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Belinograph, the Ancestor of the Facsimile: Its Role in the Transmission of Still Images

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This study explores the forgotten history of still and documentary image transmission, focusing on the evolution of the facsimile. The research started with the discovery of equipment from the early decades of the 20th century, which revealed the importance of this pioneering technology, now part of the collections of the MUMEC Museo dei Mezzi di Comunicazione in Arezzo.

The roots of this innovation go back to Giovanni Caselli's Pantelgraph, patented between 1855 and 1860, capable of sending and receiving images via an electro-chemical telegraphic system. The decisive step came in 1904 with the invention of the Belinograph by French engineer Edouard Belin. This device used a photocell to convert images into electrical signals, transmitting them through existing telegraph and telephone networks. Belin also created a receiver that decoded these signals, reconstructing the image on chemically treated photographic paper.

In 1914, Belin extended his invention to radio telegraphic (wireless) transmissions, anticipating the era of wireless communication. The Belinographic system, also known as 'telephotography', was fundamental to journalism, enabling the rapid dissemination of photographs around the world. This technology laid the foundations for the modern fax machine, photocopiers and scanners, revolutionising the transmission of documents and visual information well before the digital age. The research explores the impact of this system on society and analyses its use and historical persistence in Italy between the 1920s and 1930s, the period of maximum success for Belin's technology.

Author: CASI, Fausto (SISFA)

Presenter: CASI, Fausto (SISFA)

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