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Under the Volcano. Warburg's Legacy

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Under the Volcano. Warburg's Legacy

edited by

Ada Naval and Giulia Zanon



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Sommario

- 7 *Under the Volcano. Warburg's Legacy*

Ada Naval and Giulia Zanon

Unpublished

- 19 *Towards an Edition of the Atlas. Gertrud Bing's Unpublished Notes on the Mnemosyne Atlas Panels*

Gertrud Bing. Introduction, first Edition and Translation by Giulia Zanon

- 57 *Verso un'edizione dell'Atlante. Note inedite di Gertrud Bing alle Tavole di Mnemosyne*

Gertrud Bing. Introduzione, prima edizione e traduzione italiana di Giulia Zanon

- 95 *"Aby Warburg was a volcano"*

Max Adolph Warburg, first edition by Davide Stimilli

- 109 *"Aby Warburg era un vulcano"*

Max Adolph Warburg, a cura di Davide Stimilli

- 123 *Classical Tradition as a Method and a Way of Approach*

edited by Martin Tremi

- 127 *"One talked all European languages"*

edited by Chiara Velicogna

Rediscovered

- 133 *A forgotten essay by Fritz Rougemont on Warburg and the use of "bibliophily" as a scientific tool (1930)*

Fritz Rougemont, edited by Monica Centanni and Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino, with a Preliminary Note by Monica Centanni

- 143 *Ein vergessener Aufsatz von Fritz Rougemont über Warburgs Bibliophilie als wissenschaftliches Instrument (1930)*

Fritz Rougemont, herausgegeben von Monica Centanni und Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino, mit einem einleitenden Bemerkung von Monica Centanni

- 155 *Un saggio dimenticato di Fritz Rougemont su Warburg e la "bibliofilia" come strumento scientifico (1930)*
Fritz Rougemont, a cura di Monica Centanni e Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino, con una Nota di Monica Centanni

- 167 *A Fictional Letter, a Florentine Friendship*
André Jolles, edited by Wannes Wets

Readings

- 183 *Max Adolph Warburg's Doctoral Thesis and the Warburg Circle*
Dorothee Gelhard

- 205 *Giocare con il Bilderatlas. Due casi e una questione teorica*
Giovanni Careri

Presentations

- 227 *A Presentation of: Edgar Wind. Art and Embodiment, Peter Lang, London 2024*
edited by Jaynie Anderson, Bernardino Branca, and Fabio Tononi. A presentation by Ianick Takaes

- 243 *A Presentation of: Gertrud Bing im Warburg-Cassirer-Kreis, Wallstein, Göttingen 2024*
herausgegeben von Dorothee Gelhard und Thomas Roide, mit einem Vorwort von Dorothee Gelhard

- 279 *A Presentation of: Sternenfreundschaft. Die Korrespondenz Aby Warburg und Franz Boll, Wallstein, Göttingen 2024*
herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort von Dorothee Gelhard

Max Adolph Warburg's Doctoral Thesis and the Warburg Circle

Dorothee Gelhard



Max Adolph Warburg, painting for the Hamburg Planetarium Exhibition of the two poles of logos and myth, 1932 (in Fleckner et al. 1993, 119).

Aby Warburg had maintained a close correspondence with Heidelberg classical philologist Franz Boll since 1909 (Gelhard 2024). Initially collegial and professional, the exchange about Oriental influences on Greco-Roman culture gave rise, over the years, to a cordial friendship. Both men paid each other visits, providing aid with the supply of texts, photographs, and pertinent information on subjects of study, as well as following each other's work attentively and supportively. Without Boll's expertise in ancient astrology – he completed his doctorate on Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* under Wilhelm von Christ in 1894 – many discovery of Warburg's about Early Renaissance art would not have been possible (cf. amongst others the lecture

Italianische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara given at the Internationaler Kunsthistorischer Kongress in Rome 1912, in GS, 459-481. Cf. The 1920 essay *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Zeiten Luthers*, in GS, 487-558).

It does not at all come as a surprise that Warburg strongly advised his son to take up studies in Heidelberg under “dear friend Boll”. In the summer semester of 1922, Max Adolph enrolled at Heidelberg University. Boll, notwithstanding the research sabbatical he had been granted for the duration of the semester, promised the father to look after his son. On the 16th of March 1922, Boll wrote in a letter to Warburg:

Our warmest congratulations on your son's high school graduation! I'm sending off the reading list for the summer at the same time; unfortunately, we are not here, I am on leave this whole semester and am going to Italy, then to the mountains in Bavaria to process my findings, and in the second half of June I have to give guest lectures (about star belief) at the university in Munich as well. It's not until around the beginning of July that we think we'll be home (in Gelhard 2024, 307).

Since Warburg's son was to commence his studies in the summer semester of 1922 at Heidelberg University, Warburg, wanting to select courses for Max Adolph to attend, had asked Boll for a copy of the prospectus. On March 20th 1922, Warburg related the matter also to Fritz Saxl, who had assumed the role of acting director of the KBW for the duration of Warburg's hospitalisation:

Do we not regularly receive a complete list of lectures at German universities? I did order it; but people here are incredible fusspots. Regardless, I ask you to have this list dispatched to me immediately, if possible, by express delivery, as I want to come up with a study plan for Max. The choice will probably fall on Heidelberg (GS *Briefe*, 559).

In the years to come, Boll would inform the father, who was residing at the sanatorium in Kreuzlingen, of the progress of his son's studies, all the while trying to be a substitute father to Max Adolph, who originally wanted to become a painter. On the January 14th 1923, Boll informed Warburg: “Your son has returned, last Wednesday I called on him straightaway in my reading class on Aeschylus and was pleased indeed” (in Gelhard 2024, 329).

Boll also promised Warburg, who was keen on seeing his son complete his studies with a dissertation, that he would give Max Adolph, who apparently did not show an inclination for advanced scientific work, a dissertation topic that wouldn't be too sprawling and broad but would instead be reasonably accessible and manageable:

Dear friend, on Friday I had the pleasure again to see your d[ear] son in my class (as you were informed by Dr. Saxl, I had assumed he was still in the Odenwald doing his paintings!). We talked a good deal; he is willing to agree to your idea regarding a doctorate, and I think I'll be able to give him a topic that he enjoys and can be successful with. He wants to do other things during the holidays, but he will spend his semesters working on it (in Gelhard 2024, 334).

Unfortunately, it cannot be verified whether the topic on which Max Adolph received his doctorate in 1927 (the doctoral thesis was published two years later, dedicated to his father) was indeed the one Boll had in mind. Franz Boll died unexpectedly on the 3rd of July 1924 so that Max had to find a new supervisor for his dissertation. He went to Berlin, where he was accepted as a doctoral student by Werner Jaeger. The decision for Jaeger can be understood from the correspondence between Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Jaeger. Calder, who edited this correspondence, found out that the University of Heidelberg had plans to appoint Jaeger as Boll's successor (Calder 1978, 336). However, 76-year-old Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, a pen-friend of Boll's and mentor to Jaeger, was committed not only to keeping Jaeger in Berlin, on which issue he persuaded the Prussian ministry, but he also wanted to preempt the Heidelberg offer. The Negotiations were, of course, confidential, and Wilamowitz-Moellendorff would not have considered sharing information about the proceedings by letter with Jaeger had he not already known of the Berlin University's intentions to appoint Jaeger. Since Wilamowitz-Moellendorff loathed his phone, the letter in question is available today (Calder 1978, 339).

Thus, following Boll's death, Max Adolph did not do his doctorate under philosopher Ernst Cassirer in Hamburg, which would have been an obvious choice due to Cassirer's close ties with the Warburg Circle, but Max Adolph opted for a colleague of Boll's from Classical Philology, who was not affiliated with the Warburg Circle: Werner Jaeger. Jaeger never gave a lecture at the KBW and, though he was exchanging occasional letters with Boll, he was a stranger to Warburg's research. Max Adolph published his dissertation on Plato entitled *Zwei Fragen zum Kratylos* (*Two Questions on Cratylus*) in 1929, dedicating it to his father, who was still able to witness the happy completion of his son's course of studies.

The traces of his mentor Boll are nonetheless unmistakable in Max Adolph's work. Boll had himself always wanted to write a book on Plato. He did not get around to it since the oriental traces in Hellenism, which he set out to work on first, proved too numerous and diverse a topic. In his obituary, Ernst Hoffmann commented on this:

Boll, however, was more than a philologist with extensive skills. He was the co-discoverer and pre-eminent researcher of a new area of ancient history. If today astrology is a field with which we have to familiarise ourselves not only when we wish to disclose historically the symbols and motifs of beliefs and superstitions, of myth and art, but if today the history of philosophy, in terms both of its world concept and its school concept, does no longer seem fully understandable without thorough consideration of astrology, then Boll was the pioneering scholar here (Hoffmann 1924).

Boll did, nevertheless, hold regular seminars and lectures on Plato; he gave a new translation of the *Symposion* during the first years of World War I; and he gave a holiday course on Plato aimed at teachers returning from the war, which was very fondly remembered by its participants. Boll told Wilamowitz-Moellendorff about it (letter from Boll to Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 12th September 1920, in Heilen 2003, 141). Richard Reitzenstein, in his obituary for Boll, also makes mention of this seminar held in the Black Forest (Reitzenstein 1924-1925, 48). Moreover, at least some transcripts from Boll's Plato lectures, which Ernst Hoffmann took

in 1920 and 1921, have survived and are now in the Heidelberg University Archives (Estate Ernst Hoffmann, Heid. Hs. 3547). Hoffmann, who attended lectures by Ernst Cassirer in Berlin, would himself later specialise in Plato; he was appointed a professorship at the University of Heidelberg in 1922. In the summer semester of 1924, Hoffmann held a lecture on *Platon und die Geschichte des Platonismus bis zur Gegenwart*, which Max Adolph likely attended.

The Dissertation

In his lecture notes, Hoffmann mentions a remark of Boll's about *Cratylus*. Socrates not only converses with *Cratylus* in this dialogue, but he also discusses the origin of language with Hermogenes, to which Boll remarked: "Plato was probably all but coerced by his students into discussing such things" (Ernst Hoffmann's transcript, 24).

Max Adolph, however, did not mention his teacher and mentor Boll with a single word in his dissertation. He did not include a bibliography or footnotes, either. For the most part, it falls to the reader to ascertain the source texts and the secondary literature consulted. Sparse though they are, some references nevertheless show that Max Adolph was intimately acquainted with the thinking and the work of the KBW Circle. The following names are mentioned in the text: Ernst Hoffmann (a colleague of Boll and Ernst Cassirer, together with whom he had been working since 1916 on a manual on the history of ancient Greek philosophy), Eva Sachs [1], Ernst Cassirer, Werner Jaeger (the first reviewer of Max Adolph Warburg's dissertation), and, on more than one occasion, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff [2]. However, Max Adolph refers to these names in so casual a manner that one gets the impression that the ideas they represent were entirely familiar to Max Adolph and the readership he had in mind; hence, any further explanation was unnecessary.

It is only when taking up a critical position that Max Adolph explicitly mentions secondary literature. He distances himself not only from the works of Leopold Cohn (Cohn emphasises Heraclides Ponticus as a representative of the theory of etymology, see Cohn 1884, 84) and Hans von Armin (one of Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's first doctoral students, receiving his doctorate from him in Greifswald in 1882 with a thesis *De prologorum Euripideorum arte et interpretatione*), but above all from an essay Ernst Hoffmann, too, had expressly noted in his transcript of Boll's 1921 lecture: Hermann Diels' *Die Anfänge der Philologie bei den Griechen* (in Diels 1969). Diels declared Heraclitus to be the father of philology, assuming that, in *Cratylus*, Plato was concerned with the Heraclitean law that "everything flows" (Diels 1969, 70). Voicing his objection, Max Adolph argues in his dissertation in an opposite direction.

Astrology between Myth and Logos

As mentioned, Boll remains unnamed in Max Adolph's dissertation and yet is present throughout and needs be taken into account. The remark that Plato discussed "such things" may have been the impetus for Max Adolph's work. In fact, the dissertation answers this question. In addition, it can be seen as a contribution to the topic which became Aby Warburg's life's work and which altogether determined the thinking and the work of the Warburg Circle: the

tracing of the polarity between myth and logos in cultural history. It was chiefly with the help of Boll that Warburg was able to work on the one area of cultural history in which a collision of the two poles is particularly evident: astrology. The Greek gods, as rulers of the cosmos, would come to be displaced, in the course of cultural history, by mathematical calculations of the sky, by astronomy:

Anyone who takes a closer look and is used to considering the historical documents themselves carefully will soon notice that, despite the oriental origin of astrology, Greek thought also made a significant impact to it. Of course, this may seem like a dubious merit. For there is in fact hardly any other belief or superstition whose foundations have so completely disappeared from us and become so elusive than astrology; the verdict of the Enlightenment hit this 'scientific' superstition harder and more devastatingly than any other, perhaps precisely because it had been so exceedingly vibrant just moments before (Boll [1910] 1950, 29).

Logos, it seems, overcame myth. When Max Adolph was writing his dissertation, Aby Warburg was busy visualising these polar directions of cultural development using the panels he had prepared for his *Mnemosyne Atlas*. In 1927 Aby Warburg curated an exhibition on *Sterndeutung und Sternnglauben* in the Deutsches Museum in Munich. He was working on expanding this exhibition for the planetarium in Hamburg, but he did not live to see it realised. Aby Warburg died on the 26th of October 1929. However, Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl were vehemently committed to the project and continued supporting it so that the exhibition could finally be shown in 1932. Max Adolph painted a two-part painting which was installed above the entrance to the exhibition. In his painting, he combined the two poles of logos and myth, or astronomy and astrology. Max Adolph's painting is an illustration not only for his father's exhibition, but also for his own dissertation, which he dedicated to his father. When depicting the side of myth, Max Adolph apparently followed illustrations of the *Planetenkinder*, which Anton Hauber had published in 1916 (Hauber 1916) while he chose a comet entering the planetary orbits of Jupiter and Saturn to visualise the logos (a black-and-white photograph of the painting is reproduced in Fleckner et al. 1993, 119).

While in Kreuzlingen, Aby Warburg had still hoped to be able to bring his two colleagues, Boll and Cassirer, together, and he had high hopes that the cross-fertilisation of their work would benefit his new conception of cultural studies. This wish was dashed by Boll's death. However, in his memorial speech for Boll at the KBW in April 1925, Warburg made it clear how much Boll had meant to him personally and professionally, expressing the intention to continue the joint work (Warburg [1925] 2008, 68).

With the help of Boll, Warburg was able to delve into the field of ancient astrology, and he recognised in it source material indispensable for deciphering works of art in the early Renaissance; Cassirer, on the other hand, introduced Warburg to the mathematical side of astrology, astronomy. It is thus no coincidence that at their first meeting the two should have discussed Kepler and his discovery of the elliptical orbit of Mars. Warburg had always pointed out that cultural-historical development was by no means – as Diels claimed (Diels 1969, 68f.) – linear in direction, that is, tending towards an increase in rationality, but that mythical and rational

thinking coexist at all times. Warburg analysed this dynamic in detail in his Luther essay, the publication of which he ultimately owed to Boll (this essay, the editing and publication of which Boll had championed vigorously, first appeared in the “Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften” in 1920).

In his dissertation, Max Adolph follows the two premises on which cultural studies in the Warburg Circle were based: firstly, the conviction in the simultaneity of mythical and rational thinking in cultural history and, secondly, the assumption that it was the role of astrology from antiquity to the Renaissance to mediate between these two poles. Even a rational philosopher like Plato had knowledge of such a belief in the stars. Boll remarked about Plato's relationship to the divinity of the stars:

Plato and Aristotle did not abandon their belief in the animation and divinity of the stars, which could only be strengthened and deepened through the knowledge of the strict laws of their orbits. In Plato's dialogues there are passages that later made it easy for the Neoplatonists to accept the astrological system; the fact that these passages in Plato all belong to his myths made no difference to them. Aristophanes' joke in the Platonic Symposium about the sun, earth and moon people, the myth in the tenth book of the Republic, where the stars and human fate become closely intertwined – the myth about Ananke, the goddess of iron necessity, who rules the world with her daughters, the Moirae – and especially certain passages in the Timaeus could readily be interpreted in an astrological sense (Boll [1910] 1950, 31f.).

Richard Reitzenstein makes a similar argument in his lecture on *Plato und Zarathustra*, given in 1926 at the KBW (Reitzenstein [1923-1924] 1967, 31).

In five steps, then, Max Adolph seeks to understand how Plato, too, had come to deal with “such things”, and perhaps also how he had no choice but to do so. “Such things” had, after all, been integrated into the Platonic Academy and ultimately pushed forward the discussions there. In this context, it can be stated that Max Adolph made a precise and conscious effort when giving the few references he made explicit: he incorporates into his own interpretation Eva Sachs' study on Platonic mathematics, Cassirer's works on mythical thinking as well as *Eidos and Eidolon* (this is one of few titles Max Adolph explicitly mentions; cf. page 104 of his dissertation), Ernst Hoffmann who reads *Cratylus* – just like Diels – as a discussion of Heraclitus (Ernst Hoffmann typescript, 92), and Franz Boll's works on ancient astrology.

The Audience and the Question of Dating of Plato's Dialogue *Cratylus*

Zwei Fragen zum Kratylus, consists of two parts and five sections. In each subchapter, Max Adolph reminds the reader not to be misled by the obvious comedy and irony of the dialogue. The dissertation takes its starting point in the “Heraclitus motif” of “panta rhei”, which Diels had read literally. Socrates discusses it in detail, making it clear that it represents a special form of relativistic thinking he does not find convincing (page 8). Diels, on the other hand, was convinced that *Cratylus* introduced Plato to Heraclitus' thinking; however, as a philosopher, Plato was unable to come to terms with philological method (Diels 1969, 73). Max Adolph firmly rejects this notion and, in addition to Diels, also rejects Usener's etymological investi-

gations in *Götternamen* (Diels draws upon Usener's opus magnum *Götternamen* (1895); cf. Diels 1969, 73). His dissertation instead follows in the path of Boll's astrological works, as well as tracing Cassirer's symbolic forms.

The first part of the work analyses the context in which the dialogue emerged, which forms the basis for the interpretation in the second part. Max Adolph, therefore, starts with the question of whom Socrates actually addresses in his statements about the origin of language. The "dialogue opponents", he argues, are not Socrates' dialogue partners, Cratylus and Hermogenes, but his speech is addressed to someone who remains unnamed (page 10 ff.). Max Adolph thus cautions against an overly literal and superficial reading from the beginning, stating that Plato did neither – as he claims – argue against Heraclitus, nor were the ones named in the text, Antisthenes and Euthyphro, his actual addressees. Rather, the argument was directed at Heraclides Ponticus, Plato's deputy at the Academy, whose father was also named Euthyphro:

It goes without saying that the patronyms of the comrades were known to everyone in the Academy, and we know from Plato's own dialogues that the younger they were, the more commonly the young men were called by these patronyms. There is no mistaking the fact that this is a mere play on homonymy, and being an allusion incompatible with the style of any other Platonic dialogue, the comedy of names, which was obviously only written for a small, familiar circle, did not seem surprising to us (page 30).

Boll had also emphasised the importance of Heraclides Ponticus for an understanding of ancient astrology:

The Porta Vesperis in the starry sky, to which Anaxagoras apparently was referring, marks the beginning of the western, i. e. the Hades half of the sky, and it is located just where the Milky Way ends, which Heraclides of Pontus and others viewed as the place where immortal souls reside (Boll [1908] 1950, 20).

The argument that Heraclides Ponticus assumed the Milky Way to be the "abode of the blest" was taken up in 1931 by Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. In the second volume of *Der Glaube der Hellenen* he includes the controversial text in question, *περί τῶν ἐν Ἄϊδου*, proving Heraclides Ponticus to be the author (Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1955, 525ff.).

Finding out who the actual addressee is enables Max Adolph then to re-date the dialogue. He comes to the conclusion that *Cratylus* must have been written between Plato's first and second trips to Sicily, as an immediate prelude to the *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*:

The transformation of Democritean elements in the *Timaeus* is today, due to the research of I. Hammer-Jensen and Eva Sachs, a well-known fact. Even so, the legend of Plato's aversion to Democritus, like all such legends, has a grain of truth – in the sense that the initial, purely Socratic world of Plato hardly shared any common ground with the world of Democritus. It was not before the Platonic cosmos was reshaped that it was able to assimilate the form of Abderite spirituality, just as it did with astronomical research, which was originally no less alien to it. The debate in the *Theaetetus* would represent the first station we can determine on this path of assimilation,

which, if we want to maintain a parallel with the gradual reception and reformation of astronomy [...] (page 33).

Based on Heraclides' life dates, the method of language statistics Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's first doctoral student, Hans von Armin, employed, and his own comparative reading of Plato's dialogues, Max Adolph is convinced that *Cratylus* should not only be treated as an ironic prelude to the dialogues *Theaetetus* and the cosmology in *Timaeus*, but that is possible to ascertain an even more precise date: the 70s of the fourth century.

Exegesis of *Cratylus*

The second part of Max Adolph's dissertation is based on Boll's question as to why "Plato concerned himself with such things" (Plato, *Cratylus*, 408 d ff.). Boll was referring to superstitious ideas as part of the mythical world of images of the Greek gods. He analysed the attitude of ancient authors to astrology in a number of essays, lectures, and in various chapters of his books. In 1903, Boll published his main work *Sphaera* on the influence of the *Sphaera* Barbarica in Hellenism (Boll 1903). Together with Franz Cumont, from 1898 onwards, he published *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum*. In this context, Max Adolph's dissertation can be seen as a supplement to Boll's work. It is Max Adolph's aim to show that the dialogue in question, *Cratylus*, marks a turning point in the discussions which took place in the Platonic Academy. The late Plato, he points out, showed an interest in, and warmed to the idea of, religion. Max Adolph not only draws on Boll, but also on a statement by Reitzenstein in *Plato und Zarathustra* about the meaning of myth in *Timaeus*:

In the form of the transformation it underwent and through the reinforcement it received from another source by the new religion, the old Greek religious thought persists until today. The fact that we can trace this transmission so clearly here, in the period of upheaval no less, must give us courage to look for similar instances in periods where there is less external evidence (Reitzenstein [1923-1924] 1967, 37).

In *Sternglauben und Sterndeutung*, Max Adolph's mentor, Boll, highlighted Plato's religious transition in the *Timaeus* through the philosopher's study of astrology as well (Boll [1913] 1918, 24). Boll wrote to Wilamowitz-Moellendorff:

What wears me out here is above all the relationship between Greece and the Orient; new cases keep revealing the material dependence of the Greeks in pre- and post-classical times, and yet I always feel the enormous superiority of the Greeks, who demand and secure a cosmos, over the wild chaos of the Orient. However, without a more intimate acquaintance with oriental research, it would not be possible to present the matter convincingly (Letter from Boll to Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 25th July 1914, in Heilen 2003, 123).

Max Adolph, too, believes that scientific knowledge among the Greeks did not develop gradually, as Diels had claimed (Diels 1969, 68), but via detours, one of which was astrology.

Referencing Cassirer

The dissertation also links Boll to Cassirer: when dealing with the question of the function of the ancient gods as star deities in Greek thought, Max Adolph takes a philological approach

to Cassirer's cultural-philosophical argument. Consequently, Socrates' obvious mockery in *Cratylus* of attempts to explain language etymologically is central to Max Adolph, and he analyses it using two examples, "Greek tragedy" and "meteorology". Max Adolph began his studies under Boll in the winter semester 1922/23, in which Boll held a seminar on Greek tragedy and offered a course on *Sternglaube in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*. The correspondence between Boll and Aby Warburg attests that Max Adolph was in attendance (Cf. letter from Boll to Aby Warburg, 14th January 1923, in Gelhard 2024, 329).

Max Adolph clearly acknowledges Cassirer in his dissertation. On Warburg's initiative, Cassirer was appointed to the chair of philosophy at the newly founded University of Hamburg in 1919, and Warburg's library became an essential source for his thinking. In her memoirs, Toni Cassirer tells of Ernst Cassirer's first visit to the KBW:

I remember how, after his first visit to the library, Ernst came home in a state of excitement that was very unusual for him. He told me that this library was something incredibly unique and magnificent and that Dr. Saxl, who had shown it to him, seemed to be a remarkably curious, original man; however, after the tour through the long rows of books, Ernst told him that he would never be coming back because otherwise he would most certainly get lost in this labyrinth. [...] Discovering the Warburg library was like discovering a treasure trove in which Ernst unearthed one treasure after another. Saxl was happy to have found someone who had immediately grasped the question on which the entire collection was based. [...] A look at the collection and Ernst's contribution to it will best illustrate how reciprocal and fruitful the relationship between him and the Warburg Library was. Ernst's preoccupation with the problem of symbolic forms required the study of a kind of literature which would have been impossible to come by in as comprehensive a manner anywhere else in the world (Cassirer T. 2003, 126f.).

Cassirer, who was preparing his main work, the *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, when he met Saxl, was immediately invited by him to give a lecture, in which he presented, *in nuce*, the core idea of his cultural philosophy. It underpins, in philosophical terms, the questions with which Warburg dealt and on which Max Adolph based his interpretation of Plato.

The extent to which Cassirer moreover relies on a Jewish understanding of language and culture is nowhere more evident than in his 1921 lecture *Der Aufbau der symbolischen Form in den Geisteswissenschaften* (Cassirer [1921-1922] 1967). The definition of the "symbolic form" as "spiritual energy" through which "a spiritual meaning is linked to a concrete sensory sign, being spiritually appropriated to this sign" (Cassirer [1923] 1994, 175), is a philosophical interpretation of the biblical verse Gen. 2,7:

וַיִּצָרְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֹפֶר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפּוֹ נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

"And the Lord baked a man out of brass, breathed into him a living being, and the man became a soul" (translation by the author). In Hebrew there is a relationship between נָפַח, *nafach*, "to blow, to breathe into", נֶפֶשׁ, *nefesch*, "soul, living being, form", and finally "footfall or kneeling". However, the word the German translation chose, "nose", Hebrew אָף, *af*, is not in the Hebrew text, from which אָפוּ, *ofu*, "character" or אָפָה, *afa*, "bake" could be derived. Ra-

ther, a Hebrew understands the verse like this: God's spirit or soul bends down and brings into a form, creates, or shapes the soul that has come into existence. Thus, through God's Spirit, the soul comes into existence in the form of a human being. Man is the existing soul of the living Being (God). God's being, brought into a form, is the human soul. Man is the Spirit of God brought into a form, or expressed. This is the Hebrew Bible's idea of creation, which is deeply Platonic: man participates in God's being through his soul. Living being becomes an existing soul. Moreover, since הִיא, *haja*, "to be" does not denote a static state in Hebrew, but rather a dynamic state of becoming, this idea of creation designates, in Hebraic terms, the emergence of form which is at the basis of Cassirer's conception of the *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*.

In Cassirer's philosophical language, there are two poles, "spirit" and "sensory sign", with an energy conveying a spiritual meaning from the inside to the outside, as well as from the outside to the inside. With this conception, Cassirer distances himself from representation theorists, who assume that what is seen on the outside is depicted as a congruent image on the inside; Cassirer assumes instead that our consciousness translates an external impression or stimulus into a "free activity" on the inside. He sees this oscillation between inside and outside, spirit and sensory sign taking place equally on different levels, with the "spirit" having different mediators: in language it is the phonetic symbol, in myth and art it is the pictorial figures, and in knowledge it is the intellectual signs, all of which Cassirer refers to as symbols. He is interested in how it is possible for general laws to emerge from a process which is individual at first:

This process is manifest to us whenever consciousness does not settle simply for having a sensory content, but when it creates it from within itself. It is the force of this generation that transforms the mere content of sensation and perception into symbolic content. The image then ceases to be an external thing; it has become something to which an inner form is given and in which a basic principle of free formation prevails. This is the achievement we observe in individual 'symbolic forms', in language, in myth, in art. Each of these forms not only originates from the sensory, but also remains contained constantly within the sensory sphere (Cassirer [1923] 1994, 177f.).

An artistic form, thus, only emerges when intuition is not dictated by mere impressions and when there is a unique language of forms in which the spirit of the speaker finds an expression. By means of his language of forms, the artist shows something of the essence of things. Central to Cassirer's remarks is the reference to Plato, whom he does not mention explicitly: "We create internal illusions of external objects" (Cassirer [1923] 1994, 179f.). Cassirer, too, is concerned with the power of inner formation. The productiveness of culture lies in this inner power of "formation". This is the philosophical interpretation of Gen. 2,7. The existing soul participates in the divine living being through its ability to "create images or forms" (Cassirer [1923] 1994, 188). For Cassirer, humans do not have a passive mimetic relationship to their environment, but rather one of active formation or action (*ma'as*).

In the second part of his lecture, while explicitly referring to Warburg's research, Cassirer examines how the relationship between image and sign has changed over the course of cultural

history; he distinguishes four stages of consciousness: mythical consciousness is characterised by the indifference between image and thing. In religious consciousness a separation sets in for the first time between what is signified and what signifies, whereas the magical way of speaking employs signs in general. This is why man no longer beholds the saint himself in the image of a saint, but only perceives a representation of him in it. This achievement of abstraction is the most advanced in scientific consciousness. For the conceptual thinking characteristic of it, the image is completely separated from things and, by virtue of this separation, is able to create ever new forms through analysis and synthesis. While in myth the synthesis was, so to speak, tangible, in the scientific consciousness the synthesis can link even the most distant of elements with one another. In this way, the perceptual world which has become so familiar to humans eventually dissolves, only to re-emerge in a different dimension and in a new conceptual form.

Art or aesthetic consciousness, on the hand, and language, on the other, mediate between these three symbolic forms. With his concluding remarks about language as a symbolic form, Cassirer unmistakably distances himself from the discussions about language and form of his contemporaries. Cassirer neither follows the narrow logic of the formalists, for whom language was increasingly becoming a system of arbitrary signs, in which human agency and content as such are gradually eliminated, being sacrificed at the altar of a seemingly “objectifiable” scientificity; nor does he approve of the statements of Martin Heidegger, whose return to the “murmurous, pure language” of myth showed strong influences from Romanticism, impressing the likes of Walter Benjamin.

Like Boll a lifelong, careful reader of Goethe, Cassirer emphasised instead the ‘mediating’ aspect of language, in which he recognised, not a deficiency, but a productive potential:

Every spiritual form seems at once to represent a shell in which the spirit encloses itself. If it were possible to strip off all of these coverings, only then – it seems – would we penetrate to the real, unadulterated reality, to the reality of the subject and the object. However, just looking at language and the position it occupies in the structure of the spiritual world must raise concerns about conclusions of this kind. If it were possible to truly eliminate all indirectness of linguistic expression and all the conditions imposed upon us because of it, then we would not be confronted with the wealth of pure intuition, the indescribable fullness of life itself, but we would only be ensnared once again within the narrowness and dullness of sensual consciousness. [...] Behind every specific circle of symbols and signs – whether they are linguistic or mystical, artistic or intellectual – there are always certain formative energies. To divest oneself of the sign, not just in one or the other form, but in all forms, would at the same time mean destroying these energies (Cassirer [1923] 1994, 199f.).

By presenting Warburg’s method and the structure of the library itself as a principle of inner necessity, Cassirer’s lecture was a nod to the founder of the KBW Warburg, who was long ignored by the academic world of his time, never received greater recognition. And this recognition is all the more remarkable as Cassirer delineates with it his own philosophical standpoint. The lecture, which can be read as a preparatory work for the *Philosophie der symbolischen*

Formen, equates Cassirer's reference to Plato's philosophy and his affiliation with the Jewish faith more clearly than in any later text.

The focus is on Cassirer's reflections on the "power of inner formation" (Cassirer [1923] 1994, 187). There are two different roots in Hebrew from which the word "form" can be derived: –ד-מ-ה, *dalet-mem-he* or ע-צ-ב, *ajin-tzade-bet*. The former is used in Hebrew to describe a "figure" which denotes an "imagination", an "imago", דמות, *demut*. It goes back to the verb דמה, *dama*, "to resemble" or "to be the same", from which דמיון, *dimjon* "similarity" or "phantasy" is derived.

The verb עיצב, *itsev*, "to shape, to give form" is derived from the root ע-צ-ב, *ajin-tzade-bet*. "Formation" is עיצוב, *azuv*, and the tree of knowledge, עצ, *ets*, is also formed with this root. However, the same root is also used to denote "inflicting suffering", from which עצבה, *etsev*, "sorrow, suffering" or עצבה, *atsav*, "nerve" is formed, and עצבה, *etsav*, finally, denotes "division".

The path of the symbolic forms from mythical consciousness to scientific consciousness, which Cassirer describes in his lecture, can be traced with these two Hebrew root words: from the mythical דמה to the scientific עצב. The fact that Cassirer – and he agrees explicitly with Warburg on this – by no means conceived of a progressive development can be exemplified with the help of the verbal imagery in Hebrew. One form does not replace the other, but rather arises from a different "consciousness of formation". Under the premise of free activity, the spiritual energies Cassirer mentions at the beginning lead to "a world of self-created signs and images" (Cassirer [1923] 1994, 175), in which sometimes the similarity דמיון (*dimjon*) and sometimes the division and knowledge עצבה (*etzav*) predominates. The expressions created, however, "come between us and the objects; however, they do not only denote negatively the distance to which the object moves for us, but also create the only possible and adequate mediation and the medium through which any spiritual being becomes comprehensible and understandable to us" (Cassirer [1923] 1994, 176).

In addition to its philosophical proposition, Cassirer's lecture also contains a message to the seriously ill Warburg, who, in 1921, still had considerable doubts about his recovery: whilst emphasising the fact that "spiritual energies" determine our existence from the beginning and can sometimes have a threatening and overwhelming effect, Cassirer counters this by stating, in no uncertain terms, that the "expressions created come between us and the objects". The great achievement of humans as creators of culture is that they are capable of distance. Highlighting this not as a deficit but as a basic human trait, Cassirer makes more than just a collegial gesture to Warburg, who was driven by phobic fears.

A few years later, in 1924, Warburg took up exactly this idea of "spiritual energy" and its transformation into symbols in his lecture on the *Schlangenritual*, with which he wanted to prove to Binswanger and, above all, to himself that he was capable of rational thought again. Before delivering his lecture publicly, Warburg gave it to his friend Ernst Cassirer to read:

The existence side by side of rational cultivation and imaginative magic reveals the heterogeneous state of transition in which the Pueblo Indian lives. [...] The Indian stands midway between logic and magic, and his instrument of orientation is the symbol. Between the primitive man who snatches the nearest booty, and the enlightened man who plans and awaits the result of his action, is the man who interposes symbols between himself and the world (Warburg [1923] 1939, 282).

When Max Adolph emphasises “etymology among the Greeks” as a form of thinking, he means the same thing Cassirer had referred to as “mythical thinking”:

Whereas modern etymology completely eliminates references to given objects, taking into account the entirety of linguistic manifestations instead, Greek etymology, on the contrary, presupposes the greatest interest in the objects themselves, thus imposing a natural limitation on the considerable pool of words relevant to etymology: only such words are etymologically valid to the Greeks that, in the most succinct Goethean sense, ‘mean’ something. [...] where the old fear of the word, stemming from the indissoluble, physical-mental unity of sound and meaning, has been overcome for good. Only now that body and soul have been separated, so to speak, can the grammarian, the anatomist of language, do his work. [...] If the etymon is, as we take it to be, a necessary and organic form of Greek thinking, understanding its workings will require us to observe the organic relationship between *μῦθοι* and *λόγοι* in earlier and more productive centuries (pages 67f.).

Cassirer remarks about mythical thinking:

Whereas scientific cognition can combine elements only by differentiating them in the same basic critical act, myth seems to roll up everything it touches into unity without distinction. The relations it postulates are such that the elements which enter into them not only enter into a reciprocal ideal relationship, but become positively identical with one another, become one and the same ‘thing’. [...] Concerning the basic mythical trend Preuss has written, for example: “It is as though a particular object cannot be regarded as distinct once it has aroused magical interest but always bears within it an appurtenance to other objects with which it is identified, so that its outward appearance constitutes only a kind of veil, a mask” (Cassirer [1925] 1994, 81f., translation by Ralph Manheim).

Max Adolph confirms in philological terms the difference between conceptual and mythical thought, which Cassirer had laid out in his *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*. Taking the meaning of *ἐτυμὸν* (that which is essential) seriously, Max Adolph demonstrates that Greek etymological thought is equivalent to a magical way of thinking which requires images to be taken literally:

The principal subject of etymology are the gods. In an absolute sense, only they can “have a name” (*ὀνομαστοί*). Thus, to assign a place to etymology in Greek thought means to classify it not with philology, but with mythology. [...] Similarly, etymological variations on one and the same word, which are oftentimes countless, need be interpreted in terms of a “pictorial-magical elevation” of the word in question. One cannot expect a word that is perceived as an image to also be a concept (pages 70, 72).

Magic speech is affective in nature. This is evident in particular when invoking the name of a god. The act of enunciation is accompanied by reverence for both the form and the effect

of the divine name. Fear of the gods, as Cassirer observed, ultimately resulted in the profane and the sacred world to be separated (Cassirer [1925] 1994, 270). This separation of a sacred place from the profane rest of the world constitutes at the same time the initial act of abstraction from magic speech (Cassirer [1925] 1994, 275). Max Adolph adopts Cassirer's cultural-philosophical outlook and transforms it into a philological viewpoint when he remarks:

The etymologisation of a word is an indication of the affective value it holds, while at the same time indicating the ongoing process of the spiritualisation of pathos. Etymologisation presupposes that affective blindness, in this case represented by the φόβος, has changed into vivid θαυμάζειν, which, according to Aristotle, is also a pathos, albeit a chiefly philosophical one. Much more so than the continuation of the logos itself, which, being essentially a self-created world, can be broken down by its creator as far as the ἄτροπον, the ὄνομα is the object of astonishment here. But what is the ἄτροπον of language? – For a cultist people, it is the name: one must not disregard its meaning; whoever dared dissect it would commit sacrilege (page 75).

In *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Cassirer had shown that an increasing suppression of magic-mythical thought in cultural history ultimately gave rise to the symbolic form of science (Cassirer [1925] 1994a, 252). Max Adolph adopts this idea (Cassirer [1925] 1994b, 145) of turning points within cultural development, at which one symbolic form (in this case myth) is replaced by another (in this case religion).

Max Adolph is interested not in the teleology of culture, but in the productivity of the “spiritual cult of images” (page 81) in Greek thought. He follows the crucial line of thought Cassirer had laid out: from a linguistic point of view, conceptual speech represents an impoverishment or reduction compared to the expressive diversity of image-thinking. Cassirer had described this phenomenon in detail in *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (Cassirer [1925] 1994a, 266). Max Adolph also agrees with Cassirer's conclusion that it is the task of art to enrich with linguistic images the impoverishment brought about by conceptual speech: “The work of linguistic imagination is indeed closely linked to a specific methodology of linguistic thinking” (Cassirer [1925] 1994a, 279). In *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Cassirer had outlined the path marking the push-back of magic and myth in favour of the logos, which is manifest in language and can be observed also by the decline of religion in cultural life (Cassirer [1925] 1994b, 238ff.). While in exile in America Cassirer shifted his attention to the overwhelming return of myth. His monograph entitled *Myth of the State* (New Haven 1946) does not only present an investigation into the causes of totalitarianism, but is also, essentially, an analysis of the ideologisation of politics.

Similarly, with his interpretation of *Cratylus*, Max Adolph tries to identify the specific moment in time at which discussions in Plato's Academy turned towards religion. Unlike Cassirer's investigations in the 1920s might suggest, religion was not replaced by the abstract logos in Plato's circle but, viceversa, Plato's abstract logos turned towards religion, embracing its magical and mythical aspects. It is Max Adolph's thesis that the new focus on religious questions in the academy apparently required a detour through mythical thinking, if it was to be accepted. Accordingly, Plato remarks in *Cratylus*:

Now that the essence of things should be called [H]estia [...] is rational enough. And there is reason in the Athenians calling that [H]estia which participates in ousia. For in ancient times we too seem to have said esia for ousia, and this you may note to have been the idea of those who appointed that sacrifices should be first offered to [H]estia, which was natural enough if they meant that [H]estia was the essence of things (Plato, *Cratylus*, 401 c., translation by Benjamin Jowett).

When talking about the divine, cultic image-thinking, which had deep cultural roots (page 81), proved indispensable to the Greeks. Rejecting Diels' interpretation, which implies Plato did not understand *Cratylus* correctly (Diels 1969, 74), Max Adolph is convinced that Plato was fully aware of the importance of etymology in religion. Plato speaks more clearly of the astrological tradition in *Phaedrus*, where he mentions, among others, Zeus, who is worshipped as the leader of the twelve Olympian gods. In *Erforschung der antiken Astrologie* (Boll [1908] 1950, 21), Boll also refers to passage in question from Plato's dialogue in order to demonstrate the connection between Greek astronomy and the Babylonian cult of images. Plato remarks:

The great ruler in heaven, Zeus, driving his winged chariot, is now the first to set out, arranging and providing for everything, and after him follows the host of gods and spirits, arranged in eleven trains. For Hestia remains alone in the house of the gods. But all the others, arranged as ruling gods according to the number of twelve, lead in the order assigned to each. There are many wonderful things to see and do within heaven, and the blessed gods turn to them, each doing their part (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246 e. 247 a.).

Max Adolph states:

As it is impossible for the Greek work of art, because of the deeply rooted principle of μίμησις [imitation], to detach itself from its cultic idea, and for the statue to detach itself from the archetype of the deity depicted (no matter how much the ties may be loosened), so too is it impossible to say or imagine a meaningful word without it being reminiscent, in sympathetic terms, of other words which, infused with ancient emotions, are incarnate in nature. For better or worse, even the harshest rationalist has to come to terms with these ἀγάλματα [statues]; unless he wants to dispense with associative thinking altogether, he cannot do without them. [...] Through the practice of allegory, a new concept, which is often still abstract and pale, is connected to a name from the old world of images and is thus incorporated into the religious bloodstream of the religious cosmos (page 81).

Referencing Boll

In the winter semester of 1922/23, Max Adolph attended Boll's lecture on *Sternglauben in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*. The name of the god, the cult image, and speech coincide in astrology. In this way, Max Adolph draws a line from Cassirer to Boll. Aby Warburg had already stated in his Schifanoja essay: "Astrology is, at its core, nothing but a fetishism of names projected onto the future" (in WEB, 377).

With his interpretation of *Cratylus*, Max Adolph supplements the history of astrology presented by Boll in *Sternglaube und Sterndeutung* (Boll [1913] 1918, 24). However, Boll had emphasised in his book – without further explanation – Plato's "conviction in the divinity of the stars" (Boll [1913] 1918, 24), citing, as evidence, not only Aristophanes' well-known fairytale in the

Symposium about spherical people but, more importantly, the myth of the celestial spheres and the spindle of necessity, which mark the conclusion of Plato's *Politeia* [3]. Boll also referred to the description of the creation of the world in *Timaeus*, closing with the words: "Thus we get a glimpse of the development which took place in the school of the aging Plato under the ever-increasing influence of Pythagorean speculation" (Boll [1913] 1918, 25). Reitzenstein described this notion in terms of a new religious formation: "Something completely new intervenes, an acquisition of Greek intellectual development, science. Aware though she is cannot herself take on the role of religion, science still tries to align religious need in such a way as stays true to her own as much as possible" (Reitzenstein [1923-1924] 1967, 36). This new religious formation is the crucial point for Max Adolph's interpretation, as his examples show.

First Example: Greek Tragedy

Using the etymology of a hero's name, Max Adolph explains how magical ideas determine the plot of Greek tragedy. Thus, in Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*, which tells of the fate of Pentheus, who is torn apart by the maenads (Aby Warburg included the motif on Panel 5 in his Mnemosyne Atlas), the etymon formed by his name is omnipresent. For the verb πένθειν ("mourn, grieve") foreshadows his terrible end:

The tragic hero is perhaps in no way more fatally vulnerable than through his name; for it lies in it the magical idea of his ego, wherein is accumulated, in a malleable form, κλέος [rumour, news, fame] and δύσκλεια, [bad reputation, disgrace], εὐτυχία [happy occasion, success] and ἀτυχία [failure, misfortune]. The hero's fateful path is illuminated by his name (page 77).

According to Max Adolph, the names of heroes, therefore, "carry a divine danger" (page 79). Thoughtlessly calling upon them would be the same as carelessly conjuring and summoning a thing. If this applies to the names of heroes, it must be even more true of the names of the gods: "The Greek etymon can in no instance disavow its religious origin; it remains the symbol of a spiritual cult of images always" (page 81). This is what Cassirer meant by "spiritual energy".

Second Example: Meteorology

"The etymologies of *Cratylus* [start] from names of the gods and [linger on this subject] for a long time [...]. Among these etymologies, those interpretations that link the names of gods to meteorological phenomena occupy a special and conspicuous position" (page 87). Max Adolph stresses the ambivalent attitude of the academy towards this "misty" and "indeterminate" (page 87) area, noting that "meteorology" is no longer discussed in Plato's late work, but has now given way to "cosmic mathematics" (astronomy). The academy obviously did not approve of the old, pictorial meteorology on account of its being too unmathematical.

Max Adolph deliberately chooses the etymology of the word οὐρανός [heaven] to support his thesis about the turn towards religion in the academy:

Hence, the intensity with which Plato-Socrates rejects the pretensions of meteorology when mocking this fantastical etymology is bordering on the philosophical anger which characterises Plato's

engagement with poetry. This anger is directed against the εἶδωλον [shape, image, illusion] from the moment it arrogates to itself the sovereign rights of the εἶδος [shape, form] (page 104).

Max Adolph here expressly refers to Cassirer's essay *Eidos und Eidolon*, a lecture Cassirer held at the Warburg library in 1924. Plato's criticism, Max Adolph points out, was directed against the inaccuracy of thinking in images, not against the image itself. Plato does not declare war as such on poetry, but on speculative myth.

But there is something else that is striking about Max Adolph's remarks: Analysing how the old sound images were being reinstated in the language of poetry and observing that the poet need only "remember the innate corporality of language" (page 111), Boll's student shows himself to be at the height of the zeitgeist. In 1927, Martin Heidegger published his main work *Sein und Zeit*, in which he called for a "hearkening" to the essence of words (Heidegger [1927] 1993, 143ff.). Two years later he met with Ernst Cassirer in Davos for the famous debate about Kant. Heidegger was celebrated by the audience at the time as the winner of a 'new' philosophy, while Cassirer was labelled and ridiculed as an outdated historian of philosophy [4].

Max Adolph had no philosophical ambitions, limiting himself instead to the field of philology. It is noteworthy, however, that his interpretation of *Cratylus* so strongly emphasised the aspect of "linguistic corporality" (page 111), which was omnipresent in contemporary philosophical discussions: "The old world-view is just too deeply engraved to give way to demands for justice that are abstract in nature" (page 113). There was no need for Heidegger's "murmur" and a language "that comes to be [die west]" (Heidegger [1934] 2003, 201). By showing that Plato himself was aware of the connection between logos and myth, Max Adolph exposes the inaccuracy of Heidegger's knowledge of language, siding instead with the less fashionable, yet precise Cassirer:

A Greek εἶδος [shape, form] cannot become an abstraction in the purest sense. The Grecian Olympus or, in other words, the Greek language prevents it. It is the good fortune of this language that, at the moment of its imminent dissolution, its unprecedented capacity for abstraction is appeased by the image, that is, the image of a god, to which it is called back. Thus, when attaining to the highest form of dialectical differentiation, the Platonic logos, to choose the most significant example, must continue on the path to myth (page 115).

According to Max Adolph, the names of the gods reveal the innermost core of Greek linguistic thought: when pronouncing a name, the Greeks not only invoke its 'form', but also give name to all of its 'effects' at the same time:

Only the individual functions of a being can unequivocally be determined by ρήματα [attributes], through abstract statements. However, for Greek sensibilities, the malleable totality of such a being, its εἶδος [shape, form], is embodied only by the ὄνομα [name], its proper name, which therefore is not considered to be an abstraction but an image, a mimetic work of art, i. e. a malleable totality, after all. [...] A single ὄνομα [name] can have an unlimited number of ρήματα [attributes]. It was not until Plato's time, as the series of the Platonic dialogues *Cratylus-Theaetetus-Sophistes*

shows, that the *ρήμα* [attribute] was recognised and acknowledged as an independent linguistic entity (page 115).

According to this understanding of language, the conceptual word, due to its nature as abstractive reduction, delimits the totality of divinity. In figurative language, however, it remains perceptible. Max Adolph shares this conviction not only with Cassirer, but also with his father. Aby Warburg has repeatedly pointed out, in connection with his engagement with Lessing, that he “has to make a correction to Lessing” (*Vom Arsenal zum Laboratorium*, in WEB, 685). He was referring to Lessing’s presentation in *Laokoon* of the relationship between words and images. Whereas Lessing assumed that the pictorial representation of emotions can capture no more than a single moment in time, with language being a means to convey emotion much more comprehensively, Aby Warburg set out to prove the opposite with the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. On its various panels, Warburg documented, from a historical perspective, the changing moments of emotions. A well-known example is the connection to be observed between the rushing nymph carrying a fruit basket and the head-huntress Judith (see Panel 47).

The Warburg-Cassirer-Boll Circle was concerned not only with describing the constant pendulum movement in cultural history that involves the poles of myth and logos, for which astrology serves as a mediator [5], but, more fundamentally, was dedicated to rethinking the relationship between words and images. Max Adolph accompanied these debates in the KBW, contributing to them with a philological reading of Plato, which Boll taught him. If, from the standpoint of cultural philosophy, astrology partakes of both logos and myth, on a linguistic level the *rhemata* (attributes) take on such a mediating role. Figurately put in the language of the Greeks, this means:

The Greek world of gods [is founded] entirely on the joy afforded by images and names [...]. In the Greek sense, the divine can be defined as that which is most worthy of being formed and named. This statement, it seems, cannot be reversed: insofar as a thing is worthy of being named, it is divine [...]. When by themselves, human beings are presented merely with the effects of higher beings; with effects, however, it is not possible to *ὀνομάζειν* [pronounce, name] them, but only to *λέγειν* [read] them, i.e. to express them through *ρήματα* [actions]. Greek language presents itself in this way as a fabric woven from mythical and logical threads. *Ρήματα* [attributes], as it were, are the logical, *ονόματα* [names] the mythical *στοιχεῖα* [letters] which make up the cosmos of language. *Λόγοι* [words] and *ρήματα* [attributes] have the power to establish connections in the human world, *μύθοι* [myths] and *ονόματα* [names] establish such connections between humans and gods (page 116).

Once the principle of etymology penetrates into the realm of ideas, there is no escaping its magical compulsion:

Thus, nurtured by the epic tradition, the etymological name finds its way back to cult poetry, namely to the last creative expression of ancient religiosity; the hymn. What is crucial [...] is the fact that an old mythical figure could undergo such a fundamental metamorphosis of its character in later times. It is as though the old name of Uranos were suddenly possessed by a completely different, young and powerful deity. No one individual can bring about this phenomenon of a new

soul. A new religion must have also carved the way for Heraclides' theory of etymology. It is, to put it in a nutshell, the religion of the academy – and Uranus is none other than divine 'Timaeus' (pages 120f.).

It was not until centuries later, during the Renaissance, that an increasing suppression of linguistic images ultimately led to the depopulation of heaven and also gave rise to a new astrological worldview. Copernicus' heliocentric model of the world replaced the ancient geocentric one. In his painting for the exhibition at the planetarium in Hamburg, which was of great importance to his father, Max Adolph depicted the force of this new knowledge of the sky. The new world view is entering the orbits of the spheres like a devastating comet, bringing the mythical ideas into disarray until they dissolve into nothingness.

Notes

1. Sachs was a friend of Gertrud Bing's and pupil of Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's. In 1917 she did her doctorate under him on *Die fünf Platonischen Körper, zur Geschichte der Mathematik und der Elementenlehre Platons und der Pythagoreer*. This work received widespread attention at the time. (Cf. amongst others Kolář 1918; Milhaud 1916; Howald 1922). In her dissertation, she bases her arguments, amongst others, on Ernst Hoffmann's lecture on *Platons Lehre von der Weltseele*, which he held 1914 at the Religionswissenschaftliche Vereinigung in Berlin, (cf. Sachs 1917, VIII).

2. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff was the second reviewer of Max Adolph Warburg's dissertation. Max Adolph refers to his book on Plato (two volumes), 1919, several times. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff was also a highly esteemed colleague of Boll, with whom he corresponded regularly. Cf. Heilen 2003. In 1924 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff gave a lecture on Zeus at the KBW.

3. Aby Warburg also made reference to this passage to explain the importance of astrology in cultural history. In his essay on *Theaterkostüme für die Intermedien von 1589* (1898) he not only quotes Plato but also included a drawing by Buontalenti for the intermedii, which shows Necessity and her spindle, with the muses dancing around it (WEB, 137ff.).

4. At the satirical final event that concluded the Davos talks, the professors were to be caricatured by the students. Emmanuel Levinas imitated Cassirer. He dusted his hair with flour. It was the students' idea to illustrate the old-fashioned nature of Cassirer's philosophy by the white powder trickling out of his character's hair. Levinas would come to deeply regret his mockery later in life: "Levinas spoke little about Davos and even less about that final revue; whenever he did, it was always with regret. It remained a painful memory for him" (Malka 2003, 65).

5. To visualise the basic premise of his idea of cultural studies, Aby Warburg chose to model the ceiling of the reading room in the newly built KBW after the figure of an ellipsis. In 1926, the reading room was inaugurated with a lecture by Ernst Cassirer on *Freiheit und Notwendigkeit in der Philosophie der Renaissance*. Shortly thereafter, Cassirer incorporated this lecture as the third chapter into his book on the Renaissance, which he dedicated to Warburg on his sixtieth birthday (Cassirer [1924] 1994).

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Abstract

In his dissertation, Max Adolph follows the two premises on which cultural studies in the Warburg Circle were based: firstly, the conviction in the simultaneity of mythical and rational thinking in cultural history and, secondly, the assumption that it was the task of astrology from antiquity to the Renaissance to mediate between these two poles. Even a rational philosopher like Plato had knowledge of such a belief in the stars. The traces of Max Adolph's mentor, Boll, are therefore unmistakable in his work. Although he remains unnamed in the dissertation, yet Boll is present throughout and needs to be considered.

keywords | Max Adolph Warburg; Aby Warburg; Franz Boll; Ernst Cassirer; Martin Heidegger; Eva Sachs; Plato; Cratylus.



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