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UniCredit's photographic archives

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The photographic archive of UniCredit in Italy constitutes a rich and varied source of information about the bank's history.

The UniCredit Historical Archives, established in 1951 in order to preserve documents acquired since the company's foundation in 1870 (Banca di Genova, renamed Credito Italiano in 1895), are one of the most important business archival collections in Italy. The archives contain the historical records of UniCredit/Credito Italiano, as well as many of the Italian banks which have been acquired by the Group. Many of these had roots in the late Mediaeval period or early Modern such as: Rolo Banca 1473, Cassa di Risparmio di Verona Vicenza Belluno e Ancona, Cassamarca, Cassa di Risparmio di Torino, Cassa di Risparmio di Trento e Rovereto, Cassa di Risparmio di Trieste, along with Capitalia SpA, which took over Banca di Roma, Banco di Sicilia and Bipop-Carire. The archives' primary mission is to conserve, protect, promote and facilitate the study of this important heritage.

For the description of the photographic materials, as for the paper documentations, preference was given to the description of the file, like an album, complete with: title, chronological dates, photography studios, number and type of documentation, and

notes. For photo albums, in addition to the elements just mentioned, it was considered appropriate to highlight, where available, the captions accompanying the individual images.

The photographic section is estimated to comprise 600 photo albums, 130,000 positives, 28,000 prints, matrices and negatives. They date from the early 1900s to the 20th century, by the photographic archive of Giuseppe Rampolla, photographer already in service of Banca di

Roma SpA, with about 12,000 pieces (negatives, slides, positives and CD-ROMs) and Ferruccio Torboli, photographer already in service of the Credito Italiano Audiovisual Centre, with about 40,000 pieces (negatives, slides, positives and CD-ROMs). In addition there is now a digital archive.

The subject matter extends beyond the business of the bank, though that in itself encompasses an extensive range of material, covering education, employment and leisure, the evolution of real estate assets like offices and agencies in Italy and

abroad and the most significant moments of corporate life such as institutional events, recreational activities and promotional campaigns. The collections feature many

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1. Credito Italiano, WWI Victory Celebration in front of the Milan Headquarters, 1918

photographs depicting the staff (top management and employees) and showing the expansion of banks abroad.

The series of photographs dedicated to foreign branches is of great historical value. The destruction of materials in some areas due to conflict and war means that accessible photographic records are often lacking. Just as most people living and working abroad, the Italian bank staff took many photographs of overseas branches and surroundings as well as of daily work and recreational activities, which are helping researchers to reconstruct different aspects of past life abroad. Many thousands of our photographs arrived in our repositories through the internal real estate offices. Part of the filming was also entrusted to external professional photographers.

Amongst the most significant photographs in the collection are the three dedicated archives of Credito Italiano/UniCredit S.p.A. (1870), Banco di Roma S.p.A. (1880) and Banco di Santo Spirito S.p.A. (1924).

The Credito Italiano/UniCredit photographic section

The Credito Italiano/UniCredit photographic section covers the chronological period from the early 20th century to the early 2000s. Amongst the earliest noteworthy photographs in the archives are the series dedicated to the advertising campaign carried out in the main Italian cities to promote war loans during the First World War¹ and the series dedicated to foreign branches, especially the one in China.

The photographic images were produced mainly from the 1950s to the 1980s and for exclusively corporate purposes, in order to document the architecture of the bank's branches, the evolution of the workplace and life at the company. Most of the photo shoots record the opening or renovation of city agencies and branch offices, but there are also numerous photos that document conferences, opening ceremonies and exhibitions. Furthermore, there is a large number of photographs of the bank's presidents and employees. Other important works from the period include over 100 prints by Mario Mulas recording training courses, the data processing center, recreational activities and the company canteens. The material dating back to the 70s is mainly composed of loose photos;

there are also images collected into albums and on slides, but fewer negatives. Currently, over 1,400 dossiers have been inventoried.

The most recent photographic documentation mainly consists of the core collection made by Ferruccio Torboli, a photographer who worked at the Credito Italiano Audiovisual Centre before coming to UniCredit. Composed of about 5,000 colour negatives, 25,000 slides, 10,000 loose positives and about 350 CD-ROMS, this collection covers sporting events, press conferences, branch openings, the interior and exterior of buildings, conferences, conventions, meetings, events, gala lunches/dinners and portraits of employees and managers. A section is dedicated to the color slides, created for two publications

of Credito Italiano, *Antica Madre* and *Civitas Europea*, which cover the main Italian masterpieces and archaeological sites, from the prehistory to the middle ages. Since 2003, the photographer worked mainly digitally, delivering approx. 80,000 photo files (2003–2011).

The Banco di Roma photographic section

The photographic section of the Banco di Roma S.p.A. has been subject to numerous transfers over time prior to its new arrangement and a related inventory in 2002. Among the most important materials there are the series of photo albums made to document the evolution of the real estate assets of the Roman bank both in Italy and abroad. These photo albums (Banco di Roma S.p.A. and Felice Guarneri archive) have been reproduced and the related metadata have been associated by the company GAP Srl. Among the printing matrices there are about 6,000 negatives on glass plates. The section is divided into two groups, the collection of photo albums (1912–1977) comprising 141 albums, in 100 folders, and the collection of positives and the loose photographic matrices (1900ca.–1992), comprising 188 folders.

For the most part the albums hold three types of photographs. There are those that illustrate the progress in banking: the opening of new branches, the restructuring of the old ones, the introduction of new technologies for professional equipment. Other albums document the events organized by the branches or at which the branches participated, as well as meetings with

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2. Banco di Roma, Damasco Branch, 1920



- 3. Banco di Roma, Istanbul-Pera Branch, 1923
- 4. Banco di Roma, Rodi Branch, 1925
- 5. Banca Italiana per la Cina, Loongwha Temple, Shanghai, 1925



6. Banco Italo-Egiziano, Alexandria, the Minet el Bassal Cotton Exchange, 1930



7. Credito Romagnolo, Ravenna Branch Team's Trip to Verona, 1936
8. Banco di Santo Spirito, XI International Congress of Radiology, 1965



9. Credito Italiano, Alaska Mountaneering Expedition, 1971



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10. Credito Italiano, 1972 Rome Expo - Distribution of brochures, 1972

political and economic personalities. These events intensified in the second half of the 1930s when the banking system (and especially Banco di Roma) assumed a more prominent role in society and economy. Finally, the albums attest the presence of Banco di Roma S.p.A. in the eastern Mediterranean and Africa between 1930s and 1940s; as do other visual materials such as drawings and sketches. These images are not limited to banking but convey features of everyday life and the nature of the territory itself.

The Banco di Santo Spirito photographic section

The Banco di Santo Spirito photographic section is made up of black and white photographs and negatives between the mid-30s and 1988. The photographs illustrated the changes in the branches across the decades documenting construction or renovation works and the acquisition of new offices. Events promoted by Banco, such as the inauguration of agencies and executive offices (especially in Rome) and participation in trade fairs and conferences of national importance. The section is described in three series for more than 220 folders and albums.

After the merger between Banco di Roma and Banco di Santo Spirito in 1992 and the resulting creation of Banca di Roma, the photographic archives were increased by Rampolla's archives. The archival fonds are composed of materials of different size and type, with an important part as digital documents. The photographic services were partly carried out by the Audiovisual Office (where the photographer worked for a few years) and relate to commercials, billboards, posters, press conferences, branch inaugurations, interiors and exteriors of buildings and locations, conferences, conventions, project presentations, meetings, events, talk shows, gala dinners, and portraits by Pino Rampolla, during the last thirty years of his activity.

Conclusion

While portions of all the collections have been used extensively, most of them have never been exhibited. This is because descriptive information about photographs is difficult to access. Many photographs collections were never re-catalogued by the people who used them, photographs used for projects in the heat of the moment were often not re-filed in the original series and the subject or the event portrayed in the shoot was often overlooked. An on-going cataloguing and digitization program of this heritage is in progress at present.

To improve the accuracy of the descriptions, UniCredit Historical Archives holds related materials to

facilitate interpretation: corporate books, institutional documents, letters, diaries, administrative and accounting documents, as well as documentation relating to legal, financial and credit operations; posters, brochures for customers and prints relating to branches, advertising for banking products etc. (1916–2000); audiovisuals created for training staff, for marketing bank products or for events deemed significant for the bank's life history (inaugurations, conferences, presentations, etc.). Among these materials, the series of advertising posters relating to war loans during the First World War and the period between the Second World War and the immediate post-war period have a considerable visual impact.

The photographic archives are housed in our Lampugnano building in Milan and can be accessed by appointment through the UniCredit Historical Archives (archiviostorico@unicredit.eu).

All photographs: © UniCredit S.p.A.

Author's profile

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<https://www.unicreditgroup.eu/en/unicredit-at-a-glance/our-identity/our-history.html>

1 Credito Italiano during the war is well represented in the archives with different materials relating to WWI, in a wide array of formats, from photographic prints and negatives to posters and drawings. Most of them were created during the war (1914–1918), but a portion also deals with post-war topics such as photos for the commemoration of employees, fallen as soldiers.