

Henriette Hertz, Jacques Doucet, Aby Warburg

The Creation of Major European Libraries for Art History

Alberto FRIGO

ABSTRACT

The rise of art history as a discipline in its own right at the beginning of the twentieth century was accompanied by the creation of large specialized libraries. The *Bibliotheca Hertziana*, the *Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie* desired by Jacques Doucet, and Aby Warburg's library are three major examples of this phenomenon. While their creation was almost simultaneous, these three institutions personify different approaches to art history due to the different considerations and personalities presiding over their creation.



Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, Palazzo Zuccari, "Sala del Disegno" (1924-1925).

Henriette Hertz (1846-1913), an art lover and collector from a wealthy Jewish family from Cologne, visited Italy on numerous occasions from 1888, and in 1890 moved to the Palazzo Zuccari in Rome, which was built and decorated by the painter F. Zuccari circa 1590. This German intellectual became the owner of the palazzo in 1904, and in 1908 inaugurated her salon there—one of the centres of Roman cultural life—and soon began considering the creation of a research institute dedicated to the art of the Renaissance. Hertz found an exceptional collaborator in the art historian Ernst Steinmann (1866-1934). Thus was born the project for a "Roman institute of art history for

research on art and sculpture since the Renaissance, with a particular focus on Rome,” as well as a specialized academic library that would be constituted from Hertz’s collections, which in 1910 already numbered over 5,000 volumes and 10-12,000 photographs. In 1912, Hertz bequeathed the Palazzo Zuccari, along with its volumes and photo library, to Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften (today Max-Planck-Gesellschaft), and the *Bibliotheca Hertziana* officially opened its doors in January of the following year, with Steinmann as director. “The primary objective of the institution,” Hertz wrote in 1910, “is to explore the art and culture of the Renaissance and ensuing centuries, and particularly Rome as a centre of European civilization.” These remarks clearly summarize the specific character of the *Bibliotheca Hertziana* as a place for research and documentation, which has made the study of the city of Rome and its history the favoured subject of its activities. This orientation was expressed through the creation of two periodicals (*Römische Forschungen*, 1912, and *Römisches Jahrbuch*, 1937), and by the publication of numerous works of great erudition by researchers associated with the *Bibliotheca* (*Michelangelo Bibliographie : 1510-1926* by Steinmann and Wittkower (1927), the publication of *Guide di Roma* by L. Schudt, Steinmann’s assistant and librarian (1930), and the body of Bernini’s drawings published by Brauer and Wittkower (1932)). The *Bibliotheca Hertziana* was conceived by its founder as a working tool offered to researchers, especially foreign ones, for on-site study of the development of the Italian artistic tradition. It was thus in keeping with—at least with respect to its creation—a conception of art history that found its ideal centre and privileged subject in the study of the Italian Renaissance and its major figures, along with its connections to Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

From one capital to another, the 1910s also saw the birth in Paris of the *Bibliothèque d’art et d’archéologie*. Around 1909, the owner of one of the first fashion houses, the art lover and collector Jacques Doucet (1853-1929) conceived the project for an institution that would address the lack of major art history libraries afflicting France at the beginning of the century. By granting an annual endowment of a million francs, Doucet undertook a major purchasing and acquisition campaign with the help of two collaborators, the scholar Albert Vuaflart (1871-1927) and the art critic René-Jean. In 1914, the library’s collections included over 100,000 printed books, 500 manuscript volumes, 1,500 files of original documents, 150,000 photographs, 10,000 antique and modern engravings, 2,000 collections of etchings, and 1,000 drawings. The library, which was open to the public, was located in five rented apartments in the rue Spontini in the 16th arrondissement, across from Doucet’s *hôtel particulier*. The undertaking met a dual requirement of exhaustiveness, as it would cover the field of art history in its full geographical and temporal breadth. As such, Doucet mobilized a vast network of specialists (including the sinologist Édouard Chavannes, the art historians Paul Perdrizet and Salomon Reinach, the Assyriologist François Thureau-Dangin, and the ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep) who guided the enrichment of the library’s various sections, notably for ancient and Eastern art, through the submission of selective bibliographies and the supervision of purchases. The same concern for offering a panoramic vision of multiple artistic traditions led Doucet to constitute a rich photo library, supplied by the financing of photographic campaigns in French and European museums, as well as the acquisition of pictures of numerous archaeological sites. In addition, Doucet gathered all types of documents that could contribute to understanding artistic phenomena, hence the rich collections dedicated to books on ornamentation and architecture, along with accounts of artistic voyages, collections of copies of ancient documents, sales catalogues, and especially records of contemporary artistic life, ranging from newspapers and the correspondence of artists to invitation cards. Moreover, the creation in 1910 of the *Répertoire d’art et d’archéologie issu de dépouillement des périodiques français et étrangers* confirmed the library’s encyclopaedic mission. Through its scope and the variety of its collections, this private art library—which was bequeathed to the University of Paris in 1918—demonstrates a desire to widen the field of art history research through increased exchange with ethnology, the history of technology, and the history of taste.

The library of the Warburg Institute is certainly the best known and the most studied of these three art libraries. Aby Warburg (1866-1929), who was from a family of wealthy Jewish bankers, dedicated himself from a young age to the study of art history by supplementing his education at the universities of Bonn, Munich, and Strasbourg with

numerous stays in Florence, along with courses on psychology at the University of Berlin. In 1900, Warburg contemplated creating a “library relating to the science of culture [*Kulturwissenschaft*]” that would bear his name. With the financial support of his family, he increased his systematic purchases and in 1911 reached 15,000 volumes. Initially set up in Warburg’s home in Hamburg, the library, which was endowed with a rich photo library, took on its definitive features in 1926 by becoming a research institute established in a new building. Anticipating the consequences of Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, the Institute left Hamburg for London, where after a number of moves the library found its definitive headquarters in the building located on Woburn Square. For Warburg, the library (and the rich photo library supplementing it) constituted both a *tool* and a *mirror* of his own research on the survival of Antiquity and the life of images. Its volumes are classified according to subject matter, or even by key topics, and Warburg incessantly rearranged it in accordance with the evolution of his working hypotheses and the discovery of new connections. Fritz Saxl, a major figure in the library’s creation and its first director after Warburg, wrote that “the decisive idea was for the books taken as a whole—each with its own quantity of information and each made more powerful by the presence of the volumes surrounding it—to guide the student towards consideration of the fundamental forces of the human spirit and its history.” Hence the “law of the good neighbour” formulated by Warburg, according to which “the decisive information” can be found, in many cases, in the book shelved next to the one being sought. The Warburg library thus presents itself as a “library of questions,” which through its logic and classification “obliges the reader to engage with problems” (Saxl) by moving from shelf to shelf. It therefore expresses, in the most accomplished form, Warburg’s desire to establish a unitary *Kulturwissenschaft*, where “documents from the field of language and the visual arts or religious drama” are mobilized “to give an account of the psychology of artistic creation” (Warburg).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

EBERT-SCHIFFERER, Sybille, VON BERNSTORFF, Marieke, eds., *100 Jahre Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte. Die Geschichte des Instituts 1913-2013* (Munich: Hirmer, 2013).

CHAPON, François, *Mystère et splendeur de Jacques Doucet, 1853-1929* (Paris: Lattès, 1984).

SAXL, Fritz, “The History of Warburg’s Library” [1943-1944], in Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg : An Intellectual Biography* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1970), 325-338.

Source URL:

<https://ehne.fr/encyclopedia/themes/arts-in-europe/collection-european-images/henriette-hertz-jacques-doucet-aby-warburg>