

ELSI, Elettronica Sicula

[Back](#)

[To Museum](#)

[To ELSI / EITel exhibits](#)

ELSI was the acronym of Elettronica Sicula, an Italian venture promoted by Finmeccanica, a public company, and by Edison, a large electric utility in Milano. The plant had to be built in Palermo, Sicily, to industrialize one of the most depressed areas of the deep south of Italy. Raytheon was already supplying radar technologies and parts to another firm, Microlambda, located near Naples and owned by Finmeccanica, under the guide of one of the Raytheon's most valued management executives, Dr. Carlo Calosi. An interest in the ownership of the new company to be established was offered to Raytheon as compensation for overdue payments of royalties by Finmeccanica. The initial equity stake was set in a minority 14 percent and ELSI was founded in 1956 with Raytheon as a minority shareholder.

Around 1961 Edison, the majority shareholder, proposed to Raytheon to buy an additional 19 percent as compensation for overdue royalty payments by ELSI. In those years Raytheon was expanding in Europe and Italian market was promising also for the television boom. An agreement was found to buy from Edison a packet which included shares of ELSI and the entire share capital of SELIT, a small CRT manufacturing plant located next door and owned by the same Edison Milano together with Thomas Company of New Jersey. In return Raytheon had to waive ELSI's overdue royalties for 1.6 million dollars, take the responsibility for a 2 million dollars loan in favor of the same firm and pay 1.4 million dollars to Edison. In 1962 SELIT merged in ELSI. Productions were fully qualified and Raytheon advertised them both under its own mark.

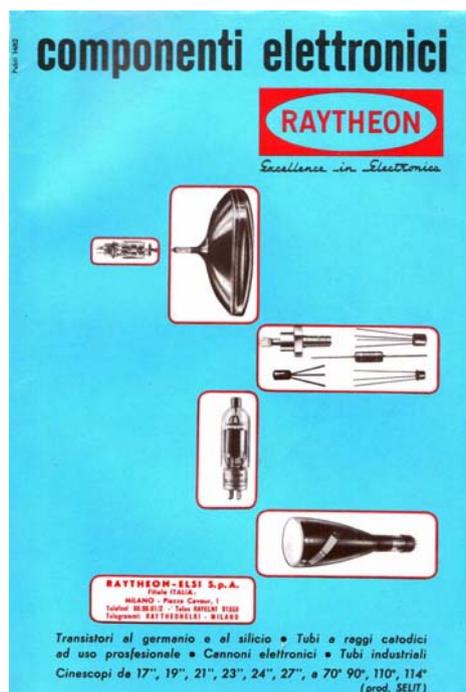


Fig. 1 - The Raytheon ad from 'Selezione di Tecnica Radio-TV' 1962, an Italian magazine, showing both ELSI and SELIT productions. Click on the image to enlarge.

No doubt that Raytheon was sure to make a good deal, if it decided to invest 5 million dollars in the venture. Probably the same professor Calosi, who had a great prestige for his successes with other Raytheon's initiatives in Italy, as Selenia, Vitroselenia and the Hawk missile program, was deceived by promises of politicians and was unable to fully evaluate risks of an industrial initiative carried out in the deep south of Italy. We can guess that Dr. Calosi, probably because of his Italian origin, was motivated more by socioeconomic reasons than by industrial business. According to the evaluation of the corporate management, ELSI had severe limitations in its action. The first one was identified in 'too much people and too much space', with its 900 employees over 200,000 square feet. Other reasons were related to its location, too far from the business center that was Milan. No skilled engineer or technician was willing to move to Palermo and even the same materials had to be procured from very far away, with significant cost increases over competition. Raytheon, although now directly involved in the management of the plant, was unable to cut costs and its participation went up again due to the liabilities that ELSI accumulated day after day. In 1967 Raytheon had raised its ownership up to 99.16 percent of the shares, the remaining 0.84 percent being held by Machlett, the fully owned company specialized in X-ray tubes. The story of following days can be read in the memories of the International Court of Justice for the proceedings initiated by United States against Italy, <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/76/9677.pdf>.

In short Raytheon removed Dr. Calosi from the direction and took the direct control of the plant. By the way those were difficult days in Italy, characterized by wildcat strikes and occupation of plants by workers. Things went even worse in Sicily, for a disastrous earthquake that made hundred thousands people homeless. Previous attempts by Raytheon management to lay off part of the 1400 workers, which included also SELIT people, had caused twenty-four wildcat strikes between January and February and the full stall of production. In March 1968 Raytheon, unable to find solutions to make ELSI profitable, decided to close the plant and to liquidate the company. On 1 April the Mayor of Palermo ordered the requisition of equipment and of the plant, which had been occupied by the workers. ELSI was declared bankrupt on 16 May 1968. The public company IRI, Istituto per la Rinascita Industriale, formed a subsidiary, Elettronica e Telecomunicazioni or ElTel, to acquire ELSI's assets from the dispossessed shareholders, Raytheon and Machlett. On 6 July 1969 ElTel bought at a bargain price the plant and most of the ELSI's tangible assets.

ElTel continued the production of Raytheon's microwave tubes for communication, military and radar applications. Later ElTel was bought by Alenia and continued the production under the name ALELCO, acronym of Alenia Elettronica Componenti, then changed to Galileo Avionica, still in business at the current date.

Tubes manufactured by ELSI were marked as Raytheon, often with their registered RMA/EIA codes, and documented as such. ElTel continued to built even later tubes to Raytheon's specs, usually with an ET prefix before the registered EIA code.



Fig. 2 - An ELSI 5C22 with the EIA standard code and a puzzling suffix, J-ES-SG, which appears to be a JAN qualified manufacturer code. Maybe that ES stays for European Supplier but this is just a guess. Click on the image to enlarge.

Nothing can be find about ElTel proprietary tubes, unregistered and mostly dedicated to military markets. Probably these tubes were handled as classified or custom-made types and are undocumented at all.

In the collection we find a few samples of vacuum tubes made by the factory under the various brands.

References:

- **The creative ordeal, the story of Raytheon by Otto J. Scott**
- **Case concerning Elettronica Sicula S.p.A., International Court of Justice memorial**
- **Advertisings from 'Selezione di Tecnica Radio-TV', early '60s.**

Last edited on 30 February 2016 by Emilio Ciardiello

[**Back**](#)

[**To Museum**](#)

[**To ELSI / ElTel exhibits**](#)