

their workers (a subject much discussed in architectural pattern books at the time) and in the desire to embellish estates with these highly visible buildings, which were often used as gate lodges. White also brings in the estate village at this point, and this topic could perhaps have been expanded: he understandably takes John Nash's Blaise Hamlet, Bristol, built in 1810–11, as his paradigm, although he might also have mentioned the same architect's unexecuted designs (depicted by A.C. Pugin) for an estate village at Atcham, Shropshire, for the Attingham Park estate, which are significant as they pre-date Blaise by a decade. In showing that the ornamental cottage could function as a pavilion for the diversion of the landowner, a permanent residence for a stratum of polite society and a 'habitation of the labourer', White illustrates the complex identity of the *cottage orné*, in which elements of style, function and status intersected.

White further refines his definition in two chapters that examine the function of the middle-class cottage and the influence of architectural pattern books. As the architect Edward Gyfford remarked of his designs, published in 1806, their intention was 'To give the importance of the villa to the cottage, not the cottage character to the villa', a sentiment amply demonstrated by Houghton Lodge, Hampshire, which is attributed to John Plaw, who produced several pattern books for cottages and villas. Subsequent chapters examine cottages located in resorts, in Wales and Scotland and royal endorsement of the ornamental cottage. The chapter on continental European, American and Antipodean examples is necessarily brief, although White rightly uses it to point out that the international migration of cottage designs by British architects, often faithfully reproduced, was facilitated in part through the medium of the pattern books. He concludes with observations on Victorian interpretations of the genre, and although he also acknowledges some recent new examples, he proposes the early twentieth century 'escapist fantasies' of Thorpeness, Suffolk, and Portmeirion, Gwynedd, as the last true hurrah of the *cottage orné*.

This volume is the product of many years of extensive research by White. His passion to disseminate it leads him to enumerate so many examples that their sheer numbers sometimes threaten to obscure his theme, although it is no disadvantage that the book is as much a gazetteer as an analytical study. Readers will no doubt eagerly scan

the text for their own favourite example of a *cottage orné* but even if disappointed they must acknowledge White's achievement in assembling such a rich array, which ably illustrates the diversity of the genre.

Copy-editing shortcomings have resulted in the inconsistent and inaccurate spelling of architects' surnames; more surprising is the omission of a bibliography, which would have been very useful, not least because of the wealth of citations in the endnotes. But these are minor criticisms, which should not detract from the value of the whole. White's informal tone makes it a highly enjoyable read, and the publisher has produced a beautiful volume with a generous number of illustrations, particularly effective in the chapter that identifies built examples derived from pattern books.

In *The Poetry of Architecture* (1837), John Ruskin wrote that 'The cottage always gives the idea of a thing to be beloved: a quiet life-giving voice, that is as peaceful as silence itself'. White has succeeded in his ambitious aim of codifying and contextualising the *cottage orné*; by admitting us into this idiosyncratic and playful world he will no doubt entice us to undertake our own picturesque journeys in search of these delightful buildings, or indeed to resolve, in the words of the nineteenth-century American architect William Ranlett, to 'live cottagely'.

Pelagio Palagi: Décorateur des palais royaux de Turin et du Piémont (1832–1856)

By Bertrand de Royere. 400 pp. incl. 239 col. + 30 b. & w. ills. (Mare & Martin, Paris, 2017), £95. ISBN 979-10-92054-67-5.

by **SIMON SWYNFEN JERVIS**

In 1995 Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel published a survey of the Napoleonic decorations of the Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome, instigated in 1811, and in 2001 Hugh Roberts produced a description of George IV's private apartments in Windsor Castle, created in the late 1820s.¹ Bertrand de Royere's book performs a comparable task for three of Pelagio Palagi's decorative schemes in Piedmont: for the Palazzo Reale, Turin; for the Castello di Racconigi, a seat of the Carignan branch of the Savoy, nominated a royal residence in 1831 when Carlo Alberto of that family succeeded as king of Sardinia; and for the Castello di Pollenzo, which Carlo Alberto bought as a private retreat in 1832.

The court at Turin rivalled any great power in elaboration. De Royere quotes Jules Janin's cruel description in his *Voyage en Italie* (1839) of the court as 'majestically childish' (*majestueusement puéril*). On his accession Carlo Alberto determined to enhance its splendour and in the following year engaged Palagi (1775–1860) to decorate the royal palaces (*Pittore preposto alla decorazione dei Reali Palazzi*). Palagi, then resident in Milan, aged fifty-seven and loaded with honours, had an established reputation as a painter of history and portraits. The promise of a monthly salary of 1,000 lire, ample lodgings near the Palazzo Reale (he retained quarters in Milan, where he kept his collections and library), an architect assistant and a draughtsman were no doubt incentives, and Palagi relished his new role as designer and impresario of palatial decorations. His involvement dwindled after 1849, when Carlo Alberto, defeated at the Battle of Novara, resigned. A posthumous swansong came in 1861 when a massive ceiling painting by Palagi, the *Dance of the Hours*, was installed in the Palazzo Reale's ballroom.

De Royere's account rests on the royal household archives (Archivio di Stato di Torino, Turin), particularly those concerned with royal properties and their *garde-meuble*, on multiple inventories, on the surviving decorations and objects (those for the Castello di Pollenzo are much diminished by a sale in 1993) and on the archive Palagi bequeathed to his native Bologna, including his library and a mass of design drawings (now in the Bibliotheca comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna), all lucidly summarised here. De Royere supplies a chronology of Palagi and a French translation of his third-person autobiography, a stolid narrative of successes, except for the end, which describes his various amusements, such as singing raucously and writing jocular verse letters. The mechanics of procurement and quality control are analysed, revealing, at times, tensions, generosity and severity. Tensions existed particularly between Palagi and the royal architect Ernesto Melano; generosity was shown in 1844, when Lerolle, a Parisian bronze manufacturer, received a gold box from Carlo Alberto, who in 1840 had saved another *bronziste*, Giovanni Colla of Turin, from bankruptcy; and severity was exercised in 1834, when Giovanni Chiavassa, a supplier of bronzes and furniture with branches in Paris, Brussels and Turin, was accused of 'impudent obstinacy' and short-changed, and in 1842, when Cesare, Conte Trabucco di Castagnetto, the royal intendant, praised Melano's intransigence towards the cabinet-

4. The Etruscan Room, Castello di Racconigi, Piedmont, designed by Pelagio Palagi, marquetry and furniture by Gabriele Capello (called Moncalvo). 1843–47. (De Agostini Picture Library; photograph A. Dagli Orti; Bridgeman Images).

maker Gabriele Capello, whose parquet floor for the Palazzo Reale's ballroom involved losses beyond his control.

The works at the Palazzo Reale, Racconigi and Pollenzo are described in a substantial appendix, with room-by-room details, richly illustrated with interiors, objects and designs. The innumerable collaborators, mainly from Paris, Milan and Turin, included painters, sculptors, stuccators, silk weavers, carvers, gilders, silversmiths, embroiderers, mosaicists and stained-glass manufacturers; an appendix details Palagi's dealings with thirty-six such craftsmen. Affection was not absent: in 1817 the Milanese *bronziste* Luigi Manfredini had addressed Palagi as a 'dear friend'. But he was perfectionist, demanding and punctilious. His absolute authority was dubbed '*Pelagiomanie*' and, when in 1836 medal cabinets were made that incorporated spaces suitable for the display of Etruscan vases, the director of the royal collections, Roberto d'Azeglio, dryly observed that Palagi had some to sell to the king.

Apart from some neat Gothic interiors in the Margaria (dairy) at Racconigi and a stiffly competent but absurd bronze group in Piazza Palazzo di Città, Turin, of Amedeo VI (1334–83) smiting two Turks, cast in 1847, Palagi's royal decorations were classical. De Royere rightly invokes Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine as a founding influence: Palagi owned their *Recueil de décorations intérieures* (1812). But he was then already thirty-seven and when, two decades later, he took up post in Turin he was an even more assured and confident designer. By the 1840s, however, the style in which he worked was falling from fashion. In 1843 Victor Hugo evoked the chill 'Empire mahogany', 'swan-neck armchairs', 'fire-dogs in the form of sphinxes', 'gilt bronzes' and 'dark-blue marble' of his childhood.¹ As early as 1834, when Palagi's Grecian console table from the Apollo Room at Racconigi, with its exquisite pairs of addorsed winged victories on tip-toe in gilt bronze, was shown in Paris, it was criticised as '*une froide composition*' – pure and correct but lacking warmth and movement. A royal reaction broke out in Piedmont when in 1852, well before Palagi's dismissal in 1856, royal apartments at the Castello di Moncalieri were redecorated by the architect Domenico Ferri in an elaborate Rococo.



Certainly Palagi's designs were often imposing and formal – indeed, appropriately royal and palatial. But cold? De Royere observes him ringing many changes between Grecian, Pompeian and Etruscan – his supreme *Gesamtkunstwerk* among many is surely the Etruscan Room at Racconigi (Fig.4) – and detects in Palagi's work a development of Neo-classicism that has slipped some of its moral moorings and, far from chilly, verges on the Baroque. The 1830s and 1840s are often neglected decades. In *Pelagio Palagi*, despite some repetition and the occasional slip, De Royere has contributed

a revelatory panorama of three spectacular decorative campaigns by a great designer at the height of his powers.²

1 P. Arizzoli-Clémentel and C. Gastinel-Coural, eds.: *Il Progetto d'Arredo del Quirinale nell'Età Napoleonica*, *Bolletino d'Arte* 70 (supplement), Rome 1995; and H. Roberts: *For the King's Pleasure: The Furnishing and Decoration of George IV's Apartments at Windsor Castle*, London 2001.

2 V. Hugo: *En voyages, Alpes et Pyrénées*, Paris (no date), pp.109–10.

3 Slips include: for 'Pyme' read 'Pyne' (p.30 and bibliography); the Jeanselme chair was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in 1969, not 1851 (p.47); Delafosse was not a Rococo designer (p.77); for 'fig. 288' read 'fig.258' (p.120); for 'Du Conseil' read 'De Bal' (p.173, fig.71); for '*sur le parc*' read '*sur la cour intérieure*' (p.251).