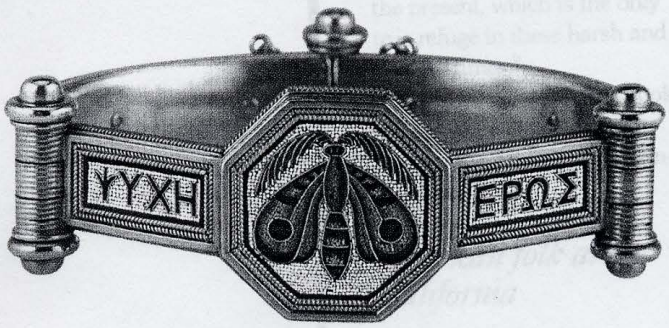
MAGAZINE ANTIQUES
NEW YORK, NY
MONTHLY 62,703
DECEMBER 2004

Burrelles Luce

-428 . HF
cy.... aq....

Current and coming

1720 Pg 14



Revival styles in jewelry

One of the most prolific proponents of revival styles during the nineteenth century was the jewelry firm founded by Fortunato Pio Castellani in Rome in 1814. During the firm's first few decades it made its reputation by producing jewelry that was in the style of that being made in France and England. However, in the 1830s Castellani was introduced to antique jewelry by the learned aristocrat Michelangelo Caetani, a scholar, historian, amateur wood turner, and sculptor. Caetani was proficient at drawing, and some of his extant sketches are designs for metalwork, particularly jewelry. For much of the nineteenth century the Castellani dynasty—Fortunato, his sons Alessandro and Augusto, and his grandson Alfredo—operated one of the leading jewelry firms in Europe. An exhibition that chronicles the rise and leadership role of the firm is on view at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture in New York City through February 6, 2005. The show is entitled *The Castellani and Italian Archaeological Jewelry* and includes 282 pieces of jewelry, design drawings, ancient artifacts, and archival materials, all of which demonstrate the wide range of revival styles the firm and its European patrons embraced over the course of nearly one hundred years.

In 1832 the records of the shop, which was located on the Via del Corso in Rome, note a payment for a necklace "made in the Etruscan style with onyxes" along with other similar pieces. This was one of Fortunato's earliest attempts at reviving a style thousands of years old. Granulation was an Etruscan technique that fascinated the firm beginning in the 1830s. This exacting process involved the application of tiny droplets of gold to the surface of a piece of jewelry. Another painstaking technique emulated by Castellani was the creation of jewelry that featured colorful micromosaic depictions of creatures, figures, geometric patterns, and monograms or words, all created from miniscule glass tesserae. Castellani also incorporated cameos, scarabs, and enamel into pieces of jewelry as had been done in ancient times. All of this required meticulous craftsmanship, for which the firm became well known.

In 1860 Alessandro, having made critical political missteps, found it necessary to move to Paris, where he established a branch of the company. Other branches followed in London and Naples. Around this time the firm also introduced historically inspired jewelry in the Roman, medieval, Renaissance, and baroque styles, which was displayed in the great international exhibitions to wide acclaim.

An indication of the popularity of Castellani jewelry is the fact that seventeen craftsmen were needed to keep up with the orders in the 1860s. The Castellani brothers, long collectors of ancient art and supporters of archaeological excavations, soon decided to buy and sell ancient material. By this time, Caetani was nearly blind, and because Alessandro was not in Rome, the firm lacked creative inspiration. Thus the firm simply continued to make earlier designs, so that dating these pieces is difficult today. Despite a lack of fresh material Castellani continued to be successful until the turn of the twentieth century.

Alfredo, Augusto's son, took over the firm in 1914 but was forced to close it in 1927. His principal interest was the preservation of the company's collections of ancient jewelry and enormous archives. Happily he was successful, and the history of the Castellani firm is ably retold in this exhibition and its accompanying catalogue.

The catalogue contains essays by thirteen international scholars and is edited by Susan Weber Soros and Stefanie Walker. It is published by Yale University Press for the Bard Graduate Center and may be obtained by telephoning 800-405-1619.