



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING



A Palace for a King. The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV by Jonathan Brown; J. H. Elliott

Review by: Joseph Connors

Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Oct., 1981), pp. 244-245

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Society of Architectural Historians](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/989703>

Accessed: 01/01/2012 11:02

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press and Society of Architectural Historians are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

God" (p. 107). The angel, leaning back in a moment of rest, regards the saint with "a benign smile that might well be described as congratulatory" (p. 124).

Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts will always be exceptional. Few books so brief are the product of so many years of intensive work. Few books have ever been or will ever be so splendidly illustrated. That Lavin has broken new ground methodically must be evident even from this review. The extent to which this achievement can be followed up is hard to assess. Although the comprehensive investigation of Italian Baroque monuments is in its infancy, Lavin repeatedly stresses the uniqueness of St. Teresa's chapel; perhaps this book will prove equally unique. In any event, it is deeply gratifying that such a work of art has now received the monograph it deserved.

JOHN COOLIDGE
Harvard University

JONATHAN BROWN and J. H. ELLIOTT, *A Palace for a King. The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980, 296 pp., 156 illus. \$29.95.

The palace that is the subject of this fascinating book may not be very familiar to the general reader. The Buen Retiro was built by Philip IV in the 1630s on the outskirts of Madrid. It was the sovereign's second residence, a suburban retreat within easy reach of the principal residence at the Alcázar. It was not the sort of building to change the course of architecture, and in any case both the palace and its archive were destroyed in the Napoleonic wars of 1808–1812; only two rooms are left standing, altered and stripped of most of their decoration, and the grounds now serve as a public park. If Brown and Elliott had written a traditional architectural monograph, it might have been a dull book. Instead what they produced is a vivid and absorbing study of a royal palace as a total cultural artifact, "the repository of the values of a ruling class." They begin by reconstructing the phases of construction and the building's physical form, then go on to reassemble the hundreds of scattered works of art that decorated its walls, and to evoke the life of the courtly society that from time to time inhabited it. It is not only a book on architecture, but one on patronage and collecting, on economics and political history, on court theater and the court as theater, on the value system of a 17th-century monarchy and on the opposition to those values. The book crosses as many boundaries as its subject did, and it has a freshness of approach that makes it seem appropriate for a non-specialist to point out some of its riches to architectural historians outside the Spanish field.

The Buen Retiro was begun in 1630 as a small addition to the royal monastery of San Jerónimo outside the eastern gate of Madrid. Originally conceived as a pious retreat in the tradition of Charles V, by 1632 it was already being expanded into a suburban villa surrounded by gardens. In 1633 the idea changed again, and the villa-retreat was turned into a school for chivalry, with a large piazza for bullfights and jousts that were expected to attract the younger generation of nobility. It grew once again in 1634–1635, when a still larger courtyard was added for still larger festivals. A large ballroom (*Casón*) and a theater (*Coliseo*) were built in 1637–1640 as semi-independent structures. By 1640 the ring of parks surrounding the building, with its system of lakes and canals, had expanded to a size half as large again as the city of Madrid.

The architect of the Retiro was a distinguished Italian nobleman, Giovanni Battista Crescenzi, assisted on the site by Alonso Carbonel as master of the works. In spite of their presence there was no preestablished plan, and the building "lurched forward from whim to whim," each new wing serving as the springboard to another more ambitious expansion. Nothing reveals the character of the Buen Retiro more clearly than the contrast that the authors draw with the Escorial: the Escorial was built on a clear axial plan, one drenched in the steely mathematical mysticism of a Salomonic age; the Retiro grew in fits of improvisation, as part of a world immersed in theater and spectacle. The authors decipher its architectural messages in terms of a concrete imagery deriving from the Spanish monarchical tradition: the austere exterior is connected with the monastic strain in Spanish Hapsburg residences; the characteristic corner turrets are interpreted as "signposts proclaiming this building was the abode of his Catholic majesty"; finally the lavishly appointed interior is linked to a whole ideology, partly Spanish and partly broadly European, of the magnificence of the prince.

To understand the Retiro one must understand a basic phenomenon of Spanish politics, namely the rise of the favorite: "... the dazzling figure of the favorite seemed an appropriate symbol of the new and more relaxed times. Victorious in the backstairs intrigues for the favor of the prince, he had the world at his feet. Part minister, part courtier, part royal confidant, he made the most, like a brilliant butterfly, of the transient days of sunshine before the return of winter." The real personality behind the Retiro was the Count-duke Olivares, younger son of an aristocratic family of the second rank, who exercised a growing psychological domination over a young king ill-equipped and ill-inclined to deal with the paper sprawl of government in this early bureaucratic age. The authors tell Olivares's story from his early rise to power to the final disgrace of 1641. In dissecting his intellectual makeup and his political program they paint a very lively portrait, one simultaneously

fascinating and repugnant; together with the various Velázquez portraits which they illustrate they leave one with the feeling of almost having met the man. One of their most suggestive ideas is a parallel between statesmanship and architecture, in which the minister's program of reforms is compared to the *trazas* or designs of a master architect. They probe the symbiotic relationship that grew up between the king and his favorite, Philip IV depending on Olivares to stage-manage his kingship, creating both the image and the substance of the *monarquía*, and Olivares depending on the favor of the king and on constant access to his person. They provide a good analysis of the various layers in the Spanish court, with fine distinctions drawn between the household attendant on the royal person, the core of government officials, and the crowds of aspiring courtiers and literateurs waiting on the fringes. Above all there is a very subtle feeling for the theater of the court, with the king continually on stage, playing a part dictated by the elaborate protocol of the *etiquetas de palacio*. Without descending to the purely anecdotal the authors convey an interesting picture of both the rituals and the diversions of the court, from hunts in a menagerie to battles between toy fleets. Without jading the reader they show something of the jaded courtier's appetite for unceasing spectacle.

A recurrent paradox of the book is that, although a pleasure palace like the Retiro suggests the delights of peace, it was built in time of war, at great cost, and in accordance with royal orders that no ordinary sources of income be used to pay for it. The authors devote a very useful chapter to finances and the organization of work, one based in part on three fragmentary accounts that compensate to some extent for the loss of the master records. They show how various groups within the ruling classes were pressured to contribute, and how the city of Madrid paid not only by a tax on meat and wine, but also by a competitive system whereby each municipal corporation would purchase space overlooking the principal courtyard and its fiestas. There is a very acute economist's sense of who really paid, of how the burden was passed along, and of the benefits gained by contributing to the enterprise. There is also a useful attempt to relate the cost to other expenses of the court and the total expenditures of the government. It puts the Retiro somewhat in perspective to know that it cost about as much per year as the fleet of 12 Royal galleys, but only a small fraction of the cost of supplying the army in Flanders.

Being austere on the outside, the Retiro depended for its effect on the splendor of the trappings assembled inside. There were collections of tapestries, in the tradition of the portable tapestry ensembles started by Charles V for his itinerant court. Although little major sculpture was actually commissioned for the Retiro, a lot was rounded up, and some of it constituted an unofficial silver reserve that could be melted

down in times of emergency. Philip IV's greatest interest was as a collector of paintings, and about 800 were assembled by him for the Retiro, second only to the 1100 pictures he collected for the Alcázar. The pace of collecting was frenetic; sometimes a thematic unity does emerge from the hangings, but often it was overshadowed by the need to express magnificence, usually by covering every wall from floor to ceiling with paintings. However, one major room does stand out as the locus of a coherent program built around paintings expressly commissioned for the purpose, namely the Hall of Realms, which was the former throne room of the palace. The authors connect its iconography with the tradition of the "Hall of Princely Virtue," the room designed to express the greatness of the prince, partly in historical narratives and partly in the newer fashion of allegorical painting.

In the Retiro the Hall of Realms was organized around three types of paintings. First there was a series of equestrian portraits of the Spanish monarchs and their queens, which stressed the continuity of the dynasty down to its presumptive heir. Good horsemanship was considered an adjunct of nobility, and the Spanish kings are shown controlling their rearing steeds with the same symbolic finesse that they would show with the reins of the state; often it is hard to tell whether these splendid canvases are showing us a baroque commander-in-chief or a pose from an equestrian ballet. The second component of the program was a series of 10 Hercules panels by Zurbarán. The authors carefully analyze the many layers of princely imagery that Hercules could convey: an image of classical strength and virtue, an emblem of the prince going back to Charles V, a symbol of the sun and more specifically of the Planet King Philip IV, a symbol of apotheosis, and finally a metaphor for conquest over discord, just as the

Spanish monarchy thought itself triumphant over revolt and heresy. The third component, the series of battle paintings that include Velázquez's *Surrender of Breda*, is viewed partly as a vindication of the military record, but also as a program for future action, one revolving around Olivares's plan for a mutual defense pact, called the Union of Arms, between the various kingdoms under Spanish rule. Maino's beautiful *Recapture of Bahia*, in which Portuguese women care for Castilian wounded with a kind of pathos taken from Spanish religious iconography, seems to be a direct reference to the Union of Arms. The *Surrender of Breda*, on the other hand, is interpreted in a brilliant exercise in the reading of gesture that forms one of the high points of the book. Surrender scenes had a standard iconography in which the vanquished general kneels alone before the mounted victor and offers him the keys of the citadel; the emphasis is on the starkness of defeat. Velázquez turns the surrender scene into the epitome of chivalry and clemency: the defeated Justin of Nassau begins to kneel but is restrained; the victorious Spinola has dismounted to embrace his enemy; the great stallion at the right of the picture is significant "precisely because Spínola is not mounted on its back." "Velázquez saw the scene as a drama, but as a drama shorn of theatricality, which he then arrested at a random moment before the participants could freeze in histrionic poses."

This is not only a very readable and well written book, but also a very well documented one, and one of the many pleasures it offers are notes and appendices that allow the outsider to see how Hispanicists go about their work; in particular, the problems and opportunities offered by Spanish archives form a very interesting parallel to what one encounters, for instance, in Italian archives. There are good bibliographical references for a number of subjects

of very wide importance: court etiquette and court theater, Hercules, the theory of princely magnificence, and neo-Stoic opposition to this theory. A surprisingly large number of Italian artists make an appearance: Claude, Poussin, Lanfranco, Sacchi, Domenichino, Fanzago, Finelli, Mitelli, and Colonna. Two talented Italian emigrés emerge as innovative personalities of the first importance: the architect Crescenzi, and the Tuscan fountain designer Cosimo Lotti, who turned scenographer and staged many of the great court spectacles. Two Spanish noblemen step into the limelight as great collectors and key patrons of Italian art: the Count of Monterrey, viceroy in Naples and organizer of two great shipments of Italian paintings to the Retiro in 1633 and 1638; and the Marchese of Castel Rodrigo, ambassador to Rome between 1632 and 1641, where he collected paintings for the Retiro, commissioned work from Claude, supported the construction of Borromini's San Carolino, and elicited designs from that architect for a mysterious "royal edifice begun by his ancestors and tombs of his (family) heroes." There are dozens of other interesting personalities that emerge and informative leads. But possibly the most important contribution of the book is the delicate balance that is maintained throughout: art is analyzed in terms of propaganda, but also movingly treated as art; the court is seen through the mirrors of drama and poetry that it held up to itself, but also in terms of the hard political and military realities of the day. It sets an extraordinarily high standard for future palace monographs, which in a sense will all now have to be written jointly, unless the crafts of historian and art historian can be combined in the same person.

JOSEPH CONNORS
Columbia University

CENTRAL AND NORTHERN EUROPE

DETHARD VON WINTERFELD, *Der Dom in Bamberg*, Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1979, 2 vols., 609 pp., 91 dwgs., 92 illus. DM 295.

Though Bamberg cathedral is one of the outstanding buildings of the later Hohenstaufen period, a regular monograph was never undertaken until now. It is the author's intention to fill this lacuna. I do not hesitate to say that he has realized this aim in a most successful way.

For more than a century the building was an enigma for historians and archaeologists. Art historians mostly occupied themselves with the problems of the famous masterworks of late Romanesque sculpture. The history of the building itself was presented rather summarily for a larger public or else in special investigations into partial problems. Architectural contradictions which show themselves in the building at first view have never been elucidated in a con-

vincing way, not even by specialists like Kömstedt or von Reitzenstein. The new monograph shows the reason why: the problems are so numerous and so complicated that neither the concept of a series of phases of execution following one another, nor the idea of a number of planning stages is sufficient. There is rather a complicated network of both.

In order to make this clear, the author chose to follow three different, but parallel ways: the