





Romualdo Moscioni, Gaeta, SS. Erasmo e Marciano Cathedral, carved candel holder representing storuies if the life of Jesus and S,Erasmo, particular, 1891-1910

## The archive of the General Directorate of Antiquity and Fine Arts of the Ministry of Education (MPI)

# Giving value to a large archive: strategies and descriptive modalities



Ministry of Culture Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation

#### Elena Berardi



Romualdo Moscioni, Pianella, Santa Maria Maggiore Church, 1862

# The history

Since the beginning of the second half of the 1800s **photography** became part of a working practice which produced a very large documentation suitable to study and teach fine arts.

The rapid spread of this new technical tool, its versatility between art and technique, as well as its impact on the creation of new codes for interpretation of reality, enriched and developed the study of cultural heritage



# The history

All the protagonists of protection and preservation started to gather and preserve photographic collections. These units would become photographic **accumulation units** and, over time, stratifications that would determine the creation of the photographic archive we'll talk about today.

No other invention before photography was so widespread around the world in such short period of time. It transformed the whole world by introducing **new reading codes** through a common and immediately comprehensible language, and suita for multiple purposes.

## The Ministry of Education

worked using the new technique, starting a process of **documentar indentification** on the whole national territory after the unification of the country.



Romualdo Moscioni, Roma, villa Blanc. Roman Mausoleum incorporated to the boundary wall, 1903 ante



Romualdo Moscioni, Magliano de' Marsi, Rosciolo – Church of Santa Maria in Valle Porclaneta, pulpit and transenna, around 1868-1890



R. Moscioni. Roma, piazza di Spagna square, demolished baroque door, 1921 ante

#### The need of documenting the territory

Until Italian unification, protection interventions of the cultural heritage were performed by the **National** History Deputations (Deputazioni di storia patria) and **Academies**. Then they were replaced by **Conservation Commissions** as new authorities managing artistic heritage. The institutional tasks of preserving, restoring and cataloguing were supported by photography that promised new investigative potential. The central administration requested to its departments ministerial regulations, dispatches, inventories, as the first attempt to launch the first photographic census of the monumental heritage. Later, also the regulations for compilation of cataloguing sheets with attached photographs were created.

They were all demonstration of a raising interest – also present in other countries –to realize a detailed and systematic identification of the national heritage.

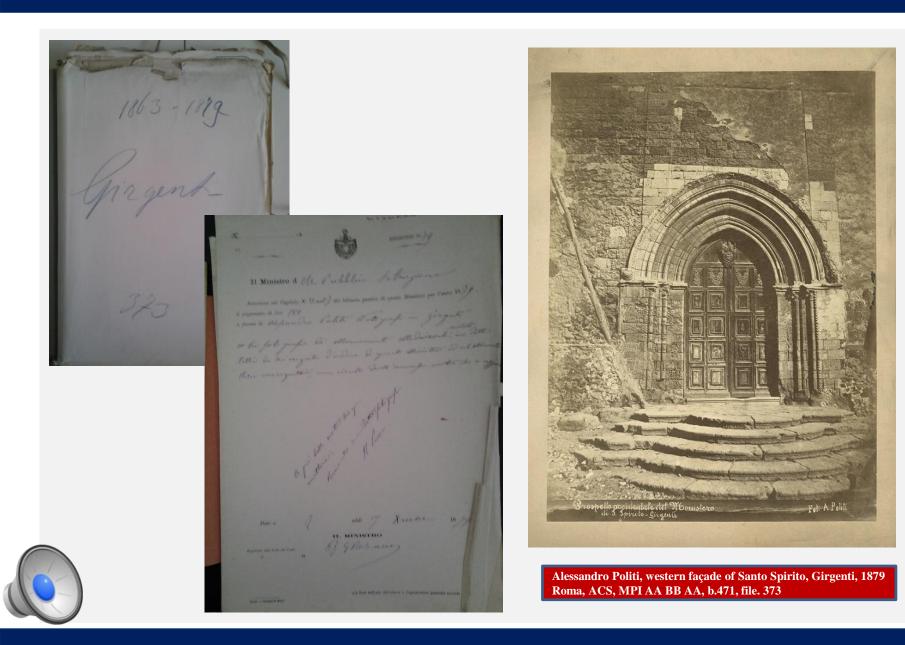
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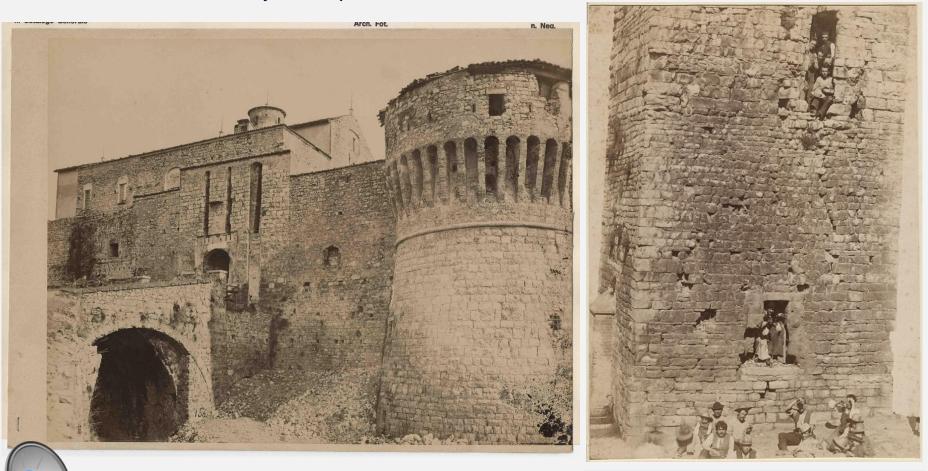
Roma, Central State Archive, MPI AA BB AA, envelope 596, file.1063

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In 1881 the **General Directorate of Antiquity and Fine Arts** was founded within the **Ministry of Education**, while photographic production had already become a documentary work practice.



Bibbiena, Tarlati palace. Torre dei Socci tower, around 1880.

Brescia, castle, 1875 post

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ANTICHITÀ E BELLE ARTI

Norme per la compilazione delle schede del catalogo

Circolare n. 865 — Roma, addi 24 settembre 1988

u pregie di comunicare alla S. V. Illium le norme per la compilazion erale degli orgetti d'arte sui quali lo stato ha diritto di vicilarea. getto d'arte verrà corredata delle notizie opportune, in triplice esen

ostante alle indicazioni della provincia e del comune, verra segnate torio, o il monumento nazionale ecc. ove si trova l'oggetto stesso. ervato alle indicazioni generali dell'oggetto, ne sarà prima notato seguiranno poscla la descrizione, le indicazioni della materia e delle di

sa successivo tratto, riferentesi all'ubicazione, il compilatore, nel porgere la notizio ttere nel luogo originario l'oggetto d'arte.

Mel tratto riguardante lo stato di conservazione e i restauri subiti dall'oggetto ste, sarà cura del compilatore di porre mente che le indicazioni fornite varranno conerma de' provvedimenti da prendersi per la conservazione dell'oggetto stesso. Mel tratto relativo alle condizioni giuridiche dell'oggetto, si citeranno i docur pure si richiameranno le tradizioni riflettenti la proprietà di esso.

Nella pagina assegnata allo studio dell'oggetto d'arte verranno date in forma comrallosa le notizie più importanti che ad esso si riferiscano e che valgano a farne rile unell valore storico ed artístico. Nel citare poi i libri, in cui particolarmente sia fatto seese dell'oggetto d'arte, si scriverà prima il nome e cognomo dell'antore, poi il tie della pubblicazione, il luogo della edizione, la tipografia e l'anno della stampa; e

titers in fine in pagina in cui è parola dell'oggetto stesso Verra fatta descrizione d'ogni oggetto artistico, tanto mobile che infisso, se quest al-

tas possi essere rimosso dal luogo in cui si trova: poi che le schede debbono fornire spai monumento nazionale i particolari, si di pittura che di scoltura, quando esa "s seno parte integrante dell'edificio. Sarà tenuto conto anche degli oggetti, i quali, sche non appartengano alle classi delle arti margiori, servono tuttava allo stadio \* delle manifestazioni dell'arte nelle varie sue forme, come de' costumi, degli usi, della tolia della sue forme.

Luo dei tre esemplari delle scheda sarà tenuto dal consegnatario dell'oggetto d'arbi il scondo rilasciato a chi possa o debba assumersi, all'occorrenza, la rinaovazione

ca consegna, il terzo spedito a questo Ministero.

P. Il Ministro - MARIOTTL

### **Regulations for cataloguing**

The «Regulations for the compilation of the catalogue of art objects » were established in 1888. In 1893 the Office for the compilation of the catalogue of monuments was created. The regulation commands to compile, for each art object upon which the State owns supervising rights, three copies of a cataloguing sheet (one for the keeper of the object, one for whom could be next keeper and one for the Ministry).

The sheet will be articulated in **topography** (province, municipality, church, oratory, etc, where the object is located), description (object, material, dimension, name of author), location, conservation conditions (including restorations implemented), juridical (ownership documents), study of the object,

Norm, september 24, 1888, n. 865: Ministry of Education, Official gazette, vol. XV, 1888, p. 523



R. Moscioni, Lanuvio. Archaeological excavation, female head, 1884-1892

#### Which archive are we talking about?

With the denomination «MPI Fund», we refer to the photographic Archive of the General Directorate of Antiquity and Fine Arts of the Ministry of Education, born within the public administration and still preserved nowadays at the Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation. It's a photographic compilation of around 200.000 positives and some drawings and prints, ordered by theme with a prevalent topographic criteria regarding italian sites and also some foreign ones. The photographic documentation, produced in a period of time between around 1860 and 1970, concerns works of art, architectures,

archeological monuments, urban historical centers, traditional objects and landscapes, realized by photographers working for professional studios and ministerial offices.



#### MPI Fund is acquired by GFN (National Photographic Cabinet). How and when?



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#### MPI Fund is acquired by GFN (National Photographic Cabinet). How and when?

In 1973, a few years before the creation of the **Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Heritage** (today Ministry of Culture), different agencies with different origins and histories joined, all with the same purpose of knowing and understanding cultural heritage:

The **Catalogue Office**, born in 1969 with the aim of defining cataloguing methodologies and coordinating the operational activities of technical bodies;

The **National Photographic Cabinet**, founded in 1895 as State Institution for the production and collection of photographic documents. It would then be accompanied by the other MPI collection.





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Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione





Romualdo Moscioni, Roma, view of Porta Furba gate, around 1880

# Methodologies for the analysis and description of a «complex»

Interest the critical/conceptual and physical reorganization of the MPI Fund has been carried out, and is still ongoing, through the ordering of photographical series.

The aim of the project was to highlight the reasons for the commission and production of the photographic series that compose the Fund (restorations, publications, identifications,master plans, documentation on war damages, etc.) This organization permitted to highlight the thematic variety of the Fund, finding, at the same time, the sense and the historical significance of the images.



Romualdo Moscioni, Roma, Sant'Uffizio palace. Loggia, 1891-1910

#### **ICCD's investments on culture**

ICCD invested financial and human resources for the preservation, the ordering and the study of this important archive.

The reasons of this investment are the necessity of making the Fund accessible in its entirety, and to complete the **inventory**, by acquiring the materials to the State patrimony.

The physical organization of the Fund has different modalities:

**loose photographs** (aound 52%); **photographs glued on cardboard**, divided by dividers (around 47%);

large formats installed in flat drawers .

The three unit's arrangement of the fund has been maintained, **respecting archival discipline.** 

Photographs are alphabetically ordered by toponym and titled by typology (churches, palaces, ecc.), by building's denomination, by event (for example: Second World War damage), etc..



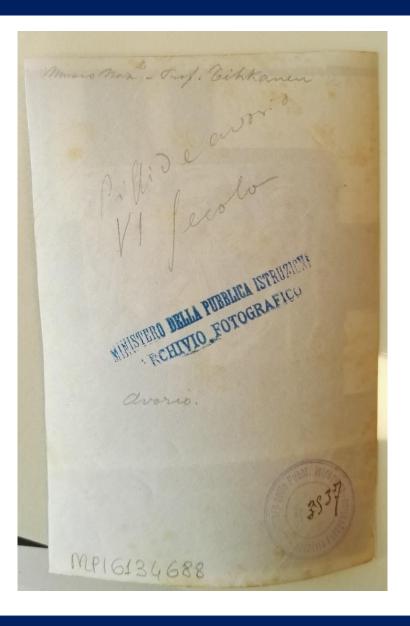
#### **ICCD's investments on culture**

The photographic series, produced within photographic campaigns, can refer to:

loose photographs, photographs glued on cardboard large formats

The research can involve the consultation of more than one section of the Archive, located in the National PhotoLibrary





### Inventory and data registration

Taking an inventory implicates the application of an inventory number, written in pencil on the back of the primary or secondary support of each photograph which lacks one. The assigned number, or better said, the alphanumeric code, composed of the MPI acronym and a sequential number, is copied in the inventory file to be transferred into SAGID. The project in its entirety produced the inventory and description of around 150.000 images.



## Workflow

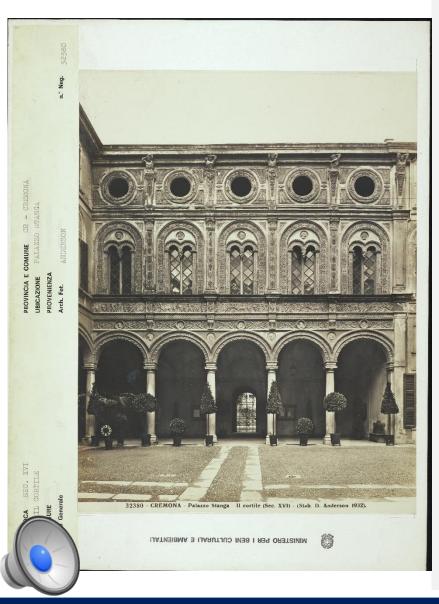




The workflow was conceived like an activity to be carried out in two different and connected phases: **the physical reorganization and the historical critic study.** All the photographs were reorganized and gathered under the appropriate toponym. Then they were described within the computer system **SAGID** (archival system for managing digital images) using an excel file containing the fields of the F cataloguing sheet.

The system is suitable to manage an enormous amount of data, formalized according to the national cataloguing standards for the F sheet, but with a quicker application.





#### Workflow

#### **Description procedures**

The examination of data produced in previous years represented the basis for the **Inventory and description** of photographs which had not been part of an inventory, yet. At the beginning of the project, these photographs, represented 2/3 of the Fund.

The need of identifying series or groups of images within the thematic subdivisions of the Fund implicated the **review** of all the photographs. A unique file, comprehensive of inventory and previous descriptions, was used as the basis for the job. This file was to be completed and implemented with new descriptions, identifying series or groups of images, including those previously produced.

- The work was launched starting from the physical reorganization of the archive. This involved a redistribution of the materials and represented the phase of preparation for inventory and description of the single photographs, as well as for the identification of the series. The materials have been studied in detail, to find the reasons of the formation and sedimentation of this production.
  - The historical-critic reorganization realized on the entirety of the material permitted to identify series, or groups, produced within specific campaigns; campaigns of documentation of works of art, monuments, archeological excavations, archaeological sites. And also photographic campaigns concerning wider territory, that were lost between the different toponyms of the Fund and therefore were not complete. They were physically and conceptually gathered under the same group title and placed in an appropriate way inside the archive.

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#### Conditioning

The conditioning of prints of greater value and of particularly deteriorated ones, was accomplished during both the physical and the critical reorganization phases.

The method consists in placing the more delicate/perishable materials inside transparent envelopes that are adequate for material preservation. In the same way, specific care is given to the preservation of some large format prints, through restoration interventions carried out by either specialized companies (until a few years ago), or restorers working for the public administration (nowadays). Within ICCD we recently acquired the professional role of restorer/art curator

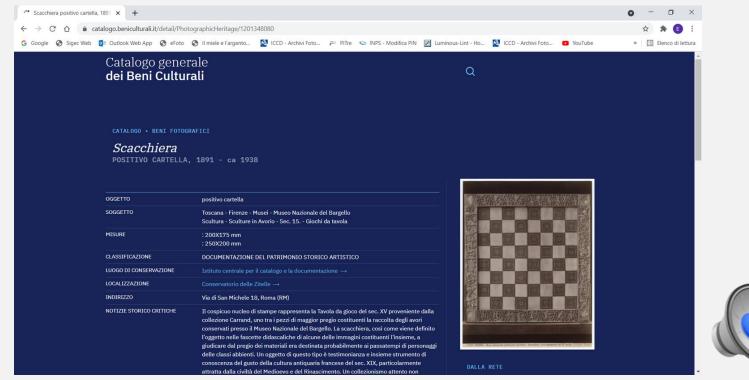


## Digitization

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Three years ago ICCD signed an agreement with Google for the digitization of the entire MPI patrimony: loose photographs, photographs glued on cardboards and large formats were object of a digitization that was realized on almost the whole Fund's materials

## Internships



Within our activities, we hosted numerous internships in agreement with universities in Rome.

The interns acquired information about the modalities to treat photographic materials of MPI Fund and gave a valid contribution by participating to the various works for the correct preservation and enhancement of materials.

The MPI Fund has been object of study and of several in-depth analysis of its specific sections, that resulted into master's degree thesis.