The Mnemosyne (“Memory”) Atlas is the last project of the German-Jewish “cultural scientist” and art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929). It is an attempt to map the “afterlife of antiquity,” or how images of great symbolic, intellectual, and emotional power emerge in Western antiquity and then reappear and are reanimated in the art and cosmology of later times and places.

In its “last version,” the Mnemosyne Atlas consisted of 971 images on sixty-three panels made of wooden boards, measuring approx. 40 x 60 in. and covered with black cloth. On this, Warburg arranged and rearranged, in a lengthy combinatory process of addition and subtraction, black and white photographs of art-historical and cosmographical images. He also included photographs of maps, manuscript pages, and contemporary images drawn from newspapers and magazines. The individual panels, in turn, were then numbered and ordered to create still larger thematic sequences.

"By heart a native of Hamburg, by blood a Hebrew, in spirit a Florentine"

With this motto Aby Warburg neatly distilled the tripartite forces that animated his life and thought. Warburg was the firstborn son of a prominent Hamburg-Jewish family of bankers and, when he was only thirteen years old and already determined to become a scholar, Aby is said to have passed his birthright to his brother Max in exchange for the promise that he would be able to purchase as many books as he needed for his studies. This promise to feed Aby’s bibliophilia would eventually provide the financial support for the founding of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg (Warburg Library of Cultural Studies) in Hamburg in 1926. Today, his library lives on as the Warburg Institute at the University of London.
A. Coordinates of Memory: Man and the Cosmos (the Tornabuoni family, Leonardo da Vinci, the Zeppelin)

I. Astrology and mythology: projections of the cosmos (Babylon, Athens, Alexandria, Rome)

II. Archaeological models and imprints from Antiquity. Ecstasy and melancholy, pathos of sacrifice and the gesture of triumph


IV. Vehicles of tradition: tournaments, pageantry, tapestries, mythological fables. Exchanges between North and South (the early Renaissance; Florence, Flanders)

V. The Irruption of Antiquity: drawing, grisaille, courtly games, mythical allegories (Pollaiolo, Botticelli)

VI. Dionysiac formulae of emotions: annihilation and fury, mourning and meditation (victim, executioner, Mother, Maenad, Laocoon)

VII. Nike and Fortuna: Merchants, Angels, nymphs, Warriors. (Ghirlandaio, Mantegna)

VIII. The gods’ ascent into the heavens, and their return to earth: from the Muses to Manet (Rome 16th - Paris 19th Century)

IX. Dürer: the gods go North. Formulae of emotions and cosmology in Dürer. Migration of the gods to the North

X. The age of Neptune. The gods and the celebration of power of the Italian courts and European monarchies (16th-17th century)

XI. Official art and the dramatization of myths: Baroque pathos. From the scene of abduction, to the Anatomy Lesson (Rubens, Rembrandt)

XII. Re-emergence of antiquity. Engrams: defense, annihilation, apotheosis. The Mother, the Angel, the golf player (prints, stamps)

Ω. The classical tradition today. Antiquity today. Church, State, power: from pagan sacrifice to the sublimation of ritual