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Richard L. Cleary
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*The Place Royale and Urban Design
in the Ancien Régime*

The Place Royale and Urban Design in the Ancien Régime is the first study to examine a unique urban phenomenon that is closely associated with French monarchy in the age of absolutism. A distinct type of city square, the *places royales* were planned in honor of Louis XIV and his heir, Louis XV. Featuring a freestanding statue of the monarch at its center, it was framed by buildings of uniform, monumental design such as are found in some of the most outstanding examples to have survived, including the Place Vendôme in Paris and the Place Stanislas in Nancy. Instruments of royal propaganda, these urban spaces tested the fealty of provincial and municipal governments, which were responsible for realizing them within the heart of densely occupied cities. In this study, Richard Cleary examines the *places royales* in terms of the political mechanisms and design processes through which they were conceived, their intended meanings for contemporaries, and their relationship to the urban fabrics of which they are a part. Also included is a catalog describing projects for *places royales* in twenty-five cities in France and Canada.

Richard Cleary is Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. He is a scholar of French architecture of the Ancien Régime, as well as modern American architecture.

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For Barbara, Patrick, Amanda, and My Parents

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Acknowledgments

My introduction to *places royales* occurred in an architectural history survey taught by Narciso Menocal at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. Like many of my own students today, I was fascinated by Aveline's engraving of the Place Louis-le-Grand (Place Vendôme) in Paris (Fig. 23), which depicts the facades as a screen having little more substance than a Hollywood movie set. How, I wondered, did such a thing come to pass? Years later, in a seminar on Madame de Pompadour conducted by Donald Posner at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York, I became interested in the interactions of patrons, governmental bodies, and artists in the creation of the *places royales* honoring Louis XV, and this investigation launched my Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia University. I set off to Paris seeking a "smoking gun," which would localize key decisions regarding the planning of *places royales* during the 1740s and 1750s in the circle of Pompadour and her brother, the Marquis de Marigny. Instead, the trail of edicts, drawings, and contracts led me back in time to the 1680s and the *places royales* of Louis XIV. Completion of the dissertation marked one stage of this journey, and my advisors – George R. Collins, Hilary Ballon, Rosemarie Bletter, Joseph Connors, and Gita May – urged me to continue. A fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities was instrumental in allowing me to do so.

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