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Abstract

The Photographic Archive of the American Academy in Rome has been in existence since 1896, and nowadays consists of over 90,000 images. The majority of the photographs focus on ancient architecture, archaeology and topography, in some cases, providing a unique record of landscapes and monuments which have changed considerably in the last century and a half. The collections have been acquired over the years mainly through donations. They represent an exceptional document of the activity of considerable personalities, master photographers as well as scholars, active from the second half of the nineteenth century (Parker collection), to the beginning of the twentieth century (Moscioni, Van Deman), and more recently (Masson, Bini, Laidlaw collections). All these collections have artifactual value for the history of photography, as well as documentary value for the study and research of their specific subject areas.

Keywords

American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive, ancient architecture, archaeology, topography

Author Bio & Acknowledgements

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The Photographic Archive of the American Academy in Rome has been in existence since 1896, and now consists of over 90,000 images. The majority of the photographs focus on ancient architecture, archaeology, and topography, providing, in some cases a unique record of landscapes and monuments which have changed considerably in the last century and a half. The collections have been acquired over the years mainly through donations. They represent an exceptional document of the activity of considerable personalities, master photographers, as well as scholars who were active from the second half of the nineteenth century (Parker collection), to the beginning of the twentieth century (Moscioni and Van Deman collections), and more recently (Masson, Bini, and Laidlaw collections). All of these collections have artifactual value for the history of photography, as well as documentary value for the study and research of their specific subject areas.



Among these collections is the Fototeca Unione Collection and the photographs of Ernest Nash which are the focus of the project, “The Urban Legacy of Ancient Rome: Topographical Photographs from the Ernest Nash - Fototeca Unione Collection.”^{1 2 3}

Historical notes on the Ernest Nash - Fototeca Unione Collection:

Ernest Nash was born Ernest Nathan to a Jewish family in 1898 in Germany and later graduated from the University of Jena, where he completed his doctorate in law. He started his career as the director of a prison, after which he established a law practice. The rise of National Socialism in Germany with the institution of racial laws by Adolf Hitler made Germany unsafe for Jewish people, so, in 1936, the young lawyer opted to migrate to Italy with his family.

¹ <https://www.aarome.org/research>

² <https://www.aarome.org/research/photo-archive/about>

³ <https://library.aarome.org/>

In Rome, Nash could not practice as a lawyer, but he developed two of his great interests: the study of ancient Roman architecture and the practice of photography. To make a living, he set up a photographic studio in which he primarily shot portraits, mainly of clerics associated with the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, his main interest and passion for classical architecture was awakened: many of his photographs of Rome date to this period.

In 1939, he and his wife departed from Naples, because of Italian racial laws, on one of the last ships allowed to leave. Again, he was forced to migrate, this time to the United States. In New York, he proceeded to set up another photographic studio, but this time he specialized in portraits of musicians. In his spare time, he went to the New York Public Library, where he could study, describe, and add captions to all of his Roman architectural photos.

After the war, in 1949, Nash returned to Europe armed with American citizenship and his trusty Rolleiflex camera. Finally, he intended to focus his interests on classical architecture, a decision that impelled him to stay permanently in Rome.

In 1956 Rome, an important organization, The Union of Institutes of Archaeology, History and Art in Rome, was created.⁴ This organization was motivated by the need to improve communication among international institutions - a sort of message of cooperation after World War II.

At this point, Nash donated his already substantial collection of images, 3,135 negatives, 1,500 prints of classical sites, focused particularly on Rome, to this organization leading to the foundation of the Fototeca Unione. After Nash's death, the initial donation grew to 30,000 images, and over the years, the original nucleus of photographs was augmented with images of the extended Roman Empire and even medieval monuments.

Now the archive, preserved in the Photographic Archive of the American Academy in Rome, consists of over 30,000 negatives with new images from photographic campaigns of archaeological sites of the entire Roman World.



⁴ <http://www.unioneinternazionale.it/>

A selection of Nash's most important pictures was used in his groundbreaking publication *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*. This impressive two volume text gives a stunning visual account of hundreds of ancient sites, but it still only includes a fraction of his entire collection.

Project Procedures:

The project "The Urban Legacy of Ancient Rome: Topographical Photographs from the Ernest Nash Fototeca Unione Collection" has been possible thanks to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation who generously sponsored this research through a Digital Resources Grant.

The project's goal was to produce an interactive website and geodatabase that could provide access to this significant photographic collection of archaeological monuments and sites, which allowed the ancient city of Rome to be revealed in stunning detail. It has been an international, multi-institution effort with staff from the American Academy in Rome, the University of Oregon, Stanford University, Dartmouth College and Studium Urbis. Moreover it has been an interdisciplinary effort, involving cartography, archaeology, architecture, art history using the technological skills of mapping and database design.

The project involved the following phases of work:

- 1 - Image selection
- 2 - Checking existing descriptive records
- 3 - Digitization
- 4 - Gathering data and metadata on topography (subjects)
- 5 - Developing website interface = linking metadata related to the digitized images

The project has been limited to the urban center of Rome and more specifically to those materials that pertain to the zone inside the ancient Aurelian Walls (late 3rd century CE).

1 – Image Selection

During this initial phase, approximately 1,500 images were selected from the almost 5,000 images of Rome, extracted from over 30,000. With an eye toward selecting images that were the most informative and unique to the collection, special attention was given to those that had been previously published in the *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*.

Criteria have been established to prioritize the selection from the Nash images of Rome, choosing panoramic views, distant views of all the main monuments and areas, followed by closer views and few details; you may also find a few interior views, which are important in archaeological studies.

Not included:

1. Photos dated before Nash (but included in his collection)

2. Photos of ancient coins representing the monuments
3. Drawings of monuments made by artists such as Du Perac, Dosio, Piranesi, etc.
4. Very specific details of interior decoration and architectural fragments
5. Plans of Rome such as those from Nolli, Du Perac, etc.
6. Photos from other archives like Alinari or Brogi to name a few

2 – Checking Existing Descriptive Records

Digitization of the 1,537 images selected

Scanned from the negative: in-house as uncompressed TIFF - 24bit, RGB Color (1200 dpi). If a negative was not available, as many acetates were deteriorated, digitization was done from positive: in-house as uncompressed TIFF - 24bit, RGB Color (800 dpi). Everything was saved, resized at the requested resolution (ca. 300/400 dpi) and sent to the Stanford Repository team through Dropbox. We organized the upload of the 1,500 files in three parts.

3 – Digitization

Enriching the existing descriptive records

The cataloging had already been completed in the past working in the library online catalog “KOHA” using the Marc format (MARC21) and AACR2 (RDA) for the cataloging rules.⁵ The metadata included: identification number, archive catalog number, author, subjects, date of production, technique and object size. For subjects, we assigned Library of Congress Subject Headings and/or applied AAT and TGN from the Getty Vocabularies.

4 – Gathering Data and Metadata on Topography (Subjects)

Enhancing the Metadata with topographical documentation

Once the spreadsheet with all the descriptive metadata was ready it was necessary to integrate it with information essential to map the images: longitude and latitude. Mapping was accomplished for all the subjects available (i.e. Palatine, Forum, Atrium Vestae, Pantheon, Colosseum, etc.) and visible in each image, even if not specifically mentioned in the original caption.

Through the Google app My Maps, and a close inspection of each image, the latitude and longitude could be established. Google My Maps is an easy tool to use. Once the geo-coordinates were determined, they were integrated into the spreadsheet. To obtain a high degree of precision, the process could not be easily automated, so the work was done manually. Metadata related to the digitized images are linked to buildings and sites on our map resources and thus placed in real geographic space.

⁵ Open-source integrated Library System - <http://www.koha.org/>

Mapping was done using three maps: Satellite imaging, the Open Street Map, and the masterful and extremely accurate Pianta Grande by G.B. Nolli (1748).



The idea is to be able to toggle back and forth between historic and contemporary cartography. All three maps permit a "seek and find" function whereby clicking on a given pin will display the photo image(s) of that place along with explanatory information. The cartography is an alternative vehicle by which one can navigate the collection and is a complement to the search and find mechanisms elsewhere.

In each map, the objects are noted as map pins in their correct geographic space. Geo-referencing (placing objects in correct geographic space) is one important enhancement included in this study - knowing the "where" of objects can facilitate a deeper understanding of the objects themselves. The maps used will show 1,286 objects noted as map pins in their correct geographic space, identified and ultimately placed through GIS software with accurate latitude and longitude metadata.

5 – Developing Website Interface = Linking Metadata Related to the Digitized Images

Final Development of the website interface involved the ingestion of the images and metadata into the Stanford Digital Repository.⁶ The design and preparation of the interactive website was developed by Stanford.

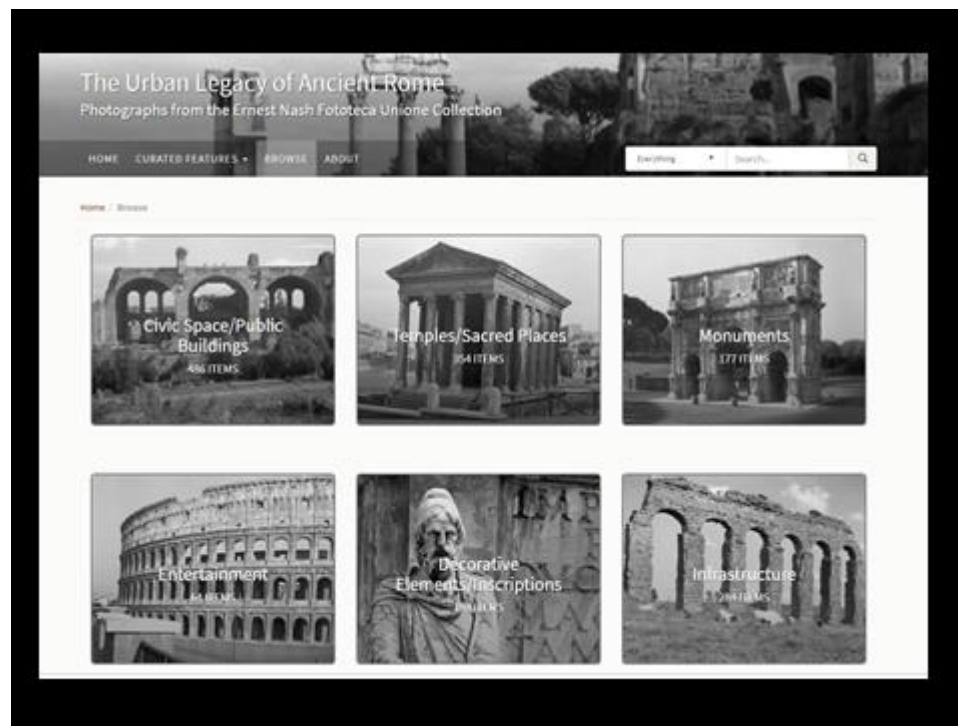
⁶ <https://library.stanford.edu/research/stanford-digital-repository>

This collaborative project, which dynamically links spatial and historical data focusing on ancient Rome as documented by Ernest Nash, is available through the Digital Repository of Stanford Library and the American Academy in Rome website.^{7 8}

How to Explore the Online Exhibition

The user can access all the project information on the Curated Features page. It is possible to limit a search across the project:

- by keyword
- by facet
- by topic (which come from the Subjects), such as: Aurelian Walls, Tabularium Basilica Aemilia, Tiber River, Servian Walls, Arch of Titus, Colosseum, etc.
- by type of building/ monument: Arch, Church, Domus, Basilica, Temple, Bridge, etc.
- by category: Civic Spaces, Sacred Places, Entertainment, Decorative Elements, Gardens and Tombs
- by type of view, such as: detail, fragment and aerial view



Relevant Notes

⁷ <https://www.aarome.org/online-exhibitions-and-projects>

⁸ <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/nash>

From the Curated Features page it is possible to explore essays that focus on the contents of the collection as thematic exhibitions. These are intended to inspire viewers to seek out similarly compelling links across the richness of this archive.

The system employs the IIF compatible Mirador image viewer. Using IIF is intended to make it simple to find images, open them in the web platform, and easily manipulate, analyze and compare them to images from other institutions.

There are alternate modes of viewing (thumbnails, arrays, etc.) which allow the viewer to then pan and zoom to examine each object or set of objects from full size to detail. It is possible to download an image, either a zoomed image or the image as a whole.



Conclusion

This digital resource has made it possible to explore, examine, and spatially pinpoint approximately one thousand photographs housed in the Fototeca Unione Collection at the American Academy in Rome.

The final result provides a unique opportunity for students to learn about the project content, i.e. the architectural history and culture of Rome, housed in a distant archive. The resulting web-based interface allows scholars to move effortlessly among existing maps with links to photographic images, and relevant texts, thereby inviting new modes of analysis and enabling learning through an interactive synthesis of three millennia of urban history.

The collection is a valuable resource for a variety of scholars and artists, classicists, archaeologists, art historians, architects, sculptors, and painters, not only at the Academy, but including the wider community of Romanists and beyond.