American architecture, and why scholars so often marginalize these structures.

In their introductory essay, the editors Jessica Joyce Christie and Patricia Joan Sarro relate the journeys that led them to the topic of palaces and in what way palaces—which they say are the material manifestation of the relationship between architecture and political power—serve as the unifying theme of the book. In the succeeding twelve chapters, seventeen authors examine this topic from a variety of perspectives.

The sites chosen come from across the Americas. In Mesoamerica, examples include the elaborate elite compounds nestled within the dense urban fabric of Teotihuacán and the beautiful courtyard houses carefully positioned on the hilltops of Monte Albán. In the Andes, authors explore distinctive structures such as the impressive adobe remains made for the Chimú elite on the dry northern coast of Peru, as well as the private compounds hidden behind the enormous and foreboding walls built by the powerful Wari state in the central highlands. In North America, the investigations range from the majestic Puebloan Great Houses in the southwest to the deceptively complex community houses of the northwest coast. As the editors note, large areas of the Americas are unrepresented, but the book is not meant to be comprehensive; rather it surveys a broad swath of Native American architecture from the earliest times until the late fifteenth century, irrespective of contemporary national borders.

While the topics explored in the book concentrate primarily on three regional zones, the book is organized not by area, but by four themes. The first section is devoted to the question of the identification of a palace within a site or culture. In particular, the authors question whether palaces existed in specific contexts and, if so, how they were configured. The second part looks at how political ideology can be mapped out in palaces, by spatial practices within a building, a site, or across a region. The third section examines the evolving relationship between material remains and social status across time and sometimes space, revealing shifting cultural beliefs and priorities. In the final section, essays consider palaces comparatively, both within a singular site and between two very different cultural groups.

For the most part, the essays in this volume range widely in approach and topic, offering fresh perspectives and new data on what we know about the architecture of some of the best known sites in the Americas. An example is an essay written by one of the editors, Sarro, “Rising Above: The Elite Acropolis of El Tajín.” Located on the Mexican gulf coast, El Tajín is a site densely packed with temples, elite residences, and notably, seventeen separate ball courts. While much research has been devoted to the site because of the ball courts, Sarro turns her attention to the area where multiroom structures associated with the elites have been placed. In a nuanced analysis, she explores the role of spatial practices—such as the manipulation of movement and views—in creating an exclusive enclave for elites, and bolsters her argument by examining other types of material culture—such as artwork and furniture. Sarro also discusses the definition of a palace and how it has been debated in the field, most notably in Palaces of the Ancient New World, edited by Susan Toby Evans and Joanne Pillsbury.1 This excellent volume, published two years earlier, was the first to bring together a series of essays examining how the term “palace” may (or may not) have related to specific architectural types in the pre-Columbian Americas. The present volume continues this investigation.

Many of the most interesting essays in Palaces and Power challenge in different ways the very notion of a palace. For example, in “Looking for Moche Palaces in the Elite Residences of Moche Site,” Claude Chapdelaine argues that the assumptions...
Several other essays illuminate spatial and naming practices by assuming a regional perspective. Susan Toby Evans's chapter, “Antecedents of the Aztec Palace: Palaces and Political Power in Classic and Post Classic Mexico,” focuses on the importance of performance and theater in royal residences across time and cultural groups, as well as other aspects of lived practice often overlooked in studies focusing primarily on form. Evans notes that the Aztecs called their royal residences a Tecpán-calli, a “Lord-place house,” that its form was easily recognizable (with three key elements: a dais room, courtyard, and plaza), and that its construction was highly regulated (a ruler had his son executed for building one without official permission). Because of the rich surviving evidence (a named building type along with written descriptions and architectural remains), Evans is able to discuss the subtleties of Tecpán history and its relationship to the earlier architecture complexes of Teotihuacán and Tula as well as to the later open chapels of the Spanish colonial era. Having a local definition of a building type provides critical insights not afforded most scholars investigating architecture made before the sixteenth century in the Americas. However, Evans’s use of the Tecpán examples reminds us of the specific details that would be lost if we thought of the Tecpán in terms of a general palace. In doing so, the author highlights the questions that thread through most essays in this book: namely, what is a palace and who should scholars even use the term?

Carolyn Dean’s essay “What is Wrong with (the term) Art?” cogently outlined the problems in trying to shape the discourse of Native American artistic production according to Western scholarly (and naming) practices. While recognizing that using the vocabulary of one culture (in this case, the term “art”) to discuss the objects of another could bring much needed attention to a neglected corpus of material (as well as highlight problematic scholarly paradoxes), Dean points out that once that goal is accomplished, we must deal with the often serious misunderstandings that have been created by bringing a foreign word into a new context.

While the present book does not provide a clear solution to this quandary, it does effectively announce the importance of Native American architecture while revealing that an examination of elite architectural complexes in the Americas can produce remarkable insights. It also allows us to begin to understand the rich diversity of Native American architectural production and the limitations and benefits of architectural terminology. Christie and Sarro should be applauded for bringing together such a diverse, thought-provoking, and data-rich collection of essays on key monuments of Native American architecture. This book should be read not only by architectural historians interested in the history of architecture in the Americas, but also by anyone who wishes to engage in the key questions of architecture across cultures.

**Stella Nair**

University of California, Riverside

Notes


Carla Yanni

The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States

Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, xi + 191 pages, 120 b&w illus. $27.50 (paper), ISBN 9780816649402; $82.50 (cloth), ISBN 9780816649396

The history and development of asylum architecture has been neglected, treated as a distant cousin to baseline trends in the history of architecture and health. Carla Yanni reverses this unfortunate pattern in her recent book on the history of asylums from 1770 to 1900. The book is an extremely important and extensively researched addition to the literature on a much maligned, overlooked building type in the history of architecture and health.

The narrative is presented in four parts. The introduction considers the pro-