**Giorgio Sommer (1834–1914)**

Georg (Giorgio) Sommer, primarily a photographer, was born in Frankfurt. He became interested in photography very young, professionally expert in it by early training, and remains best known in that field. Although not personally a sculptor, he also later employed skilled artists and artisans both to remodel and otherwise reproduce classical antiquities, including in bronze, as part of his wide commercial activity.

This began after he moved to Rome in 1856 and then to Naples in 1857, where (according to an advert of 1893) he set up his photography business taking and selling ‘Views, Architectures, Sculptures, Paintings, etc. of the most important Places and Galleries in Italy, Sicily, Tunis, Malta, and Switzerland’. For some years from 1861 he was in partnership with another German, Edmund (Edmondo) Behles (1841–1921), based in Rome and doing similar work and in 1865 both men were awarded a gold medal by King Vittorio Emmanuele II. Sommer’s son, Edmondo (b. 1864) was named after Behles and in January 1889 became his father’s partner, the Naples firm thereafter being Giorgio Sommer & Son. Its success was based on marketing through well-produced catalogues, early ones only of photographs but with the other products added later.

In 1872 Sommer bought a property in the Piazza Vittoria, on the corner of the Via Vittoria in Chiaia, Naples. There he either built or adapted a house for his family, a new photographic studio and a shop. By 1882 he was referring either to this or some extension of it as his ‘Palazzo’ or the ‘Palazzo Sommer’ in the ‘Largo Vittoria’ and used it for exhibiting and selling his wares including reproductions of classical pieces such as statuettes and vases in terracotta, marble, silver and bronze, and in varying sizes for many examples. He was also a medallist ‘By Appointment to the Royal Court of Italy’.

To make this range, Sommer either contracted out or set up workshops, the latter including a bronze foundry. He claimed that all his statues were modelled by ‘Professors of the Fine Art Institute’ and that he could produce ‘copies of all the masterpieces in all the Italian museums’. The first clear date for the ‘Fonderia Sommer’ is when it won awards for casts at an exhibition in Nuremburg in 1885 but it may have been operating from the later 1870s. It was also able to make large-scale pieces, including replicas of Roman statues found at Pompeii (some installed in the open there in place of the originals), and occasionally modern ones. The only large public example in Britain is that of Edmund Burke (1729–97) which James Havard Thomas modelled on Capri during his period living in the Naples area (1889–1906) and had cast by Sommer before it was shipped for unveiling at Bristol on 30 October 1894.

Sommer died on 7 August 1914 in Naples, just as the First World War began. This, and possibly the Naples earthquake of 1915, saw the end of his business. It was forced into liquidation in 1916, though an auction of remaining assets only took place in 1931.

*Summarised from Art UK discussion based on the Burke statue*

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