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The photography collections of the Bank of Italy's Historical Archives

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A few years have passed since May 2011, when the Bank of Italy's Historical Archives (ASBI) took part in *eabh* Archival Workshop on 'Photography Collections of (Financial) Companies—A Corporate Historical View'. The goal of the meeting was 'to learn more about the existence, importance and use of corporate photography collections in (financial) organisations for a broader public'.¹ In this short overview, we will pick up the thread of that conversation and provide an update on the activities of the Photographic Archives and its collections.

Photography is a fairly common communications tool used by banks and financial institutions: to skeletonize, photographs are employed for both internal and external purposes. First, the images offer a window into significant moments in the life of an institution and its employees, recording events attended by important political or economic figures or keeping track of change and growth in the institution's real estate assets and its art collections. Second, photography is used to raise the visibility of an institution, publicizing the opening of new branches or in the conduct of its promotional campaigns. This latter purpose is nearly absent in Bank of Italy's photography collections, since the Bank has not needed to use photography for marketing purposes, but instead has used it more narrowly as a tool to record institutional activities rather than for propaganda. Let us therefore briefly describe how the collections are organized, their size, the types of materials they contain,

the time span they cover, the places photographed, and the most important genres of photography employed. To conclude, we offer some considerations on the future content and form of the Photographic Historical Archives in the digital age.

A little history

In 1997, the Bank of Italy's Historical Archives began an awareness campaign among the Bank's directorates and branches to encourage them to help locate any hidden repositories of photographs; this enabled us to gather a considerable number of photographs in analogue format which are now held at the Historical Archives. The Bank's staff was invited to take part in this initiative, and

thanks to the enthusiastic participation of former and current employees, the Historical Archives received many photographs, both as gifts and on loan. The Photographic Archives have grown but remaining gaps have spurred searches further afield, outside of the Bank, to supplement

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internal sources and widen the perspectives represented. We turned to cultural organisations, State and private historical archives and photo agencies to uncover further traces that the Bank of Italy, through its representatives, has left during formal meetings, official visits, economic summit and so on; this too has proven fruitful, with visible progress made.

At the same time, the search was extended to the Historical Archives' own fonds of documents,



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1. Portrait of Paolo Baffi

which frequently contain photographs and/or drawings that accompany the correspondence. Our hopes were rewarded. Hidden among the papers is a rich collection, fragmented and varied, certainly, but in many ways interesting. And so the Photographic Collections have continued to grow.

In 2006, then, former Governor Guido Carli's heirs donated his archive, a very valuable one that enables us to track all of Governor Carli's activities inside and outside the Bank. In 2015, we received the donation of the archive of Niccolò Introna, former Director General of the Institute. We are now finalizing the acquisition of another rich repository of photographs, those of Governor Paolo Baffi (1911–1989), whose family has decided to donate them to the Historical Archives. This is another needful key piece of the Bank of Italy's collective memory (Photograph 1).

The collections

There are essentially two channels through which the Photographic Archives obtains materials. The first consists of photos that have been taken and/or acquired by the Directorates, whose functions are connected to the production and/or gathering of photographs, by the Bank's branches and by the representative offices abroad in the course of their work. This group consists of the Property Collection (*Stabili*), the General Affairs Archives, the Archive of the Secretariat to the Governing Board, the Branch Office Collection, the Delegations Collection, and, finally, the Directorates Collection. This last collection contains the Bank's oldest photographic riches: the Alinari Album, created between 1867 and 1868, which is a kind of all-encompassing portrait of the Bank's staff and a symbol of the Bank's geographical expansion (Photograph 2).² The Historical Archives Collection, containing photographs belonging to the textual fonds, falls into the same category.

The second source of materials added to the Photographic Archives consists of donations and acquisitions. These include the Carli Archives, the Baffi Archives, the Introna family Archives and the External Acquisitions Collection. As stated above, between the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, the Historical Archives obtained a number of photographs from press agencies or professional photographers; others were copies of photographs acquired from other institutions or archives, and finally others were donated by the Bank's staff members. As with

all the other open archives, the photographic collections are continually growing. The Bank now possesses around 50,000 photographs produced from the second half of the 1800s to the early 2000s and expects to add to this in the future. They are currently being organized and numbered and many of the fonds have been restored. Starting from 2018 the Bank of Italy's Historical Archives has joined the Census of Photographic Archives operating throughout

the country promoted by the Ministry for Cultural Heritage³ and has started digitization for conservative and consultation purposes.

A look at some collections

Property Collection (*Stabili*)⁴ The Collection of almost 5,000 positive images (very few negatives), mainly in black and white and covering the period from roughly 1930 to 1985, stands out because of its planning and its focus on a specific subject, which ensures that it is united by a common theme. The name of the collection comes from its original holding department, then called the 'Buildings Directorate', which since the early 1930s has supported the photographic services in recording the Bank of Italy's buildings in Rome and in all its branches. It is particularly significant because the time-frame and geographical reach are broad and enable us to follow the changes made to the buildings, and in some cases even to the adjacent urban areas. The collection is also consulted to evaluate what maintenance and restoration work needs to be carried out on the buildings that are subject to restrictions to protect their historical and artistic value.

It contains a number of album series, including: 'Branches-Colonies', 'Branches-Regions', 'Branches-Miscellaneous' and 'The Rocco Giglio Collection', plus numerous single photos stored in folders. A large black and white photo album from the mid-1950s is dedicated to Palazzo Koch, the Bank of Italy's headquarters. The album of the Sciamanna photo agency allows us to take a tour of the reception rooms and the offices of the members of the Governing Board, and to compare the past and the present arrangement of the Bank's art collection and the underlying stylistic choices (Photograph 3).

Images of the branch buildings located in the extra-metropolitan areas of the colonies⁵ have appeared in various publications. The Bank of Italy, an actor in the country's colonial expansion as the currency-issuing bank, built its own offices from scratch and in many cases even

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the private homes of its employees, adapting them to the instructions of the governmental authorities, to their urban environments and to the tastes of the architects commissioned for the projects. While in the cases of Tripoli and Mogadishu, the architectural style was Moorish, the same cannot be said for Benghazi, where the building was more rationalist in appearance, while the branch building in Rhodes was part of a larger project to redevelop the island's port area (Photographs 4 and 5).

General Affairs Archive This archive stems from the contribution, in 2011, of the photographs taken by the General Affairs Directorate while photographing events held within the Bank. Currently it is a fond of un-numbered films, slides, contact prints and photographic plates dating from 1985 to 2003, the year in which the Directorate stopped using analogue cameras. The fond will be expanded in the future with the addition of digital files. Among the most important subjects of the photographs are the Bank's Annual General Meeting of shareholders, conferences, inaugurations, official visits by governors of foreign central banks or delegations, group portraits, ceremonies, retirement celebrations, events at the Bank's banknote printing works and the machinery used in banknote production, and its coin collections.

Archive of the Secretariat to the Governing Board The Secretariat to the Governing Board, which works for the members of the Bank of Italy's Governing Board, donated a sizeable archive of photographs, consisting of 50 albums and a number of boxes of photographs roughly covering the years 1960–2009. This archive, which is currently being organized and numbered, contains an assortment of photographic materials (negatives, positives, slides, contact prints, digital photos, in black and white and colour) in a variety of styles covering a range of subjects. Without a doubt, the images of the celebration of the Bank's 100-year anniversary (1993), the Day in Honour of the Governor Donato Menichella (1986), the Baffi Lectures, the Annual General Meetings of the Bank in the 1990s and 2000s, and the members of the Governing Board, photographed in various formal occasions are of great importance. These include Guido Carli, Paolo Baffi, Rinaldo Ossola, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, Tommaso Padoa Schioppa, Vincenzo Desario, Antonio Fazio, Lamberto Dini, Fabrizio Saccomanni and Mario Draghi. (Photographs 6 and 7).

The Bank of Italy's Historical Archives Collection This collection, which currently contains about 9,500 images, includes photographs from the Historical Archives paper files, re-organized, catalogued and digitized. Special care has been taken in putting it together to preserve the link between the correspondence and the attached

photographs and to respect their contextualization and their original provenance. This remarkable collection is a mixture of a variety of genres of positive images (still life, furnishings, portraits, official events, ceremonies, Fascism, war damage, buildings sites, forgers' police photos and dossier, reproductions of works of art, colonial architecture, work or recreational activities, family photographs, Christmas holidays, etc.) and it stretches chronologically from the end of the 1800s to the 1970s (Photograph 8).

Carli Archives The Guido Carli Archives comprise 55 albums of positive images (currently being digitalized) and around 1,000 loose, colour and black and white photographs that mainly document Guido Carli's public activities during the period 1949–1992. The archive is partially organized: 34 albums are arranged chronologically and, within each one, by event.

Guido Carli's curriculum vitae is extensive (1914–1993): economist, head of industry, Governor of the Bank of Italy, and Treasury minister. A large part of the photographs relates to his work at the Bank of Italy and the events at which he represented it. One of the salient moments is without a doubt the annual reading of the 'Concluding Remarks', which is traditionally held at the end of May, accompanied by the publication of the Annual Report. But the backstage moments in the preparation of the event are also captured in photographs: from the 'ritual' of the joint reading practice of the text, attended only by those involved in its drafting, to its printing. However, there is also no shortage of images linked to the social and recreational activities of the Bank, such as Christmas lunches, the delivery of gifts to the children of employees for the Epiphany, and exhibitions (Photograph 9).

Introna Family Archives The archives were donated in 2015 and consist of around 500 monochrome photographs, loose and in albums. Some of them portray the institutional activities of Niccolò Introna (1868–1955), while others comprise portraits and images relating to his home and personal life. Introna, hired in 1886 by Banca Nazionale nel Regno d'Italia, which later merged with other regional banks to form the Bank of Italy, climbed the career ladder to become Inspector General, Head of Supervision and later Deputy Director General in 1928. In 1944, he was appointed Special Administrator (for the liberated parts of Italy) and was tasked with taking delivery of the Bank of Italy's gold reserves that had been left in Fortezza and found by the Allies on May 1945, the same year in which he became Director General. He resigned in 1946. We can therefore see moments in Introna's career: visits to the Bank's branches, inaugurations of new construction sites or buildings, official ceremonies, especially during the Fascist period, but also some informal occasions (Photograph 10).



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2. Alinari Album. Employees on a business trip to Frankfurt, 1868

3. 'Palazzo Koch' Album. Participants' lounge, second half of the 1950s. On the walls two tapestries from the Riccardo Gualino art collection

4. Main façade of the Mogadishu branch building c. mid-1930s

5. Main façade of the Rodhes branch building, c. mid-1930s

6. Day in honor of Donato Menichella. From left to right: Governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi with Federico Caffè and Tommaso Padoa Schioppa. Rome, Palazzo Koch, 1986



7. The Governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, heading to the Annual General Meeting with the Board of Directors and the General Director of the Treasury, Mario Draghi. Rome, Palazzo Koch, 1991/1992

8. Counterfeiters laboratory. Milan, 1959

9. Meeting for the joint reading of the Concluding Remarks. Rome, Palazzo Koch, 1963



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10. Colonel James Penick of the Allied Finances Agency returns the gold of the Bank of Italy to the General Director Niccolò Introna. Rome, May 1945
11. Theatrical performance: 'The Brigands', 1939

External acquisitions collection This miscellaneous collection contains more than 1,600 images, obtained from press and photo agencies (Ansa, Olympia Publifoto, Team, Antonio Sansone), Institutes, Archives or donated by Bank employees. It includes an assortment of typical photographic materials (positive images, slides, contact prints, digital photos, black and white and colour photographs) in a variety of genres and styles. The purchased materials were selected for their historical value and the quality of the photographs. The images document the participation of the Bank's representatives in international summits, conferences, official events, meetings, visits by representatives of foreign states, shareholders' meetings and so forth. Photographs received from Bank employees mainly capture recreational activities, parties or other moments within the life of the Bank (Photograph 11).

Archival research and some thoughts on the future

To conclude this *excursus*, this seems to be the appropriate occasion to recall a statement in the guidelines of the 2009 Florence declaration: 'The study of photographs cannot be extrapolated from the context in which they are conserved: the archive. The archive is in its materiality an autonomous and unique structure, not simply the sum of the single photographs that constitute it'.⁶ It is a statement that one should bear in mind, when working on organizing a photographic collection or archive and when trying to understand its layers, resulting from its natural evolution or subsequent assembly. The same holds true when cataloguing photographs, thanks to which it is often possible to grasp the materiality, the technique, the context in which they were taken, the value and the authenticity of that given moment, and the authorship of the shot. The Historical Archives mainly use the Ministry for Cultural Heritage's photograph catalogue system (F—Photography standard, FF—Photographic Fonds standard), which has been in widespread use for many years and is familiar to researchers. Photographs are catalogued in a database that, once fully up and running, will make it possible to search through the Historical Archives entire holdings: paper files, photographs, interviews, film clips and videos.

Nowadays we are used to the fact that photography has become a digital medium; its materiality is made up of colour, saturation, luminosity and contrast and is no longer captured on a piece of film or in its positive image. However, it has not lost its beauty and storing it has not become any safer. The fragility of the support medium, the storage space and the preservation methods, though not tangible, nonetheless require that precautions be taken: to be appropriately preserved and usable, a different approach is needed with a digital photographic collection to protect it against technological obsolescence and instability so that it can be used long into the future. Digital images are preserved long

term by a virtual system of arrangements, metadata, technological refreshing and software updates—all factors that have to be carefully evaluated. At the same time, digitization of the analogue collections, even if done for preservation purposes and not just for online consultation, certainly cannot replace the tactile and surface elements of the original, just as a catalogue entry of a photograph is not a translation of the image into words, but is rather a useful information and research tool.

All photographs: ©ASBI

Author's profile

Anna Rita Rigano graduated in Letters and Philosophy at the University of Messina in 1983 and then in Paleography, diplomatic and archival science at the Archivio Segreto Vaticano (now Vatican Apostolic Archives). Starting from 1985, she began to work with historical photography, cataloguing and photographic recognition techniques. Since 1990, she has been working at the Historical Archives of the Bank of Italy and, since 1997, she has curated the photographic collections. She holds a PhD in Economic development history and theory from the LUISS-University Guido Carli of Rome (2005). She is an ordinary member of the SISF (Italian Society for the Study of Photography).

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- 1 *eabh*, 'Photography Collections of (Financial) Companies — A Corporate Historical View' - Call for Papers.
- 2 Miraglia M. (ed). 2003. *Il potere dell'immagine. Ritratto della Banca Nazionale nel 1868*. Roma, Laterza (Collana storica della Banca d'Italia. Serie documenti, 14).
- 3 <http://www.censimento.fotografia.italia.it/>
- 4 The collection keeps the same name given to the corresponding paper-based fond.
- 5 At the beginning of the 20th century Bank of Italy opened branches in Libya, Eritrea, Somalia and Rhodes in order to promote Italian economic and commercial expansion in Africa. After Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, the Institute approved the opening of further branches in that region too. After World War I, the Italian territory also included part of Istria and Dalmatia and branches were opened in Rijeka, Pula, Zadar, Tolmin (Fiume, Pola, Zara, Tolmino). During World War II, following the Italian occupation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, branches were opened in Ljubljana, Split, Kotor, Cetinje, Sibenik (Lubiana, Spalato Cattaro, Cettigne, Sebenico). All the extra-metropolitan branches were closed after World War II. Source: <https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/quaderni-asbi/2017-003/index.html>
- 6 https://www.khi.fi.it/pdf/photothek/florence_declaration_EN.pdf accessed on 10 July 2020.