

Frank Zöllner

ABY WARBURG AND FLYING

Human flight has been the stuff not just of fantastical night-time dreams, but also of practical day-time pursuit ever since the earliest times. We need only to think of the legends of flight and flying that have come down to us from antiquity or the Middle Ages, for example, and the experiments of engineers and artists in the fifteenth century.¹ Most famous of all, undoubtedly, are Leonardo da Vinci's investigations into the subject. For Leonardo, however, the dream of flying was only to be fulfilled in symbolic fashion. This is witnessed not by his studies of flying machines or bird flight, but by his topographical drawings of North Italy. Two of these enormous ink and watercolour maps show, in bird's-eye view, an artificial lake stretching along the Valdichiana valley, south-east of Florence (fig. 1). In real life, however, there was no such reservoir: it existed only Leonardo's imagination. However, it is significant that Leonardo simulated flight with this aerial perspective, and that the imaginary body of water in both drawings suggests the shape of a giant bird which is gliding over the Central Italian landscape.²

I have chosen Leonardo's maps to introduce my subject because they illustrate, in emblematic fashion, that when it comes to the dream of flying, it is not necessarily always about flying itself, but about its visualisation and heightened symbolic expression. For more than two millennia, in fact, the visualisation of the dream of flying was significantly more important than flying itself. Human flight only became a reality

1 — Wolfgang Behringer and Constance Ott-Koptschalijski, *Der Traum vom Fliegen. Zwischen Mythos und Technik*, Frankfurt am Main 1991. I would like to thank Karen Williams for her translation of my text and Elisabeth Schaber (Leipzig) and Claudia Wedepohl (London) for advice and references.

2 — For Leonardo's drawings of the topography of Italy and his studies of flying machines, see Frank Zöllner, *Leonardo da Vinci 1452–1519. Complete Paintings and Drawings*, Cologne et al. 2011, pp. 540–557, Cat. nos. 464 and 466 (Windsor Castle, Royal Library 12277r and 12278r), and pp. 648–675, with further references (third edition).



1 — Detail Leonardo, *Map showing the west coast of Italy from Magra to Corneto*, 1503/1504, 317 × 449 mm, Windsor Castle, Royal Library 12277r.

with the hot-air balloon of the eighteenth century (1783), the gliders of the nineteenth century and the zeppelins and first airplanes of the early twentieth century.³

Up to the start of the twentieth century, flying took place first and foremost in images. Prior to this point, it was definitely more of a visual than an airborne practice. Only with the military aviation of the First World War, and with the introduction, during approximately the same period, of regular passenger and mail flights by plane and airship, did flying move beyond the realm of madcap experiments to become a firm reality.⁴ Flying was thereby considered the most exciting statement of technological progress, something that in turn inspired a vast wealth of images on the subject. An example is a poster advertising the 1914 *Prinz Heinrich-Flug*, a competition which was inaugurated in 1911 and in which the technical reliability of aircraft was tested

3 — *Ein Jahrhundert Flugzeuge. Geschichte und Technik des Fliegens*, ed. Ludwig Bölkow, Düsseldorf 1990, pp. 8–31; Camille Allaz, *History of Air Cargo and Airmail from the 18th Century*, London 2004, pp. 9–30; Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings. Aviation and the Western Imagination 1908–1918*, New Haven and London 1994.

4 — Bölkow (as in note 3), pp. 334–345 and pp. 375–398.



2 — Commercial Poster for the *Prinz Heinrich-Flug*, 1914.



3 — Medal for Hugo von Eckener's transatlantic flight with LZ 126, October 1924.

(fig. 2, plate XXXI).⁵ My second example is the commemorative medal issued on the occasion of Hugo von Eckener's crossing of the Atlantic in October 1924 (fig. 3).

The advances in aviation, and the visual practice that accompanied them, fell within the last two decades of the life of the Hamburg-based art historian and cultural theorist Aby M. Warburg, who died in 1929. Warburg engaged repeatedly and intensively both with aviation itself and with its visual and symbolic representation. In a short essay written in 1913, he discusses the celestial flight taken – according to Greek legend – by the Macedonian king, Alexander the Great.⁶ Warburg analyses the illustration of this legend in the example of a fifteenth-century Burgundian tapestry, in which Alexander is shown being carried up into the sky in a chariot drawn by four griffins. In this case the griffins are both the vehicles of locomotion and symbols of flying.

5 — Hans von Lüneberg, *Geschichte der Luftfahrt*, vol. 1, Mannheim 2003, p. 118.

6 — Aby Warburg, "Luftschiff und Tauchboot in der mittelalterlichen Vorstellungswelt" (1913), in: id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. the Bibliothek Warburg, Leipzig and Berlin 1932, pp. 241–249 (Reprint 1969).

Later, in the 1920s, Warburg turned his attention to flying itself, as well as to its representation and to the symbolism of air transport. He thereby concentrated on examples from airship aviation, the airmail transport service and airmail stamps.⁷ Like his contemporaries, Warburg was convinced that aviation and its reflection in visual culture and pictorial practice held extraordinary cultural-historical significance.⁸

Warburg's enthusiasm for the aviation of his day was fuelled by the worldwide successes of this technology. The rigid airships being produced by the Zeppelin company in Germany were already a subject of interest to him shortly before, as well as during, the First World War.⁹ He subsequently became particularly interested, at the latest as from November 1924, in the airship pioneer Hugo von Eckener, who captained the first successful zeppelin flights across the Atlantic in October 1924.¹⁰ Shortly after this date, Warburg sought to make contact with Hugo von Eckener, with whom he wished to write a book about airship travel! In airship aviation, Warburg saw nothing short of a revolutionary shift in humankind's attitude towards the cosmos.¹¹ In the mastery of the skies, he saw a triumph of technology over the previously uncontrollable and potentially threatening forces of the cosmos. He thereby understood the zeppelin and the technologies of airship navigation as a symbol of this triumph.¹²

The zeppelin was relatively sluggish in its handling, however, and consequently a comparatively undynamic symbol. A far more dynamic aircraft, by contrast, was the modern airplane, which became a frequent, symbolically charged motif of airmail stamps as issued from 1912. As a visual medium, moreover, the airmail stamp is particularly suitable as a means of illustrating Warburg's views on the creation of symbols. In 1926 Warburg himself created at least two designs for a new *Deutsches Reich* airmail stamp (fig. 4). His sketches show an airplane soaring upwards over the sea. From the private notes he made about this design, it would appear that the plane is taking off against a morning sky. The underside of the wings should carry the inscription "IDEA VICTRIX".¹³

7 — *Tagebuch der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*, ed. Karen Michels and Charlotte Schoell-Glass, Berlin, 2001, pp. 23–25; Ulrich Raulff, "Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg einer Idee. 'Idea vincit': Warburg, Stresemann und die Briefmarke", in: *Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus*, 6 (2002), pp. 125–162; Dorothea McEwan, "IDEA VINCIT – 'Die siegende, fliegende Idea'. Ein künstlerischer Auftrag von Aby Warburg", in: *Der Bilderatlas im Wandel der Künste und Medien*, ed. Sabine Flach et al., Munich 2005, pp. 121–151; Karen Michels, *Aby Warburg. Im Bannkreis der Ideen*, Munich 2007, pp. 109–113.

8 — McEwan (as in note 7), pp. 122–130.

9 — Warburg Institute Archive (WIA), General Correspondence (GC), Gustav Leithäuser to Aby Warburg March 5 1913.

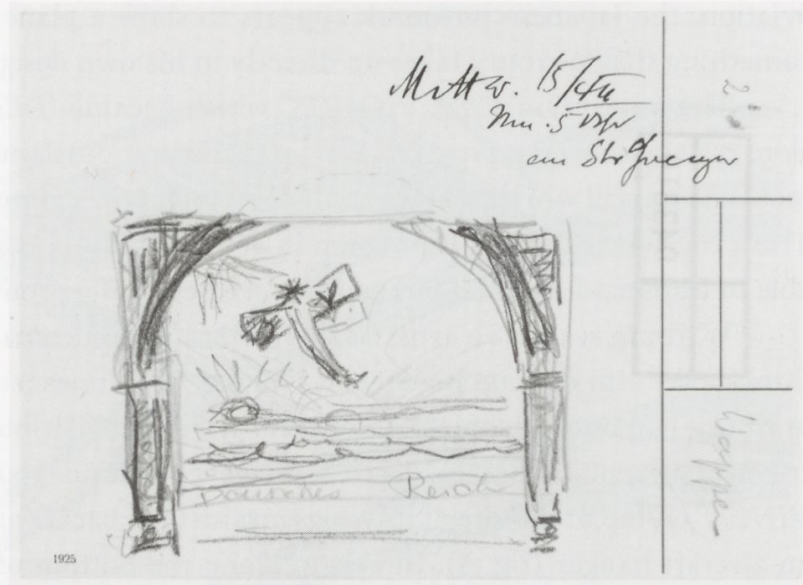
10 — WIA, GC, Aby Warburg to Felix Warburg November 5 1924.

11 — WIA GC, Aby Warburg to Alfred Giesecke July 31 1925; August 19 and 28 1925.

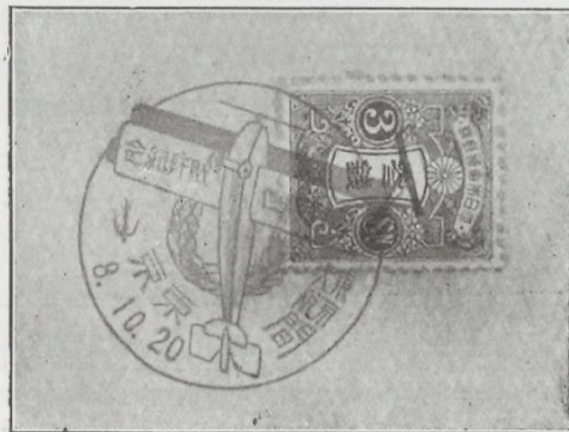
12 — Michels and Schoell-Glass (as in note 7), p. 523; Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg. Eine intellektuelle Biographie*, Hamburg 2006, p. 402 (English 1970).

13 — Charlotte Schoell-Glass and Karen Michels, "Aby Warburg et les timbres en tant que document culturel", in: *Protée. Revue internationale des théories et de pratiques sémiotiques*, 30 (2002), pp. 85–92; Raulff

4 — Aby Warburg, *First sketch for an air mail stamp*, 1926, London, The Warburg Institute Archive.



1919 (3. Oktober) Versuchs-Fluglinie Tokyo—Osaka und zurück.
Kursierende Freimarken von 1914 überdruckt:



5 — Postmark from Japanese mail flight from Tokyo to Osaka, 1919, Berezowski 1925, p. 146.

1	1 ½	Sn hellblau (rot)	3.—	40.—
2	3	Sn rosa (blau)	6.—	75.—

In his notes, Warburg also identifies the direct source of inspiration for his stamp design: a Japanese postmark used for the first official *Japanese mail flight from Tokyo to Osaka* in 1919 (fig. 5).¹⁴ In a particularly vivid expression of the dynamism of modern

(as in note 7); McEwan 2005 (as in note 7); Fernando Esposito, “Veicoli iconici”. Il motivo dell’aviazione nel francobollo di Warburg e nel fascismo”, in: *Visual History. Rivista internazionale di storia e critica dell’immagine*, 3 (2017), pp. 99–120.

14 — Michels and Schoell-Glass (as in note 7), p. 23; Alexander Berezowski, *Handbuch der Luftpostkunde. Katalog sämtlicher Marken und Abstempelungen der Luftposten*, Neustadt (Orla) 1925. For Warburg’s use of this book see WIA III. 99.1.1.2, fol. 93/32f.

aviation, the Japanese postmark appears to show a plane soaring boldly upwards – something that Warburg takes up directly in his own designs.

The inscription *IDEA VICTRIX*, which became *IDEA VINCIT* in the final version, may be read as a programmatic statement: it proclaims the hope that a forward-looking idea will win the day and will do so under the banner of technological progress. This progress finds ideal expression in aeronautics and thus in a technology which is able to transcend national boundaries (see below).

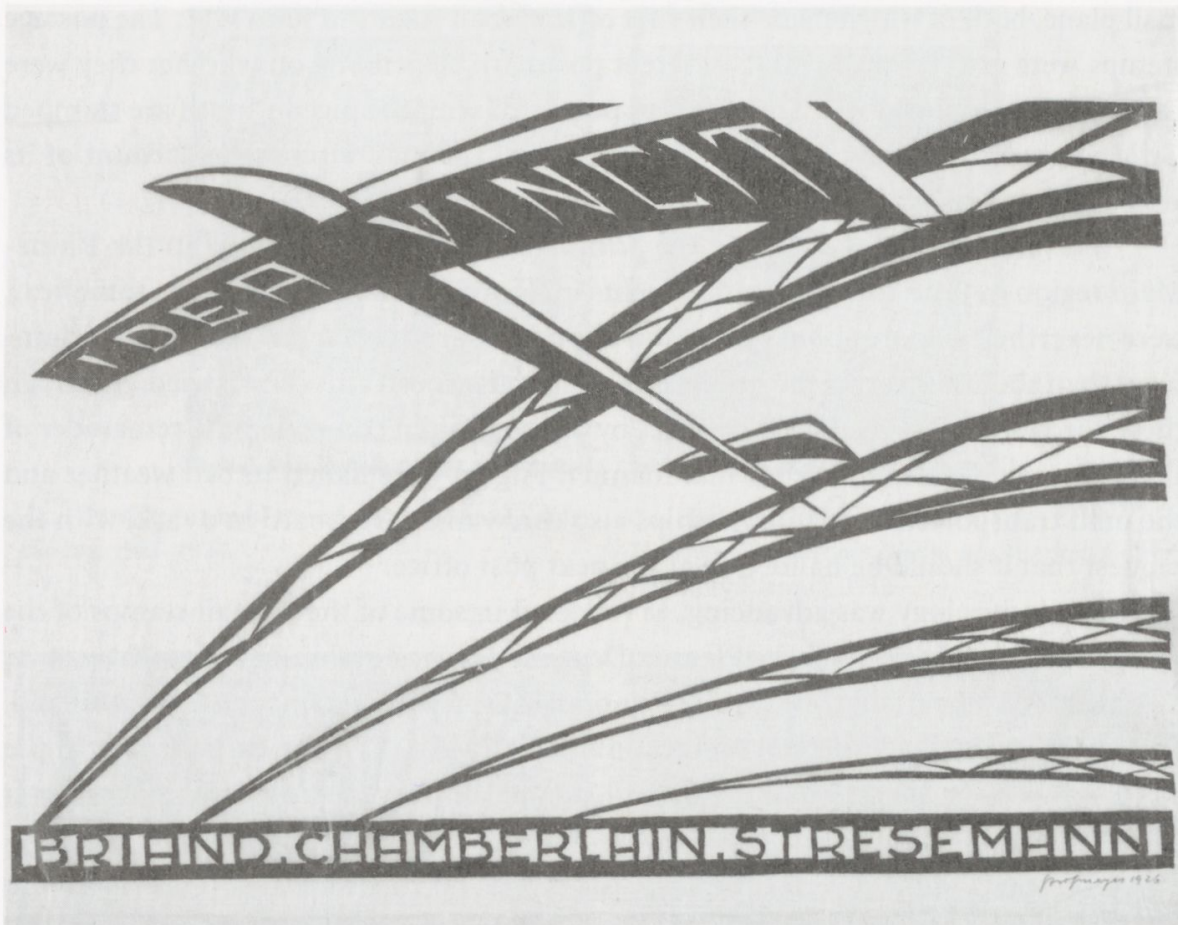
Warburg asked two artists – firstly Alexander Liebmann and then Otto Heinrich Strohmeyer – to develop his sketches further. Strohmeyer's resulting design, of which Warburg had several copies printed and which he distributed among politicians and friends, presents a highly stylised image of a monoplane, with the motto *IDEA VINCIT* on the underside of its wings, against the backdrop of the sweeping trusses of an aircraft hangar (fig. 6). In a strip along the bottom of the design are the names Briand, Chamberlain and Stresemann. They refer to Aristide Briand, Joseph Chamberlain and Gustav Stresemann, the French, British and German foreign ministers who in 1926 received Nobel Peace Prizes in recognition of their diplomatic efforts to establish a peaceful post-war order in Europe. Warburg's stamp project was bound up with his hope that a mass medium such as the postage stamp would carry the idea of international understanding far and wide. As Warburg wrote, on 28 February 1927 in the official diary of the Warburg Library for Cultural Sciences, the "airmail stamp puts the energetic dynamism of transport in place of the conveyance of the national political will".¹⁵ In other notes from this same period, Warburg observes that "the momentum of the European soul", which "despite everything soars free", finds expression in the airmail stamp. He saw the visual medium of the airmail stamp as a symbol of the transcending of borders in politically agitated times and under the conditions of rapid technological progress.¹⁶

Warburg's stamp design invoked the technological progress embodied by aviation, as well as its potentially international character and its visualisation in the postage stamp, but contemporary reality at times looked quite different. This is shown, for example, by the airmail stamps issued between 1921 and 1924 by the Free City of Danzig (fig. 7).¹⁷ Following Germany's defeat in the First World War and after the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, Danzig was separated from the former German Empire, to whose territories it had previously belonged, and now lay in the so-called "Polish Corridor". Its airmail stamps thereby became a symbol of the Free City's separation. They show a monoplane above a silhouette of the Danzig skyline. In this case, however, it symbolises

15 — Michels and Schoell-Glass (as in note 7), p. 62.

16 — WIA III 99.1.1.2, fols. 69/24 and 119/44.

17 — Berezowski (as in note 14), pp. 37–38; *Michel-Briefmarken-Katalog Deutschland 1985/1986*, Munich 1985, Danzig pp. 66 ff., pp. 112 ff., pp. 133 ff. and pp. 202 ff.



6 — Otto Heinrich Strohmeyer, *IDEA VINCIT*, 1926, 20 × 29.8 cm, linocut, Cambridge MA, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Paul J. Sachs.

not the “momentum of the European soul”, as in Warburg’s ideal of aviation, but a nationalistic programme – a programme, moreover, that is still deploying a conservative visual language.

The modernity of Warburg’s design also becomes clear when we compare it with the German airmail stamps of these years. Their designs can be characterised as follows: the carrier pigeon familiar from the traditional letter post; stylised representations of this motif; modified versions of traditional postal-service symbols; and illustrations of modern aircraft (planes or zeppelins).

The German Empire’s first official airmail stamp, issued in 1912, shows a pigeon flying with a sealed letter clamped in its beak against the backdrop of a rising or setting sun (fig. 8).¹⁸ With its representation of a carrier pigeon, the postage stamp thereby illustrates an anachronistic means of transportation.

In reality, airmail was carried not by pigeons, but by two modern aircraft: either by the Zeppelin-built airship *Schwaben*, also known as the LZ10, or by the *Gelber Hund*

18 — Michel (as in note 17), *Deutsches Reich*, pp. I ff.

mail plane, both of which made their first official mail flights in June 1912. The postage stamps were also franked with a different postmark, depending on whether they were carried by airship or plane. Thus airmail postcards with the pigeon-motif are stamped *Gelber Hund*, or “yellow dog”, the name given to the mail aircraft on account of its yellow tail and wings (fig. 8).

The airmail flights made by the *Schwaben* and the *Gelber Hund* in the Rhine-Main region in June 1912, or similar flights in Bavaria on 10 October of the same year, were nevertheless more about putting on a spectacular show for the public’s entertainment than about delivering the special commemorative postcards they carried. Although these cards were flown a few kilometres by air, they often completed the remainder of their journey by land in the normal manner. Flights were halted in bad weather and the mail transported overland. Airships also threw mail overboard in a sack, with the request that it should be handed in at the next post office.¹⁹

But technology was advancing, as reflected in some of the airmail stamps of the year 1919. Thus the green forty-Pfennig *Deutsche Flugpost* stamp, for example, carries the image of a modern biplane (fig. 9). The orange ten-Pfennig stamp, on the other hand, shows a post horn – an iconographical motif dating back to the earliest days of the postal system. To identify it as an airmail stamp, the post horn has been given a pair of wings (fig. 10).²⁰

Another *Deutsche Flugpost* stamp, issued several times between 1922 and 1924, was intended to look more modern, but from a design point of view represents no real improvement (fig. 11). This *Deutsche Flugpost* stamp returns to the motif of the carrier pigeon, but shows it in a stylised form and without a sealed letter in its beak. This stylisation as an expression of modernisation was poorly received, and the would-be modern design was mockingly dubbed the “wood pigeon”.²¹

The penultimate airmail stamp issued under the Weimar Republic dates from the years 1926 to 1927. It was designed by Oskar Werner Hermann Hadank and shows an eagle with wings outspread perched on a rocky pinnacle. The motif has none of the stylisation that, in the case of the “wood pigeon” stamp, was intended to convey modernity. Instead, Hadank gives us an almost realistic portrait of the eagle. Modernity

19 — Berezowski (as in note 14), pp. 42–47 and pp. 51–56; *Gebrüder Senfs Illustrierter Briefmarkenkatalog 1927. Postmarken von Europa*, Leipzig 1927, p. 105. The Warburg Institute Library (shelf mark NOP S25) has 12 editions of Senf’s catalogues, published between 1907 and 1928. <https://www.muenchen.de/rathaus/Stadtverwaltung/Direktorium/Stadtarchiv/Chronik/1912.html> (accessed September 23 2017).

20 — Michel (as in note 17), *Deutsches Reich*, pp. 111 f. of 1919. For the iconography of the “Posthorn” see Alexander Bungez, *Großes Lexikon der Philatelie*, Munich 1923, p. 460 and pp. 571 f. (used and recommended by Warburg himself; see WIA, GC, Aby Warburg to Ludwig Binswanger December 16 1926; Aby Warburg to Herbert Munk March 7 1927).

21 — Michel (as in note 17), *Deutsches Reich*, pp. 210 ff. of 1922; pp. 235 ff. and pp. 263 ff. of 1923; pp. 344 ff. of 1924.



7 — Danzig, Air mail stamp, *Flugpost Freie Stadt Danzig*, 1921–1924.



8 — German Reich, Air mail stamp, *Erste Deutsche Flugpost am Rhein*, postmarked *Gelber Hund*, 10 Pfennig, 1912.



9 — German Reich, Air mail stamp, *Deutsche Flugpost*, 40 Pfennig, 1919.



10 — German Reich, Air mail stamp, *Deutsche Flugpost*, 10 Pfennig, 1919.



11 — German Reich, Air mail stamp, *Deutsche Flugpost Holztaube*, 1922–1924.



12 — German Reich, Air mail stamp, *Deutsche Flugpost*, 1926–1927.



13 — Aby Warburg, *Lecture on postage stamps*, 1927, Plate 9, London, The Warburg Institute Archive.

is confined to the sans-serif capital letters of the writing around the edges of the stamp (fig. 12).²²

Warburg made his most detailed study of the topics of flying, aviation and the airmail stamp in the lecture on stamps that he delivered on 13 August 1927 (*Die Funktion des Briefmarkenbildes im Geistesverkehr der Welt*). Hundreds of preparatory notes have come down to us from this lecture, along with two of the original plates with which Warburg accompanied his talk. Another fourteen plates from the lecture are documented in black-and-white photographs. Warburg used these plates and other materials to illustrate his lecture.²³

Plate 9, in which Warburg presents an international selection of airmail stamps, is particularly interesting (fig. 13). For Warburg, as we have already seen, the “airmail stamp puts the energetic dynamism of transport in place of the conveyance of the

22 — Michel (as in note 17), *Deutsches Reich*, pp. 378 ff.

23 — Aby Warburg, *Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen*, ed. Uwe Fleckner and Isabella Woldt, Berlin 2012, pp. 151–189.

national political will".²⁴ The intention behind his plate with its examples of airmail stamps, however, is above all to illustrate the creation of symbols and their relationship to mythology and modern technology.

Plate 9 shows, almost without exception, airmail stamps with motifs, symbols and representations from the realm of flight, including eagles and aircraft as well as a pigeon and a kestrel or falcon on the 400 Kronen stamp from Austria. The exceptions include two standard *Reichspost* stamps, which have been over stamped in order to convert them into airmail stamps.

The plate also reveals a completely foreign object. It starts top left not with an airmail stamp, but with a Mexican revenue stamp from the year 1891 bearing the coat



14 — Bolivia, Postage stamp, *Centenary Year of the Bolivian Republic*, 1925.

of arms of Mexico. These arms consist of an eagle that has landed on a cactus and holds a writhing snake in its beak. The representation of the eagle and the snake is a reference to the foundation of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, modern-day Mexico City. According to legend, Tenochtitlan was founded on the precise spot, in the middle of a lake, where an eagle – as lord of the skies – caught and devoured the snake. Eagle and snake thus symbolise a magical, primal moment in the city's history and together condense into what Warburg calls a "heraldic quintessence", which he elsewhere describes as a designated function of airmail stamps.²⁵

The Bolivian stamp showing an Andean condor (*Vultur gryphus*), which appears directly below the Mexican coat-of-arms stamp in Plate 9 (fig. 14), can be interpreted in a similar fashion. The bird of prey, also very large here, is perched on a rocky pinnacle. Underneath and beside it are two inscriptions: one commemorates the "Centenario de la Republica", in other words the centenary of the Bolivian republic, while the second – on the right, next to the condor – reads "Hacia el Mar", meaning "seaward", and expresses Bolivia's claim to free access to the sea.²⁶

24 — Michels and Schoell-Glass (as in note 7), p. 62.

25 — WIA III.99.1.2.1, fol. 81/58; WIA III.99.1.2.2, fol. 58.

26 — *Gebrüder Senfs Illustrierter Briefmarkenkatalog 1927. Postmarken von Übersee*, Leipzig 1927, p. 125.

The Andean condor has been part of the coat of arms of Bolivia since 1888 and is thus a mythical symbolic figure whose existence dates back to Bolivia's pre-colonial era. Its heraldic and national political status roughly corresponds to the status of the eagle in European heraldry. As in the case of the Mexican revenue stamp, Warburg is interested here, too, in the "heraldic quintessence" of the postage stamp.

Such "heraldic quintessence" is present in a number of the European airmail stamps, too. A case in point is the semi-official 25-Pfennig stamp, issued in 1912 in the Kingdom of Bavaria, on the far left at the top of Warburg's plate (fig. 15). Its lion motif is based on an emblem designed by Otto Hupp for the Bavarian Aero-Club, and offers a variation on the heraldic lion familiar from Bavaria's normal postage stamps. Here, the heraldic lion is given a pair of wings and front legs ending in claws, while its long tail sweeps round in a circle. Inside this circle are the initials of the Bayerische Aero-Club: B A E C. On its head, the modified heraldic beast wears the Bavarian crown.²⁷

The imagery of mythical fabulous beasts also appears in the Leipzig airmail stamp on the far right at the top of Warburg's plate (fig. 16).²⁸ Designed by Max Seliger and likewise issued in 1912, it shows two anthropomorphically conceived winged beings, who are sprinkling the earth with flowers as they fly. When Warburg speaks in his notes of the "animation of the heraldic symbol by the air mail", he is probably thinking of these airmail stamps with their winged beings. In contrast to conventionally designed normal postage stamps, in other words, the heraldic symbols on airmail stamps are "animated" and brought to life.²⁹

The stamps that Warburg has assembled in Plate 9 also illustrate the visual fusion of airmail motifs with mythological tales of flight. In a Hungarian airmail stamp, for example, visible in the second row, second stamp from the right, the winged figure of Icarus hovers over Budapest (fig. 17, plate XXXII).

The third and fourth rows of Plate 9 are made up of variations on the theme of the airmail stamp, including representations of birds with a symbolic meaning and heraldic design, for example eagles and pigeons. Warburg was unconvinced in particular by the *Deutsche Reichspost* airmail stamps with their eagle motif, designed – as we have already seen – by Otto Werner Hermann Hadank and first issued in 1926/27 (fig. 12). The eagle, which faces left, appears to be about to take flight and thus gives a naturalistic impression, while at the same time recalling the German imperial eagle and thus a heraldic symbol. In other words, Hadank's eagle is a hybrid of heraldry and naturalism – something that the sceptical Warburg found disturbing and which he considered little more than a makeshift solution.³⁰

27 — See Bungerz (as in note 20), p. 41 and p. 434; Berezowski (as in note 14), pp. 13–15.

28 — Berezowski (as in note 14), p. 50.

29 — WIA III.99.1.1.2, fol. 5/2.

30 — Michel (as in note 17), *Deutsches Reich*, pp. 378 f.; WIA III 99.7.2, fol. 2 f.; WIA III 99.1.2.1, fol. 83/63; WIA GC, Edwin Redslob to Aby Warburg August 3 1927.



15 — Bavaria, Air mail stamp, *Luftpost BAEC*, 1912.



16 — Leipzig, Unofficial air mail stamp, *Margaretenvolksfest Leipzig 18. Mai 1912 – Luftpostmarke*, 1912.



17 — Hungary, Air mail stamp, *Icarus flying over Budapest*, 1924.



18 — Belgian Congo, Air mail stamp, *Postluchtdienst – Service Postal Aérien*, 1921.



19 — Switzerland, Air mail stamp, *Pilot in his Airplane*, 40 cent, 1923.



20 — Switzerland, Air mail stamp, *Airplane*, 20 cent, 1925.

In the bottom row of Plate 9, lastly, Warburg demonstrates what, in his view, contemporary airmail stamps ought to look like. In the centre he places a naturalistically designed airmail stamp from the Belgian Congo (fig. 18, plate XXXIII), issued in 1921.³¹ It is flanked on either side by two Swiss airmail stamps from the years 1923 to 1925 designed by Karl Bickel (fig. 19 and fig. 20).³² The stamp from the Belgian Congo serves to illustrate Warburg's reservations towards a naturalism that more or less corresponded to the picture postcards of the epoch: it shows a mail plane flying over the modest dwellings of the indigenous population. More convincing, on the other hand, are the two Swiss airmail stamps on either side, whose aesthetic corresponds to the "energetic dynamism of transport" that Warburg claimed for the airmail stamp.³³ Both show a modern monoplane and both convey a sense of progress in their stylisation of airplane and pilot. Here, in Warburg's view, was a perfect design: no longer traditionally heraldic and no longer naturalistic, but stylised in a modern idiom that conveyed the dynamism of aviation, but which at the same time created more distance than tame naturalism. Warburg's own design for an airmail stamp also obeys this aesthetic calculation.

Warburg's own visual practice thus spans a wide arc from non-European and European mythology, from heraldry and from traditional symbolism to the achievements of what was the most advanced technology of his day, aviation – and it does so from a thoroughly global perspective. This was by no means self-evident: even in 1923 Warburg still viewed airplanes as devilish machines³⁴, and his aesthetic education, too, erred on the conservative side. However, he could not help succumbing to the general enthusiasm for flying, any more than he could resist the possibilities of transcending international borders that were offered by the postage stamp, as the smallest and most mobile visual medium. Warburg thus became a key figure in a transitional period during which flying still offered generous scope for the imagination, but had at the same time already become a fascinating reality – one which found its symbolic expression in the medium of the postage stamp.

31 — Berezowski (as in note 14), pp. 19 f.

32 — Berezowski (as in note 14), pp. 227–228.

33 — WIA GC, Dubois, Oberpostdirektion, to Aby Warburg December 9 1926. See also Michels and Schoell-Glass (as in note 7), p. 23 and p. 62; McEwan (as in note 7).

34 — Aby Warburg, *Schlangenritual. Ein Reisebericht. Mit einem Nachwort von Ulrich Raulff und einem Nachwort zur Neuausgabe von Claudia Wedepohl*, Berlin 2011, p. 75 (fifth edition).



Frank Zöllner

1 — Zöllner 2011, Cat. no. 464; 2 — Private Collection, photo Martin Weicker; 3, 4 — The Warburg Institute Archive, London; 5 — Berezowski 1925, p. 146, Photo author; 6 — © President and Fellows of Harvard College; 7–20 — Photo Frank Zöllner.