

“Good Neighbours”: The Warburg Library Classification Scheme in Its Context

In 1920, upon walking into the Warburg Institute Library for the first time, the philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) deemed it “a dangerous library” (Ginzburg 2012, 82): a place where the reader risks getting lost in the maze of books surrounding them and the connections between them (Settis 2010, 28-30). Not unlike Cassirer, readers who enter the library today to use it for the first time soon remark on its uniqueness, quoting the open-shelf policy, the rich collections (about 370,000 items, of which, according to an estimate, 40% cannot be found in the British Library (Grafton and Hamburger 2012, 3)) and the organisation of the library as their reasons. This feeling owes much to the classification scheme of the library, designed specifically for the collection in the 1910s and still in use to this day.

This essay will analyse the unique classification scheme of the library of the Warburg Institute (now part of the University of London), its history and usage. It will also compare some of its most significant characteristics with other Knowledge Organisation Systems (KOSs) widely in use in the library world. Ultimately, as we will see, the Warburg classification scheme is an excellent case study to cast light on how KOSs can embody the ways we see the world.

ASSEMBLING AND ORDERING THE WARBURG LIBRARY

The main subject covered by the collection at the Warburg is often said to be art history, although that is not quite right, and certainly not what its creator had in mind: rather, since its inception the collection was assembled to investigate the survival of Antiquity – or, in fact, its *Nachleben*, a German term that carries far more implications than its English equivalent; and to do so through the *image*, rather than art as a discipline. The difference was an important one to the founder and original owner of the library, German scholar Aby (Abraham) Warburg (1866-1929): it emphasised the importance of the social, political, and cultural circumstances that factored into the production of what we call art, and the role of symbols as embodiments of such forces (Warburg 2012). This meant that in addition to works on art history, the Warburg Library contains large sections on texts (especially classical texts in the Renaissance and their *Textgeschichte*, or history of the texts), religion, magic and science (from botany to medicine to astronomy and astrology) and philosophy.

While Aby Warburg began collecting books while very young, it was not until 1901-02 that he consciously started assembling a library that went beyond his own information needs; soon afterwards, the library was sizeable enough for him to start making arrangements for it to be transferred to an institution after his own death (Saxl 1970, 325). He was able to expand his library quickly by obtaining the right to have his purchases funded by the family in exchange for relinquishing his birth-right to his younger brother Max (McEwan 1999, 26).

Very soon, the library became recognisable not just because of its size, but also because of its unique organisation, based not on the standards of the time, but on the idea of uniting the various branches of human knowledge and on the 'law of the good neighbour': “The book of which one knew was in most cases not the book which one needed” (Saxl 1970, 327). Such a system called necessarily for direct access to the collections, unmediated by library staff as much as possible: a rarity in modern libraries (Mouren 2015, 55). At the Warburg, modern books sit on open shelves, side by side with 16th-century editions, offprints, edited volumes, exhibition catalogues, and the occasional visual source or board game in the Bloomsbury, London building in which they have been housed since 1958 – all of them tools for the untangling of the human thought. The purpose of the Warburg classification scheme is that of “mapping the trade routes of the mind” (McEwan 2003): an object which held a strong fascination for Warburg, a long-time sufferer of mental illness.



Illustration 1: The Warburg Institute Emblem. © The Warburg Institute

As such, the Warburg Library has always been a space within which the ability to move, explore, browse, and make one's own connections was paramount (Settis 2010). This is represented in the very emblem of the Warburg Institute (ill. 1), selected by Aby Warburg from a woodcut from the edition of Isidore of Seville's *De rerum natura* printed in Augsburg in 1472 (Wuttke 1986, 210). But the most effective visualisation of this system has to be the BilderAtlas Mnemosyne that Aby Warburg started creating in 1927 and left incomplete at the time of his death: a project consisting of hundreds of images pinned to boards, which Warburg was in the process of building to investigate specific research projects (Johnson 2012). It now survives in three series of photographs taken between 1928 and 1929 (after Warburg's death), held in the Warburg Archive on the same premises as the Library and Institute (ill. 2). No edition exists.



Illustration 2: A panel from the third photo set of the BilderAtlas. © The Warburg Institute

The spatial aspect of the collection also emerges in the physical building itself (the Moderne-style building in which the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg was housed in Hamburg after being moved from Warburg's house) and the importance of its internal structure for the institution's identity (Michels 1993), as in the physical subdivision between sections that is at the basis of the classification scheme of the library. Organisation and access, together, created what Gertrud Bing (1892-1964), director of the Warburg Institute between 1954 and 1964, called a “workshop” type of library (Bing 1935). (To preserve access to items, the Warburg is a reference-only library, and placeholders – “marker cards” bearing a date, title and other details – are used to mark each item that has been removed from the shelf by a reader.)

The Library is also complemented by a Photographic Collection containing photographs, slides, postcards, and clippings from auction catalogues, dating from the late nineteenth century (Aby Warburg started collecting them in the 1880s) and arranged in folders by subject. The Photographic Collection is still actively growing – it now holds hundreds of thousands of images – and is in the process of being digitised, with the (often limited) information found on the back of the images expanded and turned into controlled vocabulary and metadata (Warburg Institute n.d).

DISCOVERABILITY AND INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR AT THE WARBURG LIBRARY

The Warburg classification scheme favours 'subject retrieval' rather than 'known object retrieval' (Broughton 2004, 4), in the sense that it allows for a high degree of discoverability at the expense of a slight increase in the time needed to locate a known item.

In this sense, the Warburg classification scheme respects the aims first identified by Cutter (“To assist in the choice of the book”) (Cutter 1904) and then developed by the *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) (IFLA 1998); on the other hand, it does not necessarily respect the standards presented by IFLA in 2009 in the updated *International Statement of Cataloguing Principles* (Tillett and Cristán 2009), inasmuch it contains a degree of arbitrariness higher than other classification schemes. Contrary to the fourth of Ranganathan's *Five Laws*, it also does not “save the time of the reader” (Ranganathan 1957). Conversely, it intentionally slows down the physical research of the book on the shelf, as we will see below, thus offering the reader the chance for improved discoverability of other items on similar subjects (or indeed, “serendipity” in the library).

Of course, the question exists of whether the facets envisioned by LIS professionals correspond to the ones needed by users (Hjørland 2013, 555). The Warburg classification scheme is very flexible, but it employs a unique type of warrant (called “scholarly warrant”) that is based on Aby Warburg's own research rather than widely accepted associations between subjects as they appear in the literature (Friman, Jansson, and Suominen 1995, 28) – thus contributing to the uniqueness of the library. This takes away some of the objectivity that KOSs normally try to achieve, for instance by finding a balance between “aboutness” and

meaning of a document (Rowley and Hartley 2008, 126-128): the Warburg was built by and for Aby Warburg, and is impregnated with the meanings he found in it.

Readers come to the Warburg Library for its open shelves; but often, they stay (or return) for the research opportunities offered by the Warburg classification scheme. A system that does not, admittedly, fit a wide range of users and information behaviours, it is often the object of initial confusion. Often, however, even when its functionalities are considered unusual or “difficult”, the Warburg classification system is appreciated for its aesthetic properties, which Ojennus and Tennis (2013a; 2013b) identified as depending on various factors, including origin and historical context.

In the Warburg classification scheme, each item is assigned an alphanumerical classmark depending on its subject; there is no indication of the author or the type of resource in the notation, and multiple items can share the same classmark. The only exceptions are items that have to be kept under key due to copyright issues (such as unpublished PhD theses) and a small number of items (mostly early twentieth-century editions) that are too fragile for handling.

The discoverability of articles in periodicals and edited volumes is thus increased by treating offprints donated to the library as individual items, which are catalogued and shelved alongside other materials. The strengths of the Warburg Library as a very physical space, however, can also be its weaknesses in the face of electronic resources. With e-resources – and especially e-books – the information behaviour that users are accustomed to among the shelves of the Warburg (favouring browsing, serendipity, and visual association) is harder to reproduce. For this reason, it is important to encourage the use of e-resources through displays as well as notices in the areas visited by readers.

THE 'LAW OF THE GOOD NEIGHBOUR': LAYOUT, NOTATION, AND CITATION ORDER

The Warburg classification scheme does not, at the moment, have a schedule, although one is under preparation by the staff. Initially, as a private collection, the Warburg Library grew relatively slowly, and in his youth Warburg himself could often be found re-arranging his books, on the basis of new readings and new ideas (Saxl 1970, 327); and when the system started being used, the early librarians, Fritz Saxl (1890-1948) and Gertrud Bing, had such a spacial and tactile knowledge of its holdings (Settis 2010, 50) that they could fundamentally navigate the classification scheme through sheer brainpower. What exists now is a list of the main subjects in each class, extrapolated retroactively by John Perkins, former Deputy Librarian of the Warburg, on the basis of the subject card catalogue, held in a single, manuscript copy at the Warburg Library and still incomplete (Perkins n.d.). This is, for instance, the beginning of the page for classmark BFA:

Philos(ophy) of Rel(igion) BFA

God 310 Omnipotence / science 310

~~Origins of Rel(igion) 300~~

~~Immortality BFA 330~~

Phenomenology of Rel(igion) 355 f. Sociology 1000 f.

The faceting is largely expressed through the classmarks; like analytico-synthetic classification schemes (Broughton 2004, 33), the Warburg scheme uses certain elements of notation (in this case, letters) to indicate recurrence of the same subject (Wind 1935): for instance, sources are always indicated by an H in the third position; economic history is commonly identified by a P in the third position; unlike them, however, it does not so consistently: for instance in CH-, the class concerning illuminated manuscripts, P indicates collections (hence CHP = Collections of illuminated manuscripts). Literal mnemonics (Broughton 2004, 48) are not used at the Warburg, except for Reading Room (RR) items.

Each Warburg classmark is composed of three letters, followed by a number. Sixteen letters are used (A to R, but not J or Q); numbers can be anything from 1 to the thousands, and do not consistently indicate a certain micro-subject (so that while lower numbers such as 1 or 5 tend to indicate general approaches to a subject, higher numbers do not indicate a similar micro-subject across classes).

So for instance, *A bibliography of printing, with notes & illustrations* compiled by F. C. Bigmore and C. W. H. Wyman (1978) has a classmark with a low number, i.e. NCF 2, while the much more specific catalogue of the 1971 exhibition *Typographia Arabica: the development of Arabic printing as illustrated by Arabic type specimens* can be found under NCF 800:

N = Transmission of classical texts
C = Bookprinting and illustration
F = The printed book
2 = indicating a general work on printing

N = Transmission of classical texts
C = Bookprinting and illustration
F = The printed book
800 = Printing in Arabic in Western Europe

Two exceptions exist: reference works, which are indicated by RR followed by the number of the Reading Room shelf where they are located; and journals, which have classmarks made of P- (P followed by one letter), followed by a number. Alphabetical order is, generally speaking, extraneous to the Warburg classification scheme: journals are also the only items to be shelved alphabetically by classmarks; all other items have to be retrieved with the guidance of a “map” found on each floor, in which classmarks are listed alphabetically and are associated with a bay or a range of bays.

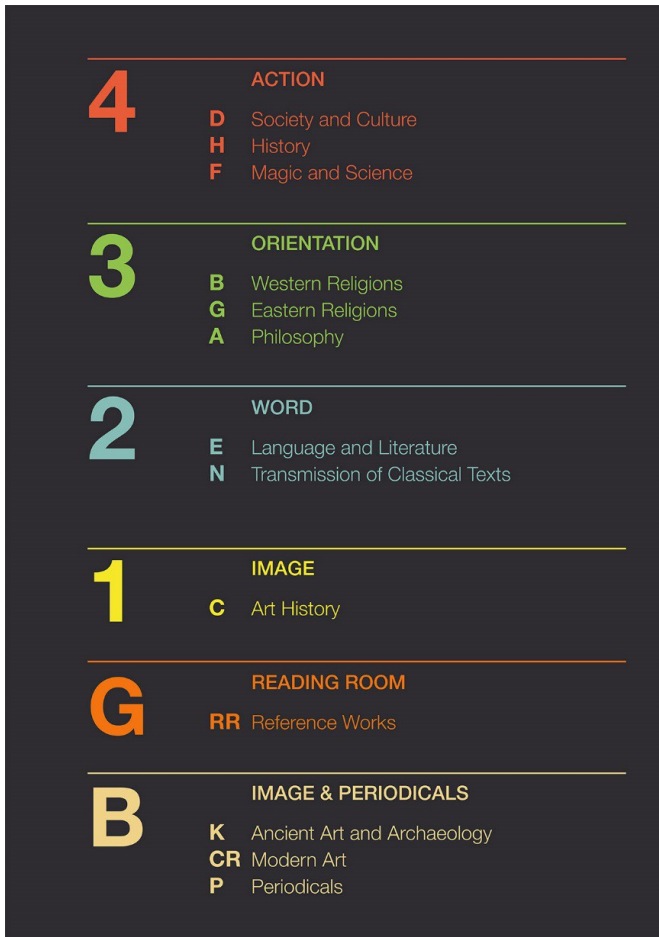


Illustration 3: Floor layout of the Warburg Library. © The Warburg Institute

The first letter serves two functions: it indicates the general subject in which an item has been classed (such as C for Art History, or A for Philosophy) and as a consequence, also the floor on which it is located, according to a schema that divides human activities and thought into four general areas: Image, Word, Orientation, and Action (ill. 3). The current layout of the

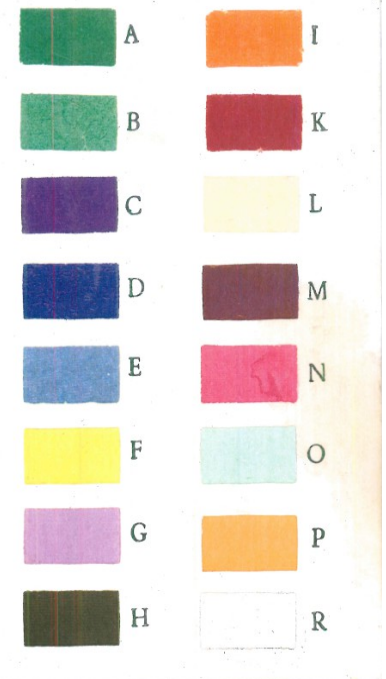


Illustration 4: Colour-coding at the Warburg Library. © The Warburg Institute

library does not correspond to what Aby Warburg himself had envisioned: in Hamburg, the reader was ushered into the Orientation section on the ground floor,

and ascending the floors, they would find Image, Word, and then Action. It should also be noted that two sections have spilled onto other floors: F (Magic and Science) belongs to Orientation, but has to be stored on the fourth floor due to lack of space; CR (Modern Art) and K (Ancient Art and Archaeology) are stored in the basement, not on the first floor, for similar reasons. It is possible that the refurbishment of the building, currently expected for mid-2019, could restore the stray sections to the floors where they belong.

Periodicals are not understood to belong to any specific sector, unless they are so specific to easily fit within a specific classmark, in which case they are shelved with that class. For instance, the journal *Renaissance Quarterly* covers a wide range of topics, and is thus shelved in the basement with classmark PF 318; but *Ludica: Annali di storia e civiltà del gioco* is classed under DCA 12 on the fourth floor (DCA is the class dedicated to studies on the topic of the history of festivals, games, banqueting, and dancing).

It is a specific characteristic of the 'law of the good neighbour' that items sharing the same classmark should not be in any particular order, reflecting a lack of hierarchy or differentiation between types of items. This is also why books carry their classmark label on the front cover (in the top-left corner) rather than on the spine, on the principle that the extra labour required to locate a known item can be rewarded by the possibilities of discoveries of other, non-known, items.

To assist in the identification of any given section, and to facilitate the work of shelvers, the Warburg

Library used to employ colour-coding (ill. 4); in this system three rectangular strips were applied onto the spines of the books, each of a colour associated with a letter used in the notation (Stockhausen 1992, 77-78; Schäfer 2005, 224). For instance, J.W. McCrindle's *The invasion of India by Alexander the Great* (1893) carries classmark GDG 160 on the front cover and the following colours (the blue completely faded to a grey colour) on the spine:

Lilac = G = Eastern Religions
Blue = D = India
Lilac = G = Hellenism in India
160 = Greek presence in India

Colour coding stayed in place for several years, until staff came to the realisation that the fading of the stickers would make it unsustainable in the long term. To this day, a part of the collection still has (much faded) coloured stickers on the spines; this contributes to the idea of a library that is fundamentally a visual and physical space.

The same principles also make it so that the size of certain sections have become unwieldy: popular topics such as major Renaissance artists can easily be covered by dozens of items all sharing the same classmark. Readers frequently reported difficulty locating items because the 'law of the good neighbour'. In order to facilitate the identification and retrieval of known objects, it was therefore decided in the mid-1990s to modify notation to add Cutters (as they are colloquially known; also 'Cutter numbers'; Library of Congress n.d.), which would restrict the order of books (in alphabetical order by Cutter within classes) and thus help locate items faster. For instance Laurie Schneider, *A note on the iconography of Titian's last painting* (an offprint from *Arte Veneta*, 23 (1969)) has classmark CNM 418.S13:

C = Art History
N = Italian
M = 16 th c.
418 = Titian's painting techniques
.S13 = Cutter number for Schneider at the Warburg

Since the very beginning, the implementation of Cutter numbers encountered opposition from those who considered them 'anti-Warburgian'; ultimately, however, it was the awareness of the cost in the terms of the extra time required for shelving that convinced library staff to do away with them, in 2003. Those are still referred within the Warburg as the years of the 'Cutter Wars'. Today, old Cutters remain, as they are not retroactively removed, and they are also still used for the large and ever-increasing collection of auction catalogues housed in the basement.

Inconveniently large classes are currently broken down by means of decimalisation. For instance, the production of Piero della Francesca (1416-1492) is considered too broad a subject to be covered within the classmarks originally assigned to it (CNA 790) so it has been broken down into:

CNA 790.0	Monographs
CNA 790.1	Essays
CNA 790.2	Painting (Conservation and technical aspects)

CNA 790.3	Profane works
CNA 790.4	Religious works
CNA 790.5	<i>Baptism of the Christ</i>
CNA 790.6	<i>The Flagellation</i>
CNA 790.7	<i>Legend of the True Cross</i>
CNA 790.8	Madonnas
CNA 790.9	Influence, <i>fortuna critica</i>

Generally speaking, the citation order follows rather traditional criteria, such as chronological and geographical order. Artists are listed chronologically by date of birth (as problematic as such a rule can be, since such dates often come into re-discussion or are entirely unknown); within a class dedicated to a specific craft, Italy will almost always appear first, often followed by Iberia (Spain and Portugal), France, the Low Countries, Great Britain, and Germany (Germany is often placed after Great Britain out of humility and gratitude, a practice solidified after the Warburg Institute, a Jewish institution, was transferred to London in 1934 to escape the Nazi regime). Within Italy, Venice usually appears first, and the rest of the peninsula follows a north-to-south general order. For instance, the subject of Death, Bodies & Burials, Afterlife (BFF 300-400) follows an order from general to specific, chronological, and geographic:

(Death)	
300	General: texts
302	General in time and place
(time)	
306	Ancient societies
310	Medieval
314	Early modern
316	Modern
(place)	
320	Italy
322	Iberia
324	France
326	Switzerland
330	Great Britain
331	Ireland
334	Germany
336	Scandinavia
338	Other European
341	Value of life
342	Euthanasia
345	Specific popular customs regarding death (misc)
347	Banshee

In true Warburg fashion, some subjects are very broad, some oddly specific, reflecting Warburg's own interest: banshees, for instance, are deserving of their own classmark. Warburg had a strong interest in folklore (and today, the Warburg Institute hosts the Folklore Society on its premises).

(Bodies and burials)

350	Corpse, mummy, embalming, cremation
353	Cemeteries and burial customs: general, all societies
355	Cemeteries and burial customs: prehistoric, primitive, pre-Christian
356	Cemeteries and burial customs: early Christian and medieval
359	Megaliths, dolmens, menhirs
360	Bildstocke, lanternes a mort
362	Buried alive
363	Desecration of tombs and burial sites
(Afterlife)	
365	General (incl. Hell, Heaven, Purgatory when treated together)
366	Texts on Hell, Heaven, Purgatory
367	Hell
368	Purgatory
369	Heavenly Kingdoms
370	Journey after death
375	Harrowing of Hell
380	Judgement of the dead
385	Cult of the dead
390	Immortality
395	Reincarnation
400	Resurrection

The intent of the Warburg classification scheme appears clear when looking at classifications such as this: subjects that would normally be placed in separate sections (the subjects covered in this section, for instance, could be spread out in Religion, Archaeology, Philosophy, Urban Studies) are all sequential, in an effective reflection of their position within human thought.

This is even more apparent when comparing Warburg classification with other classification schemes: let us take a look, for instance, at the classification of Astrology and Astronomy at the Warburg and the same subjects in the latest version of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) (Dewey 2011):

Action	
D	Society and Culture
H	History
Orientation	
B	Western Religions
G	Eastern Religions
A	Philosophy
F	Magic and Science
FF-	Natural Science
FB-	Magic
FC-	Magical Objects
FD-	Sorcery and secret societies

000	Computer science, information & general works
100	Philosophy & psychology
110	Metaphysics
120	Epistemology, causation, humankind
130	Parapsychology and occultism
131	Parapsychological and occult methods for achieving well-being, happiness, success
133	Specific topics in parapsychology and occultism
	.1 Apparitions
	.2 Parapsychological and occult aspects of specific things

FO- Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy,
Pharmacy

FG- Alchemy and Chemistry

FE- History of Medicine

FN- Mathematics

FH- Prophecy -

FM- Divination

FA- [Astrology and Astronomy](#)

FAH Sources Babylonian

25 Greek & Roman

695 Arabic & Jewish

1150 Indian

1400 Mediaeval Western

1740 16th century Italian

2150 Sources German

2810 17th & 18th century
Astrology

3516 19th & 20th century
Astrology

4000 17th & 18th
century
Astronomy

4075 19th & 20th century
Astronomy

4250 Planets

4700 Calendars

5240 Popular Almanac

5320 Astronomical
Almanacs

5460 Prognostications

6100 Chronology

7840 Meteorology

9023 Astrolabes, etc.

FAF Studies General

225 Sun

235 Moon

245 Constellations

275 Zodiac

375 Primitive Peoples

390 Jewish

425 Greek & Roman

450 Teutonic Peoples

510 Astrological
Iconography

FAN Time Measuring

298 Chronology

700 Meteorology

950 Astronomical
Instruments

1030 Globes

1065 Nautical
Instruments

FAI History of Astrology &
Astronomy

FAG Primitives

.3 Divinatory arts

.4 Demonology and witchcraft

[.5 Astrology](#)

.6 Palmistry

.8 Psychic phenomena

.9 Spiritualism

135 Dreams and mysteries

137 Divinatory graphology

138 Physiognomy

139 Phrenology

140 Specific philosophical schools and viewpoints

150 Psychology

160 Philosophical logic

170 Ethics (Moral philosophy)

180 Ancient, medieval, eastern philosophy

190 Modern western and other noneastern
philosophy

200 Religion

300 Social sciences

400 Language

500 Science

510 Mathematics

[520 Astronomy and allied sciences](#)

521 Celestial mechanics

522 Techniques, procedures, apparatus,
equipment, materials

523 Specific celestial bodies and phenomena

525 Earth (Astronomical geography)

526 Mathematical geography

527 Celestial navigation

528 Ephemerides

529 Chronology

530 Physics

540 Chemistry and allied sciences

550 Earth sciences

560 Paleontology

570 Biology

580 Plants

590 Animals

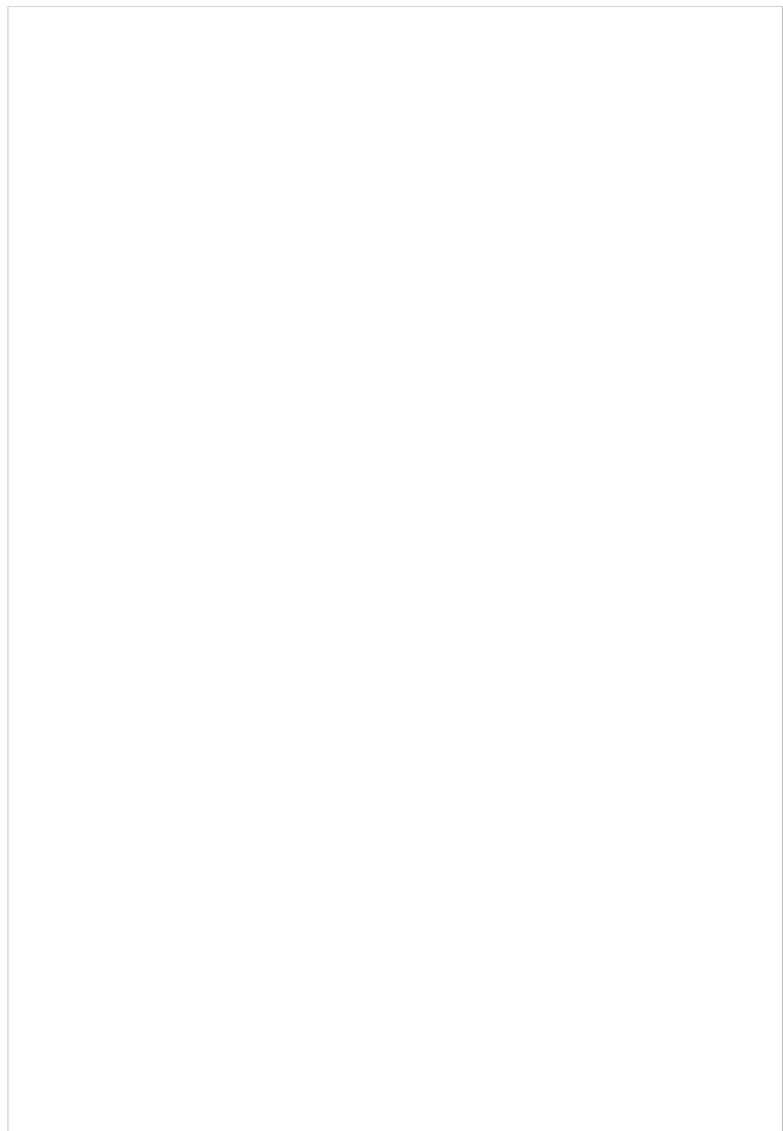
600 Technology

700 Arts & recreation

800 Literature

900 History & geography

	58	Mexico
	70	China
	100	India
	150	Babylon
	200	Egypt
	350	Iran
FAK		Greece & Rome
	330	Byzantium
FAA		Old Testament
	50	New Testament
	125	Nabateans
	150	Harran
	200	Arabs
FAB		Middle Ages
	20	Occidental
		Translations from
		Arabic
	50	12-13th century
FAC		14th-16th century
	387	17th century
FAM		17-20th century
FI-		Cosmology
FP-		Geography, Exploration,
		Cartography
Word		
E		Language and Literature
N		Transmission of Classical Texts
Image		
C		Art History
K		Ancient Art and Archaeology
CR		Modern Art



It can be observed that in the Warburg Classification Scheme Astrology and Astronomy are seen as a continuum in the history of humanity, with complex relationships but ultimately as one, same phenomenon and one response to the same question (or to the same information needs, one could say). They are placed together between Divination (FM-) and Cosmology (FI-), but in the same sector as Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy, Pharmacy (FO-). Aby Warburg was particularly keen on materialising the connections between apparently polarised aspects of the human experience (Friman, Jansson, and Suominen 1995, 27). Additionally, Astrology is considered fundamentally on par with Astronomy as a subject, and both are considered essential in the understanding of human thought: it should be remembered that Orientation (the general area to which class FA- belongs) was originally the point of entry of the Warburg Library in Hamburg.

In DDC, conversely, the dialogue between these two subjects is not quite as evident: Astrology (133.5) is classed under Specific topics in parapsychology and occultism (133), whereas Astronomy is a scientific subject in the 500s. Astrology is also considered a much narrower subject than Astronomy. This – the division between branches of knowledge that we consider normal in today's KOSs – is exactly what the

Warburg classification scheme has tried to overcome (Blunt 1938).

CULTURAL BIAS IN THE WARBURG LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION SCHEME

As explained above, the collection development of the Warburg library and the warrant of its classification scheme both owe to the nature of the institution, which was originally born as the private library of one individual and developed, for a long time, in consideration of his specific research interests. This also means that, inevitably, the Warburg classification scheme also carries some of the cultural bias that were endemic in early 20th-century Europe.

Warburg was recognised not just as an authority in the field of History and Art History, but also of cultural studies at large. One of his many research interest was anthropology, and namely American indigenous cultures; anthropological methods of the time are now harshly criticised by some as colonialist (Erikson and Nielsen 2013, 70-72), but it should also be said that it is now commonly accepted that today's awareness would not have been possible without the work of pioneer anthropologists such as Aby Warburg himself (Burke 1998).

The now-controversial term “primitive” (Benedetti 2008), for instance, recurs frequently in subjects across the library (e.g. DBD = Primitive Music), at times associated with non-western cultures (e.g. DEG = Primitive and Oriental Stage). This also mirrors the difference in treatment of western and non-western culture and forms of art. Western (largely Christian) religion sources, under classmark BCH, stretch over 23 bays (161 shelves), more than any other class. Byzantine and European miniature and bookbinding can be found respectively listed under Art History (CH-) and Transmission of Classical Texts (NCF). However, Islamic and Persian miniature and bookbinding can be found in the Archaeology section (under KGA, together with Islamic painting). While K classmarks technically belong to the Image section, the distinction between C and K classes is an important one, as it reflects a different perception of their development and sophistication.

Texts dealing with homosexuality can be found across classmarks DNK, DNB, DNC, DNM, which correspond to the subject of the position of women in society in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Modern Era respectively. As such, it is clearly considered as a gender issue, which is in itself problematic:

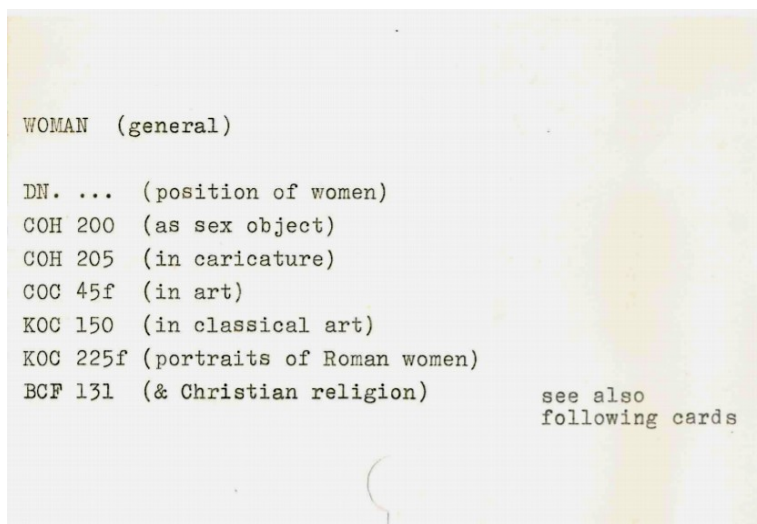


Illustration 5: Subject catalogue card from the Warburg Library. © The Warburg Institute

homosexuality is now fully recognised as an orientation, not a gender (there seems to be no items relating to transgender identities at the Warburg, possibly due to the focus of the collection).

Similarly, subject headings at the Warburg suffer from bias. Like most other libraries, the Warburg currently employs the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) (LCSH n.d.), and like most other libraries, it absorbs the biases inherent to them (Berman 1971). The Warburg catalogue still contains headings abandoned by LCSH, such as “Negro art” or the use of “man” as an umbrella term for “human beings” (Knowlton 2005). “Women artists” (49 entries in the Warburg catalogue) and “Women in art” (169 entries) also exist, but there is no equivalent for men, which could also be considered controversial (Broughton 2004, 106). Gender-based bias in controlled vocabulary is, of course, not unique to LCSH: even before implementing it, there existed separate subjects for women artists and women in other professional roles at the Warburg (ill. 5). In some ways, the reader can still feel like they are walking the connections of an early-20th-century mind.

CONCLUSION

There is no denying that the Warburg is a special place. The success of the Warburg Institute and Library is easy to read in the way in which the institution is cherished by many around the world and the place it holds in the collective scholarly imagination. The term “Warburgian” has even been accepted by the Oxford English Dictionary as meaning a particularly broad approach to research (McEwan 1999, 25). While it is very local, the Warburg classification scheme has had an impact on research on a global level: from Cassirer and his fearful first approach to the library, to today's readers who return to the Warburg year after year. Using reception as a gauge (Lee 2015), the Warburg classification scheme can definitely be deemed impactful.

In this essay, the specificities of the classification scheme in use at the Warburg Library have been considered in light of the history of the Institute and its past and current functioning; a unique classification scheme, it is essential to the spirit of the Institute and Library – to what, ultimately, makes them “Warburgian”: a powerful example of how KOSs are testimonies to our views of the world and affect our experience of information.

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