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The Pierpont Morgan of Ancient Pompeii

Why He Was Like J. Pierpont Morgan

He financed expeditions to other countries for rare products.
 He collected wonderful bronzes, paintings and other objects of art.
 He collected rare editions of Greek and Roman Books.
 He loaned money to the patricians of Rome and had special laws made for his benefit.
 He was not only a patron of art and letters but loaned portions of his collections to museums.
 His bank was the strongest in Pompeii.

Naples, May 12.
AMONG the amazing mass of new discoveries in ancient Pompeii is that of a banker who may be fittingly described as the Pierpont Morgan of the Summer capital of Roman luxury.

He occupied the most beautiful palace on the newly excavated, exclusive portion of the Street of Abundance, which has already been referred to as bearing a resemblance to the most luxurious part of New York's Fifth Avenue. This discovery adds, in a highly picturesque manner, to the resemblances between Pompeii and New York previously noted.

The Pompeian banker's name is believed to have been Lucius Caecilius Metellus, although there is still some doubt about the spelling of the name, on account of the blurs and mutilations occurring wherever it has been found written.

A fine bust of Metellus was found in the great atrium of his beautiful house. Strange to say, he had a large, pendulous nose, with a wart on it. Otherwise his face indicated great intelligence, overbearing determination and a keen power to enjoy all the good things of the flesh. Indeed, the furnishings of his house indicate that there were few forms of enjoyment with which he was not thoroughly familiar.

It appears that at the age of fifty-nine Metellus retired from the active pursuit of money-making in order to devote himself, like Mr. Morgan, to collecting precious objects of art from all parts of the world. The Roman and Pompeian spendthrifts, however, insisted on continuing to borrow money from him at upwards of eighty per cent. on the best of security, such as solid gold vases.

Thus it happened that his income continued to roll up without any effort on his part, and he was able to devote unlimited wealth to buying art treasures, without troubling about their cost.

Surrounding the columned courtyard, or peristylum, of his house, which must have been beautiful with birds, flowers, fountains and statuary, there stood a series of buildings housing the millionaire's art treasures.

There was the library, stocked with manuscripts from Greece and Egypt, and with the more recent productions of the poets of Italy. Many of these manuscripts have been recovered by the excavators, and constitute the most valuable of the latest series of finds.

Then there was a hall set apart for the masterpieces of Greek sculpture. Another building was entirely filled with arms and armor. Still another was given up to dainty creations in gold and precious stones—crowns, tiaras, necklaces, girdles, brooches, buckles, and thousands of beautiful pieces of jewelry used by men and women as ornaments in ancient times.

Egyptian papyri and palimpsests, amphoras and craters of Etruscan, Trojan and Mycenaean workmanship; Greek drinking cups of gold, called scyphi and canthari; Tanagra figurines of all periods; curious statuettes from Chalcedon; rare examples of sculpture and jewelry in the Phoenician, Cypriote and Graeco-Egyptian styles; polychromatic marble statues of Hercules, Venus, Bacchus, Silenus and all the Pagan Pantheon, enriched this wonderful collection.

The accompanying photographs show a few of the treasures recovered from the halls of Metellus. These objects represent widely separated periods of Greek art. Here is a somewhat archaic fresco representing the Greek hero Theseus killing the fabled Minotaur in the Cretan labyrinth, and here is a bas-relief representing a Bacchanalian procession that is in the most advanced style of Greek art. This is worthy of Phidias.

An exquisitely embossed helmet with decorations of inlaid gold is another example of the finest Greek style, and was probably produced



Curious Fresco Depicting Theseus Slaying the Minotaur, Indicating Metellus's Love for the Grotesque.

did not put inferior painting on their work. Some critics have argued that a fine piece of sculpture well painted should be the highest form of pictorial art, since it combines the two kinds.

Modern artists, however, have never been able to effect this combination successfully. A painted statue usually has a toy-like air. Perhaps the collection of Metellus will teach us how the ancients solved this mystery.

The Pompeian Pierpont Morgan possessed an immense collection of

manuscripts. Of these the excavators have caught only a glimpse. Many of the sheets have adhered to one another until they form a solid block, like a piece of carbon. They will be separated by a delicate chemical process, and the writing made legible.

Here it is likely we shall find original manuscripts by such Latin authors as Horace, Virgil and Ovid, by Greeks like Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Sappho and a thousand other famous or forgotten classic authors.

shortly before the time of Pompeii's destruction.

A piece of statuary known as a "Hermes" from Greece is an example of the many curiosities collected by Metellus. A Hermes was a tall square stone pillar with a bust at the top, placed at the corners of streets and in other conspicuous places by the Greeks. The head was originally that of the god Hermes, but later other gods frequently occupied his place.

Metellus possessed an immense collection of ancient Greek and Roman paintings. One of them for example, represents a spirited com-

bat between centaurs and men, which was for ages the favorite subject of Greek artists. Evidently at some early period the civilized races of Greece had a severe experience with some wild race that handled horses with superb skill. Thereafter they preferred to represent their legendary enemies as half men and half horses.

The ancient Greeks and Italians probably produced paintings to a far greater extent than we have hitherto realized. Works of this character have inevitably been more damaged by the flight of time than any others. In the vast majority of cases the paintings must have been completely effaced by time and decay, even though the medium on which they were painted may have been preserved.

It is only in such places as Pompeii and Herculaneum, where the relics of the past have been hermetically sealed up, that we can expect to find many paintings preserved. The Pompeians were especially fond of paintings, and the finer houses were invariably decorated with beautiful painted frescoes.

In the house of Metellus the searchers have found not only frescoed walls, but detached examples of paintings on wood and stone by Greeks, Egyptians and Italians—in fact, by artists of every country where the art was understood. There is little doubt that this will prove the finest collection of Greek paintings ever found.

We know that the ancient Greeks painted their statues in the majority of cases, and we must believe that the greatest sculptors who ever lived



The House of Lucius Caecilius Metellus, the Richest Banker of His Day, Who Ransacked the Whole Known World for Its Art Treasures, Found with All Its Precious Contents



Bronze Portrait from the Collection of Metellus in the Finest Athenian Greek Style. Excavating the Treasure-Filled House of L. Caecilius Metellus at Pompeii.

tal. His ships ran to every port of the Mediterranean and he lent money to other merchants on bills of lading of their goods.
 Among his business relics are a large number of receipts, some in Latin and others in Greek. Many refer to transactions in which the banker acted as auctioneer. He presided at the sales and made his profits on them in various ways. He lent the buyers the ready money they needed for their purchases and collected his debt at the end of the month with a high rate of interest.

He ran up the bidding at the sale and received a commission from the sellers on the price obtained. At the same time he increased the sums which the buyers had to borrow from him. He was manager of the communal estates of Lampuria among numerous sources of profit.

One of the receipts of the banker recovered reads as follows: "In the consulate of Nero Caesar, consul for the second time, and of Caius Martialis, on the tenth day before the Kalends of January, at the request of Pullis Lampuria, we, Sex. Pompeius Axiochus, bear witness in writing that Pullis Lampuria has received from L. Caecilius Metellus the sum of eight thousand five hundred and sixty sesterces and a dupondium, the proceeds of a sale by auction, in accordance with a signed and sealed agreement."

The transactions of Metellus ran up into the millions. They were so vast that he used a special system of numerals not found in other records of the time. In these numerals the thousands were denoted by a numeral like our "B" lying on its side.

The accounts of Metellus indicate that he rivaled the American Standard Oil Company as a manipulator of legislators. One of his entries reads: "To A. Pompeius Jucundus, in connection with the Cappadocian ruby mines, 10,000 gold denarii."

There is unhappily strong reason to believe that this sum, a vast one in the values of that age, was paid to the Roman Senate for securing some valuable special privilege to Metellus in a foreign possession of Rome.



A Rare Bronze Hermes from Chalcedon.



Exquisite Greek Bas-Relief Representing a Bacchanalian Procession, from the Collection of Metellus.

Compared to these treasures the Coptic manuscripts on which Mr. Morgan has lately been lavishing large sums in Egypt, are cheap trifles. The earliest of the Coptic manuscripts had not been written in Metellus's time. But he possessed the manuscripts of the illustrious forefathers of the Copts, the great Pharaohs and their statesmen and generals.

It may be that the investigators will find in this library some portion of the Bible older than any yet known to exist, or if not that, an independent Roman account of the Crucifixion and the events leading up to it. That is a document which has always been singularly lacking, for it seems certain that some Roman must have described that great world event.

Metellus literally scoured the whole known world for treasures and antiquities. His ships traded to the Levant and Egypt, and even brought him in communication with the Far East—India and China. He paid any

price for that which was rare or beautiful. His captives knew that they could obtain a greater recompense for a Babylonian stele or a Sanskrit veda than for the richest cargo of silks they might bring.

He lived at a period when the priceless accumulations of Greek art had just been bought or stolen by the Romans. The choicest of these things lay within the reach of his discerning eye and inexhaustible purse.

Here probably we have the richest storehouse of antiquities ever found.

Wax tablets found in the house revealed the character of the banker's business and his methods of conducting it. While the methods were perhaps simpler than modern ones, the business was of a sounder character. Metellus ventured his capital in no enterprises without good security.

He dealt in tangible things such as lands, sales of silk cargoes of wheat and objects of precious me-