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Introduction

The text which follows is an unusual source for the historiography of art and artifacts. It is, in principle, a semi-official statement of the objectives of a private library and research institute, delivered to a group of bankers and scholars who were being invited to form a board of trustees that would take on the overall responsibility for the institute’s future existence. In practice, however, it is an account of the origins of a distinct approach to the history of images that had developed over the entire intellectual life of the institute’s founder, Aby Warburg (1866–1929). Given the complexity and restless nature of his approach to cultural history, Warburg was never able to provide a comprehensive account of his ideas. And yet, when faced with the need to secure the future of the institute he had created, he took this opportunity to reflect on these very questions and to provide a short overview of his intellectual life and the aims of the library that bears his name: the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg (K.B.W.).

Warburg is regarded as one of the founders of modern art history. He has assumed this position in two ways: he widened the field to include all types of artifacts, and he transformed the pre-existing study of styles and schools into a transcultural historical discipline, which he described as a “science of culture” (Kulturwissenschaft). As a self-declared “image historian” (Bildhistoriker), he combined a historical and a metahistorical approach to artifacts. The “metahistorical” turn owed much to contemporary psychology, anthropology, and religious studies, whereas the “historical” paid close attention to the political and social-historical ramifications of culture. As for his universal approach to history, it was guided by the idea that the humanist remaking of the classical heritage achieved a necessary “balance” between experience and symbolic form. For Warburg, figures like Domenico Ghirlandaio and Johannes Kepler sought in their own work to overcome the misidentification of the image with that which it represents, thus anticipating the breakthroughs of modern science and other Enlightenment achievements. Yet Warburg also believed that such a balance faced the very real threat that the individual in every culture and historical period might lose control and revert to so-called “primitive” behavior: a behavior, for example, driven by belief in cosmic influences on humanity, as evidenced by artifacts used for magical practices and represented in astrological imagery.

The hermeneutic method Warburg developed can be characterized as a kind of cultural anamnesis, but his ultimate aim was to distill a new cultural-historical
theory. He never succeeded in formulating this theory, though he did manage, arguably, to convey its scope and methodology through the special character of his personal library, which in the 1920s became the K.B.W. By shelving books according to the “law of good neighborliness” rather than following conventional library practices, Warburg created a place of discovery, a Problembibliothek, dedicated to understanding the phenomenon of the “Afterlife of Antiquity” (Nachleben der Antike) in European culture. This phenomenon he treated as a gauge for the state of man’s psyche in specific historical moments. Accordingly, his library was meant to serve as a material—and, eventually, institutional—form of memory.

Between 1886 and 1892 Warburg studied the history of art in Bonn, Munich, Florence, and Strasbourg. At that time, the discipline of art history had only recently been added to the university curriculum and was still in the process of defining and refining its methodology. In his doctoral dissertation on Botticelli, Warburg had already adduced sources that offered new answers to the question of the development of styles. Subsequently, he developed a positivistic, so-called philological analysis of documents which he thought recorded the anthropological implications and the psychological mechanisms for understanding the “coining” of images. Always trying to gain deeper insights into these mechanisms and thereby to reach even more fundamental conclusions, Warburg remained reluctant to publish his findings without a more capacious theoretical framework. His last attempt to publish a conclusive summa of his life’s work, which he had hoped would finally pave the way for a new, comprehensive approach to the study of art, and thus metaphorically redeem the “interest” of his family’s enormous financial investments in his scholarly enterprise, was to be the atlas of images entitled Mnemosyne. It was to have consisted of four volumes with plates, commentary, and sources, but only a series of photographs of sixty-three drafted panels was left at the time of Warburg’s death in 1929. Gertrud Bing, his personal assistant during the last years and editor of his collected works, thus concluded, “The published writings”—collected in only one volume of some seven hundred pages (The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance)—“stand in no relation with the bulk of materials which he passed in review, the number of documents of which he took notice, the range of subjects into which he made inroads. All over his writings there are traces of wreckage: projects not carried out, promises of articles never written, and ideas which were never developed.”
Born in 1866 into a well-established family of bankers, Aby was the eldest of the five sons and two daughters of Moritz and Charlotte Warburg. As it was a time of extraordinary economic growth in Germany, when he came of age Warburg decided that he could afford to turn his back on a banking career and pursue instead scholarly interests. He never concluded his Habilitationsschrift (professorial thesis), he refused two prestigious academic positions, and he only began teaching as a Honorarprofessor in 1925. Moreover, the decision not to take over responsibility for the family business led him to depend first on his father’s support and later on the support of his younger brothers. In 1893 Aby’s brother Max became the main shareholder and director of M. M. Warburg

Fig. 1
and Co. in Hamburg, and under his governance the bank became even more profitable. Shortly afterward two more brothers, Paul and Felix, married into the American banking firm Kuhn Loeb and Co., which proved to be a reliable source of financial stability in the years of economic turmoil following World War I. These same brothers are the main addressees of the sketch of Aby’s intellectual career, published here for the first time in English. The concision and breadth of this account makes it unique in Warburg’s oeuvre. Throughout his life he reassured the businessmen in his family—all of whom were engaged in politics, various kinds of patronage, and charity work—of the value of their investment in his Kulturwissenschaft. They were, after all, bankrolling a private institution of national and already international stature, which consisted of an open-access library of about sixty thousand volumes, employed a number of full-time and supporting staff members, and organized lectures, as well as serving as the home of two renowned publication series.

Warburg’s collaboration with Fritz Saxl (1890–1948), a much younger Austrian art historian who had studied in Vienna and Berlin, had begun in 1910. From 1914 to 1915 Saxl, who shared Warburg’s research interest in the reception of astrology in Western art, became his librarian and assistant, but was then obliged to leave in order to join the Austrian army. In 1920 the Warburg family called Saxl back to Hamburg to serve as acting director of the K.B.W., as Aby Warburg’s recovery from the aftermath of a psychosis triggered by the events
of World War I forced him to be absent from Hamburg for four years. Saxl took the opportunity not only to promote Warburg’s new methodological approach but also to transform the library into an active, independent scholarly institution, one whose international reputation quickly grew. From the early 1920s until the institute’s move to London, a small group of renowned scholars at the newly founded Hamburg University mined the riches of the K.B.W. and joined Warburg, Saxl, and Bing to form an extraordinarily vibrant intellectual circle. These included the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, the Orientalist Hellmut Ritter, the Byzantinist Richard Salomon, and the philologist Karl Reinhard, as well as the younger art historians Erwin Panofsky and Edgar Wind. Meanwhile, the Warburg family decided to honor Aby’s life’s work, not with a Festschrift but with a specially built library to be attached to Warburg’s house. The new building was opened in 1926 (figs. 1, 2). The books on its four floors were organized thematically under the headings “Orientation,” “Word,” “Image,” and “Action” (Orientierung, Wort, Bild, and Handlung).

In late December 1927 Warburg, whose health was obviously worsening, convened a meeting with Saxl, several family members, and a representative of the Warburg Bank in Hamburg to discuss the future of the library as a private institution. The meeting, for which he had prepared the autobiographical account published below, proved prophetic, as 1928 turned out to be a crucial year financially for the K.B.W., which had to reduce its budget drastically. The
constitution of a board of trustees, however, was not decided before August 1929, when the five Warburg brothers signed an agreement that secured each of them a 20 percent share in the property (fig. 3). On his death in October 1929, Aby’s share was passed on to his son, Max Adolph. As a reaction to the political changes in 1933, Max and Fritz—managers of M. M. Warburg and Co. in Hamburg—passed half their shares on to Felix and their late brother Paul’s children in New York. This precaution—that is, to give 60 percent ownership of the library to U.S. citizens—would later save the K.B.W. from being confiscated by the Nazis. Thanks to assistance from the American brothers, M. M. Warburg and Co. was able to support the institution until its relocation, under Saxl’s directorship, to England in December 1933. This quasi-independent status remained the case, at least partly, until a trust deed was signed with the University of London in 1944.

—Claudia Wedepohl

From the Arsenal to the Laboratory

Aims of the K.B.W.: Overview of Its Past Development

RE: Preparatory Meeting of the Board of Trustees, December 31st, 4.30 pm

Present: Max M. Warburg, Fritz W[ar]b[ur]g, Erich W[ar]b[ur]g, Max A. W[ar]b[ur]g, Dr. Kessal, Prof. Dr. A. Warburg, Prof. Dr. Fritz Saxl, Fr[äu]l[ei]n v[on] Eckardt (up in the gallery). Fräulein Dr. Bing prevented by convalescence

On this day, when we wish to establish, or at least to draw up plans for, a board of trustees for the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg, I feel the need to reflect upon the origins and the nature of this institution for whose further development I ask such extensive moral and material support. I wish, then, to briefly sketch the insights that this process of self-reflection and self-criticism has revealed.
My own scholarly development began when I was fifteen years old. Since my youth, I have struggled against a strict dogmatic orthodoxy, although I have never ceased to respect either the representatives or basic tenets of its religiosity. Early on I confronted the contradictions within myself that arose between the stolid biblical tradition I absorbed at home through the Hebrew lessons that began in my early childhood and modern European-German culture. It was this culture that attempted to forge a way from medieval, Catholic dogma toward individual freedom, through, on the one hand, Lutheranism and the dissemination of the ideas of the French Revolution, and, on the other hand, through modern science. For this reason Lessing and Schiller became my ideals. I read them at the Johanneum High School, where these ideals were—surprisingly—not debased but upheld in the lessons of my highly revered teacher, Merschberger. Accordingly, in the university entrance examination, I made up for my lack of knowledge in certain areas with an essay on the “Significance of Don Carlos in Schiller’s Poetic Development.” Botany also could not be ruined by Professor Sadebeck’s soporific manner—I dissected and drew plants with the feeling that I was on the trail of nature’s law. Botany was the only subject in which I ever received an “A.”

At high school a young person such as myself, who in principle believed that world events were governed by laws, could be persuaded by a pragmatic understanding of history, as embodied by the clever and humane manner of the director, Konrad Friedländer. At this demanding school, which further required that I attend the Johanneum Preparatory School for an additional year and a half in order to become qualified to study art history, I experienced a revelation with my unforgettable teacher, Professor Doctor Bintz. I came to understand the feeling of duty and energy that could come from the assimilation and dissemination of scientific knowledge. The benefits I took from this awareness far and away outweighed the severe damage to my nerves from which I have never fully recovered.

Thus equipped I arrived in Bonn around Easter in 1886. (I was not yet freed from the pressure of orthodoxy and it took a nervous breakdown for me to forge a freer path and cease keeping kosher.) Afterward, I felt even more strongly the happiness that came from my chosen commitment to research. This was, however, understandably bound up with an undercurrent of longing for tranquility. I therefore recognized and felt that the calming Apollonian element was quite obviously the intrinsic, essential characteristic in objects
discovered by archaeology. This perception was buttressed by Lessing, who had definitively proven in his *Laocoön* that the sculpture was an authentic classical creature in which Laocoön, despite being entwined by snakes, does not scream but rather merely sighs.

When I reflect on the deeper meaning of my intellectual activity, I recognize that I have long felt compelled to offer a correction to Lessing’s thesis. If someone had prophesied this to me at school, I would have reproached him: even to be mentioned in the same breath as Lessing would have seemed to me a sacrilegious presumption. I developed my correction of Lessing’s, or, better yet, of Winckelmann’s doctrine of antiquity’s Olympian voice, in the course of the subsequent decades upon a cultural-scientific foundation. Today, this work is not yet finished.

When I first came to Florence in 1888, Raphael’s *Madonna del granduca* was both my and my future wife’s highest aesthetic ideal. This meant that the self-contained, idealized beauty of the Italian spirit was for us a new land symbolizing the conquest of the transience of time. For this reason, the hypernervous mobility of Filippino Lippi, for example, seemed an inconceivable offence and an almost disgusting violation of the laws of beautiful composition that had emerged from Italy’s “primitives”—who represented the ideals of visitors to Italy through the beauty of their inner “simplicity.” Nevertheless, by the end of my Italian semester (during the first assay of an art-historical institute, led by Schmarsow with seven German students), I understood that the movement in the details of figures—such as their hair and garments—which had been carefully discounted as the artist’s decorative fancies, must originate in antiquity. I discovered that the pursuit of Zephyr and Flora in Botticelli’s *Primavera* must certainly be a direct imitation of Ovid’s *Fasti* (which I realized by virtue of the way such images were translated in a German advertisement). Accordingly, I chose the theme of intensified outward movement as it was derived from antiquity for my doctoral thesis.

Integral to this examination was an expanded methodology. I needed to study Botticelli’s contemporaries in order to learn from documents or poetry who could have been the middleman that transmitted the prototype of the pursuit figures in the *Primavera*. For this study I required a university with a large library. Bonn seemed appropriate, but my teacher Justi was initially disinterested in my dissertation topic—though he later came to appreciate the dissertation. So I went to Strasbourg. I did so firstly because Janitschek, the scholar of
Renaissance culture, taught there, and secondly because the treasure trove of books in the institutes as well as in the State Library were freely available to students. Without the splendid humanist culture in Strasbourg I would never have achieved further development. Here also I was fortunate enough to discover Poliziano, the erudite poet, as the source for the Ovidian *topos* [of the *Zephyr*] and, indeed, what was decisive for me, also as the mediator of antique movements in *dramatic representation*. His *Orfeo*, the first tragedy written in Italian, became the main thread that allowed me to penetrate the labyrinth of intellectual interrelations, which revealed to me also, as its ripest fruit and as a problem to be solved, the northern drama of the soul (Shakespeare!).

In the year 1897, from a completely different perspective, I took on the task of understanding artistic imagery as the stylistic product of an interrelation, in the broadest sense, with the dynamism of life. After I had received my doctorate for my work on Botticelli’s *Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus*, I returned to Florence. There, logically driven by the search for the formative stylistic influence of the dramatic element, I discovered the famous architect Bernardo Buontalenti’s designs for the *Intermezzi* of 1589. In these designs the polar process of the creation of style spoke in an entirely different manner. The influence of classical learning, together with that of madrigal-type music, presented an amazingly vivid example of over-elaborate, baroque drama. This led first to Italian opera, through the self-consciously classicizing direction of the *camerata de’Bardi*, and then to the clarification of an all-too-compressed form. In other words, I had grasped and proven that classicism was a legitimate, reactive occurrence within the tradition. [In the margin: the same thing from 1589–1600.]

The distance, however, between the Quattrocento and Cinquecento was still too great for me to tackle. Primarily, I still lacked some sort of gauge to evaluate how the dynamic elements reflected in the artwork functioned as essential and internal human processes. Humanity’s entanglement with art necessitated first a firm connection at some point in reality—in its rooted, unitary holistic existence of religious-cultic, artistic-pragmatic teleology. [In the margin: experience of paganism in nature.]

Then in 1895–96 on the New Mexican mesas where I observed the mask-dances of the Hopi Indians, I experienced artwork as an instrument of magical-primitive culture. I was able to study the Hopis’ peculiar civilization for many months. I thus became convinced that primitive man, no matter where on earth, produces a fundamental equivalent for that which in so-called high culture is understood
as an aesthetic event. Imbued with this awareness about the intellectual and spiritual constitution of pre-historic man, I reentered the precinct of Quattrocento Florentine culture in order to examine the soul’s stratification in Renaissance man on a very different and much broader basis.

For some time I had been developing the idea of how to grasp human expression in the artwork, as a minted work of practical, animated life—whether it be religious ritual, the drama of courtly festival, or theater. In this I was inspired by two books I read in Florence in 1888, which I read independently of each other and without any inkling that they would have an impact on my art-historical endeavors: Darwin’s On the Expression of Mind and Piderit’s Mimicry and Physiognomy. The primary theme of Darwin’s tract is that general facial expressions are reflexive and repetitive externalizations of intellectual stimuli that are triggered akin to the remembrance of sensory stimuli. For example, if you dislike someone, you move your mouth as if tasting something sour. This quite simple maxim of the study of expression—that facial expressions are motivated to the greatest extent by the memory of stimulus—led in the following decades to two unexpected developments in the field of observation in terms of geographical—and therefore national—respects. The Darwinian theory of the memory of sensory stimuli had thus to be grasped as a polar, and not a simple, process. In this sense, stylistic transformation had to be understood not as a simple dynamic reaction, but as a counter-reaction to some tension. I interpreted this as the “foreign influence” on Italian art. The Florentine Quattrocento’s tense encounter with the North, with its Burgundian tapestry weaving and Dutch secular and religious painting, wanted to be put in its proper place.

In 1898, Sidney Colvin, the curator of prints and drawings at the British Museum, published a Florentine goldsmith’s sketchbook. At his request, I wrote a review of the sketchbook for the Supplement to the Allgemeine Zeitung. The collision between the new style all’antica and the old style alla francese could be clearly seen in the drawings of this book. The collision was exemplified by the depictions of costume, as the quite capricious, engaging intensification of classical movement in hair and drapery (in the manner of Greek maenads and Roman victorias) stood in contrast to the use of clothing as heraldic displays in the fashionable attire of France, with its accoutrements of, for example, sleeves embroidered with mottos and devices.

Through the untiring support and collegial assistance of Professor Heinrich Brockhaus, then director of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, I could
now include the inventories of Florentine collections as powerful sources for the understanding of the history of style. Thus the inventory of the Medici household, which Münz had allowed to be published only in part, became an important new resource—particularly for the stylistic question *alla francese* or *all’antica*. Some of the most astonishing and simple explanations of this query were brought to light, especially after I discovered, after a strenuous search, an older inventory in the Medici Archives that mentioned canvases whose subject was expressly described as “fiandeschi”—Flemish. Accordingly, it is evident that these canvases are the cartoons for the huge tapestry series that constituted the House of Medici’s proudest decor. It was from these cartoons that the tapestries were woven in Lille (according to unpublished order letters from the mid-fifteenth century, copies of which I have in my possession). Since such tapestries with their ancient or Italian themes measured some 250 consecutive meters as they hung in the Medici palace, it is essential that the full impact of the gigantic pictorial ensemble be envisioned. I was only able to remedy my own lack of comprehension of the tapestries’ effect once I iconologically examined the oldest Florentine copper engraving. I discovered that the composition of the engraving, a seemingly “ornamental piece,” actually echoed such lost tapestries or their cartoons (*panni*) in its small format. I first publicized this finding at the Berliner Kunstgeschichtliche Gesellschaft in 1902—although the significance of my assessment was not recognized.

In addition, I have found heraldic images to provide further evidence that the Florentines ordered devotional paintings from the North, despite the fact that art history proper would banish heraldry, as an auxiliary discipline, to the nether regions. These northern paintings, as with the Portinari altarpiece, so far out-ranked contemporaneous Florentine panel painting in their moving artistic beauty and spiritual depth that their expressive style demanded exemplary imitation. (In 1902 I presented evidence of this in the *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, and then in the proceedings of the Berliner Kunstgeschichtliche Gesellschaft, but again I failed to gain much acknowledgment.)

Why am I discussing such details here? Because one thing became clear to me while I myself was alternating my residence between Germany and Italy. This phenomenon of exchange between North and South, which had become so strikingly evident to me, could only be studied at an institute that really brought together the northern and southern threads. In other words, an institute was necessary that had the essential, very expensive publications about both areas, and that made them easily available, especially for young, developing scholars.
In 1902 I had a conversation with my late father and my brother Max in which I declared that I had to have access to two publications in particular if my scholarly development was to make any technical advances: the Österreichisches Jahrbuch des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses and the publications of the Chalkographische Gesellschaft. And furthermore, I remarked already at that time that if I had the means to purchase these texts, in addition to my already sizable book budget, my library would surely grow into an institute sooner or later.

After understandably long deliberations, and after setting out all the reasons against it—"Why should a private individual do something that the (Prussian) state should do?"—my father, with the support of my brother Max, decided to grant me the extra sum of 1700 marks. With this willingness, which cannot be appreciated highly enough, the Institute was, as it stands before us today in an extraordinary building, implicite decided upon. What was accomplished is merely the logical consequence of the following basic outlook, one that fought against convention on two fronts. First, in the theoretical sense, the Institute was based on the belief that the art object should not be judged as a product of an artist in a studio, but as a product of the factors of its time, in which real life is reflected in its stylistic development. Second, in the practical sense, the Institute must freely offer the books and images necessary for such study in a reading room accessible to all.

In order that my own will to do research would not be lost in infinite possibilities, I made sure that the question of antiquity’s influence remained the focalizing mirror in the center of the project. This mirror held fast, when later—for reasons I will not get into it now—I was faced with the task of interpreting the artwork not just as a reflection of contemporaneous life, but rather also as an orientation instrument for the heavens. Since reading my cherished friend Boll’s Sphaera in 1907, I have been able to integrate the cosmological, pictorial element into our considerations, whereby we, that is, I and my trusted friend and assistant, Dr. Saxl, were able to create a science of pictorial orientation, which has justified us in speaking of a new, cultural-scientific art history. Such an art history knows neither temporal nor spatial boundaries. For our work, however, we deal with the temporal framework of 2000 BCE to 1650 CE, and we have geographically limited our search for the Mediterranean influence to the terrain from Khorasan to England and from Egypt to Norway.
I was able to implement organically this expansion of the practice of art history since I have sat for many years on the executive committee of the International [Art History] Congress and recently, in particular, organized the Munich Congress of 1910 [1909] and, with the utmost effort, the bulk of the International Congress [1912 in Rome]. Consequently, I had developed a feeling for the European intellectual community that, without ever leading to a chummy blurring of borders, managed to convene a senate of intellectual seekers. In 1913 a similar gathering occurred at the Hamburg Summer School, which was attended by people from all over the globe and had its marvelous conclusion, probably the last for a long time, on the terrace of the Kösterberg.34

It is not necessary to waste words on how the war affected such impassioned “conscripts to the idea.” Nonetheless, with my spiritual equilibrium severely shaken in the midst of the war—or rather toward its bitter end—I wrote a study of Luther’s relation to ancient pagan prophecy.35 This work represented a further foray in the area concerning the exchange between the ancient and the northern Protestant worldviews.

Although the director of the library was not fit to serve in the years following the war, still, sweeping progress continued to be made. This was due to his colleague Saxl’s loyalty and perseverance and the knowing confidence in the health of the bedrock idea, on the part of my doctor, Dr. Embden, my wife, and my brothers. Beginning in 1921, Saxl organized, with Ernst Cassirer’s support, the Vorträge and Studien der Bibliothek Warburg (“Lectures” and “Studies of the Warburg Library”).38 These unique series of documents attest today to the unswerving German commitment to research and erudite conscientiousness. There is scarcely an undertaking in European intellectual history that proceeded so unshakably, even in the heady times of economic boom. And this was not the undertaking of self-indulgent luxury, nor of millionaires, but rather of business people who could surely have spent their money in other ways. Amidst the mad rush of the present day, with everyone so focused on the here and now and its rewards, the K.B.W. strives to create a rotating turret of observation and reflection, the consequences of which are already noticeable today. Yet we should also hope, while we still have breath, that aside from the admiration and respect paid us by the scholarly world, the public will also grasp and support the meaning of the K.B.W. as a vital element in the reconstitution of European civilization.
Clearly, it is not easy for family members, who are responsible for various businesses, to follow *bona fide* the organic, essential constitutional principle for the provisionary acquisition of books. However, such a provision in great measure is not only practical, but can also swiftly lead to meaningful research. This has been proven by how the director of the Library, after he returned, was able to incorporate in a relatively short time the Dutch school into his field of study, as thirty years before he had incorporated Botticelli. And likewise proven is that the relatively large expenditures on travel are actually the Library’s vital element. In this way Professor Saxl, through his trip to Spain, opened a new window in our observation tower. And the director, in October 1927, after a 12½-year hiatus, was able to resume his Florentine studies with Dr. Bing’s support that he had initially begun thirty years earlier. In this way it was finally possible to make visible how the mutually influencing development of art and ritual festivities is meaningful for modern cultural-historical scholarship.

If I have presented our Institute in detail, and not without underscoring our special merits, I hope you will kindly view this as a necessary act in light of the fact that since we ask for enormous means by today’s standards, we must also demonstrate that we can produce unique and, relatively speaking, prodigious results. I believe that if these results are weighed with the gold scale of the intellect and not with the butcher’s scale, we can boast of truly excellent outcomes that have often overcome exceedingly difficult obstacles.

I am, however, the last one who would want to saddle a private company, on a regular basis, with a budget as large as the one we have this year.

Claudia Wedepohl

Claudia Wedepohl is the archivist of the Warburg Institute, University of London, School of Advanced Study.

Christopher D. Johnson

Christopher D. Johnson is associate professor of comparative literature at Harvard.
1 Aby’s younger brother Max M. Warburg (1867–1946) was the director of M. M. Warburg & Co., at the time the largest German private banking firm, until the Nazis instituted their aryranization policies and his subsequent emigration to America in 1938. He was also an influential politician in the German Empire, and later in the Weimar Republic. After being an advisor to Emperor Wilhelm II, he served as a member of the German delegation that negotiated the Versailles peace treaty. From 1924 he was a member of the General Committee of the German National Bank, and was also on the boards of a number of charitable organizations.

2 Fritz M. Warburg (1879–1964), Aby’s youngest brother, joined M. M. Warburg & Co. after having completed his studies in law and training as a banker. He became shareholder and managing partner in 1907, being responsible for the management of the bank’s personnel. He was the only one of the brothers who served as a member of the board of the Hamburg Jewish community. In 1938 Fritz emigrated with his Swedish-born wife to Sweden.

3 Erich (later Eric) M. Warburg (1900–1990), Aby’s nephew and the only son of his brother Max, was a banker who joined M. M. Warburg & Co. in 1926. He became partner in 1929. From 1926 Erich Warburg was responsible for managing the financial support of the K.B.W. He continued to represent the family after the move to England, and—from it reopened as the Warburg Institute in 1934—until the Institute’s transfer to the University of London in 1944. Eric Warburg returned to Germany in 1956.

4 Max Adolph Warburg (1902–74). Aby Warburg’s only son graduated in classics with a doctoral thesis on Plato’s Kratylos. Although he was Aby’s designated successor as director of the K.B.W., Max Adolph chose a career as an artist. The Nazi regime forced him and his family to emigrate to Holland. In 1945 he moved to Britain where he worked as a teacher.

5 Rudoph Kessal was M. M. Warburg & Co.’s legal advisor.

6 Eva von Eckardt (1898–1978) was the daughter of the chief editor of the Hamburger Fremdenblatt, a local daily newspaper. She had been trained in the book-dealing business. From 1924 she was employed at the K.B.W. with responsibility for revision and acquisition, and from 1928 for accounting.

7 Gertrud Bing (1892–1964) had studied philology, psychology, and the history of literature in Munich and Hamburg. She graduated in philosophy under Ernst Cassirer with a dissertation on Lessing, and joined the K.B.W. staff as assistant librarian in December 1921 with responsibility for the cataloguing and systematic organization of the library. After Warburg’s return to Hamburg in 1924, Bing took over responsibilities as his personal assistant as well as continuing to work for the library. From 1954 to 1959 Gertrud Bing was director of the Warburg Institute.

8 The Johanneum had formerly been a secular Latin school that was established in 1529 by the reformer Johannes Bugenhagen in the buildings of the secularized Dominican convent St Johannis. Its major branch, a preparatory school (Akademisches Gymnasium or Gelehrtenschule), was founded in 1613, and a second, minor branch, a high school (Realschule; from 1876 Realgymnasium) for the sons of the local bourgeois merchants, was founded in 1834.

9 Georg Friedrich Merschberger (*1846) had studied modern languages and took up a position at the Johanneum High School (Realgymnasium) in 1875. He was awarded a professorship in 1887 and published an essay on Shakespeare on the Hamburg stage (Die Anfänge Shakespeares auf der Hamburger Bühne, 1890).

10 Richard Sodebeck (1839–1905) held a doctorate in natural sciences, and from 1876 taught biology at the Johanneum High School (Realgymnasium). In 1887 he founded a botanical institute (Institut für angewandte Botanik) in Hamburg.

11 Konrad Friedländer was director of the Johanneum High School (Realgymnasium) from 1873 to 1895.

12 Julius Bintz (1840–91) taught classical languages at the Johanneum Preparatory School (Gelehrtenschule) from 1875 to 1890, and was employed as Warburg’s private tutor for classical Greek in 1885–86.
13 Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s (1717–68) doctrine, “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur” (edle Einfalt und stille Größe), was first expressed in “Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture” (Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in Malerei und Bildhauerkunst, 1755).

14 The so-called Madonna del granduca (1504/5), formerly kept in the collection of Ferdinand III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, later in the Galleria Palatina of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

15 In 1888 the German art historian August Schmarsow (1853–1936), a scholar of Renaissance art and architecture, had invited a group of eight students from various German universities to attend privately taught courses in Florence. During this semester (October 1888 to February 1889) Warburg met his future wife, Mary Hertz. Mary, the daughter of a Hamburg senator and a trained artist, visited Florence with her family as a tourist.

16 Carl Justi (1832–1912) was a German philosopher and archaeologist who held the chair of art history at the University of Bonn from 1872 to 1901. Justi became known for his expertise in Spanish and Italian Renaissance painting after he had become acquainted with the history of art through Winckelmann’s works.

17 Hubert Janitschek (1846–93) was an Austrian museum curator who later held professorships in art history at Strasbourg and Leipzig. Janitschek was heavily influenced by Jacob Burckhardt and promoted a cultural-historical approach to art, specializing in Early Italian Renaissance and Romanesque Art.


22 Theodor Piderit, Mimik und Physiognomik (Detmold, 1886).

23 One of the leading national daily newspapers, founded in Tübingen in 1798 as Neueste Weltkunde, and published in Munich since 1892.


25 Heinrich Brockhaus (1858–1941) was a German art historian who held an extraordinary professorship at the University of Leipzig. In 1887 he went to Florence in order to build up and establish an art-historical institute that was approved by the Art Historical Congress in 1893. In 1897 Brockhaus became the first director of this newly founded Kunsthistorisches Institut, a position he held until 1917.


28 Between 1901 and 1905 Warburg delivered three lectures to the Berlin Art Historical Society (Kunstgeschichtliche Gesellschaft zu Berlin), first published in its Proceedings, and reprinted in The
Renewal of Pagan Antiquity. The first lecture, delivered at the meeting of November 8, 1901, was titled “Flemish and Florentine Art in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s Circle around 1480” (Flandrische und florentinische Kunst im Kreise des Lorenzo Medici um 1480), pp. 305–7, 483. The second, of February 17, 1905, “Artistic Exchanges between North and South in the Fifteenth Century” (Austausch künstlerischer Kultur zwischen Norden und Süden im 15. Jahrhundert), pp. 275–80, 468–70; and the third, of December 11, 1903, “Rogier van der Weyden’s Entombment in the Uffizi” (Die Grablegung Rogers in den Uffizien), pp. 309–10, 483–84. Warburg addresses the same subjects again in “Peasants at Work in Burgundian Tapestries” (Arbeitende Bauern auf burgundischen Teppichen), pp. 315–23, 484–85.


31 The Internationale Chalkographische Gesellschaft, Berlin, was dedicated to the reproduction of prints and drawings. It published a series of monographs, and, from 1886 to 1892, a periodical.


33 Summer schools were part of Hamburg’s education policy between 1870 and 1919. Initially the local higher school authority (Oberschulbehörde), an administrative body for all academic institutions—most of which were private foundations—organized an annual lecture series for the general public (allgemeines Vorlesungswesen). This institution got further support when in 1907 the Hamburg Academic Foundation (Hamburger Wissenschaftliche Stiftung) was set up. Its objective was the administration of privately raised funds, dedicated to an independent advancement of the sciences. In addition, the German Colonial Institute (Deutsches Kolonialinstitut), the first state institution for higher education in Hamburg, was opened in 1908; its curriculum was later taken over by the newly founded university in 1919. Part of this curriculum was the summer school. In 1913 (between July 24 and August 6), seventy-seven scholars from the humanities and the sciences delivered one to six lectures each. They were meant to “offer an interested lay audience an overview of the latest research in science and culture.” Warburg was a member of the committee responsible for the section titled “Cultural Science” (Kulturwissenschaft), in which he delivered two lectures under the general title “The Ancient World of Star Constellations in Early Modern Art” (Die antike Sternbilderwelt in der Kunst neuerer Zeiten). On August 5, 1913, he spoke on “The Images of the Sphaera Barbarica in Their Journeys from East to West” (Die Fixsternhimmelsbilder der Sphaera Barbarica auf der Wanderung von Ost nach West), and on August 6 about “The Planetary Images in Their Migration from South to North and Their Return to Italy” (Die Planetenbilder auf der Wanderung von Süd nach Nord und ihre Rückkehr nach Italien). Cf. Martin Treml, Sigrid Weigel, and Perdita Ladwig (eds.), Aby Warburg. Werke in einem Band (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), pp. 326–48.

34 Warburg family estate at the river Elbe outside Hamburg.


36 Dr. Heinrich Georg Embden (1871–1941) was a neurologist and Warburg’s personal physician. From 1923 to 1933 Embden held the post of head physician of the neurological department at the Hamburg Barmbek Hospital. In 1938 he emigrated to Brazil.

37 Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), philosopher and historian of ideas, had been appointed to the chair of philosophy at the newly founded Universität Hamburg in 1919. Cassirer left Germany in 1933 for England and then went to Sweden. In 1939 he became a Swedish citizen, but moved to America in 1941.
The Lectures and Studies were the two publication series of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg, the first, Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, published in nine volumes from 1923 to 1932, and the second, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, in twenty-four volumes between 1922 and 1932.

This sentence is also addressed to the two absent brothers: Paul M. Warburg (1868–1932), renowned for his financial acumen, was trained as a banker and joined the family business in 1891. He became partner in 1895. In the same year, now married to Nina Loeb, he was made shareholder of the New York banking firm Kuhn Loeb & Co. Paul Warburg is mainly known for his part in the creation of the U.S. Federal Reserve System. In 1914 President Wilson made him a member of the first Federal Reserve Board and the board’s vice-governor in 1916. Shortly afterward Paul resigned from his post in order to avoid conflict of interest after the United States entered World War I. His brother Felix M. Warburg (1871–1937) was by education a businessman specializing in jewels. In 1894 he had married into the New York banking firm Kuhn Loeb & Co., subsequently becoming a partner in one of the most powerful American investment banks. Felix followed the lead of Jacob H. Schiff, his father-in-law, and acted as president, chairman, and trustee or board member of numerous charitable organizations.

In 1926 Warburg included Dutch baroque art in his research on the afterlife of classical antiquity as a style phenomenon. On May 29, 1926, he delivered an evening lecture at his house on “Italian Antiquity in Rembrandt’s Age” (Die italienische Antike im Zeitalter Rembrandts), to mark the opening of his new, specially designed library.

Fritz Saxl went on a research trip to Madrid from late March to early May 1927, to consult medieval manuscripts in Spanish libraries and to study the painting of El Greco and Velázquez.