

1941 *English Art and the Mediterranean*. A photographic exhibition by the Warburg Institute in London

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British Art and the Mediterranean is the title under which in 1948 Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower published the catalogue of a photographic exhibition on the connections and relations between Britain and Mediterranean cultures, organised by the Warburg Institute of London in 1941.

Unpublished documentation regarding the exhibition allows for the evaluation, from an internal perspective, of the first London decade of the Warburg Library – including the Warburgian studies conducted therein. The content and form of the exhibition opened up a privileged view, provided by the use of photographic images, onto a distinct aspect of the work along with the methodological approach and practice proposed by Aby Warburg at the turn of the nineteenth century, which was later exported to the Anglo-Saxon world in the 1930s.

We propose here to provide a close-up view of a specific argumentative discourse, which can be useful in better understanding the process of how Warburgian studies took root on British soil, as an area of study that also focuses on the dynamics of cultural tradition. One of the disciplines on which the Warburgian ‘*kunsthistorisches Kulturwissenschaft*’ was projected and fragmented in London’s academic world was the history of classical tradition. One key concept in the theory of classical tradition is the binomial ‘theme-motive’ pairing intended as a focus point for highlighting the link between form and content in art. From a unique and distinct history of architecture viewpoint on the topic, Wittkower’s London works offer an example of these contrasting views.

Even in this sense, the cultural trajectory created by the Warburg Institute’s move from Hamburg to London also played a significant part in certain directions of the intellectual history of the twentieth century.

The Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg in London

In the second half of the 1920s the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg was in touch with some of the leading cultural institutions in Europe and the United States. Originally set up as a family library, it aimed to free itself of its reputation as a private, local foundation and become an internationally renowned cultural institute. This positive course was however soon interrupted by the American economic depression of 1929 (the library’s activities were founded by the Warburg family bank) and by the national socialist party’s rise to power in Germany. In January 1933, Fritz Saxl, who became director after the death of Aby Warburg,

decided to seek asylum in a country where it would be possible to continue the cultural project that was started in Hamburg. The library was thus packed up and shipped to London, which marked the start of the Warburg Institute's English odyssey. It was eventually incorporated into the University of London in 1944 and only in 1958 did it establish its own permanent premises in Bloomsbury, where it remains today. At this time the work of all those associated with the library was focused on ensuring a continuation of the Institute's normal activities. Amid the expanding promotion of its research work, the *Studien* and *Vorträge* series were converted into English language publications. Editing and publishing of the Institute's Journal began in 1937, and in 1938 the first three volumes of its *Studies* were set to print.

Under the direction of Fritz Saxl, the Institute also became one of the gathering places in London for the humanist legacy of an intellectual Europe adrift, and welcomed numerous scholars in exile from Germany and other countries, who came here as their final destination or on their way to America.

In the year 1933, Rudolf Wittkower took his place among these scholars. He had come into contact with the Hamburg circle in the second half of the 1920s, and soon became one of the Institute's key figures in London, as a teacher, as the founder and co-editor of the *Journal*, and as curator of the Institute's photographic collection. In the war years, the work of managing the collection was carried out by Wittkower in direct connection with his task of photographically documenting historic buildings in Britain for the National Building Record, set up in 1941 by the RIBA.

As has been rightly noted, Wittkower's Warburgian conversion, following his contacts established with the Library in Hamburg, started to fully emerge through these historical-documentary works, merged with the technical skills and demands of experts who were nurtured in Goldschmidt's school. This conversion from the German school of 'formalist' art history to the newly born studies — later to be defined as 'iconological' — had triggered a series of hermeneutical devices in the young Wittkower. These devices were to be made manifest with the publication of a series of key essays in the historiographic parabola of this same, unborn, iconology, primarily in the pages of the first English editions of the *Journal of the Warburg Institute*.¹

*A different version of this paper, concerning the Colin Rowe MA at the Warburg Institute between 1945 and 1947, has been published in Italian: Katia Mazzucco, 'L'incontro di Colin Rowe con Rudolph Wittkower e un'immagine del cosiddetto 'metodo warburghiano'', Mauro Marzo, ed, *L'architettura come testo e la figura di Colin Rowe*, Venezia: Marsilio 2010, 72-95. This version of the paper is based on a talk held at the University of Glasgow on 26 November 2010 (Glasgow Colloquium on Art Historiography, 'Constructing the Discipline: Art History in the UK'). I want to thank Richard Woodfield and Paul Taylor for their valuable comments, and the Warburg Institute Archive for the support in the consultation of unpublished documents and the permission to publish the pictures.

¹ Interested in the arts of the East by the early 1920s, Rudolf Wittkower gave new importance to this topic after the 'impact of some memorable meetings with Aby Warburg in Rome and Florence in 1927'; in 1928 he was invited to visit KBW in Hamburg, and that visit also occasioned the friendship with Erwin Panofsky; in 1933 Wittkower left Germany and joined the Warburg Institute in London. See Rudolf Wittkower, *Allegory and the migration of symbols*, London: Thames and Hudson 1977.

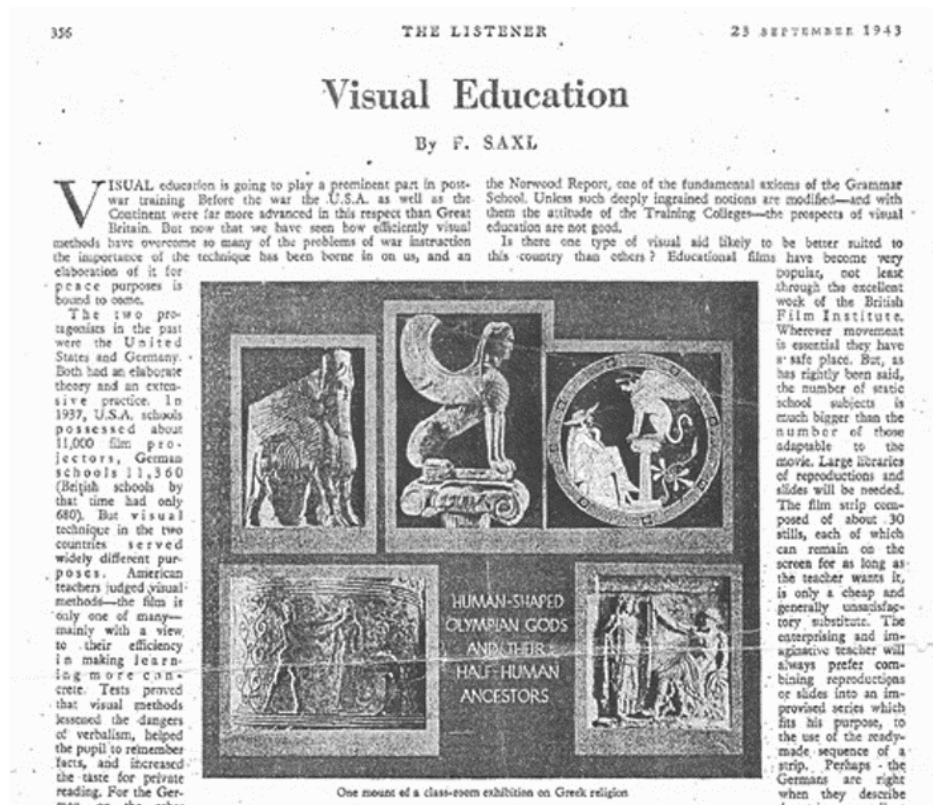


Fig. 1 Fritz Saxl, 'Visual Education', *The Listener*, 23 September, 1943.

Also in Saxl's English years it is not difficult to see a return to a reflection on the educational value of images, a reflection elaborated and transmitted actively in course-work and exhibitions organized by the young scholar in the *Rote Wien* after the First World War.² In a short essay published in *The Listener* in 1943 Saxl wrote about this method:

Visual education is going to play a prominent part in post-war training. Before the war the U.S.A. as well as the Continent were more advanced in this respect than Great Britain. But now that we have seen how efficiently visual methods have overcome so many of the problems of war instruction the importance of the technique has been borne in on us, and an elaboration of it for peace purposes is bound to come.

The two protagonists in this past were the United States and Germany. Both had an elaborate theory and an extensive practice. (...) American teachers judged visual methods— the film is only one of many— mainly with a view to their efficiency in making learning more concrete. (...) For the German, on the other hand, besides its use in compelling the teacher to take a less isolated view of his subject, the main value of the

² Among the exhibitions organized by Fritz Saxl for the *Reichsbildungsamt* review *Das Joch des Krieges* (June-July 1919). The materials displayed were heterogeneous, and organized in sections as, for instance, 'Images of the Death', which included reproductions from *Desastros de la guerra* by Goia and photo news. See: Werner Rappl, 'Fritz Saxls Ausstellungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg in Wien', in: Herbert Posh, eds., *Politik der Präsentation: Museen und Ausstellung in Österreich 1918-1945*, Wien: Turia und Kant 1996, 40-52.

visual approach lay in its greater appeal to the emotions. (...) Visual teaching in this country should retain some of the American efficiency without losing sight of the educational and psychological achievements of the Germans. (...) Film and slide should be supplemented by a new medium tried in this country during the war but not yet featured in American or German handbooks: the class-room exhibition of photographs.³

However, this kind of commitment to the photographic record, within the Warburg Institute's perspective of studies, was neither linked exclusively to the urgency of the impending war, nor to the 'documentary' status of photography. A comparison of images — which was catalogued in a collection of reproductions, projected in a slide show for purposes of divulgation, critically assembled for a thematic exhibition, published in the documentary visual apparatus for an essay — was the continuous thread in the practical aspects of the studies already inaugurated in Hamburg by Aby Warburg. Photography thus had a leading role among the instruments of research and scientific communication on history, art, and image. In fact, the documentary value of a photograph reproducing a work of art went together with its mnemonic-evocative and critical-interpretative values. The value of reproduction was played both as a projection (subject–photographic object) and translation (photographic code), that is as an interpretation in itself and as a tool for comparison and focus on details. Photography of works of art and other visual documents of the history of culture, which is also in fact interpretation — through framing, style, sizes, light, colour —, acquired in the multiple comparison the sense of mnemonic index or mark (*signatura*).⁴ The device of comparison was prepared by editing, and activated by the process of reading-vision and commenting of the panels for seminars, lectures or exhibitions.

Regarding the Warburg studies and the new research perspective that Fritz Saxl and his colleagues were striving to promote in the Anglo-Saxon world, Gertrud Bing noted that:

Until the arrival of the Courtauld Institute on the scene, the history of art had not been taught as an honours course in British universities. Most English historians regarded it with more than slight suspicion because they disliked, with good reason, the deceptively independent position, resulting in isolation from main body of historical studies, into which it had fallen on the continent. Nor were they accustomed to regard the antiquarian study of monuments as an historical discipline. 'Warburgian studies' (the term being now taken to represent the achievements of a group of scholars rather than those of the person whose name served them as descriptive label) which treated works of art, like all imagery, as the products of many strands of a cultural tradition converging in a given moment of history, had brought art history nearer to history. But the unbelieving had still to be

³ Fritz Saxl, 'Visual Education', *The Listener*, 23 September, 1943, 356. I would here like to thank Ioachim Sprung who directed my attention to this article.

⁴ On the concepts of *signatura* and paradigm in cultural research methodology see: Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of all Things: on Method*, New York: Zone, 2009 [first Italian edition 2008].

convinced that images were not less secure guides to the actions, notions and states of mind of those who used them than written documents. The emphasis in Saxl's first English papers on the historical connotations of visual evidence shows that he was aware of the doubts with which he had to contend.⁵

The doubt's and perplexities were directly proportional to the difficulty of pigeonholing the studies promoted by the Institute into academically established disciplinary currents. The 'kunsthistorisches Kulturwissenschaft', an artistic-historical variant of the Burckhardt inspired cultural science that Warburg had wanted to germinate in grounds of inquiry cultivated by his own research,⁶ in London was translated into lectures and seminars held by members of the Institute in association with the Courtauld Institute and the University, aimed at studying the history of images, Renaissance culture, and the classical tradition.

The commitment to advancing its work of research and dissemination, despite the deterioration of the political situation in Europe, was not only a moral duty but also a material necessity. The Institute had to earn its own space and legitimacy on the English cultural and academic scene, or risk its very survival. The photographic exhibitions organised by Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower in association with leading museums, academic and government institutions were part of this picture. In Bing's words, it was a kind of sanctuary of a culture of initiates that was the most commonly used image of the Warburg Institute (that still survives today); and it had to demonstrate that it bore values which could also be communicated and taken up by non-specialists, insisting particularly on the historical structure of its research and consequently on the documentary-testimonial value of art, 'without any loss of accuracy or concessions to popular taste'.⁷

Elements of reception of the Warburg Institute exhibitions. A method for history *in pictures*

It was precisely an uncertain but productive balance between material urgency and an intellectual claim that had to literally 'show itself off', which seems to characterise these exhibition events.⁸

In the first London Annual Report of the Institute we can read about the event that opened, a few months after the move from Hamburg, a dense program of exhibitions:

⁵ Gertrud Bing, 'Fritz Saxl (1890-1948): A memoir', in: Donald J. Gordon, ed, *Fritz Saxl. A Volume of Memorial Essays*, London: Thomas Nelson & Sons 1957, 28.

⁶ Warburg wrote a 'kunsthistorisches Kulturwissenschaft', in February 1928 in the 'Schlussübung' for the winter seminar 1927-1928 [The Warburg Institute Archive (WIA), III.113]; see the transcription published in: Bernd Roeck, 'Aby Warburg Seminarübungen über Jacob Burckhardt im Sommersemester 1927', *Idea*, 10, 1991, 88-89.

⁷ Bing in Gordon, *Fritz Saxl*, 31.

⁸ On the exhibitions organised by the Warburg Institute see Dorothea McEwan, 'Exhibitions as morale boosters: the exhibition programme of the Warburg Institute 1938-1945', in: Shulamit Behr, Marian Malet, eds, *Arts in Exile in Britain 1933-1945*, Amsterdam: Rodopi 2004, 267-299.

On 28th July, 1934, members of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, then being held in London, visited an exhibition specially arranged by us for the occasion. The exhibition was intended to demonstrate the connection between anthropological and historical studies. It consisted of a series of photographs representing the diffusion and history of some prominent pictorial types in European and non-European art, e.g., 'the animal killer', 'the snake dancer', 'the half-human, half-animal god' etc. as far as our means allow, we intend to complete this collection for our photographic department⁹.

The exhibition entitled *The Visual Approach to the Classics* was conceived at the annual meeting of the Classical Association in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of war. The event, also intended for a non-specialist public audience, emphasised the lacking appeal and current interest in the realm of classical studies, which was also a result of its strict and traditionally logocentric format. The opening lecture focused on the current practice in use and fruition of photographic pictures, as a competence that was very common in young people and rare in scholars such as philologists or archaeologists. It thus brought together reproductions of a high quality – in terms of technique and critical selection – for a varied but demanding audience. These were not images that could be easily found in manuals, or documentation of the great classical masterpieces, or examples of the unique and unrepeatable nature of ancient art, but testimonials of the persistence and constant change of forms and motives in ancient visual culture.

The exhibition does not set out to include such famous works of art as are easily available everywhere. In order to illustrate the main idea a more unusual selection has been made, of vases, terracottas, coins etc. It has also borne in mind that the modern children are much more accustomed to good photography than is the present-day archaeologist. They have grown up surrounded Underground, zoo, and other posters, illustrated books, periodicals and newspapers – all of which use the greatly improved technique of photography which scholars, for material and other reasons, are slow to use apply. We look upon the works of the ancients in a different way from latest generation, and modern photography is able to presents these new images to the spectator. The number of first-class photographs of such subjects is as yet limited – essential as they are for the teaching of children to day – and this has made the selection all more difficult. And this first attempt at a selection is by no means perfect.

(...) It is indeed to be hoped that a new method on these lines will lead the younger generation to a better understanding of the genesis of European history. Few things are more important at the present time than a strong feeling for the values of history.¹⁰

⁹ The Warburg Institute, *Annual Report, 1934-1935*, 6.

¹⁰ Fritz Saxl, opening lecture, WIA, I.22.5, Exhibitions, *The Visual Approach to the Classic*, 9 January-4 February 1939.

Saxl focused here on a new 'pop' visual culture, based on never-before-seen materials and media, and, at the same time, pushed for the urgency — that was truly present at the time — of a historical consciousness.

This exhibition was followed by another small exhibition on the art of Donatello, presented with no original works of art at all, only a selection of new photographs taken by the Brogi firm of Florence, and supervised by the Donatello art historian Jenő Lányi.¹¹ An intelligent 'combination of technical skill with an intimate and scholarly knowledge of the artist's work' — commented Anthony Blunt in the pages of *The Spectator* on 7 April 1939 — revealed new aspects of the artist's work through those photographs, and also an unusual but effective approach to the study of art. 'From the material presented' — the review continues — 'it is possible to form a clearer picture of the artist's methods than can be achieved from the direct study by the usual methods'.

In 1940 an exhibition was held on Indian Art, and a series of lectures was organised on the subject of comparative studies. The exhibition was supported by the Victoria and Albert Museum and compared European works with Buddhist and Hindu religious art, making use of the Institute's photographic collection and its exhibition experience.¹² In 1943, after the *English Art and the Mediterranean* exhibition,¹³ another was presented on 'Portrait and Character' and, in 1948, a day to commemorate Fritz Saxl, who had died in March of that year, was organised with a photographic exhibit.¹⁴ During the war years the Institute also worked on the organisation and staging of exhibitions promoted by other bodies, such as the National Building Record and the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA).

The contents and topics of the exhibitions reflected a conservative conception of the cultural tradition, not free from political consideration. It is not a surprise to see how Great Britain emerged from these events as the defender of culture. From a formal and technical point of view, we should remark these exhibitions not only encountered the emergency of the historical moment, but also the contemporary curatorial conception and visual taste:

They had an enormous success. In the absence of originals from museums and galleries they exercised the same kind of attraction as the 'picture of the month' at the National Gallery;¹⁵ great numbers of visitors came to see the exhibitions, among them large parties of school children with their teachers; and they met with the same response in the provinces after their run in London. But both their purpose and their ultimate effect were not bound up with war-time conditions. (...) Saxl did not think of his exhibitions in terms of 'education to art'. That was an aim which could only be achieved through originals, and there was no easy way to it. He wanted to convey a historical message, and in each case a great deal of thorough research went into preparation. But he relied on an appeal through the eye.

¹¹ WIA I.23, Exhibitions, *Donatello*.

¹² WIA I.24, Exhibitions, *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art*.

¹³ WIA I.25 Exhibitions, *English Art and the Mediterranean*.

¹⁴ WIA I.26, Exhibition, *Portrait and Character*, 1943; WIA I.27, Exhibition, *Saxl Memorial Exhibition*.

¹⁵ On the 'picture of the month' scheme at the National Gallery in London see Suzanne Bosman, *The National Gallery in Wartime*, London: National Gallery Company 2008.

He insisted on a very high quality of photography and brought the beauty or significance of the objects home by an unusual choice of enlarged details. Only a minimum of verbal information was added. It was left to the spectator's perceptiveness to read the message, without necessarily noticing how his understanding was guided by the control of relevant material and the choice and combination of pictures.

(...) Saxl's prestige was greatly enhanced by these exhibitions; their lesson was, for instance, not lost on some of the younger museum curators when they began to use large-size photographs as aids to a better appreciation of selected objects in the public collections.¹⁶

Despite the physical absence of masterpieces — presented only as photographs — the exhibition aroused considerable interest and was greeted as a high profile cultural event. The press spoke on the occasion of the numerous successes of the Warburg Institute, which also showed an entirely convincing way of proposing a discourse on languages and forms of tradition through an original use of the comparative method and visual documentation.

In modern times many scholars' tendency was thus to believe in a 'much more objective, and therefore more scientific utilisation of photographs rather than original art objects' — as Herbert Read wrote in the edition of 18 December 1941 of *The Listener*. The *English Art and the Mediterranean* event however differed considerably for the critical quality of its system and its expository method: 'a new technique, a new science, even a new art. Let us call it' — suggested Read — a 'visual education'. In comparison to an un-critical use of photographs, or to the X-Ray trend, that goes over the surface of art, thus making it invisible:

(...) the Warburg method has nothing in common with this reductive, aesthetically destructive process. The Warburg method begins with an idea, and is the realisation of that idea in the plastic medium of photography. The idea itself has been previously derived from the contemplation of works of art in their historic sequence, and what emerges from this contemplation are certain generalizations which could certainly be expressed in words and are expressed in words, but which can be demonstrated and proved in illustrations and only in illustrations.¹⁷

From the context of news pages, with photographic reportages on the Pacific war front, Herbert Read recognized the importance of an exhibition dedicated to the cultural and artistic relationship between Great Britain and the European continent, and hence noted:

But the secret of the process is its organic inevitability, and conscious human interference only produces artificiality and decadence, a hothouse culture. That would seem to be the most important truth demonstrated by this fascinating exhibition.¹⁸

¹⁶ Bing in Gordon, *Fritz Saxl*, 31, 33.

¹⁷ Herbert Read, 'English art and the Mediterranean', *The Listener*, 18 December 1941, 819.

¹⁸ Read 1941, 819.

The positive reception of the event was mixed with, and inevitably conditioned by, considerations on actual culture and politics, also in other journals. In an article titled 'Our debt to the past', the *Liverpool Daily Post* of 14 July 1942 talked, for instance, about the importance of 'a pictorial history of the cultural relations between Britain and the Mediterranean – threatened at present by Fascist enemies of culture'. The link fascism-classicism referred to the revival of Roman imperial iconography in Italy during the *Ventennio* and the aesthetical Hellenism that characterized the classical revival in Germany, marks the event of a distinct singularity. The event was in fact considerable for it represented an opportunity 'to look behind the shame which was Fascism to the grandeur which was Rome; to look behind the bomb blast to the glory which was – and still is – Greece'.

In January of the same year, *The Architectural Review* referred to the exhibition as one of the most interesting in the last years. The review presented Aby Warburg as a scholar involved in the study of the survivals of antiquity. Art was the main topic of his works, but his studies linked the fields of astrology and astronomy, mythology and the history of allegories. Fleeing from Nazi Germany, the library founded by Warburg had found asylum in Great Britain 'because of her tradition of humanism' – 'Lande der lebendigsten humanistischen Tradition' in a coeval article published in *Die Zeitung*.¹⁹ The Warburg Institute, having become renowned for the quality of its lectures, presented yet another essay regarding the value of its research. It was the use of its distinct comparative method in particular that was so appreciated. Each comparative proposal seemed cogent, as the result of extensive research, which was then effectively displayed thanks to an exceptional research team. Among the examples quoted in journals, there is the combination of the Tower of the winds – from the *Antiquities of Athens* by Stuart and Revett – with the Radcliffe Observatory in Oxford, and the project by Henry Keene, then completed by James Wyatt in 1894.²⁰ What drew such attention and praise was thus the Institute's capacity to show, even with scarce means, very modern aspects of tradition: that is, for instance, the personification of 'Britannia' in Antonino Pius and Charles II coins (1673 1/2 penny), as well as in the current penny.²¹

In March of 1942, in a short note written for the CEMA Bulletin, Gertrud Bing expressed the same idea in other words:

It differs from other C.E.M.A. art exhibitions in that it does not primarily appeal to the aesthetic sense like an exhibition of original works of art, nor to the topical interest afforded by photographs of the face of Britain after the war. It is reproductive and historical, yet carries message.

¹⁹ Peter Naumburg, 'Englische Kunst und Mittelmeer. Ausstellung im Warburg Institute', *Die Zeitung*, 18 December 1941.

²⁰ *The Builder*, 16 January 1942; see Plate 78, 'Neo-Greek architecture', in Fritz Saxl, Rudolf Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean*, London-New York-Toronto: Oxford University Press 1948.

²¹ 'The spirit of the south', *Country Life*, 26 December 1941; see Plate 11 'Theatre, lettering, coinage: modern revivals of classical types', in Saxl, Wittkower, *British Art*.

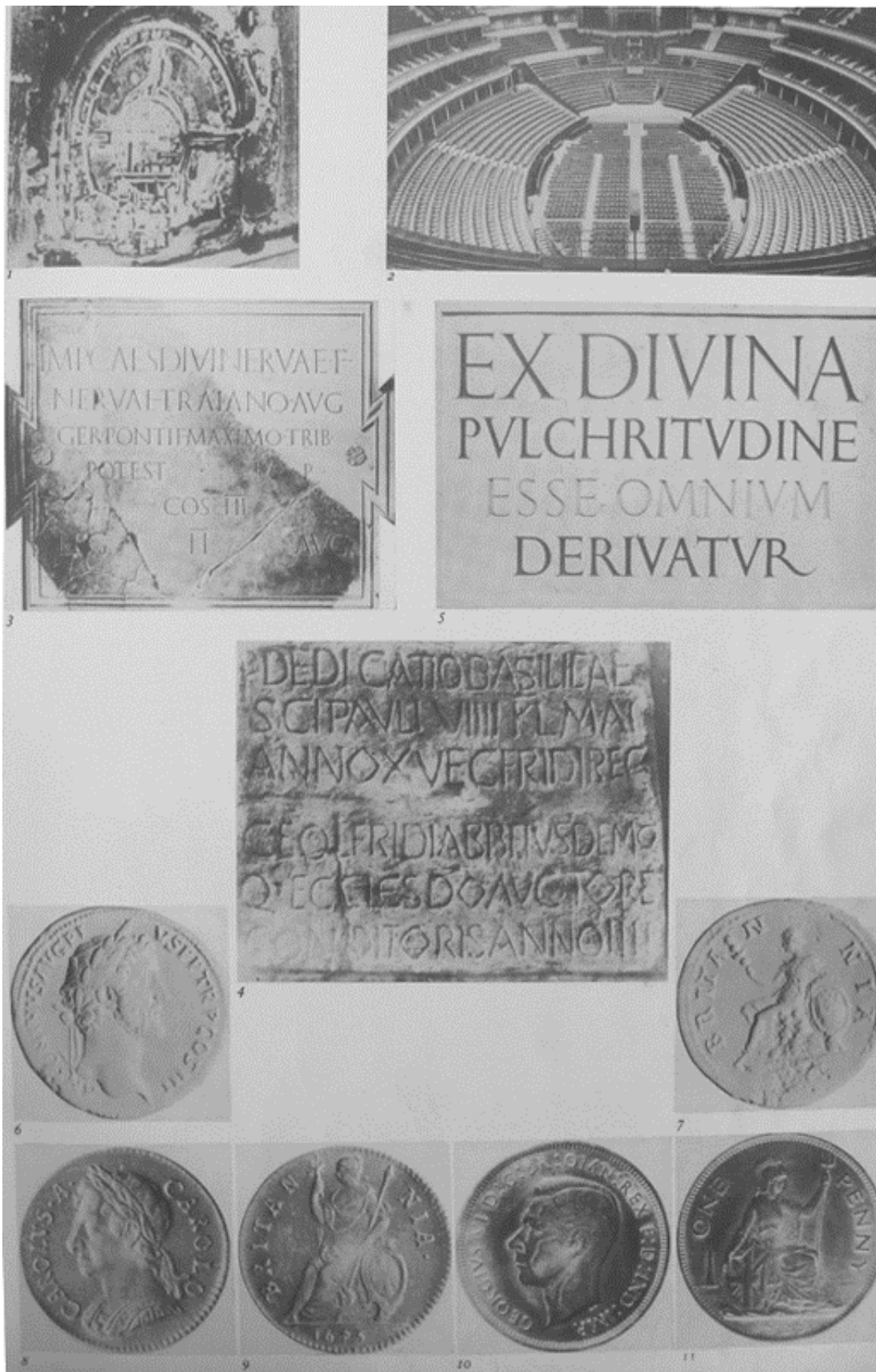


Fig. 2 *Theatre, Lettering, Coinage: Modern Revivals of Classical Types*, plate 11 from Fritz Saxl, Rudolf Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean*, London-New York-Toronto: Oxford University Press 1948, © The Warburg Institute.

(...) This story is told in 540 photographs arranged in groups each demonstrating one phase or aspect of the process. It is futile to stress the limitations of such a display. The black and white of a photographic reproduction cannot and is not supposed to be an adequate rendering of a work of art. But it is an obvious fact that an exhibition dependent for its documentation on a great number of objects, architectural ones prominent among them, and covering long periods, cannot be made from originals; and the method of showing a careful selection of photographs side by side permits of comparisons to be drawn and accents to be laid which it would be impossible to demonstrate by other than visual means. The twofold message which the Exhibition aims at conveying in spite of its limitations of scope and method is that the contacts between England and the Mediterranean peoples have in the past produced permanent values, and that this simple but memorable truth may be demonstrated in terms of art, and approached by visual education.²²

Such measures combined ‘cultural history’ and images as a medium of ‘visual education’; and the work involved in preparing the exhibition was based precisely on this binomial pairing.²³

‘Theme-motive’ in *English Art and the Mediterranean*

The *English Art and the Mediterranean* exhibition was planned from the start as an exportable product, and such was the case. The exhibition, accompanied by lectures and seminars,²⁴ was staged at universities and cultural centres throughout Britain between 1942 and 1944.

The exhibition is today documented by many published and unpublished materials: all the original photographs were displayed;²⁵ a guide with brief texts for each panel and captions of the single pictures;²⁶ a volume published in 1945 entitled *England and the Mediterranean tradition* which collected — among the many papers — the lectures presented in that occasion by Fritz Saxl, Rudolf Wittkower, Edgar Wind, Frances Yates;²⁷ and a ‘visual anthology’ as the main catalogue published in 1948 edited by Saxl and Wittkower.

²² WIA, General Correspondence (GC), Exhibitions, article outline by Gertrud Bing for the *CEMA Bulletin*, attached to a letter of 2 March 1942, Fritz Saxl (?) to Philippe James, CEMA, Board of Education.

²³ The photographic exhibitions organized by the Warburg Institute in London represent an element of continuity with the research method experimented in Hamburg; but the ‘visual education’ that inform these events is formally and conceptually different from the theoretical work on image by Aby Warburg; in this sense see: Katia Mazzucco, ‘Quarant’anni di bibliofilia e iconofilia. Osservazioni sul montaggio del libro *Mnemosyne* di Aby Warburg’, *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 2, 2011.

²⁴ See the *Addenda*.

²⁵ The Warburg Institute Photographic Collection.

²⁶ WIA I.25.3.

²⁷ The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, ed, *England and the Mediterranean Tradition. Studies in Art, History, and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1945, 142-153.

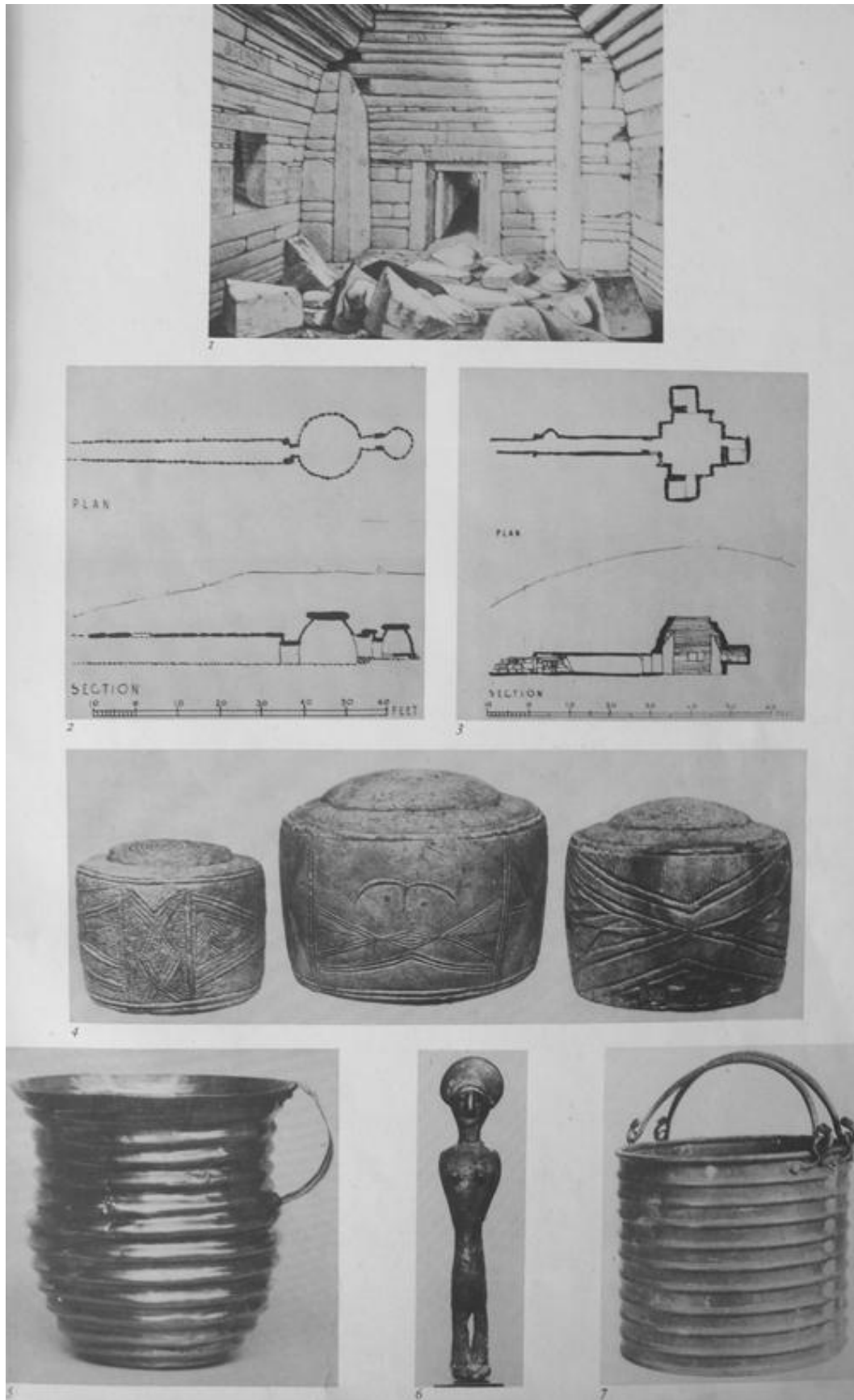


Fig. 3 *Mediterranean Traces in Prehistoric Britain*, plate 1 from Fritz Saxl, Rudolf Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean*, London-New York-Toronto: Oxford University Press 1948. © The Warburg Institute.

The catalogue, titled *British Art and the Mediterranean*,²⁸ gathered a typographical reconstruction in eighty-six plates of the original sixty-five panels, accompanied by a revised version of the texts for each panel from the exhibition guide. Furthermore, the event had had a precedent in a series of lectures held in Hamburg and published in the ninth volume of the KBW *Vorträge*, 'England und die Antike', illustrated with ninety pictures on thirty plates.²⁹

English Art and the Mediterranean was thus an exhibition made up of photographs of works that offered a broad panorama of the relations between British artistic expression and the Mediterranean tradition, from prehistory to the end of the nineteenth century. The first section, from prehistory to the sixteenth century, was curated by Fritz Saxl, the second, from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, by Rudolf Wittkower³⁰: a temporal illusion that on one hand showed long processes like 'those cinema pictures where the opening of a flower from the bud is shown as a consecutive movement', and on the other showed the breakdown of a relatively short sequence, the historic time-line development of three centuries, 'like those [pictures] which show a horse jumping a fence, in a number of shots recording every single position of the leaping animal [a.k.a. chronophotographic series]'. These were the photo-kinetic metaphors used by Wittkower in the preface to the catalogue.

Some of these shots (or single frame-images) were dedicated precisely to critical aspects of the discourse on the forms of tradition, especially those regarding the Italian influence on British art and architecture, or to objects favoured by Wittkower's studies of those years. For example, there was a panel on the 'Italianized Architecture of Inigo Jones and his school'. The key object and opening of the discourse in this panel, was the Queen's House in Greenwich as the 'first house in full Italian manner to be built in England', begun in 1616 by Inigo Jones and restructured in 1664 by John Webb. Inigo Jones's knowledge of Palladian architecture, acquired not only from the treatise but also from a study visit to Vicenza and its surrounds, was emphasised in the text accompanying the illustrations. It illustrated how the models of Palladio's design were conceived: for the facade facing the grounds, Jones had adapted a replica of Scamozzi's Villa Molini; whereas the side facing the river had been inspired rather by the Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano.

The reference text for the illustration analysed the displayed plan by comparing the proportions of Palladio's plan for Villa Pisani with those of Inigo Jones's building. The comparison showed that 'although Inigo Jones fully embraced the Italian ideals of symmetry, regularity and harmonious proportions, there is still an English element in the flat appearance of the elevations and in the excessive length of the building compared with his height'. The spread and assertion of the Italian style were further documented by a design from *Manière de Bien Bastir* (1647) by Pierre Le Muet — a well known study in England — and by comparison of Coleshill House by Roger Pratt (with Inigo Jones; 1650-1662 – figure 3 of plate 44), Eltham Lodge by Hugh May (1664 – figure 4) and the Dutch example of Van Kampen and Post (1633-1644 – figure f).

²⁸ Saxl, Wittkower, *British Art*.

²⁹ *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, IX, 1930/1931, Leipzig-Berlin: Teubner 1932.

³⁰ See the *Addenda*.



Fig. 4 *The Italianized Architecture of Inigo Jones and his School*, panel XXXVII from *English Art and the Mediterranean* exhibition, 1941. © The Warburg Institute.

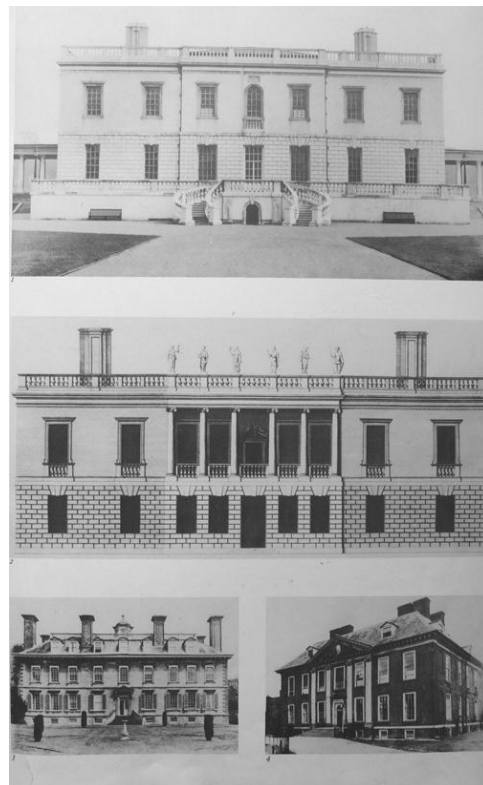
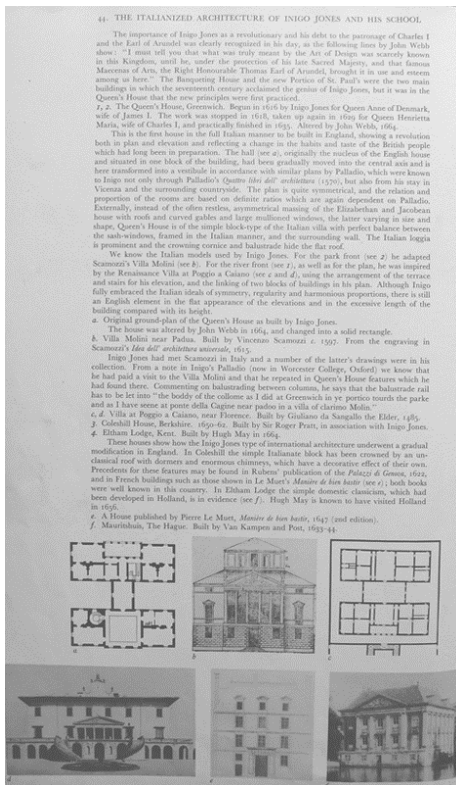


Fig. 5 *The Italianized Architecture of Inigo Jones and his School*, plate 44 from Fritz Saxl, Rudolf Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean*, London-New York-Toronto: Oxford University Press 1948. © The Warburg Institute.

In the catalogue plate on the elaboration of the ‘new style’ of the English eighteenth century there was an illustrative example of the theoretical ‘motive-theme’ scheme in architecture, as discussed by Wittkower in various writings. The ‘Italian architectural motives’ – studied in Lord Burlington’s circle and incorporated into English contemporary architecture – take on a ‘completely new meaning in the new context’. The chosen example was that of the so-called Venetian window, the Serlian frame, consisting of three lights, two with architraves and a larger, arched one at the centre. Theorised in the treatise by Sebastiano Serlio (figure a of plate 55) and also known in the English academic lexicon as a Palladian window, the motive – of an already ancient matrix – was widespread in Britain thanks mainly to the many editions of Vincenzo Scamozzi’s work (1615 – figure 1)

The obsessive recurrence in Neo-classical English architecture turns the motive from a compositional element of plastic-functional value into a ‘decorative pattern’. The emphasis of the stylistic exercise highlights the risk of transforming the planning process into a kind of transcription — in some cases at a very high level — of idealised, and some ways sterilised, stylistic elements.

The discourse on the transmission and reuse of motives in the ancient style is also argued by Rudolf Wittkower in his essay on pseudo Palladian elements in English neo-classicism published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* of 1943 and re-edited in the volume *England and the Mediterranean tradition*; the same issue that contains lecture papers and articles on the theme of the exhibition³¹. At the beginning of the essay, Wittkower writes:

The academic architects of the Burlington circle felt themselves to be the custodians of the tradition formed by Palladio and Inigo Jones, in whose works they believed that they had discovered the eternal rules of architecture.

In practice, as in theory, English architects sought to restore this past glory following the precepts derived from the work of the two masters. But in appraising Palladianism, Wittkower suggests using a critical eye, or evaluating the ‘endeavours’ rather than the ‘achievements’, in order to reveal the original and contextual characterisation of that style of architecture.

He then notes that some of the strongest and most recognisable motives of mid-eighteenth century academism were not, in the end, of authentic Palladian derivation, or they could be found in Palladio’s work only as occasional experiments. The viewpoint adopted in the essay focuses precisely on this unmasking: the idea of the pure classicism and Italianism of some ‘pseudo-Palladian elements’ common to the English architectural lexicon was certified by only presumed and not wholly demonstrable genealogies, while actually responding to an entirely contemporary conception of classicism.

³¹ Rudolf Wittkower, ‘Pseudo-palladian elements in English neo-classical’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, VI 1943, 154-164; revised edition in *The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, England*, 142-153; then in: Rudolf Wittkower, *Palladio and English palladianism*, London: Thames and Hudson 1974. See also by Wittkower: ‘Principles of Palladio’s Architecture I’, *Journal of the Warburg Institute* VII 1944, 102-122, and ‘Principles of Palladio’s Architecture II’, *Journal of the Warburg Institute* VIII, 1945, 68-106.

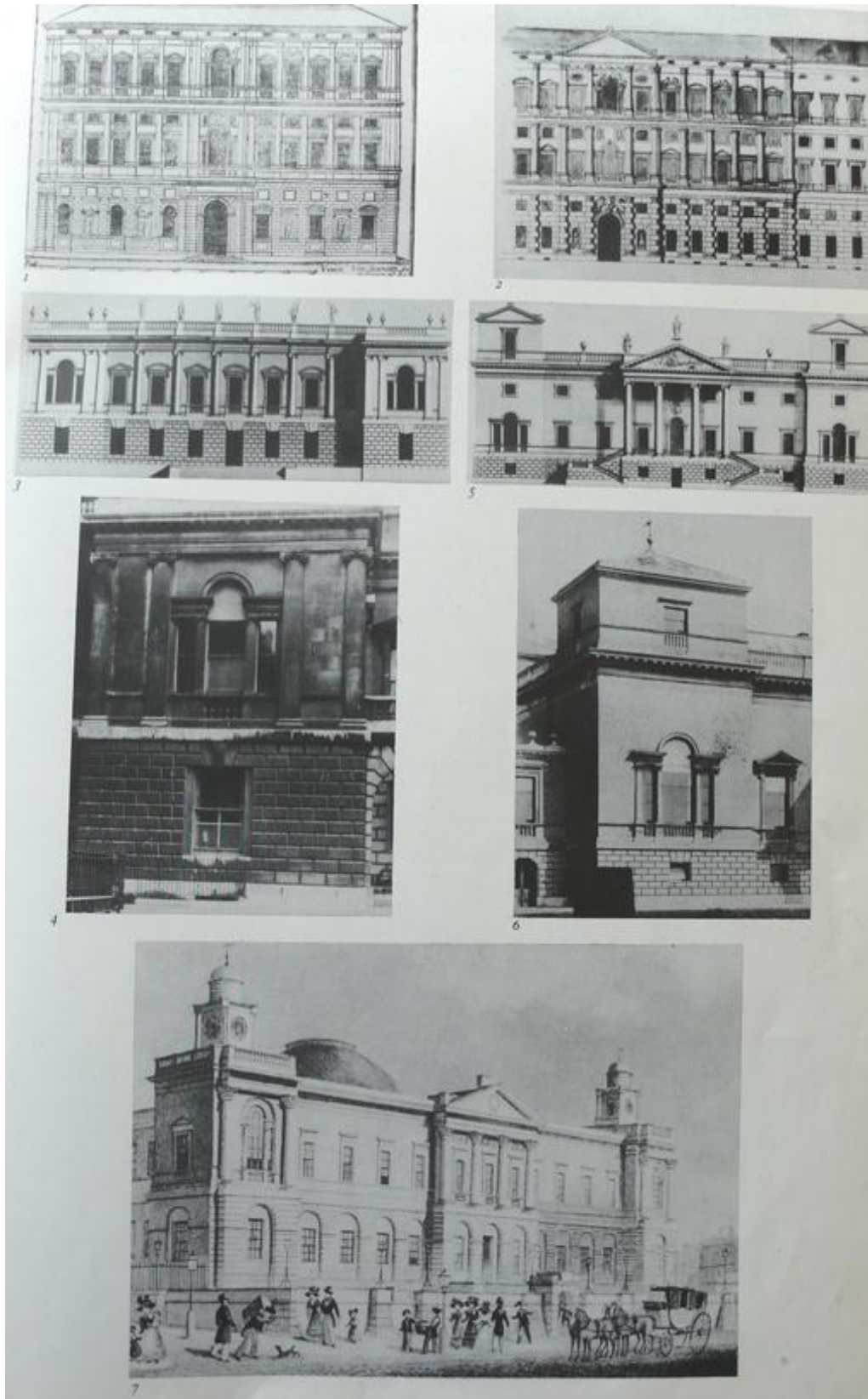


Fig. 6 *The Emergence of a New Style*, plate 55 from Fritz Saxl, Rudolf Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean*, London-New York-Toronto: Oxford University Press 1948. © The Warburg Institute.

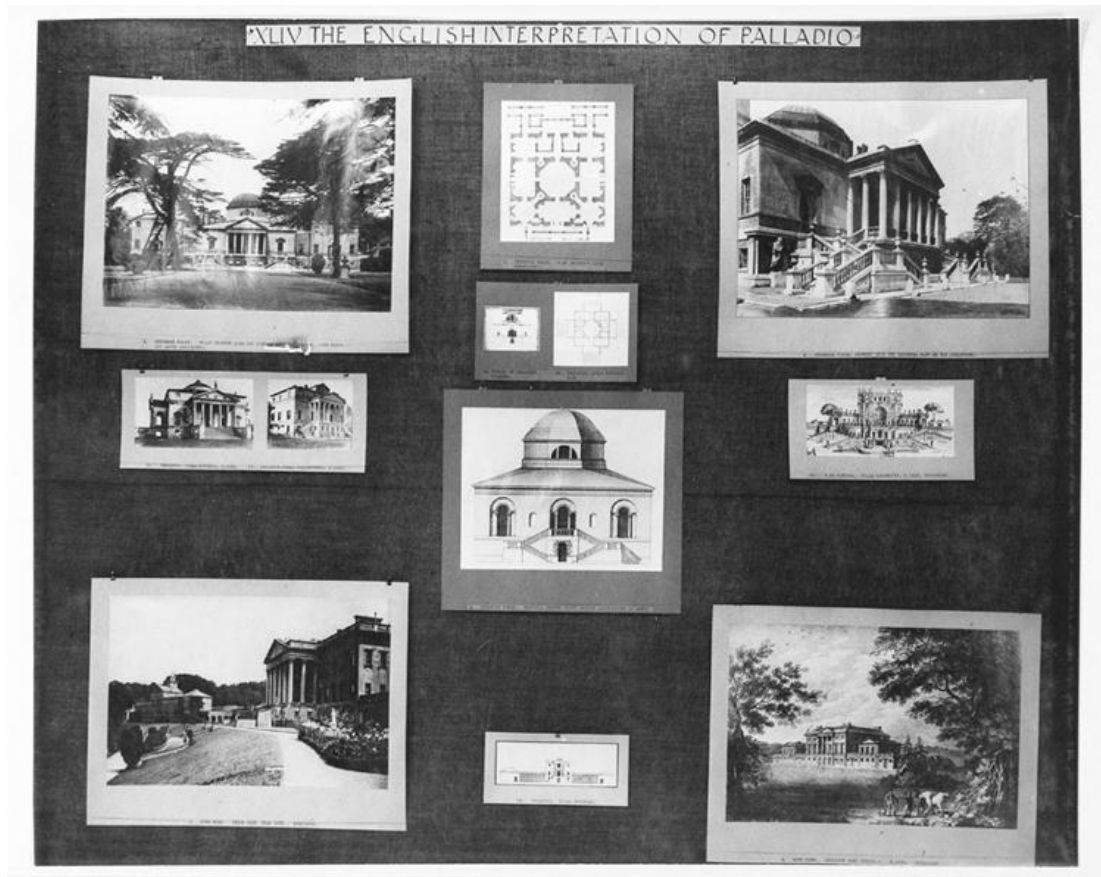


Fig. 7 *The English Interpretation of Palladio*, panel XLIV from *English Art and the Mediterranean* exhibition, 1941. © The Warburg Institute.

That which was considered an absolute rule, deduced from universal canons, lent itself in the essay to being discussed as an instrument for effectively expressing a clearly determined architectural sensitivity.

The examples proposed by Wittkower were the Venetian window, probably the most famous motive in English Palladianism, and a characteristic type of door or window frame: 'a simple moulded frame which has blocked quoins at regular intervals superimposed on its sides and a compact mass of three or five voussoirs in its lintel'³². In both cases, the complete catalogue of historical examples would be too large to be completed, even briefly. The discussion focused thus on few selected works.

The Venetian window motive has an uncertain origin, although it is first noted in Roman imperial architecture between the second and fourth century B.C. Adrian era examples are rather well known, and a very famous example is the one found in the Diocletian Palace of Split. The posthumous fame of the motive and the vulgarization of its applications came about in the modern era. The publication of the fourth *Libro dell'architettura* by Sebastiano Serlio (Venice, 1537) is the context from which came the name *serliana* for this frame.

In Palladio the motive appears repeated in a series on the Vicenza Basilica, from which the term Palladian or Venetian window derived. However, in Palladio's works, the motive has few occurrences as a single isolated element – the early

³² Wittkower in *The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, England*, 149.

Palladio project for Villa Angarano is an example of that use. In English culture of the eighteenth century the Venetian window became a rule for the single frame, very common even in non-monumental context and in use for popular architecture. Given these elements, the question discussed by Wittkower is how British architects can define the *serliana* motive as one that was Palladian, or better: ‘could English architects quote Palladio’s authority for that usage?’.

The second ‘pseudo-Palladian’ element presented in the Wittkower essay is the ‘ashlar frame’. The motive allows for enlightenment on the English interpretation, in a decorative manner, of structural elements that took origin in Italian architecture.

The classical equilibrium of the frame and its Palladian origin are however denied by Wittkower: ‘how does this motive fit into the pattern of Palladian and neo-classical architecture? Does it correspond to our conception of classical poise and is it — an *a priori* demand of classical architecture — easily ‘readable’?’³³ Although testified in many drawings by Inigo Jones, within a series dedicated to gates and portals, the Italian derivation of the motive is still uncertain. In Italian architecture this motive is a sign of a stressed mannerism, in the style of Giulio Romano — as traces of the penetration of the blocked quoins into a window or door’s frame (Mantua, Palazzo di Giustizia). ‘The road to this kind of conflict’ — wrote Wittkower — ‘was opened by Michelangelo in the Ricetto of the Biblioteca Laurenziana, where he built doors with overlapping architectural members which interfere with [one another’s] functions’.³⁴ But in Italian architectural culture the motive of the blocked quoin frame is not seen as a functional element; it has episodic occurrences, yet it has not been included in treatises, if not in only a few exceptional cases (as in the *Extraordinario Libro* by Serlio). After a short season of fortune in France and Netherlands, the motive ‘was legalized and academically petrified’ within the English culture of the mid 18th Century. Moreover, it was used in a very different manner from the nervous style of Giulio Romano, for it was placed in a plainer and calmer context — as the flat surface in Seaton Deleval by Vanbrugh.

The study of the processes by which some architectural motives were ‘translated from Italian into English idioms’ helps to ‘throw new light on the [neo-classical] movement as a whole’.³⁵ Behind the ease with which specific elements of the architecture of all English academic schools are read — an ease granted partly by their pervasiveness and a consequent visual familiarity, as noted and emphasised by Wittkower — the process of neutralisation of the original excesses or singularities is concealed. Wittkower proposed that the loss of the rhythmic-structural value (the example is the Serliana) or plastic value (the example here being the ashlar frame) of the Italianising motives in the tradition of that design and construction lexicon makes it possible to see how the characteristics of eighteenth-century English architecture could not be appreciated on the basis of an evaluation of cubic masses or volumes, or on the basis of the function of the elements within the design theme, but primarily by the pictorial qualities of its buildings. English neo-classical architecture was based, paradoxically, on a two dimensional

³³ Wittkower in *The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, England*, 150.

³⁴ Wittkower in *The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, England*, 151.

³⁵ Wittkower in *The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, England*, 142.

conception: its monument, suggested Wittkower, 'should be seen from a distance like a picture'.³⁶ Turning to the theoretical perspective, Wittkower seems to suggest a variation of the 'model-outcome' relationship, one of a purely typographical nature, or, in cases of transcriptions of distinct quality, a calligraphical nature.

London epilogue, American introduction

The *British Art and the Mediterranean* catalogue of 1948, already defined as a chapter in the Warburg Atlas,³⁷ also seems to exemplify this argumentation.

'The loosening of Classical Ties in Modern Times' is the title of the panel that ends the exhibition and catalogue. The text explains that a loss of contact with interests in classical tradition, and the further vacuum created by industrial culture seem to have caused a separation between ancient signs and their symbolic meaning. This signals the loss of meaning suffered by symbols, from which there we can read a conservative, even nostalgic, and evolutionary-biological line of interpretation.

The return to the classic in the period preceding the Second World War, which was literally swept away, and the revolt of the modern artist against the 'petrified apparatus of classical forms' are evidence of a discordant relationship with the artistic history of the past. In the plate we can see the caryatid chimney realized by Alfred Stevens for Dorchester House (now at the Victoria and Albert Museum; 1858-62 – figure 1, plate 86). The piece is sculpted in the crouching position of the 'prisoner' archaeological type, as an inspired reference to the renowned sculpture by Michelangelo. Stevens is defined in the catalogue as 'the last of the great humanist artists', however the editors add that this might be a pessimistic viewpoint. Even in the *torso* by Frank Dobson, now considered to be one of the fathers of modern British sculpture (figures 2, 3), we can hear the echoes of an archaeological-style fascination for ancient fragment – as the plate composition suggest. In the project by Herbert Baker for the Council Chamber in New Dehli (1913 – figure 4) the appeal to a classic order, after Jones and Wren. 'But it is questionable' – we can read in the 1948 catalogue – 'whether Wren's view, so readily accepted by Sir Herbert Baker, that 'Architecture aims at Eternity; and therefore the only Thing incapable of Modes and Fashions in its Principles, [only] the Orders' holds equal promise for the future'.

And yet the exhibition and the catalogue close with a refined and more indicative visual proposal, although the reductive schematism of the texts. The example is the detail of a typeface circulated by the English daily press (*The Times Literary Supplement*, figure 5 from panel 86) whose matrix may be found in the great Italian printing and publishing revolution of the sixteenth century (Lomazzo, *Trattato di Pittura*, Paolo Gottardo Pontio, Milan 1585 – figure 6). It is as if to say that traces of the restless relationship with history are at times concealed in unknown places or in not so particularly striking expressions of the cultural tradition.

³⁶ Wittkower in *The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, England*, 153.

³⁷ See the introduction by Giovanni Romano to the Italian edition of Wittkower's *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols (Allegoria e migrazione dei simboli)*, Torino: Einaudi 1987).



SEARCH OF THE SUBLIME

For he too came under the spell of Picturesque Beauty. These Tours in our own country which he brought out (themselves forming a small library) in 1768 and the next few years are amusingly jumbled affairs, because of his passion and an equal apt for noticing picture galleries and architectural features. Young was certainly as good as his word in supplying accounts of the present state of agriculture, manufactures and population wherever he journeyed; but he interpreted very willingly, among the data of rivers, wages, provisions, supplements, markets, his offerings to the romantic and the cosmopolitan. In search of the sublime, he can be grouped with such grateful explorers as Thomas Gray and William Gilpin, and like them he had some skill and grace with the pencil as well as the pen. His "Northern Tour", 1770, is illustrated from his own drawings, and incorporates quite a work by itself in the Lakes, with pictures of "waterfalls. The spirit of his descriptions is easily imparted: "Kewick, upon the whole, contains a variety that cannot fail of attending the spectator. The lake, the islands, the hanging woods, the waving meadows, and the cascades, are all most superlatively elegant and beautiful; while the rocks, cliffs, crags, and mountains, are equally striking and sublime." All the same, he would not be Arthur Young if he did not earnestly point out a deficiency, and require an industrial improvement: "There are a vast many edges of precipices, bold projections of rock, pendant cliffs, and wild romantic spots, which command the most delicious scenes, but which cannot be reached without the most perilous difficulty. To such points of view, winding paths should be cut in the rock, and viewing-places made for the weary traveller." As for his catalogue of pictures, a few of his observations at Oxford will signify how he was to work, and nobody can say that he did not form an opinion.

Q V I N T O

quella arte, con che fervore io sentiva. Però che l'una condizione non può andare senza l'altra, come favole quella che lo possono. Dall'opra farliò gli sommo nati: uno opera, come vedono, & non bello, & non cadente, & tanto; come è Raffaello & Polidoro, & ad Alberto Durero, pittore, benché non nella sua maniera Barbara, subodiosa, & intelligibile, che solo ha fatto più felice, facile, gueto, & capisco, che non hanno fatto, per così dire tanti gli altri insieme, che non sono ben collucati, come si vede per il gran fatto delle sue carte tagliate da lui, con deliquita grande, & equitativa. Adunque per quello rispetto non hanno da prendersi gli foresti, che se parra allora la pittura abbia da farsi per ben fare dell'azione. Però che ancora che il cervello de i modelli, sommano quelli sono opere della gloria, e non fare. Ma in forma il buon pittore si ferre di quel modo d'habituato detto sopra per dipoi la pittura viene ordinata sopra l'arte, & poi del naturale per gli passi ne quali si finge perfettamente, come vanno, & non in quelle vite di strano bagano nell'acqua, & certa, come viano moto, con loquace, & mai non si rappresenta un passo vero, come v'è. Celi ne fanno una parte di una maniera di passo giacuto, non del tutto della verità. Per che chiaramente si può comprendere questo si habbano a fuggire tali viziati, non tanto perché si fanno girare via il tempo, quanto che non condacioni mai le opere alla verità. Oltre che di qui ne legiamo per quelle piazze, palloni, & frangimento di cose, & di tanto ne gli' ornamenti, i quali dobbiamo procurare ad ogni modo di frangere. Finché ad aspettar bene, & lentamente investigare, ci vuole chiarezza, & ferre di tanto che possa fare per la facilità del fare, & la sincerità dell'arte. Così fra a effetto opposto dalla malinconia, & puerile considerazione non le cose che ci fanno con l'occhio del diletto, & condacione le opere al fine più perfetto non migliori, & più rari modi. Egli v'era che questi tali non possono cadere in non nell'azione di coloro, che conoscono, & usano bene tutti i primi elementi dell'arte, & tanto gli effetti che in tutte le opere possono passare. Così che ci affiora ad attendere a gli studi delle buone arti, che si fanno come strade & sentieri alla dilata mente, & insieme progressi al sapere; che i principi che si coltivano a lui, sono di tanto valore che in un momento fanno germogliar sentieri, & non per strade facili, & spesse, che altro che la buona di Dio non ha potuto fare, in quanto che non sommano a bastanza della prosperità.

Fig. 8 The Loosening of Classical Ties in Modern Times, plate 86 from Fritz Saxl, Rudolf Wittkower, British Art and the Mediterranean, London-New York-Toronto: Oxford University Press 1948. © The Warburg Institute.

The task of the art historian is hence to find them and point them out, or make them visible. In the Warburg Institute's first years in England, concern and almost worry about the documentary value of images seems to have reduced its overall methodological proposal to single, strict, outlines. Despite the fact of this fragmentation, a wish remains that continues to live on, relating directly to the Warburgian intellectual inheritance: that of finding an appropriate and non-reductive form for the narration (and exposition) of cultural processes. In those years, the Institute was a place where one could still experience the urgency of the question of how to comprehend the forms of 'cultural tradition' as well as the 'disquietude of history' and its possible forms of representation.

In 1956 Rudolf Wittkower no longer appeared on the list of editors of the *Journal of the Warburg Institute*. At the beginning of that year, after months of uncertainty and numerous attempts to verify his possible academic position in Britain, he decided to accept a proposal from Columbia University in New York, and move to the United States. In 1955, the first chair of Art History in Oxford, in the Faculty of Modern History, was assigned to Edgar Wind. And that same year, Erwin Panofsky had republished the introductory essay of his *Studies in Iconology* – first published in 1939 – as first chapter of *Meaning in the visual arts*, with significant terminological editing in the discussion of his theory on the three levels of description and interpretation of a work of visual art. That book, with which the Warburgian method started to be identified and confused with iconology, was the main frame of reference for the theorization of the principle of disjunction of the 'theme-motive' scheme.

The story of the *English Art and the Mediterranean* exhibition formally ends with a reprinting of the catalogue in 1969. Having originally been published in 1948 in a very limited edition – as Wittkower writes in the preface to the reprint – the work had sold out in three months, becoming a kind of collector's item. However, there was another reason for the reprinting – without alterations and only minimum corrections – a work that had become so remote in the history of studies, or better, so distant from the debate on the state of a 'new art history' that was already taking shape in the United States at the end of the 1960s.

In those years there had been important growth in the history of British art studies, and yet that book, with its original texts and illustrations, had 'not been replaced by a better one. It would therefore still seem to have a definite function'. The reprint hence acts to cover a hole in the critical bibliography on the topic, thanks especially to the panoramic overview offered by the content of the catalogue. Additionally it has the definite function, we might add, as a (photographic) fossil of the presence of the so called Warburgian studies in the city of London.

Katia Mazzucco is currently British Academy Visiting Scholar in London. In 2010 she was granted a post doctoral fellowship at the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence and a 'Grete Sondheimer' fellowship in Cultural and Intellectual History at the Warburg Institute in London. Her current research topic is 'Photography as a research tool in the historiography of art'. Among her recent publications: 'Uwagi do tekstów', in Aby M. Warburg, *Narodziny Wenus i inne szkice renesansowe*, Ryszard Kasperowicz, ed., Warsaw: 2010 (bibliographical and biographical notes to the Polish translation of Aby Warburg's *Ausgewählte Schriften*);

'The work of Ernst H. Gombrich on the Aby M. Warburg fragments', *Journal of Art Historiography* Number 5, December 2011.

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Addenda

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Lectures 1941-1942

courses in connection with an exhibition of *English Art and the Mediterranean* which will be opened at the Warburg Institute on the 2nd of December, 1941

1941

Courtauld Institute of Art

October, 30 Sir Kenneth Clark: 'Introductory lecture: Mediterranean influences on English art';

November, 6 Mr. T.D. Hendrick: 'Mediterranean elements in Anglo-Saxon ornament', 13 Dr. Otto Pächt: 'A giottesque episode in English mediaeval painting', 20 Mr. James Mann: 'Italian influence versus English tradition in sixteenth century sculpture', 27 Miss Margaret Whinney: 'The English house, 1550-1650: the classical revolution';

December, 4 Professor Emile Cammaerts: 'The school of Rubens and English painting'.

The Warburg Institute

December, 2 opening of the exhibition, 11 Dr. F. Saxl: 'Transformation of Italian models in the middle ages', 18 Mr. W.A. Pantin: 'Monasticism in England before coming the franciscans'.

1942

The Warburg Institute

January, 8 Miss Evelyn Jamison: 'Alliance of England and Sicily in the second half of the twelfth century', 15 Dr E.J. Wellesz: 'Eastern elements in English ecclesiastical music', 22 Mr. C.S. Lewis: 'Vernacular literature and the Renaissance in England', 29 Miss Frances A. Yates: 'Some uses of the emblem in Italian and English poetry';

February, 12 Mr. A. Prag: 'Newton's precursors and their Italian masters', 19 Dr. R. Wittkower: 'Lord Burlington and his circle', 26 Mr. J.T.A. Burke: 'Hogarth and Reynolds: a contrast in English art theory';

March, 5 Mr. Charles Mitchell: 'English portrait and history painting', 12 Mr. Basil Willey: 'Classicism in English literary theory';
 Courtauld Institute of Art
 April, 16 Professor Geoffrey Webb: 'English art in the baroque period', 23 Dr. E. Gombrich: 'Heroic landscape', 30 Mr. Francis Watson: 'The Grand Tour and English art';
 May, 7 Dr. F. Antal: 'William Hogart', 27 Mr. Anthony Blunt: 'The classical and the gothic in William Blake'; June 4 Dr. Nikolaus Pevsner: 'The Pre-Raphaelites and Italy'.

England and the Mediterranean Tradition. Studies in Art, History, and Literature, The Warburg and Courtauld Institute, eds, Oxford University Press 1945

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 Francis Wormald, 'The Fitzwarin Psalter and its Allies'
 John Pope-Hennessy, 'Nicholas Hilliard and Mannerist Art Theory'
 Frances A. Yates, 'The Emblematic Conceit in Giordano Bruno's 'De gli eroici furori' and in the Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences'
 D.J. Gordon, 'The Imagery of Ben Jonson's 'The Masque of Blacknesse' and 'The Masque of Beautie''
 Margaret Whinney, 'Classical Desings for Churches by John Webb'
 Edgar Wind, 'Julian the Apostate at Hampton Court'
 J.T.A. Burke, 'A Classical Aspect of Hogarth's Theory of Art'
 Rudolf Wittkower, 'Pseudo-Palladian Elements in English Neo-classical Architecture'
 H.F. Clark, 'Eighteenth Century Elysiums'
 Charles Mitchell, 'Benjamin West's 'Death of general Wolfe' and the Popular History Piece'
 Anthony Blunt, 'Blake's Pictorial Imagination'

British Art and the Mediterranean, London-New York-Toronto: Oxford University Press 1948

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