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ottobre/novembre **2023**

206

**Dürer, Rembrandt,
Manet.
Warburg Manebit!**

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Dürer,
Rembrandt,
Manet.
Warburg
Maneabit!

a cura di
Ada Naval e Giulia Zanon

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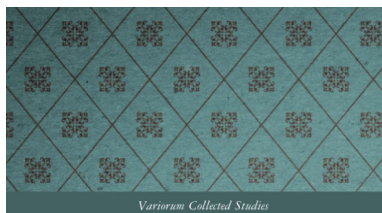
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Warburg and the Warburgkreis through a Magnifying Glass

A Presentation of: Studies on Aby Warburg, Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing, London 2023

Dorothea McEwan. A presentation by Seminario Mnemosyne

Routledge, in its series *Variorum Collected Studies*, publishes *Studies on Aby Warburg, Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing*, an anthology of essays written by Dorothea McEwan in the course of her research life. Originally published in German, Italian and French these articles have been translated into English for the first time by the author, the former archivist of The Warburg Institute, London. The articles include discussions of Warburg's academic work with scholars, intellectuals and collaborators, such as the trusted Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl. The chapters are arranged according to topics, not chronologically. A large part of the source material is taken from Warburg's and Fritz Saxl's correspondence, the mirror of their collaboration for some 20 years. All chapters are to be considered as microhistories, research essays on specific questions, many involving the genesis and legacy of a particular research concern of Warburg. We publish here the book summary and one of the chapters, *On the origins of the Serpent Ritual lecture. Motive and motivation. Healing through remembrance* which reconstructs the genesis of *The Serpent Ritual*, the famous lecture that Warburg prepared, with the help of Fritz Saxl, and delivered on 21 April 1923 Kreuzlingen (see 21 aprile 1923. Il rituale del serpente, "La Rivista di Engramma" 201).



STUDIES ON ABY WARBURG, FRITZ SAXL AND GERTRUD BING

Dorothea McEwan



Dorothea McEwan, *Studies on Aby Warburg, Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing*, London 2023.

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On the origins of the Serpent Ritual lecture. Motive and motivation. Healing through remembrance

Originally published in D. McEwan, *Zur Entstehung des Vortrages über das Schlangenritual, Motiv und Motivation/Heilung durch Erinnerung*, in C. Bender, T. Hensel, E. Schüttpelz (hrsg. von), *Schlangenritual. Der Transfer der Wissensformen vom Tsu'ti'kive der Hopi bis zu Aby Warburgs Kreuzlinger Vortrag, Abschrift, 'Schlangenritualtagung'* (Warburg-Haus, Hamburg, 11-13 April 2002), Berlin 2007, 267–281.

Introduction

A number of events coincided for Warburg to think about giving a lecture in Kreuzlingen Sanatorium in 1923 (*Kreuzlinger Mosaik* 1991). Using a methodological interpretation I wish to present side by side the intellectual *milieu* in Kreuzlingen as well as the projects which Saxl had initiated in Hamburg. The source material is fragmentary: on the one hand the volume of information is large, on the other hand personal limits dictated by the medium of letters formed a barrier to the public use of information until now. Also, the correspondence between Warburg and Fritz Saxl stopped for the weeks when Saxl was in Kreuzlingen, most importantly the weeks and days before Warburg's lecture in April 1923.

In addition to the correspondence between Warburg and Saxl, there are a number of letters, by Saxl to Mary Warburg and friends, which point to Warburg's occupation with the topic, not yet visible to outsiders, and show how the research by the two scholars coalesced to bring it to the surface. The correspondence *corpus*, therefore, is an important source, but only one segment with which to chart the development of the lecture text and the collaboration between Warburg and Saxl, as well as Warburg's preparation for his lecture. The correspondence, ho-

never, permits insights into the way in which the task, the research, and then the drawing up and presentation of the lecture comes to the fore, with Warburg and Saxl as protagonists. A beautiful example for this fusion is the poem *Among School Children* by William Butler Yeats, in which the great Irish poet put it thus: “how can we know the dancer from the dance?”. He evokes a picture of total integration, a picture of the multiplicity of ideas, events, impressions, which bring about the shape of the final product. It is in this sense that I see Warburg’s lecture, when his experiences, gained on his travels in America, received new significance during his stay in Kreuzlingen. These experiences and their contemplation, that is the memories and the research distilled from them, intertwined with each other. The travels in America as the dance and Warburg as the dancer bring motive and motivation together.

Warburg suffered from a mental illness which manifested itself at the end of World War I. After stays in various sanatoriums in Germany he moved to Kreuzlingen, to the sanatorium of Dr. Ludwig Binswanger in Switzerland, from 1921 to 1924. As part of his treatment he was encouraged to write down his observations, which led him to work on and deliver a lecture. In 1923 Warburg had two big successes: on 21 April he presented in front of doctors and nurses, patients and friends in the sanatorium his lecture *On logic in the magic of primitive man (Über die Logik in der Magie des primitiven Menschen)*, also known today as the *Serpent Ritual (Schlangenritual)*. And in the autumn of 1923 he was sent the proceedings of his lecture in Rome from October 1912 (*Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara, Renewal*, 563-592, 732-758). Both lectures are seminal pieces of research. The lecture on the serpent ritual was first printed in 1938, nine years after Warburg’s death, in a shortened version in English (Warburg [1923] 1938-1939) and in German only in 1988 (Warburg [1923] 1988; see also Fleckner 2018). The lecture in Rome was published in 1922 and only reached Warburg in 1923. The lecture in Kreuzlingen as well as the publication of the lecture in Rome were made possible by Saxl’s active assistance and became steps on the road to Warburg’s recovery. Saxl’s share in Warburg’s recuperation and re-integration in his work in Hamburg were gratefully recorded by Warburg still years later (A. Warburg to L. Binswanger, 18 November 1924; A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 8 December 1928; A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 1 June 1929). This chapter will limit itself to the genesis of the text on the Serpent Lecture.

American impressions

It was in September 1895 when Warburg, 29 years of age, sailed to New York for the wedding on 1 October 1895 of his brother Paul Moritz with Nina Loeb.

Apart from family commitments and society invitations he found time to visit the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, where he saw exhibits from Native American peoples. Shortly afterwards he headed to the West, armed with letters of recommendation to the military authorities and friends of the family, as he wanted to see for himself the paintings and ornaments of the Hopi and Zuni (A. Warburg to F. Warburg, 18 December 1895). For Warburg, having been raised in a big city, it was an encounter with cultures which were diametrically opposite to his range of experience. Small rural communities, where missionaries and teachers had been ac-

tive for many years, were in the transitional phase from traditional culture to the erosion of their cultures under the influence of 'modern' values. He noted in his travel Diary, "I read Stevenson's story Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Deeply symbolic. Everybody has such a Mr. Hyde" (WIA, III.10.1, Diary, 7 April 1896, 52). He felt placed in a situation which he could not, or could not yet, fathom.

He was gripped by a feeling of dislocation, alienation, transformation. His travels through Arizona, New Mexico and California were physically arduous, but Warburg accepted everything, the cold, the poor food, the bad lodgings, the rutted roads (A. Warburg to C. and M. Warburg, 12 January 1896) – the resulting reports, photographs, collections of works of art and utensils were to prove important to him. He made lists of words (Cf. WIA, III.2.1., index card box, 40, "Americana", Moki Vocabulary booklet, 040/020435) in order to communicate directly with Native Americans, for "here I learn more about the history of the human soul than staying at home in Europe for years" (A. Warburg to C. and M. Warburg, 12 January 1896). He confessed when writing to his future wife that he had embarked on an "immortal work":

"Symbolism as function of the force of gravity in the mental household". Really, I should not produce some nonsensical writing about my insights, because, in fact, they are quintessentially my thoughts [...] My experiences in America present me with living experiences for religious symbolism, but taken as a whole I will have to wait for a long time until this work is completed (A. Warburg to M. Hertz, 3 March 1896).

He bought a camera in order to photograph the dances around the totem poles; he bought cooking pots, utensils, pieces of clothing, which he sent to Hamburg (A. Warburg to C. and M. Warburg, 31 January 1896) and later deposited them as permanent loans in the ethnological museum there in 1902 (K. Hagen to A. Warburg, 3 January 1902). He read modern American journals, like *The Lark* and *Chap Books*, about which he wrote articles after his return to Europe (Renewal 703–710, 776). His sister Olga added to her welcome letter a passage by Nietzsche, "Daybreak: Thoughts on the prejudices of morality", dealing with superstition, fear and the history of culture, hoping that Warburg would find it interesting (O. Kohn-Speyer to A. Warburg, 1 August 1896).

After his return to Hamburg he prepared lectures with photographs about his travels: "I have happily written down the dance of the Indians with the help of the stenographer Marta Martens, but have arrived at a dead point again" (WIA, III.10.1, Diary, 11 October 1896, 63). He did lecture twice in Hamburg and once in Berlin in 1897. On 21 January 1897 Warburg gave a lecture at the photography association "Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Amateur-Photographie in Hamburg". Warburg gave a second lecture on 10 February 1897 in Hamburg at the "Amerikanistenclub"; I have not come across printed reports about this lecture. Warburg gave a third lecture in Berlin on 16 March 1897. As he had not seen the so-called Hopi serpent dance, he was invited by William H. Bean at the end of 1896 to return to America. Bean offered to organise the trip for Warburg (W.H. Bean to A. Warburg, 30 December 1896). It did not happen then and it did not happen when he wanted to travel to America in the late 1920s. Despite

his interest in and intensive occupation with Native American culture during his stay in the southwest of the USA, and despite his correspondence with Philipp N. Lilienthal in San Francisco – who waited eagerly for Warburg’s book about it (Ph. Lilienthal to A. Warburg, 1 October 1897) – with James Loeb – on Warburg’s research on Native American symbols (J. Loeb to A. Warburg, 23 April 1897) – and with Karl Lamprecht in Leipzig – who worked on drawings by Hopi children in 1905 (K. Lamprecht to A. Warburg, 5 December 1905) – Warburg had started working on other research projects. But he let slip his feelings for America: when Warburg contrasted a lecture by Professor Richard Muther on Rembrandt in Hamburg in 1907, “a verbal exhibition of dry professorial messianic fake diamonds”, with an “eminently appreciative letter about my Sasseti” (Renewal 223–262, 451–466) by Max Weber, which gave him an “emotional uplift”, he admitted that he would have “sold myself to America long ago” (A. Warburg to M. Warburg, 13 October 1907). It is anybody’s guess how honestly Warburg meant what he wrote, given that the topic of Native American art and culture was mentioned only rarely. In 1910, on the occasion of the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden, Warburg sent three objects from his American travels to the exhibition, one of them the paper bread which the Pueblo Indians used at rituals (A. Warburg to O. Neustätter, 1 June 1910, Copy book III, 349–351).

Only in 1921 did Native American topics surface again. Saxl regularly wrote to Warburg about books, lectures and developments in Hamburg, and he mentioned a lecture at the Society of Religious Studies where Cassirer spoke about F. H. Cushing’s article on the Zuni (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 5 December 1921). According to Saxl, the Zuni linked their cosmology not to astrology, but to the totem animal, a finding which Cassirer could only have studied in Warburg’s library (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 8 December 1921). Half a year later Warburg thanked Saxl for Cassirer’s lecture text, which he found “very good”, but in contrast to Saxl he failed to find a reference to the Zuni (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 5 June 1922). This was the first time that Warburg picked up the topic again, which in the space of one year would solidify into his lecture on the serpent ritual.

Motif and motivation

The travels in America were the motif which Warburg took up again in September 1922, 15 months into his treatment in the sanatorium in Kreuzlingen. As part of the treatment Dr. Ludwig Binswanger, head of the sanatorium, encouraged Warburg to write down his “self-observations” about his illness. It was Warburg himself who had, on the occasion of one of Saxl’s frequent visits, expressed the wish to be allowed to do so (F. Saxl to F. Warburg, 21 September 1922). Warburg stayed in Kreuzlingen from 1921 to 1924 and during that period Saxl visited him a few times per year, as often as Dr. Binswanger permitted it (Cf. the correspondence on visitor permits, F. Saxl to L. Binswanger, 25 March 1922). For his trips to Kreuzlingen, Saxl, as acting director of the Warburg library and lecturer in the university (McEwan 2012, 53–54 and 62–63), was granted leave of absence from Hamburg university by the dean of the Philosophy Faculty, Conrad Borchling, who agreed with Saxl that it was im-

portant “to our university” for Warburg to return healed to Hamburg some day (C. Borchling to F. Saxl, 16 April 1923). Close cooperation continued despite the geographical distance.

The doctors treating Warburg had noticed that each visit by Saxl had a calming influence on Warburg (L. Biswanger to F. Saxl 19 October 1922), so they allowed Warburg to dictate his observations, among which his travels to the Native Americans was a high point (A. Warburg to M. Warburg 21 September 1922). In October 1922 he expected a visit from his brother Fritz and asked him to bring him “my American material” (A. Warburg to M. Warburg, 19 October 1922). Two days later he repeated his request, this time to his son Max Adolf (A. Warburg to M. Warburg, 19 October 1922), and explained to his wife that his “American material” was kept with his documents and in the subject catalogue “Americana”. He wondered whether anybody would come to a lecture of his in Kreuzlingen and requested more postage stamps from Mary, as his friends were no longer able to keep up their correspondence due to the raging inflation (A. Warburg to M. Warburg, 26 October 1922).

The therapeutically prescribed writing exercise very quickly turned into something quite different: he no longer wanted to write for himself, but for an audience, possibly triggered by the lecture programmes of Saxl and Binswanger. Saxl had started a lecture programme in Hamburg, which initiated discussions about the research agendas as well as the research methods in the KBW. Saxl knew that book publications of lectures were the appropriate visiting cards to show and explain to colleagues the function of the KBW. Such publications were also vital for Warburg to see what was going on in his library despite his absence. In October 1921 Saxl had been able to send a programme of lectures in the Warburg Library to editors of a number of academic journals requesting wider distribution (F. Saxl to G. Sarton, 20 October 1921 or to J. Ilberg, editor of *Neue Jahrbücher* in Leipzig, on the same day). To Warburg he wrote, “Your library has completely turned into a scholarly institute with productive results” (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 8 August 1921). In the first lecture Saxl explained the rationale for the lecture programme, Warburg’s work and Saxl’s belief in Warburg’s work (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 28 December 1921. See McEwan 2015, 106), which Warburg should not dismiss as “gentle persuasion” (Saxl [1923] 2023). Apart from the “Vorträgen” (Lectures) series Saxl started a second series, “Studien” (Studies), in which topics were published which had not been presented as lectures in the KBW). When the article appeared in 1923 it went without saying that Saxl sent a copy to Warburg.

In October 1922, after having started on his own case history, the lecture idea had taken shape. The topic would be the Hopi, an eminently important topic for Warburg’s case history. At the end of the month Saxl regretted that he could not be in Kreuzlingen for Warburg’s lecture because the academic year had begun in Hamburg. “What a pity that I cannot be with you and hear the American lecture, how much I could learn!” (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 30 October 1922). This did not mean that Warburg’s lecture was imminent, only that Saxl could not get away from Hamburg again to assist Warburg. Saxl knew how significant the project was for Warburg and therefore tried to help him from Hamburg by, for instance, supplying articles

about the Zuni in the Census Report (F. Saxl to W. Printz, 1 November 1922), and he promised to collaborate with him on his next visit (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 13 November 1922).

The lecture project followed in the footsteps of another event. On 16 November 1922 Binswanger spoke in the sanatorium to patients, colleagues and friends about Husserl's "Phenomenology" lecture, in particular about the difference between the arts and the sciences, about "the cathedral style of music", the *Blue Horses* painting by Franz Marc and the term "speech room", "which was coined by a mentally ill person as collective noun for voice hallucinations" (Schindler 2000, 8 and footnotes 23 and 24). Warburg was enthusiastic about the lecture, claiming the topic was "the real topic of my psyche" and called it in his summary to his wife "Image and Sign" with the subtitle "Phobic selection of the function of image memory" (A. Warburg to M. Warburg, 24 November 1922). The reference to Franz Marc's famous horse paintings must have made Warburg sit up, because he had bought the Marc painting *Mare with Foal* (*Stute mit Fohlen*, 1912) in 1916.

The lectures, that is speaking and sharing as a method of scholarship, the lecture programme started by Saxl in Hamburg, and the lecture programme on offer in Kreuzlingen, spurred Warburg on to work on a lecture of his "American material". He asked Carl Georg Heise in Lübeck to visit and bring him slides. Heise, although not very well, was having to travel to Switzerland for two lectures and did not want to make a detour to Kreuzlingen with heavy glass slides. He wrote to Saxl for advice (C.G. Heise to F. Saxl, 25 November 1922), who replied that he would take the glass slides on his next visit to Warburg (F. Saxl to C.G. Heise, 27 November 1922). Shortly afterwards Warburg asked Saxl to visit him in Kreuzlingen in January 1923 for his lecture about the Native Americans (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 6 December 1922), but Saxl had not yet received Binswanger's permission (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 13 December 1922).

Warburg's lecture in Kreuzlingen in context

In January 1923 Saxl was preparing to travel to Kreuzlingen as well as to attend lectures in Zurich (F. Saxl to A. Stern, 20 December 1922 and F. Saxl to H. Bodmer, 4 January 1923) and Bale (F. Saxl to F. Rintelen, 20 December 1922), but the plans did not work out: his mother in Vienna suffered a stroke and he had to travel to Vienna (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 29 January 1923). This was hard for Warburg; he pressed Saxl, "You do know that my return to Hamburg depends to a certain degree on the promise of your extended presence here" (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 1 February 1923).

Saxl arrived in Kreuzlingen on 12 March. From now onwards it was the librarian Gertrud Bing's task to supply Warburg with books from Hamburg, maps of America, the paper bread of the Zuni which Cushing had sent (G. Bing to F. Saxl, 19 March 1923). Mary Warburg advised Saxl in her first letter that he should not blame himself if he could not achieve anything in Kreuzlingen (M. Warburg to F. Saxl, 2 March 1923). But as early as the next day Saxl was able to reassure her: Saxl had typed up 40 pages which Warburg had dictated. The notes were mainly aphorisms, thoughts which had occupied Warburg in San Francisco, symbolism, topics which connected his illness with his research work, the liberation of the human being from magical

fear, a topic with which he was confronted every day of his treatment. In his Diary Warburg wrote, “To my surprise [I find] much of value in the old notes. Hunting magic, by mimetic change weather magic in the Kiva” (WIA, III. 11, no. 54a. Diary, 23 March 1923, 5887). Ernst H. Gombrich wrote that Warburg doubtlessly had

Sensed that his own mental illness had given him new insights into these ‘primitive’ states and he was confident that in describing them he would again acquire sufficient ‘distance’ to achieve that poise which he had always known to be precarious (Gombrich 1970).

Saxl was pleasantly surprised that the work went well, noting “the impetus for work is incredibly strong in the hope to get away from Kreuzlingen”. True, he complained about the lack of specialist books, which made it difficult to get Warburg away “from philosophising” and to get him to work on the material. In Saxl’s mind, it was only “actual work” which would lead Warburg “to come out of this ghost world into the world of physical health” (F. Saxl to M. Warburg, 23 March 1923).

The next day Warburg and Saxl went for a walk and visited St Ulrich, the old church of Kreuzlingen. Warburg showed Saxl the baroque side chapel with a crucifix hanging from the ceiling and a painting above it depicting the scene with the brazen serpent on a pole. He entered in his Diary, “Moses – the serpent miracle directly above the crucifixion (Augustinian erudition. Library)” (WIA, III.11, no. 54a. Diary, 24 March 1923, 5893). He spoke to Binswanger about the serpent cult, “suppressed” by Christianity, yet typologically conscious (4,21)” and “about the serpent in Kreuzlingen” (WIA, III.11, no. 54a. Diary, 24 March 1923, 5894–5895. Hebrew Bible, Numbers 21:4–9; 2 Kings 18:4). In his daily letter to Mary he referred to his finding of the serpent in Kreuzlingen, “where I showed Saxl the ceiling painting of the miracles of the brazen serpent in the Old Testament parallel to the crucifixion” as an example of banning fear. Warburg wanted to know more about it: he asked his friend Paul Ruben for an explanation from the point of view of Orthodox Judaism of “this idolatrous renunciation, sanctioned by Moses” (A. Warburg to M. Warburg, 24 March 1923). Soon afterwards he told Mary that he and Saxl had studied the book by Fewkes about the serpent dance, “doubtlessly the most interesting enclave of pagan nature religiosity in the midst of European culture from earlier centuries (Spain/Mexico) and present time” (A. Warburg to M. Warburg, 8 April 1923. Cf. Fewkes 1895, 118–141; Fewkes 1897, 273–326). And:

I resumed work on Laocoön as a symbol of the great affliction by serpents and am myself a roaring serpent-Laocoön. What I have to endure! (Warburg to Mary Warburg, 11.4.1923).



1 | Kreuzlingen, St. Ulrich church. Fresco of the Mount of Olives chapel. The erection of the brazen serpent, wall painting in the background, the large crucifix in the foreground. ©Kreuzlingen, Pffarramt, St. Ulrich. Source: Photo: Andreas Schwendener.

Aside from assisting Warburg in Kreuzlingen, Saxl kept up his correspondence with scholars, in particular Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer, who frequented the Warburg library in Hamburg, remarked that every day he understood better the arrangement of the books and the “harmony” in the library, so that he was able to see in language the link between myth and logic (E. Cassirer to F. Saxl, 24 March 1923). In a heartfelt letter Warburg thanked Cassirer:

Recently, hardly anything gave me such great joy as your letter. It made me sense the knocking on the other side of the tunnel, the attempt of a breakthrough, so that I take up again my tools, which I had put down, and try to find the courage to clear up the old debris (A. Warburg to E. Cassirer, 27 March 1923).

It was important for Warburg to be understood by Cassirer. Bing replied to a question on the brazen serpent (G. Bing to A. Warburg, 27 March 1923), Saxl updated Mary Warburg on the progress of work, and by the end of March Warburg had dictated more than 50 pages and selected 80 slides, primarily pictures of dances he had witnessed in America. The framework for the lecture was ready: Warburg would present a geographical introduction, show pictures of landscapes – “so that one can see that the people live in villages in the steppe” – of pottery and of weaving, through which he wanted to show “that they are the symbolic expressions of magical imagination”, followed by pictures of dances “as the mimic expression of magical imaginations”. He was certain that with the pictures of the life of the Hopi he would establish what was essential, what “primitive thinking distinguishes from our thinking” (F. Saxl to M. Warburg, 29 March 1923).

Alfred Doren’s lecture in the Warburg Library on 24 March 1923 on *Fortuna in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance* was extensively summarised by Bing and equally extensively commented on by Warburg. He found in Doren’s subject matter an echo of his own: the goddess of destiny, Fortuna, with her sail, rudder and horn of plenty, and the god of luck, Caerus, with his forelock, were images for making tangible intangible and incomprehensible events. “In this way Fortuna’s rudder and Caerus’s lock of luck are the graspable handles for those who fight the demonic powers of life”. The language of symbols, in which incomprehensible events are explained by causal connections, the “purely mythically anthropomorphic causation of the things generally”, comprises the essence of pagan-religious symbols on the one hand and on the other the possibility for the faithful “to grapple with this quasi human cause not only through adoration and sacrifice” (A. Warburg to A. Doren, 31 March 1923). Investigations into pagan-religious tropes stretched from Europe to America. Warburg’s use of the word “pagan” was ambiguous; what he meant was a spiritual condition, “the state of the surrender to the impulses of frenzy and of fear”. Warburg wanted to study, according to Gombrich, “this fateful heritage [...] and in this quest he freely identified the life of the individual and that of the collective mind” (Gombrich 1970, 308).

The intensive work proved very positive for Warburg: he concentrated on his research and no longer on his own musings. He wanted to understand and get to grips with the “primitive”, or magically oriented thinking, into which he had lapsed.

The doctors were impressed with his progress (F. Saxl to M. Warburg, 8 April 1923), and even Warburg himself must have been aware of it, for he praised Saxl in a letter to Doren, calling him his “best friend” (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 6 April 1923). Saxl knew he had not done enough work for the library and that he had not written regularly enough, but he worked tirelessly with Warburg in the few days left before the lecture *On logic in the magic of primitive man*, a topic which was “doubtlessly an attempt to save oneself from magic” (F. Saxl to KBW, 8 April 1923, *Über die Logik in der Magie des primitiven Menschen*).

Ludwig Binswanger wrote to Warburg’s general physician in Hamburg, Dr. Heinrich Embden, to say that he wanted to talk with him about discharging Warburg from the sanatorium. Embden had mentioned it to Mary, but Mary had written to Saxl that it would be a very difficult period for Saxl after Warburg’s return to Hamburg. She added that she could not thank Saxl adequately enough for his touching dedication to Warburg (M. Warburg to F. Saxl, 8 April 1923), for standing by Warburg in his battle, which, years ago, she had termed the battle of “astral” nature against “swamp” nature (M. Hertz to A. Warburg, 29 May 1892).

An ‘incredible occurrence’

Saxl stayed in Kreuzlingen until 24 April, after the lecture on 21 April. Mary Warburg felt it important to write to Saxl before the lecture that, if everything went as well as Saxl hoped, it would be due to Saxl’s influence (M. Warburg to F. Saxl, 15 April 1923).

On the evening before the lecture Saxl wrote a note of thanks to Warburg; he confessed that he found it beautiful that Warburg had been able to finish the task. Despite Warburg’s illness he had made a great impression on Saxl, so that he wanted to end with a Goethe quote – “Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft! Die Sonne könnt es nie erblicken!”, “Were not the eye itself a Sun / It could never perceive the Sun” (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 20 April 1923. Goethe, *Zahme Xenien*, III) – which gave the proof of Saxl’s understanding of Warburg.

On the same evening Warburg wrote to Mary full of doubts, commented that it was all in all an “incredible occurrence” that he would speak in front of the audience in the sanatorium, but in the second part of his letter (dated the next day) he sounded upbeat and reported that everything had gone really well. His son, Max Adolf, who also attended, added a postscript that the lecture was enthusiastically received:

Father, of course, used only sporadically his nearly word-for-word drafted manuscript and otherwise spoke freely and with brilliant appraisal of the audience, for whom, as a matter of fact, he had to make sacrifices with many a phrasing and instead had to ‘show’ more [...] One can only say ‘hurrah’ (M.A. Warburg to M. Warburg, part one dated 20 April 1923, part two 21 April 1923).

In his report to Hamburg, Saxl stressed that after a rehearsal on the afternoon of 21 April, the lecture in the evening went very well. The dining room of the sanatorium was filled with patients, doctors, nurses, friends and members of “intellectual” Kreuzlingen. On the lectern Warburg’s typescript lay close at hand, but he did not need to use it; he spoke freely. The evening was improved by this; it lost its academic tone and turned into a “more or less good-

humoured causerie". To Saxl it was impressive to see the command Warburg had of his topic, recasting it in a totally new form. The audience would not have been able to follow a scholarly manuscript (F. Saxl to M. Warburg, 23 April 1923). When at some stage one slide got stuck, Warburg did not panic, but waited in a jovial mood until the glitch was fixed (F. Saxl to KBW, 24 April 1923). The audience was gripped by the passion with which he spoke and discussed the question, "how does humankind save itself from primitive magic and arrive at spiritual devotion on the one hand and logical thinking on the other hand?" (F. Saxl to M. Warburg, 23 April 1923). What the reaction of "intellectual" Kreuzlingen was is anybody's guess; so far I have not found reviews about it in any local newspapers.

Five days later Warburg made Saxl promise not to show the lecture text to anybody except Mary, his friend Embden, his brother Max and Ernst Cassirer. He also specified that the lecture text must not be published, as Warburg, to whom it was "the frightening deadly spasms of a decapitated frog", had to revise it thoroughly. He thanked Saxl for his services as "birth assistant" of his "monstrosity" (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 26 April 1923).

Warburg's injunction is the reason for the late publication of this lecture. Saxl had kept his promise to Warburg not to publish it straightaway. Back in Hamburg he read the text with Embden (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 30 April 1923) and Cassirer (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 7 May 1923). He apologised to his Viennese friend Dagobert Frey for the late return of the corrected proofs of his article "Frühes Christentum und spätes Heidentum" and explained the delay was due to his seven weeks of work in Kreuzlingen. "You can imagine how important it would be to help this man on a human and scholarly level to succeed and, if possible, help this man to provide scholarly works again" (F. Saxl to D. Frey, 2 May 1923. See Saxl 1923, 63–121). After Saxl had departed from Kreuzlingen, Warburg thanked him again and lamented about pains (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 8 May 1923), impressed on him once more not to show the lecture text to anybody (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 15 May 1923) and wondered why Cassirer did not visit him – were Warburg's ideas too weak? (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 31 May 1923) Saxl was able to reassure him that Cassirer was impressed by the Serpent Ritual lecture (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 26 June 1923), but could not yet give him a date for his visit (F. Saxl to A. Warburg, 5 June 1923).

Warburg felt isolated. The lecture had not brought him back to Hamburg (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 1 June 1923), although Cassirer wrote to him that Embden would soon allow him a short stay in Hamburg. After having read Warburg's lecture, he was very much looking forward to meeting Warburg, as he realised how closely aligned their research interests were (E. Cassirer to A. Warburg, 15 June 1923).

The topic of the serpent ritual surfaced a few more times. At the end of 1923 Saxl sent Warburg Fendt's description of a Gnostic church service, stating: "it is simply marvellous how these things converge with the Zuni ceremonies" (F. Saxl to Warburg, 14 December 1923. Cf. Fendt 1922). In his reply Warburg explained his research in Kreuzlingen as the "struggle with the monster", as "an archetypal act of pictorial symbolic cosmological causation" and illustrated his view with examples from his earlier research on "Ferrara (Perseus)-Fortuna-

Luther-Oraibi" (A. Warburg to Saxl, 13 January 1924). Warburg felt in himself "an ascending power [...] for liberation from emotional dysfunction" in the time between his lecture on 21 April 1923 and Cassirer's visit on 10 April 1924; he had healed his destroyed spirit and beaten the monster himself (A. Warburg to Max Warburg, 16 April 1924).

Warburg was able to return to Hamburg for good in August 1924. He read Th. W. Danzel's 1923 books *Mexiko I: Grundzüge der altmexikanischen Geisteskultur* and *Mexiko II: Kultur und Leben im alten Mexiko* (Danzel 1923), entered into a correspondence with him about a shepherd's crook with a piece of wood in human form tied to it and asked Danzel to find the drawings by Native American children, which Warburg had loaned to the ethnological museum where Danzel worked (A. Warburg to Th.-W. Danzel, 4 October 1924). He wrote to Franz Boas about his assumption that the shepherd's crook with the human form pointed to an animal sacrifice. Via Boas he also sought to get in touch again with James Mooney at the Smithsonian Institution (A. Warburg to F. Boas, 13 December 1924), with the Mennonite missionary and Hopi expert Henry H. Voth (A. Warburg to G.A. Reichard, 1 September 1928) and with Richard Wetherill, his guide in Mancos, Colorado (C.L. Bernheimer to P. Warburg, 23 March 1925). His friends Paul and Else Hildebrandt in Berlin sent him the article *The Red Indians invoke the rain. Great festival with the Pueblo-Indians* and asked Warburg to check it prior to its publication in the youth magazine "Jugendinsel" (E. Hildebrandt to Warburg, 2 November 1926). In 1928 Warburg seriously entertained the idea of travelling for a second time to America, but his brothers were against it and Warburg went on his extended trip to Italy instead. Nevertheless, when in Rome, he wrote to church authorities to ask whether the missionary Pater Guillard, whom he had met among the Pueblos, was still alive (A. Warburg to B. Nogara, 5 March 1929).

The lecture in Kreuzlingen was printed only after Warburg's death and the move of the KBW to London. It is fitting to end with Warburg's thanks to Saxl for his "devoted support", which led him back to scholarship (A. Warburg to F. Saxl, 23 December 1923). Saxl, who understood like nobody else what linked Warburg to the Zuni, promised to write a book titled *From the Zunis to Rembrandt's Claudius Civilis. A. Warburg on his 70th birthday*, which, however, was never written. Saxl once more came to talk about the serpent ritual lecture on the occasion of his lecture at the KBW to the International Americanist Congress from 7 to 13 September 1930. He spoke about the relation of Anthropology and Art History, "as the professor had understood it", and read a passage from Warburg's lecture about the relationship of the serpent symbol and Laocoön. Bing ended her report of Saxl's lecture to Mary Warburg wistfully, confessing that "Saxl and I both had the feeling that it was the last piece of the direct legacy of the professor, and I believe, he would have been happy with the progress of the evening" (G. Bing to M. Warburg, 19 September 1930).

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Abstract

We present here an excerpt from Dorothea McEwan's book *Studies on Aby Warburg, Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing*, published in 2023 by Routledge, in its series *Variorum Collected Studies*. This fragment addresses Warburg's lecture on the *Serpent Ritual* in the Kreuzlingen Sanatorium in 1923, by exploring side by side his intellectual *milieu* in Kreuzlingen and the projects which Fritz Saxl had initiated in Hamburg.

keywords | Warburg Archive; Kreuzlingen; Aby Warburg; Fritz Saxl.



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