CHAPTER 8

POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM IN CUBA: THE IMPACT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS ON THE ISLAND'S VISUAL ARTS[1]

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> Havana . . . when examined closely, bears some resemblance to Pompeii . . . it would not be surprising to discover the House of Pansa or of Cornelius Rufus in the Cerro – which is the Faubourg Saint-Germain of Havana. The inner courtyard surrounded by marble or stucco columns, the font and the small garden in which the great lord of Cuba spends the evening with his family, seem to have been copied from the plans of a Pompeian villa.

These words, which link the splendid country residences of the suburban quarter of the Cerro (Philippou 2014: 115; Coyula Cowley and Rigol Savio 2015: 193–214), in the Cuban capital, to those of the famous city buried under the lava of Mount Vesuvius, appeared in the Mexican newspaper *Diario del Hogar*, on 22 October 1898.[2]

Indeed, European travellers arriving in Havana at the end of the nineteenth century would have been able to observe the consequences of the mass introduction of neoclassicism in (not only) domestic architecture: the builders of the most important and luxurious dwellings of that century had adopted the courtyard surrounded by galleries (or cloistered courtyard),[3] featuring in Roman and, of course, Pompeian *domus*, as a characteristic element of these new buildings. Nonetheless, it warrants noting that they had adapted the neoclassical courtyard to local requirements: by choosing Doric columns, rather than pillars to support the round arches of the galleries, they had taken into account the small size of these spaces and the need for light and the circulation of air in the surrounding rooms (Weiss 1996: 348; García Santana 2005: 59–62). In relation to these galleries, already in 1841 the *Diario de la Marina* offered an account of the villa of the Count of Santovenia, built in the Cerro between 1832 and 1841 by Manuel Eusebio Martínez de Campos, the fabulously wealthy owner of sugar mills in the province of Matanzas: 'Its sumptuousness is dazzling not only because of its tropical architecture, but also because of the treasures that it contains; . . . the interminable series of columns with graceful capitals in the style of a Pompeian mansion' (Weiss 1996: 417–18).

These two allusions to the houses of Pompeii in the press appear to be linked to the dissemination of the knowledge of the excavations and ruins of the two ancient Campanian cities in Cuba – irrespective of whether this was through news appearing in the press or in almanacs,[4] or through the journeys of the scions of the Creole elite in Italy[5] – which provided an archaeological frame of reference so as to recognize the floorplan and characteristics of ancient Roman dwellings, but not to a conscious or

comprehensive development programme for building 'Pompeian' mansions on the island.

Accordingly, this chapter focuses, on the basis of the subject matter of a paper by Luisa Campuzano (2014: 93–7), on other examples of the most direct influence of Pompeian decorative motifs in nineteenth-century Cuba, in the framework of the adoption of a neoclassicism which was adapted to the island's geographical context and contributed to foster a local 'good taste'.[6]

Nineteenth-century Cuba and the dissemination of and the taste for the neoclassical style

The dissemination of the neoclassical style and the taste for Pompeian architecture in Cuba was linked to a series of political, economic, social and cultural factors emerging on the island between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. From 1817 and 1819, the Spanish monarchy, which feared the spread of revolutionary ideas on the island and that the black population might revolt against the authorities, following the conspiracy of the black Creole José Antonio Aponte in 1812, issued two royal decrees that introduced important changes: the first, entitled 'on white colonization', encouraged the immigration of Spaniards and (white) foreigners, who were guaranteed advantageous living conditions;[7] the second, dated 10 February 1818, established the right of free trade with foreign countries, thus bringing the island's commercial isolation to an end (Weiss 1996: 325; García Santana 2005: 63–4). This opportunity for opening up to Atlantic trade was accompanied by widespread sugarcane cultivation – a result of the Haitian Revolution of 1791 – which led to the building of new sugar mills, above all in eastern Cuba. The mass production and sale of sugar, together with coffee and tobacco, gave rise to an affluent class of rural owners who, as with the industrial and trade magnates, invested part of their vast profits in the construction of magnificent urban and country villas, which drew inspiration from the new fashions arriving from Europe and North America.

During that important economic boom, which peaked in the second third of the nineteenth century, engineers, architects, Creoles and foreigners were hired not only to build the railroad, its stations and public buildings. In Havana, they also participated in a far-reaching civil building programme, whose implementation was especially vigorous during the period from 1834 to 1838, when Miguel Tacón y Rosique was the captain general of the island. Employing public funds and granting concessions to private entrepreneurs, alike, Tacón encouraged the construction of public and private buildings, featuring the theatre named after him – which will be discussed further on –, a promenade and the New Prison and the Market (Weiss 1996: 335, 387–90, 392–7; Philippou 2014: 118–20).

At that moment of economic splendour, which had an important impact on building programmes, laws were passed favouring the dissemination of education and the promotion of culture and the fine arts. In 1818, the Free School of Drawing and Painting was founded, under the auspices of the Royal Economic Society of Friends of the Country,

whose name was changed to the National Academy of Fine Arts of San Alejandro in 1832. Its mission was to revamp and improve the arts on the island through the good offices of (white) painters trained at European academies, including its first director, the Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Vermay, rejecting previous works produced, by and large, by free black artists of African provenance. Indeed, as José Antonio Saco (1946: 41) declared, 'Down to an absolutely deplorable misfortune, practically all the arts on our island are in the hands of coloured people' (Saco 1946: 41; Paneque Duquesne 2020: 141–2; Neill 2012: 293–5). In its lecture halls, well-educated white students[8] would learn to draw by imitating engravings that reproduced European masterpieces and plaster casts of ancient sculptures.

The newspapers, controlled by the Creole and peninsular elite, also fostered 'good taste' and the fine arts – principally relating to the modernity and neoclassicism promoted by European academies – in daily life (Neill 2012: 305). In response to the same demands, in the 1840s there was an attempt to found a theoretical-practical school of architecture, once again under the auspices of the Royal Economic Society of Friends of the Country, whose biennial programme would include architectural drawing and composition courses: despite having been given the go-ahead by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid back in 1841, it was never brought to fruition because of the lack of a suitable venue (Paneque Duquesne 2020: 272–3).

As of the 1850s, the white Creole elite, who in the first half of the nineteenth century had become aware of their own economic, social and aesthetic identity, began to implement a policy of open confrontation with the Spanish monarchy, which as of 1868, led to nearly thirty years of wars of independence in Cuba. Those wars did not completely undermine the island's economy or cities which, like Matanzas (García Santana 2009: chaps. 2 and 3), were enlarged and renovated according to the new taste for neoclassicism.

Thanks to the aforementioned aspects as a whole, neoclassicism, and with it the Pompeian style, promoted by the white Creole and peninsular elite and originally linked to a process of ideological renewal developed in the classrooms of the Seminary of San Carlos and San Ambrosio, under the guidance of the enlightened bishop of Havana (originally from Salamanca) Juan José Díaz de Espada y Landa (1802–32), were disseminated in Cuba in three ways. Firstly, through the works performed by the Spanish military engineers tasked with fortifying the island's cities. Secondly, through the foreign artists and architects who, as of 1817, began to arrive in Cuba, above all from France, and who rendered their services in different places. And, lastly, through the US traders who, protected by the free trade laws, settled on the island, bringing with them an interpretation of neoclassicism in wood, such as the round arches equipped with fan blinds or the gorge cornices adopted in the Deep South of the United States (particularly in New Orleans) (García Santana 2005: 63; 2008: 218).

Gioacchino Albé, Daniel Dall'Aglio and Antonio Meucci

The artists and painters who, as of 1818 under the law on 'white colonization', made the most of the opening of Cuba to the world, its thriving economy and the Cuban elite's

penchant for 'good taste', travelled to the island in search of fortune, included Frenchmen, Spaniards and Italians. As highlighted in the studies performed by Roselló (2002, 2009, 2019), the Italians began to arrive on the island in the 1830s. Specializing in miniatures, portraits and murals, genres very much in fashion in Europe at the time, they offered their services to the Italian opera companies that performed at the theatres of Havana. Some of them also collaborated with the aforementioned National Academy of Fine Arts of San Alejandro, with one of their number, Ettore Morelli, becoming its director in 1857 (Paneque Duquesne 2020: 229).

Three of those artists, Gioacchino Albé, Daniel Dall'Aglio and Antonio Meucci, are worthy of greater attention insofar as they had a hand in the Pompeian-style[9] decorations conserved in one of the island's nineteenth-century buildings.

Born in Bologna in 1800 and, in all probability, a disciple of Antonio Basoli, Albé was a decorator and set designer.[10] He arrived in Havana in 1835 and, the following year, married Antonia Valdés, with the also Italian painters Luigi Tartarini and Mario Bragaldi acting as witnesses. He worked regularly at the Tacón Theatre, which he decorated, with another Italian, in 1835, as soon as it had been built. The last extant piece of information relating to him is dated 1850, when, together with another compatriot, he made the backdrops for Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots*, much acclaimed by the public and the press. A piece of news and a press announcement, published in the newspaper *Faro Industrial de La Habana*, on 1 May 1843 and on 4, 6 and 7 September 1846, respectively, confirm that it was he who painted the ceilings of the Aldama Palace in Havana – which will be covered in the following section – designed by the Florentine Antonio Meucci[11] (Roselló 2005: 77; Herrera López 2007: 112), another Italian colleague at the Tacón Theatre. Furthermore, when this theatre had to be repaired after the hurricane in October 1846, Albé was commissioned to decorate one of the drop curtains, brought from Italy, which depicted a garland of flowers and, in the bottom part, Medusa (Cruz Díaz 1999: 3). In view of the formal and technical similarities to the decorations of the Aldama Palace, Pedro Herrera López (2007: 37, 46 and 112) asserts that Albé also decorated the ceiling of a small parlour of the house that was the residence of José Eusebio Alfonso Soler, the uncle of Miguel Aldama, currently located in Old Havana, on calle San Ignacio, 503, on the corner with Santa Clara. Regrettably, this circular ceiling, depicting candlesticks and masks surrounded by tondos, was demolished and the only image available is to be found in the book by Herrera López (2007: 37).

As already noted, the Roman painter, decorator and also architect Daniel Dall'Aglio was one of Albé's colleagues at the Tacón and Principal Theatres in Havana. Born in 1811 (Fernández 2008: 218, n. 1) and almost certainly academically trained, in 1834 he embarked for Havana, together with the aforementioned Tartarini, as a painter hired by an Italian opera company, probably linked to the La Pergola Theatre in Florence, which was going to perform at the Principal Theatre. It seems that Dall'Aglio only remained on the island for a few months, before returning a second time in 1837, after which he stayed until 1871, when he requested a passport to travel to Mexico, where he ended his life. In 1838, he was hired by the recently opened Tacón Theatre as a painter of backdrops and sets, where he began to collaborate with Albé and Meucci, while continuing to work at

the Principal Theatre. The drop curtain that Dall'Aglio painted for the Tacón Theatre was first used on 31 March 1839, being considered as 'the best of its class that has been seen hitherto in Havana' (Rey Alfonso 1988: 5), although nothing is known about what it depicted.

As will be seen further on, it is plausible that around that date Dall'Aglio travelled to the city of Trinidad to decorate the halls of the Cantero and Borrell Palaces, even though there are some doubts and that these commissions, together with the paintings of the living quarters of the Guáimaro sugar mill, for the same client, might have been carried out at the end of the 1850s. He was certainly in Havana in 1844, for he was commissioned as an architect to design the new theatre of the city's Philharmonic Society of St Cecilia, while decorating the building with Albé.

According to the news appearing in the *Avisador de Comercio* on 9 August 1849, together with another Italian painter, José Baturone, Dall'Aglio decorated the stage of the new theatre in Puerto Príncipe, namely, the Principal (Roselló 2009: 32–3). In 1858 or 1859, Dall'Aglio and Baturone yet again worked together on the interior decoration of the Tacón Theatre, which had been damaged by the explosion of the navy arsenal on 29 September 1858 (Rey Alfonso 1988: 21). The artist then moved to Matanzas, probably in 1860, where he stayed until 1871. In this city, he was responsible for two masterpieces of Cuban neoclassical civil and religious architecture: the Esteban Theatre, now the Sauto Theatre – on which more will be said further on – and the church of St Peter the Apostle in the district of Versalles, work on which started in 1867 and which for Weiss is 'the most important nineteenth-century religious building on the island' (Weiss 1996: 429). Despite the success of the Esteban commission, in 1864 part of Dall'Aglio's fees were still outstanding and, according to the news appearing in *La Aurora del Yumurí* on 29 May of the same year (Fernández 2008: 221), he was in financial straits. Perhaps to improve his finances, in 1866 he painted the drop curtain and eight decorations for a small theatre in Bemba (modern-day Jovellanos), in the province of Matanzas. After the building of the church of St Peter the Apostle, he emigrated to Mexico where he probably participated in, or supervised, the building of another theatre, the Iturbide, and where he died before 1888, the year in which, now deceased, he was mentioned in *La Aurora del Yumurí* on 27 March.

The last Italian artist whose biography deserves a brief mention is the aforementioned Antonio Meucci, a colleague of Albé and Dall'Aglio from his Havana days and the author of the designs for the decorations of the Aldama Palace (Roselló 2005: 63–93). This eclectic was born in Florence in 1808, where, as of 1821, he attended the Academy of Fine Arts for six years: there, he not only studied drawing, painting and sculpting, but also mechanics and chemistry, having the opportunity to perform experiments in the laboratories. This knowledge enabled him to be hired as an assistant machinist at the La Pergola Theatre in Florence and to acquire the skills that he would subsequently demonstrate when, probably for political reason, he had to abandon his hometown and emigrate to Cuba, embarking in Livorno on the same ship as Dall'Aglio. In Havana, together with his wife, who was a costume designer, he worked as a machinist and stagehand at the Principal and Tacón Theatres, earning an additional income thanks to his many inventions, such as water

purification filters and a new electroplating technique. As with his compatriot Dall'Aglio, Meucci also had a knowledge of architecture, since, when the Tacón Theatre was damaged by the hurricane in 1846, he was named director general of the reconstruction works. Meucci left Cuba in 1850, embarking for the United States.

The Aldama Palace

The first building featuring Pompeian decorations discussed here is the Aldama Palace, located in Havana, facing the Plaza de la Fraternidad Americana, and currently housing the History Institute of Cuba. It is one of the most significant houses of the colonial period, the successful attempt of a wealthy family belonging to the peninsular and Creole elite to create a dwelling embracing neoclassicism and its 'good taste', all the rage in Europe and the United States since the end of the eighteenth century. According to Philippou (2014: 116), it could even be regarded as an example of the reworking of the classical style, also employed at the time in buildings linked to the representation of Spanish central power (e.g. the refurbishment of the Palace of the Captains General and the Tacón Prison), as a reflection of the desire for autonomy in Cuba, which looked more to France and Italy than to Spain (Ramos 1995: 56).

The building, defined as 'the most artistic . . . to have been built in the city during the nineteenth century' (Herrera López 2007: 106), actually comprises two dwellings,[12] which are linked by an elegant portico with Doric columns and a length of 56 m: a larger house, in which the owner lived, and another smaller one, behind the first, almost certainly occupied by one of his daughters and her husband. The chosen plot, close of the Military Camp or Camp of Mars, was located outside the walls of Old Havana.

The main personages associated with the palace's history, as will be seen in light of the brief summary provided below, were members, at least with respect to the youngest generation, of that well-to-do liberal Creole class who sought to express their identity and aesthetic ideals through their magnificent homes, which were not now identified as before with the street on which they were located, but with the names of their owners. Domingo Aldama Aréchaga, the palace's builder and owner, who had been born into a poor family in Spain and had emigrated to Cuba at an early age, had amassed a huge fortune in the slave trade, thus allowing him to set himself up as a landowner with the purchase of four sugar mills in the province of Matanzas and sundry properties in Matanzas, Guanabacoa and Havana, as well as shares in the railroad company. As of 1834, the year in which Miguel Tacón was named captain general of the island, he was unable to play a political role on par with his economic clout, because efforts were made to distance the economic elite of the Havana area from public offices and institutions (Aguilera Manzano 2010: 13). Accused of being a traitor by the Spanish government and deprived of his assets for a time, in 1869 Aldama decided to emigrate with his family to the United States, where he died in New York in 1870 (Herrera López 2007: 118–9).

When aged fifteen, Miguel (1820–1888), one of the four children born from Aldama's marriage to the wealthy Rosa Alfonso y Soler, continued his schooling in Germany,

where he became acquainted with Alexander von Humboldt, and subsequently in England and France. On returning to Cuba in 1840 or 1841, he very successfully managed his parents' sugar mills, taking a stance in favour of the abolition of the black slave trade and the introduction of free white labourers of Spanish origin. Named Marquis of Santa Rosa by Isabella II in 1864, he renounced the title because of his republican ideals. Initially a member of the annexationist movement and then the reformist movement, in 1868, with the outbreak of the Ten Years' War, he was one of the main proponents of the secessionist cause (Herrera López 2007: 114–8; Pérez 2006: 82–3).

Lastly, the Venezuelan Domingo del Monte Aponte (1803–1853), the son-in-law of Domingo Aldama, who in all likelihood lived in the palace's smaller house, emigrated to Cuba with his family in 1811, became a doctor of law in Madrid in 1828, was a prominent intellectual, journalist, writer and organizer of literary gatherings, in which the most prominent Cuban authors participated (Pérez 2017: 40), and a member of the aforementioned Royal Economic Society of Friends of the Country and the Academies of History of Paris and Madrid. Additionally, he fought for the abolition of the slave trade, being accused by the Cuban government of being the leader of the Conspiracy of La Escalera, owing to his friendship with the English consul David Turnbull (Herrera López 2007: 36). Settling in Paris in 1843 and then, after being absolved of all charges, in Madrid in 1844, he died in the Spanish capital in 1853.[13]

Del Monte was involved, at least initially, in the building project of the palace, insofar as in a letter, dated 25 October 1838, that he sent to his co-brother-in-law, he declared that 'our father-in-law … intends to build a small house with simple and elegant architecture, which, if he follows the plans with which I have already provided him, will be best and one and only in Havana in which it is possible to glimpse intentions and indications of respect and love for the fine arts' (Herrera López 2007: 21). These plans had been drawn by the Venezuelan engineer Manuel José Carrerá Heredia, a friend of Del Monte, which were first modified and finally rejected because of their cost.

As Alicia García Santana (2012: 242–4) has demonstrated, it was the French architect Jules Sagebien (1796–1867) who was commissioned to draw up the final plans of the palace and who revealed his culture and refined taste in his work (García Santana 2011: 28–39). Having emigrated from France to Cuba in 1818, and after a brief stay in New York, he pursued his profession chiefly in Matanzas, where shortly after his arrival on the island in the retinue of another Frenchman Esteban Best, he built the first neoclassical building in the city, that of the land Customs House, which was completely refurbished in 1911 (Pérez Orozco et al. 2015: 40–1; García Santana 2009: 117–8), thus giving rise to a new architectural period, under the influence of neoclassicism. In the proposal submitted to Aldama, Sagebien modified the floorplan of the stately mansion-warehouse, typical of the eighteenth century, by including a colonnade with an architrave (García Santana 2012: 249; Weiss 1996: 346). While the carpentry by John Lambden and the flooring by the Italian marble mason Francesco Bertolidi, with materials from Italy, followed Sagebien's plan, it is more than probable that the murals, conceived, as observed above, by Antonio Meucci and then painted by Albé, perhaps with the collaboration of Dall'Aglio or Mario Bragaldi and Luigi Tartarini, were commissioned and completed

when the palace had already been finished, namely, between 1844 and 1846, since there is no reference to them in Sagebien's papers (García Santana 2012: 245; 2010: 205; Herrera López 2007: 47).

Some of those paintings, featuring classical and, especially, Pompeian motifs (Weiss 1996: 350 and 376; Campuzano 2014: 47), can still be seen. Precisely, nowadays, 'paintings are only found on eight of its ceilings and the wall of a premises . . . we know that there were other rooms with ceiling paintings and not only on the main floor, but also on the mezzanine, where none have survived' (Herrera López 2007: 45–6 *passim*). This state of affairs was initially the result of the vandalism of the Spanish volunteers who occupied and pillaged the building on 24 January 1869, in reprisal for the adhesion of Miguel Aldama and Leonardo del Monte, the son of Domingo, to the secessionist cause, and subsequently of the damage caused to the palace when it was converted into a tobacco factory, with its offices and workshop.

The Pompeian motifs, which the painter-cum-decorator Albé described as being 'in the style of Raphael . . . with figures, arabesques and gilded elements' (Herrera López 2007: 47) in an announcement offering his services, appear, for example, on the ceiling of the dining room (Figure 8.1) on the top floor of the house intended for Domingo del Monte.

Here, it is possible to observe, together with the faux architectural elements which give the whole a feeling of depth and order, the presence of female masks framed by red medallions, small Cupids inside tondos placed symmetrically in the four corners of the ceiling, gold polygonal spaces containing fine candlesticks that emerge from the heads of

Figure 8.1 Ceiling of the dining room on the top floor of the house of Domingo del Monte. © Julio A. Larramendi.

female busts and from which plant motifs sprout: above them, there are small figurines of youthful tight-rope walkers, flanked on both sides by floating maidens.

The decorators also painted Pompeian motifs on the ceiling of the top floor passage that connected the house of Domingo Aldama with that of Domingo del Monte: on a light green background there are female masks framed by hexagons which, on the long sides, are accompanied by opposed griffins, in addition to geometric and plant motifs which create a mosaic and stucco effect (Weiss 1996: 350, Fig. 632). The main hall of Aldama's house features Cupids in different poses which surround a central painting framed by faux architectural elements and a cornice in which the figure of Jupiter enthroned appears (Weiss 1996: 350, Fig. 633 and 635). Finally, the ceiling of the music room is decorated with Renaissance panels executed in *trompe l'oeil*, each one with a rosette, gold rectangles occupied by plant motifs and a bird in the centre, and, in the central section, Terpsichore holding a lyre in her right hand and a laurel in her left, with a Cupid offering her a musical score at her side (García Santana 2012: 245).

It is evident that, by selecting these Pompeian motifs, in line with the prevailing European taste for neoclassicism, and placing them mainly in reception rooms, Meucci, Albé and their collaborators intended to give the building a refined air of cosmopolitan 'good taste', in accordance with the wishes of their clients who followed the model of the elegant and modern houses in the United States and in cities like Paris and London, which they themselves had seen on their travels. Indeed, as Weiss (1996: 376) notes, 'The decoration of the Aldama Palace was truly that which corresponded to a building of that type in Europe.' On the other hand, by commissioning foreign painters with academic training (true in the case of Meucci, probable in that of Albé) and classical knowledge to decorate the rooms of his houses, Domingo Aldama showed his readiness to distance himself from what had been considered as art in Cuba until the beginning of the nineteenth century – to wit, the work of uneducated artisans – and to align himself with European and North American standards.

The Cantero Palace

The second case study of a building decorated with Pompeian motifs, located in Trinidad, a city in the central south of the island and declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988, represents one of the best extant examples of the neoclassical houses that proliferated in this urban centre during the first half of the nineteenth century, in parallel with the development of the sugar industry and trade (García Santana 2010: 153). Built between 1828 and 1829, it first belonged to the planter José Mariano Borrell y Padrón (1767–1830), the owner of the Guáimaro sugar mill and the man who, in 1827, achieved the highest sugar production in the world. It is not clear who designed the palace, but, in view of several architectural innovations, García Santana (2012: 223) assumes that a possible candidate might have been the Scotsman Vitruvio Steegers, the master builder of Trinidad in 1828. The palace, which was sold to María Montserrate de Lara in 1842, owes its current name to her second husband, the physician and musician Justo Germán

Cantero. Currently housing the city's history museum, the palace has one floor, a neoclassical courtyard with galleries on all four sides and a central fountain, and a high tower dominating the urban landscape. On its façades, high pilasters sustain a Doric-inspired entablature painted in *grisaille*, with triglyphs and metopes.

One of the elements most frequently employed in nineteenth-century houses in Trinidad were murals, which were not only a simple way of concealing cheap building materials, but also of reflecting, above all in drawing and dining rooms, the opulence and taste of their owners. To this end, anonymous painters, many of them mulattos, were hired, sometimes providing them with books from which to copy motifs (García Santana, Angelbello, Echenagusía 1996: 278–81). In the case of the Cantero Palace, José Mariano Borrell y Lemus (1813–64), the son of the above-mentioned Borrell y Padrón and the richest man in the city, in addition to a collaborator of the Spanish crown,[14] commissioned the Italian painter Dall'Aglio, then living in Havana, to decorate it.[15] A piece of news published in the *Correo de Trinidad* on 6 February 1839 (García Santana 2010: 199) allows for assuming that the commission was carried out shortly before this date, although the fact that the Italian painter decorated another house, that of the Guáimaro sugar mill, owned by Borrell y Lemus himself, shortly before 1859, has led Luisa Campuzano (2014: 97) to opt for the 1850s, perhaps the most probable option.

Dall'Aglio designed a highbrow decorative programme for the palace as a whole, employing Pompeian and neoclassical elements. His focused his efforts on the principal reception rooms, namely, the main hall and the small hall (Figure 8.2), separated, in accordance with the distinctive feature of the houses of Trinidad at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by rounded arches (García Santana 2012: 222).

In the main hall, a frieze was painted on the top half of the four walls, depicting the Muses – numbering ten for the sake of decorative symmetry – against a blue background and framed, alternating with symmetrical mythological paintings which, on the long walls and in the corners, reproduce griffins, Cupids combating them and, in the centre, a lyre. In contrast, above the doors of the short walls, through which the rooms are accessed, there are griffins and, in the centre, a winged genie. The doorways are surrounded by faux architectural elements, which create an illusion of depth, while the front of the columns feature classicist decorations with reddish plant motifs alternating with blue geometric figures.

This classical-Pompeian ensemble as a whole, which visitors to the palace encountered as soon as they had crossed the threshold of the main door, must have impressed them and have borne witness to the 'good taste' and wealth of the owners, who no longer sought out unschooled local painters, but foreign artists trained at academies. In the small hall, which served as a more intimate reception room, Dall'Aglio opted for a simpler decoration. He chose a regular geometric frieze, reproduced faux architectural elements around the doorways and decorated the central part of the columns with meanders in pinkish frames, thus contrasting with the blue background. The rooms also have framed doorways and geometric and floral friezes (García Santana 2010: 199, Fig. 69.7.3; Campuzano 2014: 97). There are plant garlands which, in turn, serve as a support for the framed scenes or small landscapes featuring architectural elements and statues. In

Figure 8.2 Main hall and small hall of the Cantero Palace. © Julio A. Larramendi.

one of these scenes, located on the wall of the doorway through which the tower is accessed (García Santana 2010: 199, Fig. 69.7.3, second on the right in the bottom half of the page), there are three male figures which, to a certain extent, resemble the Cupids playing with a rope in Plate XXXIII of Book I of the *Antichità di Ercolano*.[16]

The Borrell Palace

The third building featuring Pompeian decorations is, like the Cantero Palace, located in Trinidad, on calle Medialuna 18, and whose name is owing to the fact that in 1859 it belonged to the aforementioned José Mariano Borrell y Lemus, Marquis of Guáimaro, who had purchased and refurbished it back in 1841. Nowadays, it is the headquarters of

the Office of the Curator of Trinidad and the Valley of the Sugar Mills. As García Santana, Angelbello and Echenagusía (1996: 276, n. 39) have observed, it is a typical eighteenth-century house, modified in the nineteenth century with the addition of galleries and the hallway under the two-storey tower. The author of the murals was yet again Daniel Dall'Aglio, insofar as there is a strong resemblance between the paintings of the living quarters of the Guáimaro sugar mill, undoubtedly the work of the Italian painter (García Santana, Angelbello and Echenagusía 1996: 291) and those of the Borrell Palace. As he had already done in the Cantero Palace, Dall'Aglio reserved the most elaborate decorations for the drawing room, where he depicted a series of Pompeian and neoclassical themes (Campuzano 2014: 96–7; García Santana 2010: 287, Figs 68.7 and 68.8). Effectively, the top part of the four walls, whose bottom section is divided into squares by lines, plant motifs and a faux cornice, display Cupids in different postures, framed in blue octagons, which reproduce, to some extent, those appearing in Plate XXXVI of Book 3 and Plate LIV of Book 4 of the *Antichità di Ercolano*. Surrounding them, in the top and bottom parts of the frieze there are faux architectural element and bas-reliefs, which create an illusion of depth. Next to the Cupids on the short sides, rectangles frame an ensemble formed by two lions (only the top part of them) and, in the central part, a vase of flowers from which plant motifs sprout (García Santana 2010: 192, Fig. 67.1). On the ceiling's main cross-beam there are faux Renaissance panels with rosettes, while the inner face of the rounded arch is also decorated with rosettes and acanthus leaves.

In the dining room, Dall'Aglio divided the walls into canvases – the solution also chosen for the drawing room – on which he painted pictures, surrounded by real gilt wood frames: they are bucolic landscapes and scenes depicting classical ruins (statues, sphynxes, temples and porticos) (García Santana 2010: 199, Fig. 69.7.2), with a certain romantic air about them, which bear a very strong resemblance to those that the painter subsequently reproduced in the living quarters of the Guáimaro sugar mill.

The Esteban Theatre

To conclude this tour of nineteenth-century Cuban buildings featuring Pompeian decorations, it is worth mentioning the Esteban Theatre, now the Sauto Theatre, in the city of Matanzas, on the north coast of the island, not far from Havana, which was refurbished in 2019. The reason behind this mention, which is not strictly related to the Pompeian style, but rather to neoclassicism, lies in the fact that this coliseum represents one of the last works of Dall'Aglio as an architect and as a decorator and painter, in addition to one of the main examples of Cuban neoclassicism in civil architecture. In Matanzas, founded at the end of the eighteenth century and nicknamed the 'Athens of Cuba', the process through which, between the first and second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the economic boom, the city's aspect was gradually adapted to the neoclassical 'good taste' professed by the affluent middle-classes, mainly linked to the sugar industry, as a factor in the construction of their modern and cosmopolitan identity,

can be clearly seen. This came about thanks to the urban development of areas outside the city centre, the creation of new neighbourhoods (Pueblo Nuevo and Versalles), the revamping of public spaces and the improvement of the buildings in the area between the rivers (García Santana 2005: 123–4). Indeed, as the newspaper *La Aurora de Matanzas* declared in 1831, 'There has always been a norm in architecture consisting in imitating the ancient or, better said, in copying the works of Greece and Rome' (García Santana 2005: 128).

According to García Santana (2005: 127; 2009: 112–39), the city's new image was gradually forged, in the realm of civil architecture, chiefly thanks to the works of the French architect Jules Sagebien who, it should be recalled, was the author of the plans of the Aldama Palace and, to a lesser extent, to those of the other engineers working in Matanzas. With his theatre and church of St Peter the Apostle in Versalles, Dall'Aglio also played an important role.

The need to build a new theatre to replace the existing one, the Principal, began to be proposed in the 1850s. Matanzas had effectively become the island's second port, its population had tripled and the foreign opera companies which wanted to perform there encountered a building with deficient acoustics and a limited seating capacity. As shown by the available documents, in October 1858 it was decided to create a joint stock company to defray the cost of the building project. After being put out to tender, the proposals submitted by Daniel Dall'Aglio and Francisco Piqué were chosen for further evaluation. On 1 May 1860, the board of directors opted for the former and work on the new theatre began on 15 October. In the building, opened in the plaza de la Vigía in April 1863 and considered as being 'worthy of any European capital' (García Santana 2012: 274), Dall'Aglio was not only in charge of the architectural aspects, probably drawing inspiration from the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, but also of the decoration as a whole. In addition to placing marble statues of Greek goddesses in the lobby, whose main function was to isolate the auditorium, the Italian artist painted the first eight decorations and the figures and ornaments on the ceiling. In accordance with the type of building, he chose the Muses as the subject, as he had already done in the drawing room of the Cantero Palace, this time eight in number (García Santana 2012: 277).

Conclusions

The foregoing analysis of three examples[17] of Pompeian decorations allows for arriving at several initial conclusions.

All the case studies are linked to Italian painters (one of whom, Meucci, was certainly academically trained, while as to the other two, this was likely) who, on arriving in Cuba in the 1830s, employed their knowledge of classical and Pompeian antiquity not only to work in theatres, but also to decorate private houses. It is not known whether, before travelling to Havana, they had had the opportunity to visit the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Be that as it may, in their formative years they would have seen reproductions of Pompeian themes, which became an essential component of their

iconographic repertoire and which could be combined according to their own taste and the desires of their clients.

These artists were commissioned to decorate the mansions of the Creole elite, of different political leanings, who sought, through their elegance and luxuriousness, to distance themselves from the traditional artistic culture (mainly in the hands of the island's coloured population) and, in contrast, to embrace European (especially Italian and French) and North American academic art. At least in the case of the Aldama-Del Monte family, the intention was probably to build a modern and cosmopolitan Cuban identity, capable of distinguishing itself from, and competing with, its peninsular counterpart.

Notes

1. This paper is the result of the Research Project 'Reception and Influence of Pompeii and Herculaneum in Spain and Ibero-America' (PGC2018-093509-B-I00, FEDER/Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación-Agencia Estatal de Investigación).
2. I owe this reference to Elvia Carreño Velázquez, PhD, the authoress of Chapter 2 of this collective book.
3. It is interesting to note how this type of inner courtyard was also related to a convent, and not to Pompeii, in the house designs proposed by Arturo Soria in the Ciudad Lineal in Madrid, as observed in Chapter 1 by Mirella Romero Recio.
4. To offer just one example, in the *Memorias de la Real Sociedad Patriótica de La Habana* (1838) there is a short section devoted to the excavations of Pompeii (finds made in 1837, risks for the conservation of the mural paintings already discovered).
5. Mention should go to the case, which I shall address in another forthcoming paper, of the citizens of Matanzas Eusebio and Antonio Guiteras Font, who visited Pompeii in the first half of the 1840s (Aguilera Manzano 2010).
6. I am much obliged to professor Luisa Campuzano, PhD, the photographer Julio Larramendi and Karen Reyes of the Casa Malibrán Documentation Centre of the Office of the Curator of Trinidad for their assistance in collecting the data, information and images for this chapter.
7. In 1817, as a result of the development of sugar industry, slaves of African origin accounted for 35 per cent of the Cuban population (Neill 2012: 297).
8. These student selection criteria, to which there is no official reference in any of the academy's statutes, were discussed at internal meetings of the Royal Economic Society of Friends of the Country (Neill 2012: 307). Alejandro Ramírez himself, the main promotor of the academy, which was named 'of San Alejandro' in his honour, created the Committee on the White Population in 1817.
9. The basis for the choice of these buildings has been the paper (2014) by Luisa Campuzano, PhD.
10. In the *Archivio Storico Ricordi* there are sketches of opera stage designs made by Albé, before he travelled to Cuba https://www.digitalarchivioricordi.com/en/iconografia?relatedPeople=Gioacchino+Alb%C3%A9 [accessed 21 November 2021]), some of them relating to classical themes (*Aureliano in Palmira*, *La Vestale*, *Niobe*). Furthermore, on the website *Storia e Memoria di Bologna*, where he appears with the surname of Alba, it is recalled that Basoli mentioned that he was one of his collaborators in 1816 and that nothing more is known about him in Italy as of 1820 https://www.storiaememoriadibologna.it/alba-gioacchino-481254-persona [accessed 21 November 2021].

11. According to Roselló (2005: 77), they were both given the commission thanks to the success of the sets and effects that they had designed for Antonio García Gutiérrez's comedy *Mazulme*, premiered on 16 April 1843.
12. This aspect is reflected in the building licence, dated 22 January 1840, which states the following: 'I grant Don Domingo Aldama the necessary licence for building two houses' (Herrera López 2007: 29).
13. For an overview of this person, cf. Martínez Carmenate 1997; Morán 2016.
14. On 18 August 1851, Borrell y Lemus voted in favour of the death penalty for the Cuban patriot José Isidoro de Armenteros and his companions, and, on 5 June 1860, the queen Isabella II granted him the title of Marquis of Guáimaro for services rendered to the Spanish crown.
15. García Santana, Angelbello and Echenagusía (1996: 293) highlight the presence of two types of decorations in the building, since under the highbrow ones of Dall'Aglio, it is still possible to glimpse traces of others, of the popular sort, perhaps contemporary to the building of the house, in the valances of the main and small drawing rooms.
16. I owe this piece of information to the editor of this book.
17. It is conceivable that some decorations representing Pompeian themes existed in the house located on calle Martí 62, on the corner with María de Valdivia, in the city of Sancti Spíritus (García Santana 2008: 263, Fig. 401, above). Built between 1848 and 1855, it belonged to Félix Rodríguez Valdivia and Teresa de la Cruz González, husband and wife and owners of ranches, slaves and several residences. Refurbished during the final decade of the twentieth century, it is currently the premises of the Provincial Branch of the National Office of Tax Administration. Regrettably, these paintings were lost during the building's restoration. I am much obliged to the Office of the Curator of Sancti Spíritus, in particular to the historian María Antonieta Jiménez, for the information on the history of the house, and to Javier León, who made an inventory of the murals of the houses of Sancti Spíritus for his MA thesis, for the data on the conservation.

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