I. Illustrated postcards around 1900

1. Travellers' images, landscape and memory

The appearance of postcards in the early 20th century is a remarkable phenomenon and direct antecedent of the millions of images which in our present global culture currently circulate on internet together with short texts. It can also be considered a forerunner of modern social networks, as collectors from different cities or countries shared postcards with images or themes of common interest. Their diffusion was widespread and some became true symbols of identity still to be found today.

Postcards are of great documentary value as windows open to memory rousing curiosity or nostalgia, documenting a variety of places and times from different perspectives. They are unique records of the transformations of urban landscape, architecture or customs, with different themes which give us a better understanding and appreciation of what we were so that we may build a more meaningful future.

This work aims to encourage the study of Malaga and other cities through their postcards, analysing the collection edited by German publishers Purger & Co. around 1905. It should be remembered that in the previous decades as a result of a pioneering industrialisation process in Spain the city of Malaga had witnessed one of the most buoyant economic periods in its history. The image and urban layouts of the city centre are the result of reforms from that time of splendour, which was coming to an end in the early 20th century. This collection is of great documentary value for a unique period in the history of Malaga.

2. The production of images in the late 19th century

We live in what is known as a culture of image, in an era which fills our lives with a wealth of images. Although this has not always been the case, studying these images makes it possible to visualise different periods of history.

A primitive period covered prehistoric drawings in caves, inscriptions in stone, on tablets, etc. right up to the use of paper as a medium for graphic or written language. The invention of the printing press around 1450 was a milestone in human civilisation, enabling mass dissemination of texts and drawings. However, compared to the present, there were few human-made images until the 19th century, with the exception of paintings, drawings or engravings, available to few people on an everyday basis.

The invention of photography in the mid-19th century was a groundbreaking transformation which altered how we perceive the world, and let us recall past times which without this technology would be condemned to oblivion. Photography fulfilled a desire going back to the discovery of the rules of perspective in the Renaissance: the recording of visual impressions which until then only the most brilliant artists had been able to produce.

Around 1826 the first images were immortalised in a camera obscura and the daguerreotype was invented in 1839, producing unique images which could not be duplicated. These perfected procedures to multiply photographic images using glass negatives, wet collodion techniques and albumen copies dated from 1851. This brought about a great increase in the production of images and was a milestone in the history of our civilisation.

In the second half of the 19th century the different techniques for printing on paper were key to other advances. At the time there was great interest in reproducing photographs in books, although it was some time before this technique became a reality. Although daguerreotypes could not be duplicated, they were used as models for lithographs and engravings. In addition, since the magazines of the time could not include photographs, they relied on faithful xylographs based on photographs in their place. At times the photographic prints were pasted directly onto the pages of books.

From the mid-19th century the *cartes de visite* were an important cultural phenomenon which encouraged the production of photographic scenes of all sorts, occasionally with considerable print runs. The importance of stereographs, including three-dimensional views of cities, monuments and architecture in different countries should also be highlighted. These were series on topics considered of interest, spreading the different cultural archetypes of individual places.

In the final decades of the 19th century there were major innovations in the production of printed images. From 1880 methods were tested to publish photographs without initially recording the image seized by the camera in a drawing. The invention of the collotype around 1868 and its dissemination around 1880, finally made it possible to print clear and inexpensive photographic images, decomposing them into sections of small dots in a wide range of greys[1] *(fig. A)*.

---

[1] Collotype (*Phototypie* in French, *Collotipia* in Italian, *Lichtdruck* in German and *Fototipia* in Spanish) was a printing process created by Louis Alphonse Poitevin in 1856 and perfected in 1868 by German photographer Joseph Albert among others. NEWHALL/FONTCUBERTA, 1983, p. 251. KURTZ, 2001, pp. 177-179. SOUGEZ, 1989, pp. 64-85.
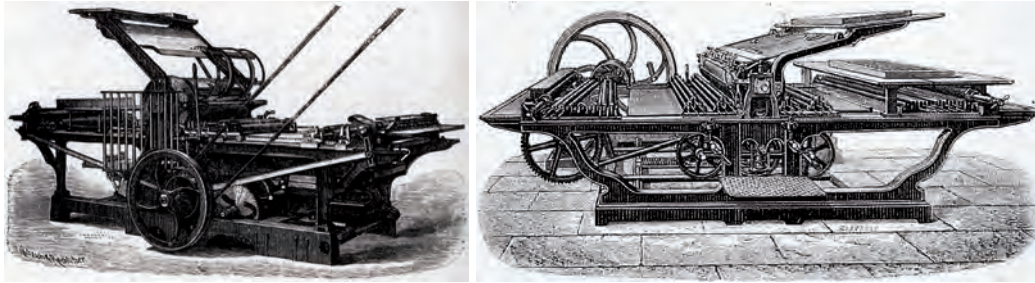
Fig. A. *Printing presses for the industrial production of collotypes*
(illustration by Klitzsch-Rochlitrer around 1880).

Around 1880 the photochrome, a technique combining black and white photography with colour lithography, was invented using different lithographic plates to colour with different tints[2]. The Photochrom Zürich company began to commercialise this process, which became popular from the 1890s, when colour photography was being developed but was not yet commercially viable. Its use was licensed to other companies and it was very successful in the United States, where The Detroit Photographic Company printed millions of images, so much so that the term photochrome became synonymous with the images of these postcards.

Like the famous Swiss company P. Z. (Photoglob Zürich) the German publishers Purger & Co. used the photochrome as a printing system, obtaining beautiful results using templates to colourise black and white photographs. In the early 20th century both these companies published an extensive collection of postcards which spread through many European and North African countries.

---

[2] The photochrome was invented by Hans Jakob Schmid (1856-1924), an employee of traditional Swiss printers Orell Gessner Füssli, who founded the Photochrom Zürich company.

3. Origins and evolution of illustrated postcards

The postcard was invented in 1869 as a way to send brief messages cheaply[3]. Initially no images were included and the front was used to include the address while text was added on the reverse, circulating in open form and therefore not private. In the last third of the 19th century sending postcards increased due to a variety of social and economic circumstances[4]. The postage cost, lower than that of a normal letter, was one of the keys to this success. From 1873, postcards were in circulation around Spain, cofounder of the Universal Postal Union in 1878. The international homologation of post imposed a single 9 x 14 centimetre size and a normalised system which took off rapidly. By 1900 this system was almost worldwide.

Like the graphic press or the cinematograph, postcards found an ideal breeding ground in the new society of the masses. Up until then, the cost of photography had been prohibitive for the middle and lower classes given the high cost of cameras and laboratories required for developing. The perfection of printing techniques brought about a boom in postcards at affordable prices.

In the last decade of the 19th century images began to be incorporated on the front of the postcards, always leaving some free space for text. Many types of postcards were on sale: drawn, decorated, in relief, and even perfumed. City scenes were one of the favourite subjects, showing the unique progress or development of each city: its production, society, culture, urbanism and major events.

---

[3] The invention of the postcard is usually attributed to Austrian professor Emanuel Hermann (1839-1902). On 26 January 1869 he wrote an article proposing new formats for postal correspondence. His ideas were widely accepted and the first postcard was issued on 1 October 1869.

[4] RIEGO AMÉZAGA, 1997, pp. 19-57.