Review of *The Early Temples of the Mormons*

ANDREW, LAUREL B. *The Early Temples of the Mormons.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978. 218 pp. $15.00.

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Laurel B. Andrew's recently published book, *The Early Temples of the Mormons,* is a slightly modified and refined version of her earlier doctoral thesis, "The Nineteenth-Century Temple Architecture of the Latter-day Saints" (University of Michigan, 1973), the latter being a scholarly expansion of an even earlier collaborative study with her husband of "The Four Mormon Temples in Utah" (*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* 30:1 [1971]:51–65). Her major thesis, that nineteenth-century Mormon temple architecture uniquely expresses the spiritual and temporal aspirations of a millennial and utopian "Kingdom of God" on earth, has remained consistent throughout the three studies. What is obvious to a Mormon reader in comparing the dissertation to the book is the elimination in the book of some, though not all, anti-Mormon biases, what I would call "Brodyisms" for want of a better term. Her book promises to appeal to an educated and tolerant Mormon audience, although its scholarly tone and technical architectural terminology may make it somewhat inaccessible to the lay reader.

This book is clearly the most exhaustive treatment of Mormon temple architecture to date. Mormons admire their temples primarily as monuments to God. "Their viewpoint is historical, not critical", she claims. Indeed, Mormon writers have maintained an almost exclusively ritualistic rather than stylistic orientation toward their temples. Nibley in "What is a Temple?" and Talmage in *The House of the Lord,* while drawing illuminating analogies between the earlier Mosaic and Solomonic sanctuaries and temple symbolism, say little about the style of Mormon temple architecture, except to say it is unique, a major point of concurrence with most writers on the subject, including Andrew, who writes simply: "[Mormonism] produced an architectural form unique to itself, the temple, and created a style sufficiently different from other revival styles of the nineteenth-century to be recognizable as pure Mormon." [Note: Andrew, p. 11. William A. Raynor's *The Everlasting Spires* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965) also grew from a thesis and contains one fine chapter on the architecture of the Salt Lake Temple, but is of necessity more limited than Andrew's and treats only one of the Utah temples. Andrew also criticizes an "extravagant" statement in Nibley's article: ". . . in establishing their temples the Mormons did not adopt traditional forms: with them the temples and its rites are absolutely pristine. In contrast, the church and temple

architecture of the world is an exotic jumble, a bewildering complex of borrowed motifs." (*Millennial Star* 120:8 [1958]:247.) This was an unfortunate and easily refutable claim in the work of an otherwise impeccable scholar—his delightful rejoinder: "A lot has been learned since then" (Hugh W. Nibley, *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* [Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1978], p. xvi). Mormon readers may take issue with how she comes to this conclusion, for she maintains that there are both theological (symbolical) and architectural links to Freemasonry, and while this alone may be innocuous enough in light of several studies relating Mormonism to Masonry, it does call into question the divine origin of early temple styles, particularly the Kirtland, Nauvoo, and Salt Lake temples. [Note: Her objective stance is understandably critical of divine revelation, but her treatment of Joseph Smith's role in the planning of the Nauvoo Temple is unnecessarily skeptical and derogatory (see p. 62ff).]

The real value of this book lies in its efforts to analyze and place in historical and religious context the nineteenth-century Mormon architectural achievement. Andrew's basic premise is very "Ruskinian", namely, that artistic monuments are the most reliable index of cultural values. It follows, therefore, that as the Church changed and evolved in doctrine and ritual in its early formative years, the major edifices which both house and symbolize those religious values changed, even in the face of prevailing taste (the Utah temples were constructed in a style Andrew terms "castellated Gothic," several years after the Gothic Revival had run its course in America). The above premise also explains the uniqueness of Mormon architecture as a reflection and outgrowth of its unusual religious tenets. What a Mormon reader may dispute is the militancy she assigned to nineteenth-century Mormon Millennialism as reflected in the fortified austerity of the temple exteriors. However, one tends to agree with her contention that the Utah temples were, in addition to their ecclesiastical functions, fortified outposts in an alien land, marking the periphery of the Kingdom of God in the wilderness, and perhaps even acting as bastions of defense against the all-too-keenly-remembered persecutions of the Gentiles. And whether intentional or not, the fortress appearance may be seen as a defense against the world, a protection from the world, a separation of the worldly from the divine sanctuary within, which she terms the receiving place of the Lord. These suggestions amplify the sacred and cosmic significance of temples in the Mormon faith. One wishes she had made more of these dualities in strictly architectural and historical terms, for the blending of the sacred and the secular goes back through the Renaissance to the Roman marriage of the trabeated Greek temple and the arcuated secular arena in the Colosseum.

One of the most illuminating aspects of the book is the author's meticulous tracking of changed ritual, function, and need to the evolving architectural style of the early temples. The Nauvoo Temple, for example, marked the first appearance of architectural symbolism based in Mormon theology, but since the doctrines were still in a state of flux and the Church was young, its architectural awkwardness was due to the attempt "to create an architectural identify for a new people" (p. 96). Ignoring the religious reasons behind the artistic form would lead to the narrow criticism of Aldous Huxley, for example, who criticized the Salt Lake Temple as "completely unoriginal, utterly and uniformly prosaic" and called the Logan Temple a "cyclopean gazebo." [Aldous Huxley, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Other Essays* (New York: Harper 1952), pp. 237, 250.] Andrew is also aesthetically critical of a couple of temples—in particular, the Kirtland, whose "strange appearance is due in part to the lack of any plastic definition of either facades or sides" (p. 43), and the St. George, whose "tower is far too narrow for the base upon which it rests, and contradicts the fortified mass toppled by battlements" (p. 174). She finds the Logan Temple "a far more authentic English castellated structure" (p. 177) than either St. George or Salt Lake and reserves her highest admiration for the Manti Temple, designed by W. H. Folsom, "the most sophisticated architect" working for the Mormons. It demonstrates his "originality in working with a unique form and in an outmoded style, both of which he reconciled with contemporary ideas to produce an imposing and truly monumental building" (p. 177). It is interesting that she prefers the one Utah temple which is most contemporary and, as she claims, most secular. The latter term is more confusing and inappropriate in reference to the earlier temples, whose primary forms derive from Georgian and Gothic prototypes. Nevertheless, it is refreshing and illuminating to see our holy shrines through the eyes of a scholarly nonbeliever—we gain a truer view of their value because we are more aesthetically and historically informed. Her conclusion regarding the Mormon contribution to American culture is at least partly true: "The Mormon view of the relationship between man and his surroundings was essentially pragmatic, not poetic—it is only in architecture that the Mormons made a significant and original contribution to the visual arts of America" (p. 196).