



ROMA CAMBIATA

RICHER'S EARLY 20TH CENTURY PHOTOGRAPHS

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PREFACE

This exhibit and catalog is a preliminary step in the study of the photos of Rome published by Ernesto Richter at the beginning of the 20th century. Studium Urbis has collected some 50 large photos and 550 postcards bearing Richter's mark. This corpus was thought to be a good beginning for an extended study of Richter's work. While obviously intended for commercial purposes, the images often reveal an artistic aspect which they have in common with the work of earlier photographers. Since Richter has been considered to be only a publisher and not a photographer, little attention has been paid to his images in the past.

The images of this exhibit are mostly of the larger format (18 x 24 cm). These are from the same negatives as the smaller (9 x 14) postcards which clearly constituted the lion's share of Richter's sales. As more information is gathered about Richter's activities, a second exhibition and catalog will be planned. This will concentrate on the smaller, more plentiful postcards. Both exhibits are intended to illustrate the aspect of urban change in Rome, so they will not include photos of interiors and of works of art, which constitute a significant part of Richter's opus. Since information on Richter is very scant, if readers come across any facts relating to his work, they are invited to contact the author of this catalog, and to participate in the preparation of the next one.

All images in the catalog are printed at actual size of the original. Exceptions are small details which are enlarged for clarity.

All the modern photographs were taken in November and December 2007 with a digital camera (Nikon S10).

INTRODUCTION

Little is known about Ernesto Richter except that at the turn of the 20th century he published numerous images of Rome and of works of art in Roman museums. He also published some views of the Roman Campagna. His images appear in two forms: 9 x 14 postcards, and 18 x 24 photos. His postcards bear his name, a number and a title. Many images are also marked with an address, presumably of his studio.

Bruno Brizzi states that Richter was not a photographer but only a publisher (*editore*) using images photographed by others¹. Piero Becchetti concurs by not including him in his extensive list of photographers working in Rome up to 1915². Brizzi and Becchetti are among

¹ Brizzi, Bruno *Album di Roma*, Roma: 1979; p.80

² Becchetti, Piero *La Fotografia a Roma*, Roma: 1983; p. 265-358

the most noted writers about early photographs of Rome and their opinion is hard to refute. However as one peruses the urban images published by Richter, one can find a certain sameness of approach which suggests the same photographic eye at work. So if it was not Richter himself responsible for those images, it was probably a photographer working for him whose name has yet to be determined. In some cases credit on the published images is given to other photographers (e.g.: Cat. 11), but this only strengthens the possibility that many of the Richter photos not labeled in this way were done “in house.” Aside from the photos attributable to other photographers, whether the remaining photos were by Richter himself or by someone working for him makes little difference to the importance of this corpus of images, which, for want of a better name, will be referred to as “Richter’s images” for the purposes of this text.

In Richter’s day it was common for photographers to acquire negatives by others and print them with their own mark, without giving credit to the original photographer. Thus Chauffourier, the famous French photographer who worked in Rome, bought numerous negatives of Sibelli and De Bonis, two less well known photographers, and published them as his own³. Vasari in turn acquired numerous Chauffourier negatives and published them with his own mark⁴. Richter published a fair number of Vasari photos under his own imprint, giving credit to Vasari for some images but not for others (see Cat. 11).

The characteristic which many of Richter’s urban images share is that of including the context of buildings, and not presenting them as they appear in the work of the more famous publishers like Alinari and Anderson where the building is usually treated as a distinct object, represented full face and devoid of context. Granted that some of Richter’s views, especially of churches, lack context, but these are in the minority, and might even suggest the work of another hand. Another characteristic which differentiates Richter from Alinari is the presence of strong shadows in many images. Alinari preferred overcast days with few shadows. Some of Richter’s images use strong shadows as a compositional element (see Cat. 9).

Some of the most interesting Richter views represent streets and piazze. These, together with panoramic views, record a city that has undergone considerable change since they were photographed; hence the name of this exhibition: **Roma Cambiata**. To indicate these changes, some modern photos, taken from the same viewpoint, are placed next to Richter’s images for comparison. The text includes a brief indication of the urban changes since the early 1900s, and points out some of the major landmarks appearing on each image.

Richter images continued to be sold after World War II in the larger 10 x 15 format postcards as well as some photos in the 18 x 24 form, but these are not from the same negatives, and are clearly by a successor to Ernesto. The ER symbol on the back of these, together with the name

³ Lundberg, Bruce, and Pinto, John, *Steps off the Beaten Path*, Milano: 2007; p. 10

⁴Manodori, Alberto, et al, *I Vasari*, Roma: 1991; the photo labeled “Foro Romano dal Campidoglio” on p. 169 of the Alessandro Vasari section is from the same negative as the photo on p. 237 of the Chauffourier section of the same book.

“E. Richter” on the cards, suggest a family member. However these are not represented in this exhibit, whose focus is on turn of the century exterior views of Rome.

DATING

There are four ways of dating Richter’s images:

1. Internal evidence from the elements photographed, knowing when they were still there and/or when they were demolished.
2. Richter’s studio address on the card, which changed at a certain point from Via di S. Giovanni 85 to Via [dei] Serpenti 170.
3. The postmark on those cards that were actually mailed, which provides a *terminus ante quem* for the date.
4. The design of the back of the postcards which changed in 1905:
pre-1905: whole verso is dedicated to the address
post-1905: left half of the verso dedicated to text; right half dedicated to the address

IMPRINT

All the Richter images bear an imprint with his name. All are numbered except a few postcards, which belong to a particular, low quality sepia series, probably later reprints by Richter’s successor. The numbering on the images is not consistent because the same number is often used for different subjects. Of over 600 images in the Studium Urbis collection, only 5% are marked with “Editore” as part of the imprint. Listed below are the different forms which of the imprint:

E. Richter, Roma

Ernesto Richter, Roma

Ernesto Richter, editore, Roma

– E. Richter – V.S. Giovanni 85 – Roma

Ernesto Richter, Via Serpenti 170 – Roma

Ernesto Richter, Editore, Via Serpenti 170, Roma

Cat. 22 Notes

The radical change which the station area has undergone since the late 19th century makes it difficult to orient oneself in this image. The only point of reference is the surviving fragment of the Republican wall, which Richter attributes to Servius Tullius. The greater height of the cylindrical structure on the left in the modern

photo indicates that the ground level has been lowered since the Richter image.

On the right is the southeast corner of the old Termini railroad station (built 1867-1873). This was demolished to make way for the present station (completed in 1950). All of the buildings to the left of the Republican wall have also given way to the new station.