



## My eureka moment

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# My Eureka Moment

*John E. Moore*



Cataloged photograph cabinets, 1970s. 13 x 18 cm. FAL Administrative Files.

OVER THE YEARS, MY “EUREKA” MOMENTS HAVE HAPPENED IN EUROPEAN archives or libraries (the British Library, the Biblioteca Hertziana, the Vatican Library, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Herzog August Bibliothek) with extensive holdings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That said, ever since I became a patron of the Fine Arts Library in the previous century, I’ve come to think of it as an unfailingly dependable resource. No matter how seemingly obscure the publication, and regardless of whether it’s in French, German, Italian, or Spanish (not to mention English), I find what I’m looking for. To uncover fresh archival materials is truly exciting, but an excellent library with a wide-ranging collection mandate is indispensable, for it helps me reflect upon those finds and place them into rich contexts. And the descent into the stacks never fails to be an adventure, since I normally come across one or another item that captures my attention, whether on the shelf somewhere near the one I wanted or propped up on one of the book trolleys. I love that spatial

and physical serendipity. Clicking on a mouse also leads one in unexpected directions, but it's not the same as pulling a book from a shelf and opening it. In the fall of 2010, I found a book lying on a table in the reading room that provided me with information about a monument in Naples that I knew nothing about and thus an important insight for an article I was writing.

Digitization and the Internet have fundamentally changed how we locate and use images today. But I remember, when I was a young graduate student working in the basement of the Fogg, being absolutely astonished by the endless sea of metal cabinets that housed the mounted photographs; the separate, neatly typed cards in the catalog that documented, with individual call numbers, those same photographs and every slide in the slide collection; and the room full of people—in particular, Angelike Koniaris—who looked after those collections. I had this experience for a practical reason, in that my carrel was on that level of the library. But something about that particular conjunction of scrupulously processed things and hardworking, knowledgeable, and generous individuals made me realize, very early on, the scale of the privilege I had been granted.

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