Hence the mystics do not reject the ruins that surround them. They remain there. They go there.

—Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*

Mysticism is seldom discussed in terms of the material conditions of the site where it takes place, or how such experience and practice corresponds to space, location, or other architectural premises.¹ In 1982 Michel de Certeau initiated a dialogue about place and space in what he termed “the mystic fable”, dwelling on such concepts as the mystic circle, redistribution of space, the refuge, places to lose oneself (the monastery, the public square, the garden), and the foundations of the mystic sign.² De Certeau’s essay ventures, in fact, into a most vexed area of the study of mysticism: the negotiation of spatial grounds with a journey otherwise largely understood as ineffable, incorporeal, and spiritual. The following words by Teresa de Jesús³ illustrate the complexity of this point:

¹ This study is part of a chapter of a book project titled *Teresa de Jesús and the Place of Mystical Rendition*, in which I seek to recover the original spaces of the 17 convents reformed by De Jesús in an attempt to understand the space shared by her place of mysticism with *mudéjar* and other strands of architecture representing transconfessional and transcultural expressions in early modern Spain.


³ Teresa de Jesús, 16th-century mystic, writer, and reformer of the Carmelite order in Spain, is the author of four treatises published as the *Book of Life* (Libro de la vida, 1652), the *Way of Perfection* (Camino de perfección, 1562–64), the *Interior Castle* (Castillo interior, 1577), and the *Book of Foundations* (Libro de las fundaciones, 1573–82). All references to her written works in the present essay are drawn from the *Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, trans. E. Allison Peers (London, 1946), and will be cited with the title of the book by De Jesús, the volume, and the page number of origin. Each reference will be followed by the Spanish original drawn from De Jesús’s *Obras completas*, ed. Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink (Madrid, 1986), and will be cited at the end of the quotation with the title of the book and the page number in the *Obras completas* where the passage can be found.
O God, how little have buildings and outward comforts to do with the inward life of the soul! For love of Him I beg you, my sisters and fathers, never to be other than very modest in this matter of large and sumptuous houses. Let us bear in mind our true founders, those holy Fathers from whom we are descended, for we know it was the road of poverty and humility which they took that led them to the fruition of God.4

To convey to readers the indescribable “inward life of the soul” (lo interior) and the ultimate aspiration and achievement of the “fruition of God” (gozo de Dios), De Jesús’s Book of Foundations prescribes modesty in the presence and meaning of the “large and sumptuous houses” (casas grandes y suntuosas) that emerged during the 16th and 17th centuries in Spain.5 Critics reading this passage and numerous others in which the Carmelite nun inscribes architectural images have read these signs at face value and concluded that her brand of mysticism negates the physical world, and that references to architecture mean little more than background noise—a mere ancillary sign on the

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4 De Jesús, Foundations, 3: 65; “¡Oh, válame Dios, qué poco hacen estos edificios y regalos esteriores para lo interior! Por su amor os pido, hermanas y padres míos, que nunca dejeis de ir muy moderados en esto de casas grandes y suntuosas. Tengamos delante nuestros fundadores verdaderos, que son aquellos santos padres de donde descendimos, que sabemos que por aquel camino de pobreza y humildad gozan de Dios” (De Jesús, Fundaciones, p. 720).

5 De Jesús was familiar with this kind of house because she spent over half a year in the palace of Luisa de la Cerda in Toledo, which (as María Pilar Manero Sorolla notes) “stood out among more than sixty noble dwellings not only for its magnificence and architectural exuberance—which combined Mozarabic, Mudejar, Gothic, and plateresque styles—but also for being one of Toledo’s most influential” (Manero Sorolla, “On the Margins of the Mendozas: Luisa de la Cerda and María de San José [Salazar],” in Power and Gender in Renaissance Spain: Eight Women of the Mendoza Family, 1450–1650, ed. Helen Nader [Urbana and Chicago, 2004], p. 115). This building, where De Jesús composed most of her Book of Life while on leave from the Convent of La Encarnación in Ávila, sat atop the highest hill in Toledo. Manero Sorolla describes it as the site of a small court “frequented by highborn ladies of the upper nobility and even royalty” (Manero Sorolla, “On the Margins,” p. 115). De Jesús no doubt referred to these palatial edifices, most of which were built anew or over the remnants of previous manors in order to house those in positions of authority and power: the palace of Charles V in the Alhambra, Granada; the palace-monastery of Philip II in San Lorenzo del Escorial, Madrid; and the numerous palaces and princely houses that populated the architectural halls of the Peninsula during these two centuries. The bibliography on this subject matter is vast, so I merely name a few introductory studies: Barbara von Barghahn, Age of Gold, Age of Iron: Renaissance Spain and Symbols of Monarchy (Lanham, Maryland, 1985); Helen Nader, The Mendoza Family in the Spanish Renaissance (New Brunswick, 1979); Earl E. Rosenthal, The Palace of Charles V in Granada (Princeton, 1985); George Kubler, Building the Escorial (Princeton, 1982); and Jonathan Brown and John H. Elliott, A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip V (New Haven, 2003).