

THE WARBURG INSTITUTE AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

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At first sight, classical architecture, with its continuous revivals and reworkings of the forms of Greek and Roman building, would seem to offer a privileged field to apply Aby Warburg's central notion of the survival of antiquity and his view of art history's unfolding as a process of remembrance, of *Mnemosyne*. Yet Warburg himself wrote very little on architecture, and after auspicious and impressive beginnings by Rudolf Wittkower, Richard Krautheimer, Georg Kubler, and Nikolaus Pevsner, the role of architectural history in the activities of the Warburg Institute, its Library and Journal, dwindled. A brief survey of the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* shows that, up to the early 1970s, it published three to four articles on architectural topics every year. Among them are classics in the field that have kept their value to the present day, such as Wittkower's articles on perspective and Palladianism, Robin Middleton's article on Cordemoy, or Krautheimer's on medieval iconography.¹ Beginning in the mid-1970s, archi-

1. Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1–33; Rudolf Wittkower, "Brunelleschi and Proportion in Perspective," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953): 275–91; Wittkower, "Pseudo-Palladian Elements in English Neo-Classical Architecture," *Journal of the Warburg and Cour-*

tauld Institutes 6 (1943): 154–64; George Kubler, "Architects and Builders in Mexico, 1521–1550," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 7 (1944): 7–19; Robin Middleton, "The Abbé de Cordemoy and the Graeco-Gothic Ideal: A Prelude to Romantic Classicism," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 25 (1962): 278–320.

1 tectural contributions became less frequent, with an hiatus between 1992 and 2
 2 2003. After 2003 architecture became incidentally present in the *Journal*, with 3
 3 very diverse contributions ranging from articles on the funding of Santa Maria 4
 4 Novella to Michelangelo's design method in the Bibliotheca Laurentiana.² The 5
 5 gradual subsiding of interest in architectural history may have to do with Witt- 6
 6 kower's departure from the Institute, but also with architectural historians work- 7
 7 ing on classical and Renaissance architecture moving away in this period from 8
 8 an iconographical approach that was based on Warburg's and Wittkower's ideas 9
 9 toward other fields, such as patronage studies or the social and economic history 10
 10 of building.

11 The first decades of the Institute show an astonishing variety and scope 12
 12 of architectural studies, from Wittkower's work on Renaissance proportion and 13
 13 perspective to early comparative studies on Western, Indian, or New Mexican 14
 14 architecture by George Kubler and R. A. Jairazbhoy; and from James Ackerman's 15
 15 essay on Renaissance villas to Suzanne Lang's early contribution to architectural 16
 16 reception studies.³ But can we speak of a Warburgian approach to architectural 17
 17 history? And if so, what is the role of the Warburg Library, in distinction to its 18
 18 founder's thought? My argument is that the architectural history developed in the 19
 19 context of the Warburg Institute is distinguished by two, distinct features that 20
 20 can be connected respectively to Aby Warburg's ideas on *Nachleben der Antike* and 21
 21 *Mnemosyne*, and to the organization and holdings of the Library. But I will also 22
 22 argue that Warburg's own thought offers important, and hardly explored, start- 23
 23 ing points for new questions and investigations of the built classical heritage. 24
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25 Revivals of Antiquity on British Soil 26

27 One of the first public activities of the Warburg Institute after its reopening in 28
 28 London was the exhibition "British Art and the Mediterranean World," curated 29
 29 by Wittkower and Fritz Saxl. It was first shown in London in 1941, then toured 30
 30 the provinces. Publication in book form was suggested by a visitor, a Mr. Jarrold, 31
 31 who offered to publish it using a new printing procedure that would allow the 32
 32 reproduction of many (and large) plates at relatively low cost. The resulting book, 33
 33 which appeared in 1949, was very close to Aby Warburg's image atlas *Mnemosyne*, 34
 34 yet also very different in a way that even then announced the divergence between 35
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 37 2. David Hemsoll, "The Laurentian Library and Michel-
 38 angelo's Architectural Method," *Journal of the Warburg and*
 39 *Courtauld Institutes* 66 (2003): 29–62; Rab Hatfield, "The
 40 Funding of the Façade of Santa Maria Novella," *Journal of*
 41 *the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 67 (2004), 81–128.

3. R. A. Jairazbhoy, "The Taj Mahal in the Context of
 East and West: A Study in Comparative Method," *Jour-*

nal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 24.1/2 (1961):
 59–88; James Ackerman, "The Belvedere as a Classical
 Villa," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14
 (1951): 70–91; Suzanne Lang, "The Early Publications of
 the Temples at Paestum," *Journal of the Warburg and Cour-*
tauld Institutes 13.1/2 (1950): 48–64.

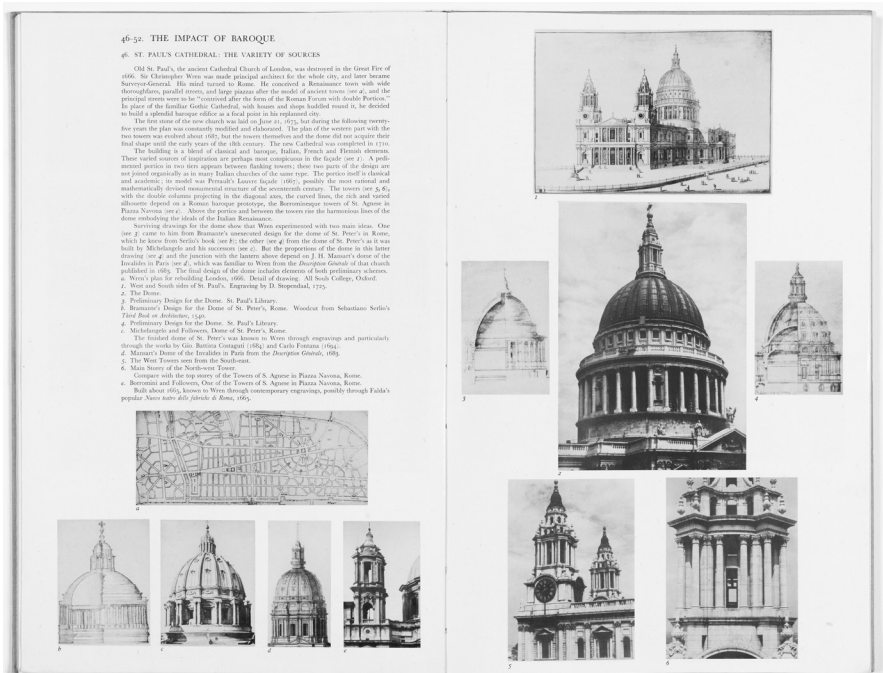


Figure 1. Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), plate 46. Saint Paul's Cathedral: The Variety of Sources. Photo Copyright: Royal Library, The Hague, Netherlands.

the Hamburg and London phases of the Warburg Institute.⁴ Physically, the volumes are very similar: the right hand page of the British volume offers a collage of images, recalling the felt boards in Hamburg on which Warburg used to pin the images whose connections he wanted to display (Figures 1 and 2); the left hand page has the accompanying text, varying from mere captions listing names, dates, places, and artists, to explanatory notes. The volumes also share a broad scope of subjects. Warburg included high art and popular visual culture, newspaper photographs, political propaganda, statues, film stills, and scrapbook fragments. At the time, this choice of subjects and material was very much at odds with academic art history, but it has become increasingly clear over the past decades to what degree Warburg's global, anthropological interest in images announced present-day visual culture studies or *Bildwissenschaft*.

Saxl and Wittkower did not limit themselves to high art from antiquity and its various renaissances and revivals; they also dealt with Celtic transformations of classical forms; animal lore, botany, and astronomy; the revival of classical

4. Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948). Saxl wrote the part to 1500, Wittkower the chapters on the subsequent period.

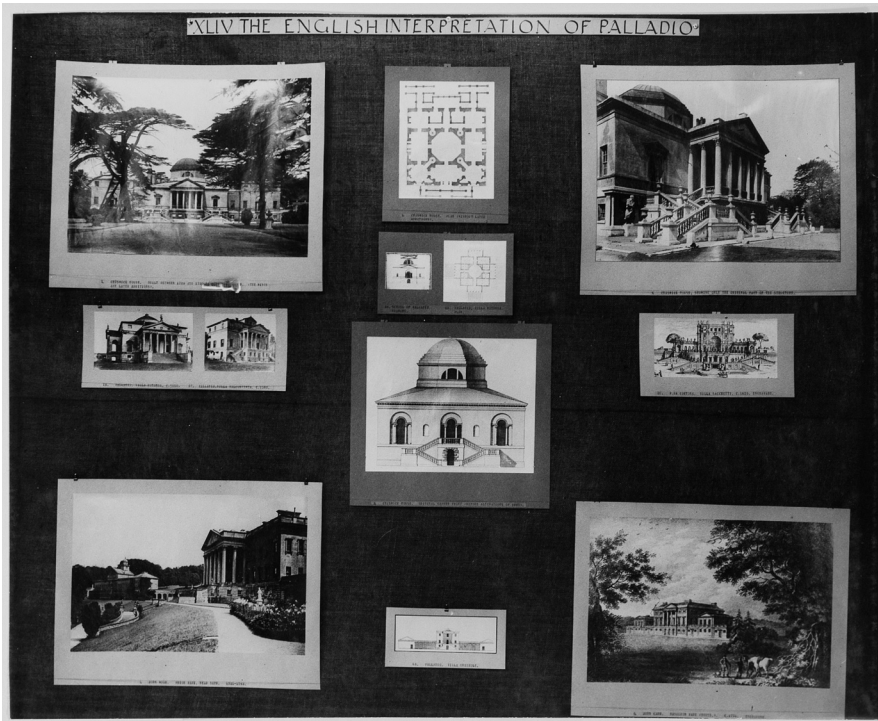


Figure 2. The Warburg Institute, Photographic Exhibition "English Art and the Mediterranean," 1941, Panel XXXV, Copyright and Photo: The Warburg Institute.

mythology; humanistic scripts; the role of Flemish artists in the transmission of classical art to Britain; Sir Christopher Wren's Roman sources for Saint Paul's Cathedral; the strong influence of Michelangelo on British art; and the role of the neoclassical hall as a setting for sculpture and the precursor of many nineteenth-century museum displays of statues (Figures 3 and 4). "British Art and the Mediterranean World" thus addressed many of the themes that occupied Warburg. It also exhibited Warburg's capacity to detect connections and continuities (for instance, the constant presence of Michelangelo in British art). But the manner in which these themes were treated had changed profoundly.

Warburg's introduction to *Mnemosyne* (1927–29) is a profound meditation on the afterlife of classical art and memory.⁵ In the work of Renaissance artists—Pollaiuolo, Donatello, Michelangelo—attitudes, expressions, and gestures often figure that recall ancient statues, sarcophagi, or medals. Thus the drapery of Botticelli's *Venus* recalls that of ancient maenads. Such interests raise fairly concrete art-historical issues of recognition, attribution, and artistic intention. What antique works did these Renaissance artists know? What did they borrow,

5. Aby Warburg, intro. to *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, ed. Martin Warnke and Claudia Brink, in *Gesammelte Werke*, part 2, vol. 1 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2000), 3–8.



Figure 3. Aby Warburg, Mnemosyne Atlas, 1929, panel 45
 Copyright and Photo: The Warburg Institute.

from whom, through what channels of transmission; and what artistic problem did they aim to solve by the employment of classical elements? For Warburg, such *Nachleben* became an issue with immense ramifications. He did not consider every reuse of classical elements but mainly what he called *Pathosformeln*: draperies, facial expressions, attitudes, or gestures that express strong emotions suggesting a living presence. By focusing on these elements, he introduced much wider methodological and cultural issues into the historical study of origins, transmission, influence, and the imitation or transformation of the classical heritage—issues



Figure 4. Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1929, panel 5
 Copyright and Photo: The Warburg Institute.

stemming from a Nietzschean view of the origins of art in Dionysian ritual as a way of taming primal fears and desires.⁶ The final formulation of Warburg's ideas on *Nachleben*, in the introduction to *Mnemosyne*, shows that *Nachleben* had branched out from a way of thinking about the classical heritage and its revivals

6. On the relation of Nietzsche and Warburg, see Helmut Pfotenhauer, "Das Nachleben der Antike: Aby Warburgs Auseinandersetzung mit Nietzsche," *Nietzsche Studien* 14 (1985): 298–313.

1 into a philosophy of history. In it, Warburg tried to preserve a precarious balance
 2 between a rational attempt to understand the mechanisms and motivations of
 3 these revivals as an artistic issue—that is, as an issue of representation and there-
 4 fore of metaphorical character, at one remove from life’s fierce realities—and
 5 an uneasy awareness of the uncanny continuing life of ancient art. Warburg
 6 here conceived art history as remembrance, manifesting itself in the revival or
 7 ongoing life of past art forms. If recollection is a storehouse, *Nachleben* is the pro-
 8 cess through which it is filled.

9 With *Mnemosyne*, Warburg added a new chapter to the German histo-
 10 riographical debate on the nature of history and the past it records. In “Ueber
 11 die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers” of 1822, Wilhelm von Humboldt had
 12 defined the task of the historian as the “Darstellung des Geschehen.” But *das*
 13 *Geschebene*—what took place—is not the series of acts and events that had made
 14 up the subject of the humanist *historia rerum gestarum*, but rather what connects
 15 them as an apparent unity, in a much more abstract sense—a set of inner causal
 16 connections.⁷ The events themselves are no longer the first objects of historio-
 17 graphy, serving as a *magistra vitae*; the primary objects of historical interest are
 18 the form that inheres in the events, their causality. Similarly, Warburg’s aim,
 19 certainly in *Mnemosyne*, was not to collect individual cases of survival of classical
 20 art, but rather to understand the inner, for him psychological, mechanisms that
 21 form the hidden cause determining the process of *Nachleben*.⁸

22 Nietzsche had added new zest to this debate by contrasting, in his second
 23 *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung* of 1874 (a text Warburg knew very well), monumental,
 24 antiquarian, and critical history.⁹ All historiography ultimately serves the living.
 25 Monumental history inspires and consoles the active man, fired by the ambition
 26 for great achievements, and it changes life, by keeping alive the heroic endeavors
 27 of mankind in the past. Antiquarian history serves life by preserving the condi-
 28 tions under which the heritage of the past came into being, by carefully looking
 29 after it; but it can only preserve the life of the past, not create new life, and it
 30 has no sense, unlike monumental history, for what is new. Antiquarian history
 31 thus threatens to suffocate the present and creates the need for a last variety of
 32 historiography: critical history. In order to live, one has to forget and demolish
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34 7. For an overview of German concepts of history in
 35 the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Reinhart
 36 Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*,
 37 trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

38 8. On German historiographical debates in the eigh-
 39 teenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in relation
 40 to art and architectural history, see Mari Hvattum, *Gott-
 41 fried Semper and the Problem of Historicism* (Cambridge:
 Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162–68; for humanist
 views of history, see Anthony Grafton, *What was History?*

The Art of History in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge:
 Cambridge University Press, 2007), chaps. 1 and 2, and
 123–41.

9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*,
Zweites Stück: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das
Leben, in *Werke in Drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Darm-
 stadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982), vol. 1,
 sections 2–4 (219–37).

those recollections of the past that can no longer help the living. In its analysis of history writing as a way of preserving the life of the past, but also of serving the life of the present, and in its arguments against the indiscriminate conservation of anything remaining, Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung* provided much of the conceptual scaffolding that would support Warburg's practice of art history. But reflection on Nietzsche's opposition of monumental and antiquarian history also helps to put the tensions and risks of Warburg's project into stronger relief. His introduction to *Mnemosyne* shows how his study of the revival of classical forms could be transformed into a meditation on the origins of art and its role in society. His ideas had become very close to those of Freud (in *Totem and Taboo*) on the origins of society. But it was very complex to connect these ideas to actual historical research into the transformations of classical forms. There is a gap between antiquarian and critical history, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the gap between monumental history and the philosophy of art developed in *Geburt der Tragödie*; and neither gap would be bridged by Nietzsche's successors. The metaphysical and anthropological aspect of Warburg's thought disappeared into the background, to be revived in the 1990s by Italian and French thinkers such as Salvatore Settis and Georges Didi-Huberman.¹⁰

With the publication in 1949 of Saxl and Wittkower's preface to *British Art and the Mediterranean*, we encounter a very different atmosphere. Instead of a metaphysical and psychological meditation on the nature and psychological origins of art, memory, and the survival of forms and motifs from the past, the authors offer a matter-of-fact account of the origin and aims of the exhibition, recalling with discreet pathos the time of war "when the Mediterranean had become a battle ground" and evoking the desires and hopes that at the time were aroused by the "contemplation of the cultural relations of the past." The aim of this "kaleidoscopic survey" is not to present the visual laboratory that Warburg worked in (together with a meditation on the metaphysics of remembrance or the origins of art in the primitive mind as founding mechanisms of art history), but rather to present to the "retrospective mind" visual testimonies of the debts of British art to Greece and Italy. The texts and plates show the transformation of Greek and Roman forms; display sources for British artists in Renaissance and Baroque art on the continent; and illustrate the formative role of classical art on British taste and aesthetic thought, for instance in the develop-

10. Gombrich and Didi-Huberman represent the opposite ends of the spectrum of Warburg interpretations: Gombrich's intellectual biography reduces the philosophical aspects and attention to the irrational that characterizes Warburg's thought; Didi-Huberman reads him as a thinker on time and history. See Ernst Hans Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Warburg Institute, 1970); Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des Fantômes selon Aby*

Warburg (Paris: Les Editions du Minuit, 2002); Claude Imbert, "Warburg, de Kant à Boas," *L'Homme* 165 (2003): 11–40; Salvatore Settis, "Kunstgeschichte als vergleichende Kulturwissenschaft: Aby Warburg, die Pueblo-Indianer und das Nachleben der Antike," in *Künstlerischer Austausch – Artistic Exchange: Akten des XXVIII. internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*, ed. Thomas W. Gaetgens (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1993), 139–58.

1 ment of the Picturesque or neo-Palladianism. But very little, if not nothing at
 2 all, is said about what became Warburg's main preoccupation: understanding
 3 the reasons, the psychological and artistic processes, that lead to the *Nachleben*
 4 *der Antike*—which is not to say that Saxl and Wittkower's exhibition was merely
 5 the symptom of a loss of intellectual ambition. On the contrary, metaphysical
 6 reflections on the general conditions of the possibility of art do not automatically
 7 lead to art-historical research programs. The exhibition can also be seen as a step
 8 in the very productive transformation of the Warburg from a laboratory or even
 9 a *Denkraum*—where ideas on the revival of antique forms were formulated by
 10 juxtaposing images on the famous felt boards—into a research library, devoted to
 11 charting the transformations of classical art and culture, and whose chief instru-
 12 ment increasingly became the book.

15 **An Indirect Iconographical Approach to the Revival of Antiquity**

16 The next major publication of the Warburg Institute, Wittkower's *Architectural*
 17 *Principles in the Age of Humanism* (1949), arguably the most influential postwar
 18 study in architectural history, shows another variety of this transformation of
 19 Aby Warburg's philosophical considerations into a research program. Its main
 20 focus is no longer the transformations of classical art but, instead, the icono-
 21 graphical analysis of architectural form. Wittkower, like Nikolaus Pevsner, intro-
 22 duced German research methods into the British architectural-history scene,
 23 which until their arrival had been dominated by connoisseurs and critics such as
 24 John Ruskin, Geoffrey Scott, and Sir John Betjeman, or by architects like Harry
 25 Goodhart-Rendell.¹¹ The Germans introduced systematic archival research and
 26 evaluation of sources, but also a question that had informed the rise of art his-
 27 tory as an academic discipline in Germany from 1800 onward: should art history
 28 study art for its aesthetic value and its significance as an expression of the human
 29 mind—that is, be a branch of aesthetics—or should art history should model
 30 itself on the historical sciences and favor the factual description, based on docu-
 31 mentary evidence, of styles, iconography, careers, oeuvres, and building histories,
 32 from design through execution, restoration, or ruin?¹²

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 35 11. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (London: John Mur-
 36 ray, 1851); Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (London: Constable, 1914); Harry Stuart Goodhart-Rendell, *English Architecture since the Regency: An Interpretation* (London: Constable, 1953), based on the Oxford Slade Lectures of 1934. For the impact of Nikolaus Pevsner on British architectural history, see, for instance, Alexandrina Buchanan, "Nikolaus Pevsner and the Architectural Writers of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reassessing Nikolaus Pevsner*, ed. Peter Draper (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004), 95–109.

12. On British architectural history until the arrival in London of the Warburg Library, see David Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History* (London: Architectural Press, 1980), 94–160. On German nineteenth-century debates about art history and its relation to aesthetics and general history, see Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), intro. and chap. 1.

Wittkower's *Architectural Principles* was a clear break from the traditional English view of Renaissance architecture, which was based on visual analysis and ultimately derived from Ruskin's condemnation of Renaissance art as a hedonistic, academic, and pagan style, distinguished by its incapacity for formal or constructional innovation.¹³ Wittkower's is an essay in architectural iconography, linking the formal motif of the centrally-planned church to worlds of theological and metaphysical ideas, and with a hitherto unprecedented scale and wealth of scholarly detail. Because of the connections it forges between architectural design, its significance, and the ideas behind it, the book signaled a new beginning in architectural history. It also represents a significant advance in knowledge about architectural thought in the Renaissance. At the same time, *Architectural Principles* comes at the end of a long tradition of books on architectural thought that influenced contemporary design. Hardly noticed, on its appearance in 1949, outside the scholarly community of Renaissance specialists, the book was taken up by architects and critics such as Le Corbusier and Colin Rowe, and had a huge influence on the turn of modernist architects toward proportion and anthropomorphy in the 1950s and 1960s (the Modulor is the best-known example).¹⁴ Alina Payne has unearthed the modernist aesthetic bias in Wittkower's appraisal of Alberti and Palladio; Christine Smith has questioned the universality and uniqueness of his views on mathematics as the dominant mode of architectural apprehension; and Matthew Cohen has shown that most of Wittkower's ideas on Brunelleschi's use of proportion are untenable and not based on actual, firsthand measurement of the buildings themselves.¹⁵ Nonetheless, *Architectural Principles* continues to exercise a great appeal for architects and architectural historians alike, because it offers a very concentrated and focused access into Renaissance architectural design and thought.

Wittkower's book, although superficially very different in ambition and themes from Warburg's study of the revival of antique art, actually provides an answer to a fundamental question raised by the revival of the antique, one that had already troubled Renaissance architects and viewers; that is, how to defend the use in Christian churches of pagan forms, in particular the architectural orders and elements of temples such as porticoes, with their strong associations with

13. On the opening page of the *Architectural Principles*, Wittkower quotes Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, vol. 3, chap. 4, sec. 35: "Pagan in its origin, proud and unholy in its revival, paralysed in its old age."

14. On the reception of the *Architectural Principles*, see the preface to the 1988 edition; on Wittkower's role in the 1951 Triennale, see Anna Chiara Cimoli, *La Divina Proporzione. Triennale 1951* (Milan: Electa, 2007), in which the original contributions by Wittkower, Ackerman, Giedion, Le Corbusier, and others are published.

15. Alina A. Payne, "Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53.3 (September 1994): 322–42; Christine Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Eloquence, 1400–1470* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Matthew A. Cohen, "How Much Brunelleschi?: A Late Medieval Proportional System in the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67.1 (March 2008): 18–57.

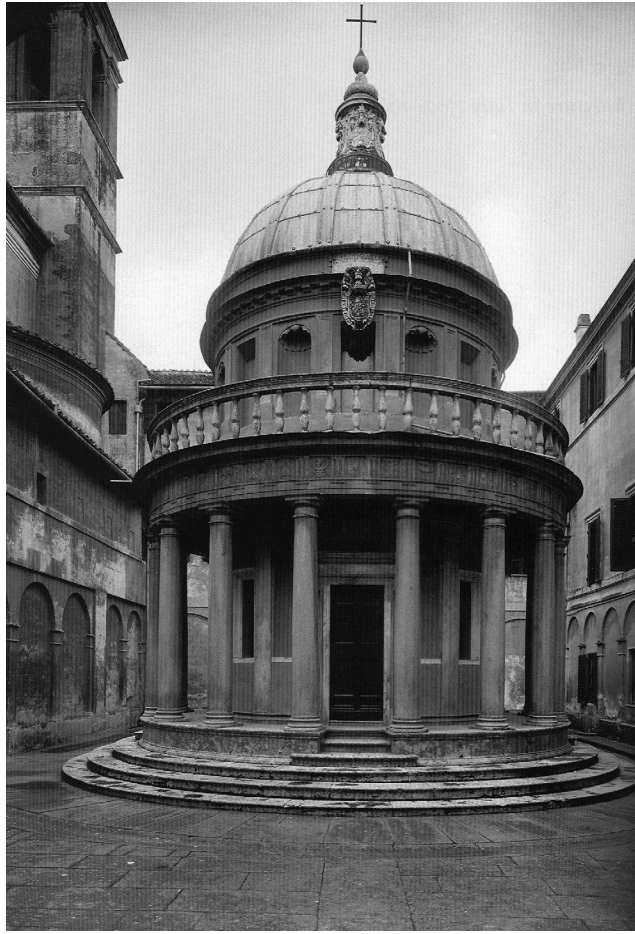


Figure 5. Rome, Tholos by the Tiber near the Forum Boarium, probable identification Temple of Hercules Victor, attributed to Hermodoros of Salamis, mid to late second century BC.

pagan religion and society. Wittkower never raises this question explicitly, but he addresses its implications indirectly by condemning the views of his predecessors Ruskin and Scott, who believed that the very use of classical forms was proof of a return to antique paganism. Against them, Wittkower argues that Renaissance architects and theorists, from Alberti via Francesco Zorzi to Palladio, used pagan forms but endowed them, through their use of the centrally-planned church, with Christian symbolism. He traces the transformation of a classical motif—that of the circular temple into the circular Renaissance church, for instance from the temple of Hercules to Bramante’s Tempietto in Rome (Figures 5 and 6)—but he also shows the intellectual processes that led to the motif’s revival.

Architectural Principles could never have been written without the Warburg Library. E. H. Gombrich recalls how Wittkower used to leave the Institute late every night, loaded with Renaissance tomes; but the Library was vital also in a more fundamental way—because of its organization. As everyone who has ever used the Library knows, the open shelves ordering its holdings in four large categories (image, word, orientation, and action) force one to rethink the usual chronological, stylistic, iconographical, or genre categories of art-historical research. By its very organization, the Warburg Library also inspires one to ask

Figure 6. Donato Bramante, Tempietto, San Pietro in Montorio, Rome, c. 1502. Photo copyright Leiden University Digital resources.



new questions that, in the case of architectural history, diverge completely from the traditional conceptual structure of the discipline. Architectural history is practiced mainly by architects. Starting with Vitruvius and continuing to the present day, architectural history to a considerable degree has been written by designers, who write the history of their art from the perspective of design issues. Architectural history was born in the Renaissance, when architects such as Alberti, Serlio, or Palladio began to reconstruct the ruins of Roman buildings; from the seventeenth century, it was taught in an institutional form at the Académie Royale d'Architecture in Paris and the Accademia di San Luca in Rome by and for architects; and the first incumbents of university chairs in architectural history were all architects.

But by its conceptual organization the Warburg Library moves away from design issues and instead includes architectural history and theory in a system of thought whose primary concern is not the decision making of the architect who has to solve a design problem, or the biography of a building from its commission to its design, building, use, and demolition. The roles that a building can play in

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1 society take center stage—both in a restricted Warburgian sense, as the mani-
 2 festation of the revival of classical forms and as the stone embodiment of their
 3 remembrance, and also in a wider sense, suggested by the organization of the
 4 Library, as an agent in society, part of the same culture that also produced rhetor-
 5 ic or music, astronomy or the revival of ancient mythology. To do architectural
 6 research in the Warburg Library, therefore, always means to reshape the subject
 7 of one’s inquiry in the terms that Warburg and his successors set out: to think of
 8 art not primarily in terms of its creation, material properties, dating, or stylistic
 9 history, but as an agent shaping culture. As Alberti put it in the prologue of *De re*
 10 *aedificatoria*, architecture is not only the setting for civic life, it also provides stone
 11 monuments to keep the collective memory of society alive. It is this profoundly
 12 humanist view of architectural history as monumental history that the Library
 13 embodies.¹⁶

16 **Toward a Warburgian History of Architecture**

17 Still, Wittkower and his students by no means exhausted the potential of War-
 18 burg’s thought for architectural history. Warburg wrote little on architecture
 19 but was interested in it, as is shown by his involvement with the design of the
 20 Warburg-Haus in Hamburg, but also by the notes (of October 1890) that he
 21 made in the manuscript “Grundlegende Bruchstücke zur Psychologie der Kunst”
 22 about his reading of Gottfried Semper’s 1856 lecture on the “Formal Principles
 23 of Ornament.”¹⁷ They form part of Warburg’s efforts in these years to develop
 24 a theory of artistic expression, predicated on the conviction that representation
 25 is the locus of artistic freedom since it allows for a distance from the threaten-
 26 ing aspects of images. (The motto he chose for these notes was “Du lebst und
 27 thust mir nichts.”) He shared this conviction with a series of late-eighteenth- and
 28 nineteenth-century architectural theorists, from Quatremère de Quincy via Böt-
 29 ticher to Schopenhauer and Semper.¹⁸ They all believed that aesthetic representa-
 30 tion is the realm in which artistic freedom manifests itself and in which utilitarian
 31 artefacts are transformed into works of art. This transformation happens, for
 32 example, through a sculptor’s choice to use a material widely different from the
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34 16. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten*
 35 *Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert
 36 Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), prologue,
 37 5–6.

38 17. Aby Warburg, *Grundlegende Bruchstücke zu einer moni-*
 39 *stischen Kunstpsychologie* (1888–1995), unpublished manu-
 40 script, Warburg Institute Archive no. 33, August 27, 1990;
 41 Spyros Papapetros, “World Ornament: The Legacy of
 Gottfried Semper’s 1856 Lecture on Adornment,” *Res*
 57/58 (2010): 309–29.

18. See Caroline van Eck, “Figuration, Tectonics, and
 Animism in Semper’s *Der Stil*,” *Journal of Architecture* 14.3
 (2009): 325–39, for a more detailed discussion of this tradi-
 tion in German architectural aesthetics.

being to be depicted—using cold, hard marble for a portrait bust, for instance, 1
 when soft ivory would feel, like a living body, warm to the touch. In architecture, 2
 it is ornament (and particularly the decorative forms derived from the classical 3
 orders) that play this role. They have no structural role but, instead, represent the 4
 tectonic forces at work in a building and thereby transform inanimate stone into 5
 a living work of architecture. In the words of K. G. W. Bötticher: “lautlos und 6
 starr, verräth sich Gedanke und Begriff nur durch characktervolle Zeichen.”¹⁹ 7
 Without such forms, the way in which static forces work upon each other in a 8
 building would not be perceptible, and the building would seem dead. Art forms 9
 are the visual language of tectonic forms: they make a building speak.²⁰ Sem- 10
 per pushed this line of reasoning even further, arguing that the outer shell of a 11
 building—its dress—fictionalizes it, dematerializes it, and by this means can 12
 animate dead matter. 13

Warburg shared with Bötticher, Semper, and Quatremère de Quincy an 14
 ambition to understand the appeal that the forms of classical architecture exer- 15
 cise even fifteen-hundred years after the end of the Roman empire. Warburg 16
 was not interested in their potential as design solutions but in what they can tell 17
 us about the role of artistic representation in the development of human society 18
 and psychology. He was not consistent in the way he pursued this interest, but 19
 his all too brief remarks on architecture point in the same direction as his work 20
 on the visual arts. Both are integral parts of his effort to construct a new way of 21
 thinking about images, in the broadest sense of the word, and about their role in 22
 society, all over the world. 23

For the architectural historian, Warburg’s ideas and the Library that grew 24
 out of them still offer ways of thinking about architecture as the expression and 25
 embodiment of cultural memory; reading Warburg and using his Library can 26
 aid architectural history to sidestep the focus on practical design issues that even 27
 now dominate the discipline. Warburgian ideas about the survival of classical 28
 forms have not yet received a systematic application or test in the domain of 29
 architecture, even though the ornamental, expressive formal repertoire of the 30
 orders seems to ask for analysis in such terms. Doing so would allow for a study 31
 of ornament that sidesteps the traditional dichotomy of utility and beauty, thus 32
 reducing ornament to the beautiful but useless, and would instead offer insight 33
 into the mental processes that lead to the use of such forms as a *Denkraum*—as 34
 the locus for artistic freedom. 35

Warburg’s London legacy, as I have indicated here, contributed to the 36
 development of architectural iconography and to the study of the transformation 37
 of classical forms in building. The work of Wittkower, Saxl, and Krautheimer, 38

19. Karl Gottlieb Wilhelm Bötticher, *Die Tektonik der Hellenen* (Berlin: Ernst and Korn, 1844–52), xv.

20. Bötticher, *Die Tektonik der Hellenen* (Berlin: Ernst and Korn, 1874), 24.

1 among others, opened up ways of pursuing the transformation of classical form
2 while connecting it to the societies that produced these buildings. John Onians's
3 *Bearers of Meaning* of 1988, tracing the transformations of the meanings of the
4 classical orders from antiquity to the end of the sixteenth century, is a new prod-
5 uct of Warburgian architectural iconography. Alina Payne's work on the adoption
6 and transformation of Vitruvius by Renaissance architects and theorists, along
7 with her forthcoming work on the topics of *Lebendige Architektur* and ornament
8 in the nineteenth century, likewise show how Warburg's ideas on the survival of
9 classical form (and their renewal in the Warburg Library) have led to a variety
10 of architectural history that uncovers the slow processes of transformation and
11 renewal that are often hidden from sight by histories focusing on individual archi-
12 tects and their designs. Recently, Jan Assmann's work on the role of memory in
13 society has created a new wave of interest, across the humanities, in the cultural
14 role of memory and its embodiment in texts, art, and architecture. Here too the
15 Library has an important role to play: given the uniquely tangible ways in which
16 the Library raises the issues of *Nachleben* and *Mnemosyne*, it is uniquely able to
17 show, in concrete detail, how the formation of cultural memory actually works.
18 The Warburg Library may be the embodiment in stone of its creator's ideas, but
19 it is at the same time so supple, inspiring, and interactive a living institution that
20 it energizes the thinking of one new generation after another.

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