

# *A Parabola on the Tuscan Landscape: New Gazes of the Amateur Photography in the 1920s*

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## ABSTRACT

The contribution investigates the cultural dynamics and spaces of expression that, during the 1920s, made amateur photography the most effective medium for creating and disseminating a new image of the Tuscan landscape. In this decade, landscape photography played a leading role in various publishing and exhibition projects in Tuscany, such as the magazine “*Illustrazione Toscana*” (1923-1945), the two editions of the Florentine *Esposizione Fotografica del paesaggio toscano* (1925, 1927), and the book *Toscana* (1927). If, at the beginning of the 1920s, the official visual panoramas of the region were constructed and transmitted by professional photographic studios, in the following years, renewed visions of Tuscany were promoted through its non-monumental aspects, mainly due to amateur photographers, such as Vittorio Alinari, Lodovico Pachò, Gino Danti, and Ermanno Biagini.

## KEYWORDS

Landscape, Tuscany, Amateur Photography, Publishing, Mediated Vision

The contribution investigates the cultural dynamics and expressive spaces that, in the 1920s, made amateur photography the most effective medium for creating and disseminating a new image of the Tuscan landscape. Our argumentative path recalls the trajectory of a parabola with a downward concavity. The points that compose the curve correspond to significant events in the history of amateur landscape photography in Tuscany that we will discuss. The ascending part corresponds to the collective interest in landscape photography that Tuscany experienced in the early 1920s, as a result of efforts to defend the nation’s tangible and intangible heritage. The peak coincides with the *Prima Esposizione Fotografica del paesaggio Toscano* (1925), a highly impactful event for the community where the landscape achieved an unprecedented autonomy of depiction, thanks especially to the work of amateurs. Finally, the descending phase corresponds to a period in which the representation of the landscape once again includes human presence and loses its narrative centrality. Our study also includes an in-depth examination

of specific photographic works, supported by a bibliography from the field of aesthetics (primarily within the Italian context), dealing with the concept of landscape. Ultimately, the contribution aims to highlight the role of amateurs in the development of Tuscan photographic culture in the 1920s and to position itself within the interdisciplinary field of periodical studies, with a focus on the magazine “*Illustrazione Toscana*” as our main primary source.

### 1. *Shaped landscapes*

In 2005, the Italian multimedia artist Ciriaco Campus published a low-quality digital photograph titled *La Steccaia. Paesaggio senese tra il Nevada e L'Arizona* (*La Steccaia: Siene Landscape Between Nevada and Arizona*) (FIG. 1) accompanied by a detailed report:



Fig. 1. Ciriaco Campus, *La Steccaia. Paesaggio senese tra il Nevada e L'Arizona*, 2005. Photomechanical reproduction in Campus 2005, p. 166.

On a recent trip to Las Vegas, I had the opportunity to visit, alongside the extravagant hotels with adjoining gambling houses on the Strip, the recreation of a portion of the Italian landscape just outside the city, not far from Lake Mead. Francis

Bacon Junior, a local tycoon who owns half a dozen gambling houses, has long been enamoured with Italy, particularly Tuscany. [...] To assuage the pain of his wife Alba's passing and believing that she, despite her contentment, had always yearned for Italy, he decided to build and dedicate 'La Steccaia' to her, a large mausoleum in the shape of a Tuscan landscape nestled in the middle of the Southern Desert between Nevada and Arizona. Occupying an area of about 30 hectares, 'La Steccaia' replicates a slice of the Siene landscape complete with a farmhouse, cypress trees, and a vineyard with an olive grove below. [...] After ascending through row the cypress trees, the road becomes flatter and, having crossed a meadow adorned with rose bushes and rosemary, leading to a stone and brick house. According John Barth, a kind of factor who has served Francis Bacon Junior since the inception of 'La Steccaia', this building was the reconstruction of the couple's estate in Chianti, dismantled and reassembled atop the hill. [...] Creating the five hills that comprise the settlement of 'La Steccaia' required to bulldoze thousands of cubic metres of earth, covered additional soil brought from nearby California, and the installation of a complex reticular irrigation system with pipes connected directly to Lake Mead (Campus 2005, pp. 166-169; trad. mia).

The first impression upon reading this story is marvelling at what wealth can accomplish, convincing us that this curious and surprising transplant, although extravagant, appears plausible within the current context of landscape planning, where it is not uncommon to see the shaping of a territory influenced by its ideal representation (Turri 2001, Thompson 2009). However, the image is a photomontage and the tale is fictional. The Campus' artistic operation is credible by the involvement of photographic 'truth'<sup>1</sup> and further substantiated by the inclusion of the Tuscan landscape, one of the most recognisable and beloved Italian features abroad. It is precisely the rows of cypress trees between the winding paths found in *La Steccaia*, as well as in typical pictorial and photographic depictions of Tuscany, that give the region its current fame, so undisputed that we believe the story of Campus.

Although these natural features were already well-documented through an incalculable number of paintings and photographs in the past, it was in the 1920s that we witnessed some 'variations on the theme' by a series of Tuscan amateur photographers. In this contribution, we define amateur photographers as individuals who engage in photography as a personal pursuit rather than a primary occupation or for profit, often participating in group exhibitions for their own enjoyment. Throughout photographic history, various figures have been categorized as amateurs, a distinction that does not imply they are less significant than professionals. The status of the amateurs is flexible and versatile: they can choose to remain as such or transition to professionalism permanently or temporarily (Vitali

<sup>1</sup> The photographic history is studied with studies on this subject. See among all Fontcuberta 2014.

1959). More often than not, it is the amateurs – less constrained by market rules – who are credited with contributing more originality into the photographic culture of their time. This was particularly evident in the 1920s when amateur photographers reinterpreted their homeland through unconventional visions, encouraged by the regional publishing industry that provided a platform for their works (Cammilli 2014).

One of the most esteemed Tuscan publishers of the 1920s was Giorgio e Pietro Alinari, specialising in editions featuring high-quality photomechanical reproductions (Gli Alinari Editori 2002). This publishing house originated from the Fratelli Alinari photographic firm in Florence, founded in 1852 by Leopoldo Alinari, which quickly became Italy's premier photographic entity dedicated to depicting the nation's tangible and intangible heritage (Quintavalle 2003, Tomassini 2019). In 1890, the family enterprise passed to the founder's son, the amateur photographer and businessman Vittorio Alinari (1859-1932), who, between 1921 and 1922, curated two books photographically illustrated under Giorgio e Pietro Alinari: *Paesaggi italici nella "Divina Commedia"* (*Italic Landscapes in the "Divine Comedy"*) and *Il paesaggio italico nella "Divina Commedia"* (*The Italic Landscape in the "Divine Comedy"*). These volumes were part of a significant project commemorating the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dante Alighieri's death, showcasing Italian locations imaged in *Divine Comedy*, photographically interpreted by Alinari and 31 other authors and accompanied by excerpts from the masterpiece.<sup>2</sup>

Both volumes illustrate how the photographic medium played a pivotal role in raising awareness about landscape conservation during a period when Italy was enacting legislative measures to protect its natural beauty, acknowledged as fundamental aspect of its cultural heritage, mirroring similar initiatives in other European countries such as France, Germany, and Austria. In the early 1920s, Italy witnessed a series of cultural and legislative developments spurred by intellectuals such as naturalist Luigi Parpagliolo, jurist Nicola Angelo Falcone, and philosopher and literary critic Benedetto Croce, all of whom made significant contributions to the discourse and held influential roles within the government (Piccioni 2014). As Minister of Education, Croce authored the landmark 1922 law that established the country's first comprehensive landscape protection regime (Settis 2020).

<sup>2</sup> These books differ not only in title but also in format: the former is a luxurious edition limited to 500 numbered copies signed by Alinari, containing 77 high-quality phototypes, while the latter is a larger, more affordable edition featuring over 200 photomechanical reproductions (see Quintavalle 2003 and De Martino 2012).

It becomes evident how Alinari's visual approach in these books convey profound messages: photography addresses issues of landscape protection, invoking past glories during a period when the wounds inflicted by the Great War on cultural heritage had not yet healed. An example is the photograph by Florentine amateur photographer and physician Lodovico Pachò (1870-1975) depicting the woodland of La Verna (the sanctuary of Saint Francis of Assisi near Arezzo) (FIG. 2). In the image, the mountainous terrain housing the convent is magnificently presented from a low perspective, set against a barren field featuring a solitary tree that balances the composition with the religious structure positioned in the upper right corner. Pachò's photograph is accompanied by the tercets 106-108 of *Canto XI* of Alighieri's *Paradiso*, referring depicted location: "Nel crudo sasso intra Tevere e Arno / da Cristo prese l'ultimo sigillo, / che le sue membra due anni portarno".<sup>3</sup> This passage links heaven to Tuscany, a region often described in literature and represented in art as an unspoiled, verdant place, serene and pure, akin to a terrestrial Garden of Eden or *hortus conclusus*.

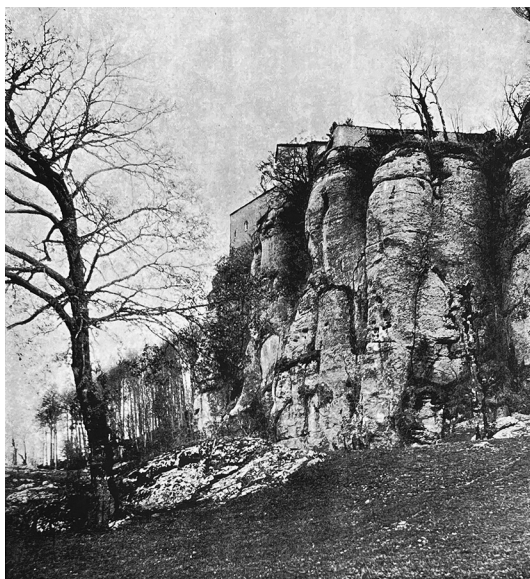


Fig. 2. Lodovico Pachò, *La Verna*, 1921 ca. Phototype in Alinari 1921, Tav. LXX.

<sup>3</sup> "On the rude rock 'twixt Tiber and the Arno / From Christ did he receive the final seal, / Which during two whole years his members bore."

Within both national and international contexts, the Tuscan landscape has become synonymous with the quintessential Italian vista, to the extent that the Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni wrote in his *Memoirs* “if Italy is the garden of Europe, Tuscany is the garden of Italy” (Goldoni 1997 [1787], p. 243; trad. mia). Since the 1970s – beginning with the theories of Rosario Assunto (1973) and Eugenio Turri (1974) in the Italian context – it has been acknowledged that the garden and the landscape are distinct entities, albeit both are constructed and shaped (D’Angelo 2009 and 2010, Siani 2022a, 2022b, and 2023). The landscape, in particular, is the result of the centuries-old sedimentation involving art, history, economy, and agriculture: a phenomenon especially true for the Tuscan landscape. Landscaping differs from gardening in several aspects, such as the absence of deliberate planning in the daily activities of humans on the territory in which they inhabit. As Paolo D’Angelo recently explained:

The landscape, then, is never the result of complete planning; on the whole it is random and unplanned: it is characterised by *non-intentionality*. On the other hand, the garden is planned and is the result of a design: it is characterised, therefore, by *intentionality*. Not only does a landscape never have an author, unlike a garden, but those who have shaped an area with their labour have never done so in order to build a landscape. They simply worked, cultivated, built, and planted trees, and the surprising result is that in a great many cases, especially in the past, this working not only without presupposing an aesthetic result, but without explicitly coordinating with the other actors in the landscape, produced results of extraordinary beauty (D’Angelo 2021, p. 13; trad. mia).

D’Angelo underscores that the landscape is *also* a product of human activity, highlighting the absence of deliberate coordination among its various contributors, in contrast to the conscious aesthetic focus of gardening. However, in the 1920s, amateur photography disrupted conventions by framing what was created through uncoordinated planning (typical of landscape) with *intentionality* (characteristic of gardening), resulting in some of the most evocative scenes in Tuscany. The amateur photographer, akin to a “passionate gardener” (Borchardt 1951) utilises the medium to *intentionally* transform the landscape into the image of a timeless garden.

## 2. The “Devoted Worship of Tuscany”

In Tuscany, a wide appreciation for both the tangible and intangible heritage emerged from 1923 in the Ente per le Attività



Toscane (Tuscan Activities Organization, hereafter EAT).<sup>4</sup> Founded as a non-political association, it was driven by the “*devoted worship of Tuscany*” (Ente per le Attività Toscane 1923, p. II), described as a secular faith that aimed at safeguarding the region’s interests – and by the extension the homeland – through the promotion of art, history, and the natural beauty (Giacchetti 1923, p. 3). The 1920s witnessed the adoption of a religious rhetoric for secular matters, aiming to unite people through shared experiences and emotions: a strategy previously employed during Italy’s unification and World War I, and later embraced by the Fascist regime (Cavazza 1997, De Cesaris 2020, Masseroni 2014). Like any cult, establishing rituals was essential, and among those of the EAT were termed ‘pilgrimages of Tuscany’, shot trips designed to visit and photograph various sites across the region. Indeed, during this time, an increasing number of people were traveling with the latest generation of compact cameras that were conquering the market (Cresti 2004).

The outings not only enabled participants to take new pictures but also provided the EAT with a steady stream of photographs for publication its monthly magazine, “*Illustrazione Toscana*” (“*Tuscan Illustration*”, 1923-1945). Initially printing 25,000 copies distributed to members, municipalities, institutions and tourist entities across Europe, the magazine featured amateur photographs of monuments and landscapes taken during these pilgrimages, alongside more conventional imagery, mainly from the Fratelli Alinari photo-archives.<sup>5</sup> The predominance of amateur photography in the journal suggests that the professionals’ repertoires did not fully meet the magazine’s need for images of lesser-known architectures and peripheral sites. Such an editorial choice was also linked to the EAT’s ability to significantly reduce photography costs: instead of purchasing images from large distributors, they likely recovered them free of charge from members of the Florentine organisation. Thus, whether intentionally or not, “*Illustrazione Toscana*” became a pivotal platform for promoting contemporary amateur photography in Tuscany.

Departing from the traditional imagery, in December 1924, the Federazione Toscana per il Turismo (Tuscan Federation for Tourism, hereafter FTT) – a technical body of the EAT established to stimulate and support activities for the development of regional tourism (La costituzione 1924) – announced a contest for amateur photographs of Tuscan landscape, followed by an exhibition in

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the history of the EAT, see Ente per le Attività Toscane 1923, L’opera dell’Ente Toscano 1926, Barfucci 1926, Ente per le Attività Toscane 1926, Capelli 1968, and Gentilini 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Reviewing the pages of “*Illustrazione Toscana*” we observe that the number of pictures credited to amateurs is at least twice as high as those credited to professionals.

Florence. The general rules of this contest specified that “all printed photographs and slides *awarded* would become the property of the FTT, to be exhibited its spaces, included in its publications, and used in special lectures, always crediting the author” (Concorso fotografico 1925, p. V; trad. mia). This clarification is significant, indicating the FTT’s appreciation for amateur photography at a time when magazines rarely acknowledged not-famous photographers. In this context, “*Illustrazione Toscana*” adopted a distinct approach, recognizing amateur photography as the most suitable iconographic source for its purposes.

The *Prima Esposizione Fotografica del paesaggio toscano* (*First Photographic Exhibition of the Tuscan Landscape*), inaugurated on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1925 at the former convent of Santa Maria Novella, aimed to “repeat and renew the great iconographic synthesis of the Tuscan landscape” (L’Esposizione fotografica 1925, p. IX; trad. mia) through the work of 18 amateurs, 24 Tuscan municipalities and over 20 regional organisations and professional photographers.<sup>6</sup> Journalist Marco Marchini provided a comprehensive review of this exhibition, representing an essential primary source for reconstructing the event.<sup>7</sup> Marchini begins by emphasizing:

There are certain landscapes that the camera excels at portraying better than others. Among these are the Tuscan landscapes in general. Photography is all *chiaroscuro*, shadows, penumbras, lights: all the picturesque effects of colour disappear [...] the beauty of the Tuscan landscape, rich in nuances, lies mainly in the purity of its drawing. The Tuscan landscape does not offer violent colour contrasts – its colours are soft and gentle, subtly highlighted by a discreet *chiaroscuro*: the cypresses with their black green barely form spots – but instead offers a linear, balanced, and harmonious composition: it is essentially a drawn landscape. Therefore, it is easy to understand how photography is well-suited to reproduce it without losing its best and attractive features in this reproduction (Marchini 1925, p. 7; trad. mia).

Here, the term ‘drawing’ refers to the 15<sup>th</sup> century Florentine artistic tradition, celebrated in art history textbooks worldwide, including artists like Leonardo da Vinci. Through analogies blending the unique qualities of the regional landscape, drawing, and imagination, Marchini undertakes a linguistic and conceptual operation to legitimise the inclusion of photography in the *pantheon* of the visual arts: why exclude this medium if it can capture the same subjects and qualities for which drawing is renowned globally? It was crucial to convey and popularize the idea of photography as

<sup>6</sup> The list of participants can be found in L’Esposizione Fotografica 1925, Barsi 1925, and Verbale della riunione 1925.

<sup>7</sup> The exhibition is also reviewed in “Il Marzocco” (10th May 1925, p. 3) and “Il Corriere Fotografico” (June 1925, pp. 95-96).



an asset of aesthetic significance comparable to those created by the hands of the old masters, amidst a national debate (started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) regarding the artistic value of photography (Costantini & Zannier 1987, Falzone del Barbarò & Zannier 1991). This is the cultural atmosphere of so-called ‘pictorialism’, a photographic movement emerging at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that sought to validate the artistic role of photography through techniques like gum bichromate printing, which aimed to mimic paintings and watercolours effects (Zannier 2004). Notably, one of pictorialism’s prominent figures was aforementioned Pachò (Tamasia 2005), who presented a series of “photographs that perfectly evoke the technique of watercolour” (Marchini 1925, p. 10; trad. mia) at the *Prima Esposizione Fotografica del paesaggio toscano*.

The first prize in the amateur section of the 1925 exhibition was awarded to the Florentine painter Gino Danti (1881-1968), a prominent figure in the Tuscan landscape photography. Among Danti’s works on display was *La chiesa di Diacceto* (*The Church of Diacceto*), where he opted for a vertical format instead of a more common horizontal format used for landscape depiction: choice that allows more than half of the frame to be occupied by the great masses of clouds (FIG. 3). These compositional expedients balance the chromatic elements in the composition – the sky above and the hills and vegetation below – emphasizing the isolated presence of the small church mentioned in the title. Positioned at the centre of a hypothetical golden spiral culminating at the upper right-hand edge of the image, the church stands as the sole human artifact depicted.

Today, cypress trees are considered one of the defining elements of the Tuscan landscape, shaped over time largely by the paintings of the old masters and the photographs of professionals. However, what did amateur photographers think of this subject in the 1920s? It is surprising that in the 1925 exhibition, cypress trees were presented in the works of very few participants, especially non-Tuscans. This can be attributed to both the technical limitations of the photographic prints at the time (as previously mentioned, “the cypresses with their black green barely form spots”) and the personal experiences of Tuscan amateurs, who were interested in recording ‘other’ characteristic aspects of their land because they were free from the linguistic canons of professionals and with greater familiarity and comfort with regional subjects than foreigners. It is precisely in the absence of the canonical representation of the cypress tree that a sign of originality of the amateur aesthetic can be identified.



Fig. 3. Gino Danti, *La chiesa di Diacceto*, 1925 ca.  
Photomechanical reproduction in Marchini 1925, p. 7.

At the end of the *Prima Esposizione Fotografica del paesaggio toscano*, the awarded photographic prints remained the property of the FTT, which collected them in the Gabinetto (later called Archivio) Fotografico del Paesaggio Toscano (Photographic Cabinet/Archive of the Tuscan Landscape): a place of preservation that, since 1925, would house the iconographic repertoire of the region produced by amateurs and professionals during events organised by the EAT. The Gabinetto was directed by Florentine professional photographer Tullio Locchi (1891-1926) and located in his newly opened studio in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele (today's Piazza della Repubblica) in Florence (Notiziario 1925, p. VII). Starting in 1925, as evidenced by the frequent appearance of his photographs in "Illustrazione Toscana", Locchi – a young and newly professional with the adventurous spirit of an amateur – became one of the most published photographers by the EAT, contributing with his work to shaping the new imagery

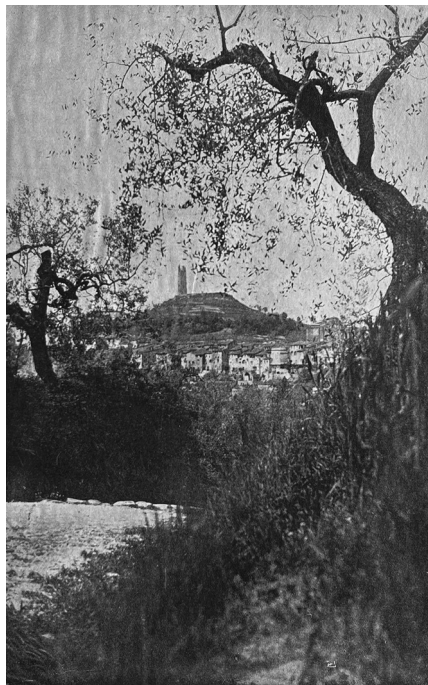


Fig. 4. Tullio Locchi, *Paesaggio Toscano*, 1925 ca.  
Photomechanical reproduction in “*Illustrazione Toscana*”, III/12 (1925), p. 7.

of the regional landscape. He was the author, for example, of a photograph published full-page in December 1925, depicting San Miniato (Pisa) from a distance between two trees (FIG. 4).<sup>8</sup> San Miniato is recognizable by Frederick II's tower on top of a hill, photographed from the banks of what is probably the Elsa river. Dense vegetation can be seen in the foreground, which at that time characterised the flat areas of the Tuscan hinterland, not yet subjected to the reclamation programs conducted in the following years (Barsanti & Rombai 1986, Snowden 2006). Indeed, lush fields were among the most characteristic features of photographic representations of the region landscape in the 1920s, underlining the bucolic essence of the sites, synonymous

<sup>8</sup> As contemporary photographic productions attest, framing the main subject through natural elements (foliage and tree branches) or architectural elements (windows and arches) is a popular expedient during these years, employed by professionals and amateurs in Italy and abroad, cf. Amonaci 2011.

with untouched and genuine nature: a contemporary Arcadia, concrete and, above all, easily accessible. This parallelism between past and present, myth and reality, highlights the role of the photographer – especially the amateur – as an explorer of hitherto apparently unknown places, discovered and made public through the mediation of photography.

### 3. *From Natural to Human*

On 7<sup>th</sup> January 1926, Tullio Locchi became the victim of a fatal accident during a photographic expedition to the abbey of San Galgano (Siena):

Locchi attempted to climb from the falling bell tower of the building onto the wide wall surrounding it. Motivated by his love for the beauty of Tuscany, he hoped to capture a unique aspect of this beauty to share it and to enhance the iconographic heritage with the same religious spirit we had determined to organise into a collection unique in the world (Tullio Locchi 1926, p. 16; trad. mia).

With his death, the program of the “unique collection in the world” mentioned in this passage – i.e., the Gabinetto Fotografico del Paesaggio Toscano – collapsed. Newly founded and already without a director, the institution was inexorably set aside in favour of more profitable public projects (such as the A11 highway and the National Central Library of Florence), as suggested by the decreasing mentions of it in “*Illustrazione Toscana*”. While the announcements and reports of the EAT continue to recall the existence of the Gabinetto, no further information was shared regarding location and conditions of this photo-archive.<sup>9</sup>

The Gabinetto was intended to house the prints awarded at the *Seconda Esposizione Fotografica del paesaggio toscano* (*Second Photographic Exhibition of the Tuscan Landscape*), which opened on 24<sup>th</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Agli amici 1925, p. VIII; Barfucci 1926, p. 15; Concorso fotografico illustrativo 1927, p. I; Barfucci 1926, p. 15; L'Ente per le Attività Toscane 1927, s.p.; Giornale dell'E.A.T. 1927b, p. II; Opere promesse 1928, s.p. From November 1927, there is information about the establishment of Gabinetto Fotografico della Toscana (Photographic Cabinet of Tuscany) – an additional place of conservation, complementing the already existing one – which aimed to house the iconography of various regional aspects: landscape, custom, monuments, events, etc. Cf. Giornale dell'E.A.T. 1927a, p. II; Giornale dell'E.A.T. 1927b, p. I. The most recent source identified that mentions a “photographic cabinet” is an undated typescript written shortly after 1934, Cf. Pro-Memoria [after 1934], p. 49. For the present study, an investigation was conducted at the Archivio dell'Azienda Autonomia per il Turismo (AAT) in Florence, an institution that has inherited the functions of the EAT over the decades. However, the archival search did not lead to the identification of any photographic material.

April 1927 in the Florentine Palazzo Medici Riccardi with the works of at least 15 amateurs and 19 professionals from all over Italy, along with 18 Tuscan institutions and municipalities (Cipriani 1927). The rooms were arranged in five sections, corresponding to the most visited regional tourist destinations at the time: the Etruscan landscape, castles, towers, beaches, and health resorts (L'opera dell'Ente 1926, p. 32).

In October 1926, Vittorio Alinari promoted the exhibition in the article *Per la difesa del paesaggio* (*For the Defence of the Landscape*) published in "Illustrazione Toscana". In this text, the author explains how the event will be an opportunity to

enlighten the mass of the public on the need to prevent with every effort those alterations that are inconsiderately brought to our landscape and that irreparably disfigure it [...] with the holy purpose of calling the competent authorities to respect everything that nature and art has handed down to us over the centuries" (Alinari 1926, p. 4; trad. mia).

To raise awareness of these issues, Alinari himself curated a special section where the old and new conditions of places are compared through photographic reproductions of paintings, lithographs, engravings, and contemporary photographs (Cipriani 1927, p. 27). The most successful comparison was the then-famous Impruneta Fair (near Florence), in which a photo-reproduction of the 17<sup>th</sup> century painting by Filippo Napoletano (at the time attributed to Paul Bril) was displayed alongside a recent photograph of the same place, both taken by Vittorio Alinari (FIG. 5). This section is interesting for investigating the life of places over time, whose changes are driven by the condition of the natural and architectural heritage and also by the human activity.

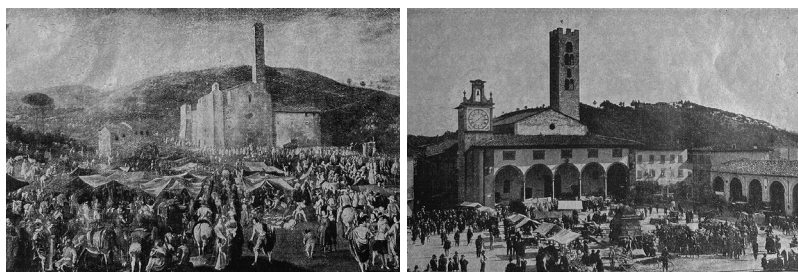


Fig. 5. Vittorio Alinari, *Dal Paolo Bril – La fiera dell’Impruneta nel Sec. XVII*, undated (left) & Vittorio Alinari, *La fiera dell’Impruneta nel 1926*, 1926 (right). Photomechanical reproduction in Cipriani 1927, pp. 22-23.



Thanks to the EAT's tourist-cultural activities, particularly through the two exhibitions and 'pilgrimages', the publishing industry will soon benefit from an updated imagery of Tuscany, continuously enriched by professional and amateur photographers. An immediate example of this impact on contemporary publications is seen in the 1927 volume *Tuscany* by geographer Attilio Mori. This comprehensive work spans nearly 400 pages, exploring the region's natural and cultural features, illustrated with over 180 photomechanical reproductions of 47 Tuscan amateur and professional photographers, including Danti, Pachò, and the Fratelli Alinari establishment. A comparison between Mori's *Toscana* and the contents of "Illustrazione Toscana" reveals that some photographs featured in the book originated from the *Seconda Esposizione Fotografica del paesaggio toscano*. This is the example of Danti's photograph *Firenze – Piazzale Michelangiolo*, which depicts the monument dedicated to the great artist Michelangelo Buonarroti from the back, positioned distantly and off-centre to emphasize the front panorama (FIG. 6). Similar to the earlier-discussed photograph *La chiesa di Diacceto*, once again the Florentine amateur demonstrates high care in the image construction, aligning the position of the dark silhouette of the bronze *David* with one of vertical axes that ideally divide the image into three parts. This composition balances and, at the same time, modernises the view of the location, departing from traditional Renaissance symmetry.

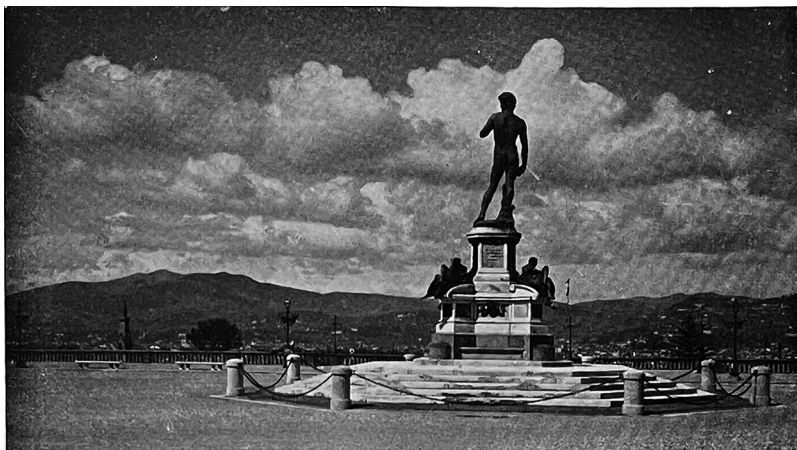


Fig. 6. Gino Danti, *Firenze – Piazzale Michelangiolo*, 1925 ca.  
Photomechanical reproduction in Mori 1927, p. 263.



Furthermore, *Toscana* is important for its recognition of all contributing photographers: a rarity during a period when only the most celebrated photographers were acknowledged. Volumes like this serve as crucial primary sources that document the vibrant photographic culture of the region. Mori's book significantly enhances our understanding of the works produced by talented amateurs who were widely esteemed and published in their time, yet are often overlooked today due to the lack of preserved archives. By crediting each photographer by name, the publication underscores their roles as authors, acknowledging their contributions as cultured and perceptive eyewitnesses of reality.

From the latter half of the 1920s, amateur photographers began to receive increasing recognition in publishing, affording them opportunities to expand and refine their skills and interests. Among these figures was lawyer Ermanno Biagini, who became a regular contributor to a number of national magazines, focusing primarily on documenting natural aspects such as flora and fauna, as well as human activities like farming, fishing, and hunting. Over time, Biagini's contributions gained intellectual depth, with his involvement in writing articles alongside his photographs from 1928 onwards.<sup>10</sup> Biagini's photographs notably reintroduced the human figure and its activities as integral of the imagery of the regional landscape, exemplified in his 1929 photograph of the *Bagni di Chianciano* (Chianciano Baths) (FIG. 7). Here, a shepherdess with a small herd occupies the foreground, looking directly to the camera. In the background, amidst lush vegetation characteristic of earlier representations, a building labeled 'Acqua santa' (holy water) emerges, marking the site of the town's baths. This depiction signals the evolving perception of the Tuscan Arcadia, previously perceived as untouched until recently, now 'discovered' and already serving the needs of what would soon become mass tourism.

In the late 1920s, the conception and representation of landscape expanded in response to cultural and economic changes the Tuscan region. Natural elements increasingly gave way to productive and infrastructural features, such as industrial factories, which symbolized the contemporary icons of national development (Turri 1979, p. 45). A notable example can be found in the October 1929 issue of "Illustrazione Toscana", where a panorama of San Gimignano (Siena) taken by the Logi photographic studio<sup>11</sup> is juxtaposed with an anonymous view of blast furnaces at the steel factory in

<sup>10</sup> From a preliminary survey, in the 1920s Biagini published at least in the magazines "Illustrazione Toscana", "Natura", and "Le vie d'Italia".

<sup>11</sup> The same photograph was already published with credit in the February 1926 issue.



Fig. 7. Ermanno Biagini, *Bagni di Chianciano*, 1929 ca.  
Photomechanical reproduction in "Illustrazione Toscana", VII/7 (1929), p. 7.

Piombino (Leghorn) (FIG. 8). The two photographs are accompanied by an unsigned text that underscores the contrast between the subjects:

Mediaeval buildings as serene as the sky, or as simple as the trees of the forest, are now envisioned to be invaded by motors, contorted by the spasm of living and creating that is the characteristic of the modern Age. But when the engines fall silent and passions subside it is still their calm lines, their august silences that give rest to souls and comfort to passions. Thus, there exists an aesthetic of motion and an aesthetic of repose, an aesthetic of noise and one of silence. And both are appropriate in the diversity of times and aspirations: both have the right to exist and triumph (Anonymous 1929, p. 7; trad. mia).

The juxtaposition text-image highlights how the frenetic noise of tomorrow challenges the quietude of yesterday. The town of San Gimignano, with its majestic towers as a manifesto of the past, gives away to a formless black mass from which slender chimneys emerge, emitting dense clouds, as a symbol of modern mechanisation.

It is evident that the apprehension of modernity, which often signifies the unfamiliar and disproportionate, differs significantly from the understanding of the past, grounded in knowledge, harmony and proportion. This duality evokes a paradoxical sense of attraction and

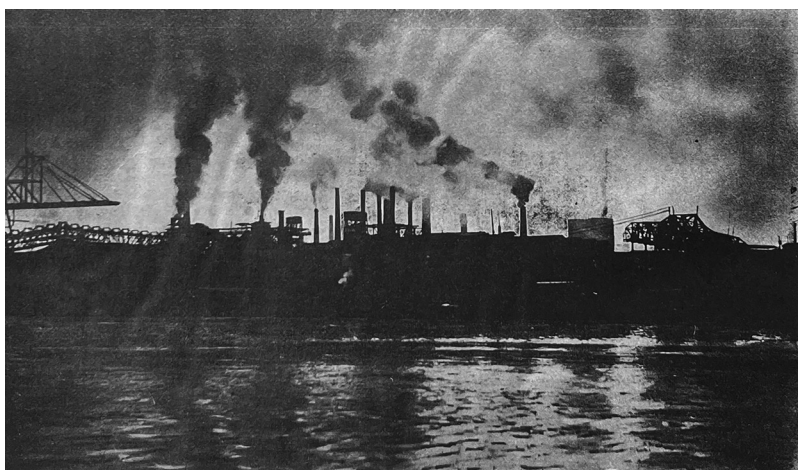
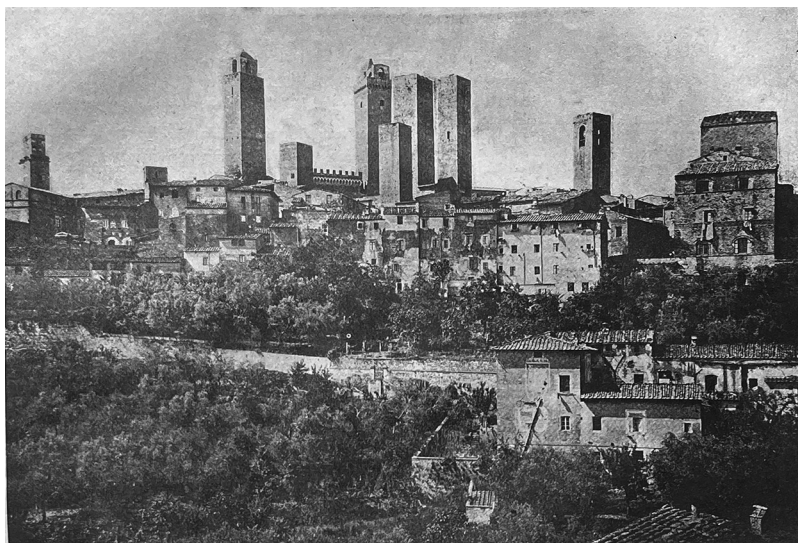


Fig. 8. Foto Logi, *S. Gimignano*, 1926 ca. (above) & Anonymous, *Piombino – Alti forni – Panorama dal mare*, 1929 ca. (below). Photomechanical reproduction in “*Illustrazione Toscana*”, VII/10 (1929), p. 7.

repulsion in observers faced with the grandeur and power of today’s artefactual landscape: an uneasy yet compelling pleasure arising from elements that are simultaneously disturbing, intimidating or seemingly beyond rational control. This dichotomy of attraction and repulsion can be likened to the concept of the ‘sublime’, which encompasses not

only an aesthetic but also a moral dimension (Gatti 2015). Photographers, confronted with both natural and human spectacles, often feel like helpless observers. They are acutely aware that they bear witness to an epochal transition phase that positions their region competitively within Italy from economic and productive perspectives. Human labour and machinery became central in photographic representations disseminated through official channels of the fascist regime (Zannier 1975), while investigations into purely landscape aspects were largely confined to personal visual research (Cammilli 2014).

Within the timeframe covered here, a significant parabola emerged as amateur photographers turned their focus to the landscapes of their homeland. This perspective, part of a broader cultural movement characterized by an unprecedented sensitivity towards the subject, played a pivotal role in challenging stereotypical representations of Tuscany. In the 1920s, amateur photography redefined the visual conventions associated with their region, offering fresh interpretations aimed at capturing the *genius loci* – the unique natural and cultural identity of a place – and revitalising the ‘experience’ of landscape, which had already been widely explored in the artistic realm. However, the long journey towards establishing landscape as an autonomous photographic subject would continue for several decades. Landscape photography resurfaces in the Italian context at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when an inseparable bond with the photographic gaze matures (Valtorta 2013). The result is that today the landscape is – figuratively speaking – indebted to photography (Borgherini & Sicard 2020), both for the latter’s ability to uncover previously overlooked aspects (as in the 1920s’ amateur photographers) and in the way mediated visions influence its design (as in Campus’ *La Steccaia*). If, as Augustin Berque argues, human vision encompasses not only optical information but also memory, culture, and background, so that “notre regard ne se porte pas seulement *sur* le paysage; dans une certaine mesure, il *est* le paysage” (Berque 1995, p. 25), this case study suggests that the photographer’s camera lens is not just *about* the landscape; to some extent, it *is* the landscape.

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