

PLATE LVI



OTTO KURZ

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1908–1975

**I**N the province of the Republic of Letters in which the Warburg Institute is situated, Otto Kurz had become a legend in his lifetime as a polymath, a wit, and a scholarly oracle always willing to be consulted.

I was fortunate to have worked side by side with him during most of the forty-six years from 1929, when we became fellow students, to 1975, when he died as my colleague at the Warburg Institute, but time and again I could only marvel at the speed and accuracy with which he located, absorbed, and retained information, and the utter selflessness with which he shared his knowledge with others.

Not that he was easy to know. His life was overshadowed by tragedies, but he never liked to talk about himself and he never complained. Only his intimates realized that exceptional as he was as a scholar he was even more so as a human being.

Otto Kurz was born in Vienna on 26 May 1908 as the only child of Dr Max Kurz and his wife Anna, née Mandl. His parents both came from the small-town Jewish communities of Moravia, that corner of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy which also produced Sigmund Freud and Gustav Mahler. Max Kurz was a respected General Practitioner in the service of the Austrian Tobacco Monopoly but also had a private practice. He evidently had many interests, and a delightful picture-book he drew for little Otto, which is still extant, testifies both to his talents and to his human warmth. Even later in life Otto Kurz often quoted the views and sayings of his father with whom he was perhaps on closer terms than with his mother. Otto Kurz had the conventional education of his class, he attended the *Humanistisches Gymnasium* and, like so many other boys, eagerly collected stamps and coins.

One of the few little incidents he ever told from his school days suggests that even then his exceptional knowledge had been noticed. When he was set an essay on the joys of winter, he had cheekily written the single sentence, 'Winter has no joys for me.' Asked whether he was punished, he reluctantly admitted that his knowledge of German Renaissance literature made him proof against retribution. It was another boy who got it in the

neck for imitating the performance when a similar theme was set.

He never had much respect for the traditional methods of his school. I remember him making fun of the way he was supposed to learn Latin. He wondered, he said, how many applications he would receive if he announced somewhere that he was willing to teach a language, one hour every weekday for eight years, to a standard enabling his pupil to translate easy texts with the aid of a dictionary.

Since school could not satisfy his thirst for knowledge, Kurz volunteered at that time to work part-time in the Library of the *Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie*, the counterpart of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The early items in his bibliography were in fact written before he ever got to the University. The first is a publication with commentary of the Catalogue of the Vienna art exhibition of 1777 (published in 1927); the item had been considered lost but Kurz tracked it down in the Vienna *Nationalbibliothek* among the many entries under 'Catalogue', neither inflating nor dismissing the relevance of the little find which listed the exhibits of many artists and showed (as Kurz recognized) the co-existence of Baroque, Rococo, and Neo-Classical trends in the Vienna of that year. Much weightier was the brief note 'A contemporary reference to Dürer' (published 1928) which the schoolboy found in Johannes Cochläus' 1512 edition of Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia*. The proof of the popularity of Dürer's prints in Portugal at comparatively so early a date foreshadows a life-long interest in the dissemination of cultural achievements. The knowledge he stored at that time of German humanist literature also remained readily available to him when his interests had long turned elsewhere. When, in 1964, I was looking for evidence of the influence of the invention of printing on the awareness of progress, he asked 'Is this not quite common in the Latin school comedies?' and instanced a play by Nicodemus Frischlin (of whom I had never heard), in which Cicero is mocked for his ignorance of the new art. He had probably not read it for some forty years.

When early in 1929 I was admitted to the seminar of Julius von Schlosser (the *Zweites Kunsthistorisches Institut*) of Vienna University, Kurz, who was a year ahead of me, was already the acknowledged star of his generation. I believe the first report I heard him give in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* dealt with the boardgame by the German Renaissance carver Hans Kels and

impressed his teacher no less than his fellow-students for the range of its erudition. From that time on I counted him as one of my teachers. Our ways home from the University coincided for a considerable stretch and where they divided we used to stand for a long time while he expounded some piece of out-of-the-way lore. Nor was it all erudition. We had a great deal of fun together, sampling lectures on literature or on vulgar Latin and sometimes—I fear—giggling at what seemed to us like pedantry or vacuity. But Kurz was no rebel against authority. He had the profoundest respect for real scholarship, a respect which he preserved throughout his life. Two of his teachers had a lasting influence on his outlook: first and foremost Julius von Schlosser (whose life-work, *Die Kunsthistorische Literatur*, Kurz was to keep up to date in the Italian editions of 1937, 1956, and 1964), and to whom he devoted a penetrating and moving memoir, *Julius von Schlosser, personalità, metodo, lavoro*, published 1955, one of the most personal of his writings. It was from Schlosser that he learned how to combine the curiosity of an antiquarian browsing in old guide-books with the wide horizon of a true historian. The rival Chair in Art History (*Erstes Kunsthistorisches Institut*) was held by Josef Strzygowski who advocated a global outlook and the recognition of Asian influences on Western Art. Kurz never subscribed to his theories, but he was certainly impressed by the problems he encountered in these lectures and in a latter *curriculum vitae* he enumerated Strzygowski among his teachers. The closest personal ties, however, developed with Hans Tietze who was something of an outsider and merely held an *ad personam* chair. The author of many volumes of Austria's *Kunsttopographie* and of an important book on the Methods of Art History, Tietze was an encyclopaedist whose immense bibliography (together with that of his wife Erica Tietze Conrat) Otto and Hilde Kurz were later to compile for the *Essays in Honor of Hans Tietze*, published by the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 1958. It may well have been his example which determined Kurz to choose for his dissertation that most unpopular figure Guido Reni, for Tietze had pioneered the study of the Bolognese with his article of 1906 on Annibale Carracci's Galleria Farnese.

Collecting material on a neglected artist who had once enjoyed such fame was a pleasure to Kurz; I recall a joint expedition to a church outside Bologna to which we lugged his heavy camera and tripod to photograph an unpublished altar piece, but I also recall the comic despair with which he would repeat 'how does one write a dissertation?' He claimed to have

looked for models and found that writers of monographs never stuck to the point. Writing about one painting they would enlarge on the subject-matter, the next would give them a pretext to discuss the life of the donor, the third the pedigree, and the fourth the style. This could not be right. Having finally submitted in 1931 his terse draft on 'The early works of Guido Reni' to Schlosser he found in the margin a number of pencil-marks which he took for signs of criticism. So he promptly omitted the relevant paragraphs and shortened his piece even further. The marks had in fact been Schlosser's way of expressing his approval, but nothing untoward happened, since the final version was never read.

Such anarchic conditions may well cause a modern reader to shake his head, but our studies at that time were wholly unstructured. There was no art historical syllabus and no examinations except the final *rigorosum* which was an oral. Lectures were hardly more important than they are in Oxford or Cambridge, but instead of regular tutorials there were only the reports for seminars, many of which were expected to demand several months of preparation and to continue over more than one meeting. These tasks were the main topics of conversation among students and it was here that the advice and guidance of Kurz was most frequently asked and received.

Unhappily the situation was also anarchic in a more sinister sense. The University enjoyed 'extraterritorial' immunity from police interference which led to a reign of terror by Nazi thugs. Kurz was among the victims of their brutal violence when he was assailed in the University Library and hit over the head with a steel truncheon. After his recuperation he was welcomed back by Schlosser to his seminar with a line from Schiller: 'Monument von unserer Zeiten Schande' (Reminder of the disgrace of our time), but Schlosser had no more power or determination to put an end to this disgrace than had the other members of the professorial body.

These were tense and unhappy times in Austria as in the rest of Central Europe and the chances of employment for a young scholar were exiguous in the best of cases, and non-existent for students of Jewish extraction. The suffering and heartbreak of the situation should not be minimized, but there was one side-effect which at least benefited those whose parents were able to support them for a while—lacking any prospect of an ordinary career they just continued to study. Thus Kurz and I took lessons in Chinese with a kind missionary at the Ethnological

Museum. Our teacher's passion was the diversity of tones used in various Chinese dialects, a subject more confusing than enlightening to beginners; neither of us stayed the course for long, but Kurz returned at various periods of his life to the study of the language which certainly enabled him to make out titles and simple inscriptions.

On the advice of Schlosser, Kurz also attempted to improve his prospects by enlisting in the course of the *Österreichisches Institut für Geschichtsforschung*, an institution modelled on the *École des Chartes*, the graduates of which enjoyed a high prestige among prospective employers. For his entrance examination Kurz submitted a paper on the later works of Guido Reni which again cost him agonies to write. He was altogether unhappy in the uncongenial atmosphere of the place, but a fortunate constellation of circumstances in which von Schlosser still had his share led to a turning-point in his life. He had written a paper on Vasari's Life of Filippo Lippi (published 1933), demonstrating that certain romantic motifs which also occurred in one of Bandello's novels were derived by both authors from an unknown source. It was thus, so it seems, that he came into contact with Ernst Kris, an art historian, eight years his senior, who was keeper in the Collections of sculpture and applied arts of the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*. Kris had been the first student to graduate after Schlosser had transferred from the Museum to the University and had earned the respect of his teacher, who always called him 'mein Urschüler'. Now Kris was looking for an *amanuensis* to help in an ambitious project that had grown out of his work on the Austrian sculptor Messerschmitt. It had turned out that the biography of that artist written in the eighteenth century contained several stereotypical anecdotes also told of other artists. Through his marriage Kris had by then come into contact with the circle of Sigmund Freud and had not only undergone analysis but had also applied psychoanalytic insights to the study of artists. He realized that it was not enough for the historian merely to reject the typical legends told about artists as untrue; their very persistence and popularity suggested that they expressed a widespread reaction to the mystery of artistic creation. In proposing to collect such motifs from all over the world as a contribution to the psychology of art Kris could not have found a more suitable helpmate than Kurz, whose wide reading had by then extended beyond the horizon of Western culture and included Byzantine, Islamic, Central Asian, and Chinese sources. Moreover, the interests of the two

young scholars (Kris was in his early thirties, Kurz in his twenties) were complementary; where Kris looked for psychological symptoms, Kurz enjoyed tracing the migration of motifs in the light of those culture contacts which remained his overriding concern throughout his life.

Now Kris had also been drawn into an enterprise which concerned cultural history. The *Bibliothek Warburg* in Hamburg, the only institution devoted to this subject, had begun to compile a *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliographie zum Nachleben der Antike*, for which a large number of collaborators were enlisted. It was natural that Kurz should also join this team (the first volume of 1934 contains 25 contributions by him) and providential that Kris recommended his admired young colleague to Fritz Saxl, the Director of the Warburg Library, as an ideal research assistant. True, the situation in Germany had, if anything, become worse than that in Austria. In January 1933 Hitler had been appointed Chancellor, but the consequences were not yet fully realized. Kurz was to remark later that he must have been the only Jew to immigrate into Germany at the time of the Nazis. Perhaps immigration is too strong a word. When he came to Hamburg in the spring of 1933 he was not offered fixed employment but asked to help with a variety of tasks, including the organization of the Library's neglected photographic collection and research assistance to a variety of visiting scholars.

The most immediate and the most permanent gain for Kurz was the contact he made with the Library, its staff, and its users, first and foremost among them Fritz Saxl, a congenial scholar whose versatile mind encompassed the study of Rembrandt, of Mithraic monuments, and of the history of astrological imagery, a subject inherited from Aby Warburg which fitted in so well with the interests of Kurz in the transmission and dissemination of motifs. No less important, from the human point of view, was the friendship of Saxl's helpmate Gertrud Bing which lasted throughout their lives. There were plenty of projects at the Warburg with which Kurz could and did help, but there also was unfinished business in Vienna, which prompted his return. He still had to undergo the torture of eleven examinations at the *Institut für Geschichtsforschung* (which he did in December 1933), and most of all to complete the book on the *Legende vom Künstler* (published 1934) which was dedicated to the *Bibliothek Warburg*. Meanwhile, however, the situation in Germany had grown increasingly menacing and it was decided

to accept the invitation of an *ad hoc* committee to transfer Warburg's Library to London. The books arrived in London in December 1933 and were temporarily accommodated in Thames House.<sup>1</sup>

Kurz was most eager to rejoin the Institute and in April 1934 Saxl wrote that he needed his help. The financial situation, however, was most precarious and all Saxl could do was to procure a one-year grant from a member of the Warburg family for Kurz, in support of another joint project with Ernst Kris—research into 'the magic of effigies and the prohibition of images'. Once arrived, however, Kurz was soon drawn into other projects in which the Institute had become involved. There was first of all the second volume of the *Bibliography* for which he read and discussed an even wider range of publications, but most of all there was the ambitious project of a new and scholarly edition of Marco Polo's *Description of the World* by Paul Pelliot and A. C. Moule which was sponsored by Sir Percival David, the great collector of Chinese art. The enthusiasm and impatience of Sir Percival is delicately characterized in the preface to that work where it is mentioned that one of the editors received no less than four letters and one long message from the sponsor on a single day. Saxl, who looked for opportunities of proving the usefulness of the unknown Institute to his English colleagues, also offered help and so the resources of the Library and the staff were placed at Sir Percival's disposal. At one point Kurz was ordered to go to Venice to meet Sir Percival at the Hotel Danieli, a meeting which necessitated his travelling for two nights without Saxl wishing him to charge any fee except expenses. Sceptical as Kurz was about the value of some of these feverish activities, the subject itself was close to his heart since it involved the contact between China and Europe across Central Asia. He developed a lifelong admiration for the two great scholars who prepared this model edition.

But another fortunate circumstance prevented Kurz from abandoning his erstwhile field of Bolognese painting for the lure of the Far East. He was recommended as a guide and interpreter by the German art historian Heinrich Bodmer to a young Englishman who did not have much Italian but wished to do research in Italy on Guercino. That student was Denis Mahon, and the close ties which developed between him and Kurz in the course of their long travels became of benefit to

<sup>1</sup> A factual account of this move can be found in the *Annual Report of the Warburg Institute*, 1952/3.



both scholars, who may be said jointly to have revived interest in Italian Seicento painting.

It was during their frequent journeys between Bologna and Cento (Guercino's birthplace), as Kurz once told me, that he worked through the whole text of Vasari's *Lives* for any mention of drawings, a labour which resulted in the subsequent publication of Vasari's *Libro dei Disegni* (published 1937). The study of art historical sources and drawings altogether looms quite large in his bibliography of that time, the most important being his 'Contribution to the History of the Leonardo Drawings' in the Royal Collection of Windsor (1936) which helped to establish the pedigree of that great corpus. But he was also extending his feelers towards the East, studying the leaf of an insular pattern-book which has a bearing on the much debated history of Psalter illustrations in Byzantium.

The generosity with which the English world of learning received and supported the many refugees from Nazi persecution can never be sufficiently appreciated, but for the individual arrival whose special field was rather remote from ordinary university curricula the situation could not possibly be easy, either financially or psychologically. Kurz did some teaching at the Courtauld Institute soon after its establishment but this could not provide a living wage, and Saxl was only able, in 1935, to secure a grant for another year from an anonymous donor. Without the continued association with Denis Mahon, whom he accompanied on his travels (including a trip to Russia), the situation might well have been desperate. Yet Kurz was certainly not a gloomy companion during the spring of 1936, when we lived in the same boarding-house and jointly prepared our meals on the gas-rings of our bedsitters.

Unsettled as was his life, and uncertain as was his future, he still decided to marry, late in 1937, his former fellow-student of the University of Vienna to whom he had been deeply attached for many years, Hilde Schüller, who shared so many of his interests. The Institute at that time was homeless, having had to leave Thames House in the spring of 1937, and the preparation of alternative accommodation in the Imperial Institute Buildings dragged on till early 1938. In March 1938 Hitler occupied Austria, in September of that year there followed the Munich crisis. The anxieties for relatives and friends still left at the mercy of their persecutors and the dread of the devastation that would accompany the almost unavoidable war created a nightmare situation which even those of us who

lived through it find hard to recapture, let alone convey. Kurz had managed to let his father join him in England, but his mother had wished to stay close to her own mother and ultimately perished at the hands of the Nazis. It was a blow which he never mentioned even to his friends.

And yet life had to go on and work had to continue. Expanding Saxl's work on the history of star imagery in Western manuscripts Kurz drew up a project for a book on classical book illustration and its survival in secular literature. Though he later hoped to complete it jointly with Byvanck, the rich material he had collected unfortunately remained in his drawer. Another joint enterprise succeeded better, the Handlist which he compiled at that time with Hugo Buchthal, of illuminated Oriental Christian manuscripts (published 1942). The pull of the East was strong. He wanted to take a course in Japanese to master the literature on Eastern art, but lacked the money to do so. Instead he and I accepted a commission from T. S. R. Boase, the Director of the Courtauld Institute, to write bibliographical introductions for students of the new subject of art history, the first to be devoted to iconography (where Kurz undertook the sections on portraiture and on Christian art).

In 1939 Saxl staved off our financial worries by securing a two-year grant for both Kurz and myself from Sir Percival David on condition that we would find a permanent job at the end of that period. The outbreak of the war upset all these arrangements. The books of the Institute were again packed into cases and evacuated, but Saxl kept its activities alive by arranging photographic exhibitions on various themes. After the fall of France and the threat of invasion in the spring of 1940 Kurz was interned as an 'enemy alien'. He took his fate philosophically and liked to joke, later, about the 'old camp tie' which linked a number of Central European intellectuals in permanent friendship. His daughter Erica, his only child, was born while he was away.

On his release he was engaged to do some more teaching for students of the Courtauld Institute in Surrey. Towards the end of 1940, however, another strange concatenation of fate gave him the opportunity to work in the field which had interested him for so long, the culture contacts between East and West. One of the photographic exhibitions organized by the Institute was a display of illustrations of Indian Art belonging to Stella Kramrisch. It was this event which led in turn to a visit of the great French archaeologist Joseph Hackin, then a member of

the Free French Forces, who was invited to lecture on the finds he had made in the service of the French Government in a series of seasons in Afghanistan, including the depot of a trading-post at Begram which yielded a group of objects of Hellenistic, Indian, and Chinese origin. He discussed his ideas and plans with Saxl and with Kurz and was obviously so impressed by their interest and knowledge that he decided to leave all his material in their charge before he left England, never to return. Understandably this decision did not remain unchallenged involving as it did the rights of two rival Government authorities. It is all the more gratifying to record that the disinterested services of Saxl and of Kurz ultimately received unqualified recognition in the official account as it appeared years later in the *Mémoires de la délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan*, Tome XI, *Rencontre de trois civilisations Inde — Grèce — Chine (Nouvelles recherches archéologiques à Begram)*, J. Hackin, Paris, 1954.

De vifs remerciements doivent être adressés au Warburg Institute de Londres, ainsi qu'à M. Otto Kurz, de cet Institut. Lorsqu'en 1941, J. Hackin s'éloigna de Londres pour une mission qu'il savait périlleuse, et où il devait trouver la mort, il confia au Warburg Institute les documents concernant Begram et approuva le travail que M. Otto Kurz entreprit alors, étude comparative entre les objets découverts à Begram et les objets gréco-romains analogues déjà connus. Après la libération de la France, quand le Musée Guimet put reprendre la publication concernant Begram, la totalité des documents lui fut remise et M. Otto Kurz, d'accord avec M. Saxl, alors directeur du Warburg Institute, accepta de continuer à consacrer une très grande partie de son temps aux recherches commencées. Il entreprit plusieurs voyages d'enquête à cet effet et parvint ainsi à réunir un ensemble de comparaisons remarquables. Sa contribution aux études dédiées à la mémoire de J. Hackin est très importante. Nous tenons donc, en terminant cet avant-propos, à souligner le rôle du Warburg Institute de Londres.

Admittedly this happy consummation was not reached before some fourteen years had passed, but it seemed right to interrupt the chronological sequence of this account to document one of the main research projects which occupied Kurz during and after the war. He made himself at home in the history of Hellenistic and Roman glass and toreutics; in other words, he added classical archaeology to his previous accomplishments.

Meanwhile the war had also claimed other victims. The Institute's Librarian Hans Meier had been killed in an air-raid

in April 1941 and with him the whole material for the third volume of the *Bibliography* which he had in his flat had been destroyed, together with essential parts of the Institute's equipment, in the same night. It was decided to remove the Institute's staff to the Lea, a country house near Denham, which was run more or less like a collective farm. The Kurz family did not join for some time but preferred greater privacy in another house near London. Kurz continued to teach some students of the Courtauld Institute but he also worked on a book on fakes which had been commissioned by Faber and Faber (published 1948). Unlike most authors writing on that subject he shunned sensational accounts and anecdotes, offering strictly what the title promises, a Handbook for Collectors. Only in an addition to the second edition (1967) did he give rein to satirical humour in the discussion of forged medieval frescoes allegedly uncovered in Germany after the war; in fact, few of his writings so preserve the flavour of his style as a raconteur as this record of gullibility. He was still not allowed to forget Bologna. At the suggestion of Anthony Blunt he began in 1943 to catalogue those holdings of Bolognese drawings in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle which remained after those by the Carracci, by Domenichino, and by Guercino had been allocated (published 1955). In the same year he was at last given an official post and function on the staff of the Warburg Institute, being appointed Assistant Librarian. In the next year—in November 1944—the Warburg Institute itself found a safe anchorage in the University of London and with the end of the war books could be brought out of storage and normal life resume.

Rich and varied as his publications remained in the subsequent years—including his surveys of recent research in the *Burlington Magazine* (1948–60)—it was in the Library that he found the true scope for his talents, particularly after his appointment as Librarian in 1949. The limited budget of the Institute demanded utmost concentration on essentials. As he once said to me: 'It is really very simple, at the beginning of the financial year we can buy any book we want—but then we cannot buy another one.' He always knew how to select the one significant title from any field of study which would enable the prospective user of the Library to orient himself about the state of research and find his way to other information. He could not have offered this guidance to users of the Library if he himself had not been an experienced scholar. As such he had always

found it hard to understand how specialists ever managed to stop short at the frontiers of their so-called field. Whatever question he felt tempted to explore, he said, the search for an answer inevitably led him across these artificial frontiers. A drawing by Dürer of a sleeping nymph could only be explained through the history of a pseudo-classical inscription 'Huius nympha loci' (1953); a group of Florentine drawings for an altar demanded for its elucidation an understanding of the liturgical problem of where to keep the consecrated wafer (1955). At the same time the skill with which he had learned to master new subjects also made him impatient of the specialist's claim that one could not possibly 'keep up' with the bibliography of more than one limited area. What were they talking about? Granted that, say, in a 'Rembrandt year' a mass of literature on that artist came out—would it really take more than a week to sort the wheat from the chaff and read anything of significance of which a Rembrandt specialist had to take note?

His clear vision of what the Library had been and what it should be rarely made him hesitate about purchases. He gave priority to texts over secondary literature, to original works over translations, and ignored inflated pot-boilers. He was aware of the obligation the Librarian had to maintain the subject areas which had been cultivated in the past, but also to expand into new fields of studies. Together with Gertrud Bing, with whom he travelled to Italy in 1953, he established a system of exchange which greatly benefited the Italian holdings of the Library. Few users of the Institute's resources who knocked at his door to consult him did not emerge with a long list of titles of works in their special field of which they had never heard. The number of books in which he is thanked in the preface testifies to the range and value of his contribution. But he not only gave advice, he gave encouragement and something of his own enthusiasm. Nobody expressed this inspiring character of his companionship more charmingly than Miss Beryl Smalley in the Preface to her book on *The English Friars and Antiquity* (Oxford, 1960): 'Dr. Otto Kurz ordered me to turn a forty-minute paper into a book, and I obeyed him.'

Few of those who consulted him as an oracle knew that in May 1957 he had been visited by a terrible tragedy. His wife had to undergo brain surgery and emerged from the operation half paralysed and without speech. Refusing the pessimistic prognosis of the specialist who advised permanent hospitalization Kurz took her home and nursed her back to something like

normal life, later aided by the therapeutic skill and devotion of Nurse Irene Wilkinson. Yet despite this burden he carried on in the Library and even continued to write and to publish.

In fact, it was in this period, during the last eighteen years of his life, that his work expanded organically, not into one, but into two fields he had previously merely reconnoitred. The first of these was the field of Islamic art, its sources, and its influences. Three scholars should here be mentioned who may have encouraged this interest: Paul Wittek, the historian of Turkey and a frequent visitor to the Warburg Library, D. Storm Rice, of the School of Oriental Studies, and, later, Richard Ettinghausen, whose work he especially esteemed. Again external circumstances may have provided the final impulse. In the summer term of 1962 he was given leave of absence for six weeks to go to Jerusalem. He had been invited by the Salomons Foundation, because the eminent orientalist, the late Professor L. A. Mayer, had wished him to complete a project of long standing, the *Bibliography of Jewish Art and Archaeology*. Though a librarian, Kurz was never an enthusiast for large bibliographical compilations, but he carried out this demanding task with his customary attention to detail (published 1967). The real gain of the visit, however, was his involvement with the L. A. Mayer Memorial Institute and its magnificent collection of Islamic art, in the administration of which he was asked to take a share. He never did things by half. In the years which remained to him he tried to see as many of the chief monuments of Islamic art as were within his reach; he took his wife, despite her partial disablement, to Anatolia, to Granada, and Cordoba, and acquired sufficient Arabic at least to read inscriptions and book-titles. When, in pursuit of his overriding interest in culture contacts, he went to Rome in 1963, to examine the voluminous correspondence of the seventeenth-century Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher in the *Gregoriana*, he told me on his return that many of the scholar's orientalist correspondents wrote to him in Hebrew or Arabic. 'I did not know you could read Arabic', I said. 'I don't,' he replied, 'but that much anyone can read.'

When in the early months of 1964 he returned to Jerusalem I was not surprised to hear that he would give a lecture course on 'Islamic art in its foreign contexts'; but even I had not expected that he had proposed a Seminar on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art which he intended to open with a discussion of the design of the *Museo Clementino* of the Vatican and its importance for the history of Neo-Classical architecture.

He had also collected notes over the years on Heine's *Salons* which he would use for later meetings.

In 1965 Professor Hugo Buchthal resigned his personal Chair in the History of Byzantine Art at the Warburg Institute to accept a position in the United States and Kurz was asked whether he would exchange the Library for a teaching post. He had developed an enthusiastic interest in the Institute's new teaching programme through which he hoped to make its position as a centre for cultural history better known and understood. Yes, he said in his paradoxical way, there was one topic he really would like to teach—the history of maize. And, becoming serious, he explained that the aspect of the history of civilization which was most in need of cultivation was the transmission of food plants and of other materials across the globe. It was a facet of culture-contact which had fascinated him ever since his concern with East–West relations had acquainted him with the researches of Berthold Laufer, the German Sino-logist who worked at the Field Museum in Chicago. (He once remarked to J. B. Trapp that what he would want to be written on his tombstone was: 'He did everything wrong, but he bought the works of Berthold Laufer.')

While he was preparing this course he participated in the Institute's teaching on the Renaissance by giving classes on the geographical discoveries, to which he brought many otherwise neglected accounts by humanists on exotic countries and on astrology (in which he spent two classes casting my horoscope according to the strict rules of the game). The official title of the Chair which he took up in October 1965 was 'Professor of the History of Classical Tradition with special reference to the Near East'; and he also did justice to this designation by giving regular classes, jointly with his colleague A. I. Sabra and Dr. R. Walzer of the University of Oxford on 'The Sources and Legacy of Islamic Civilization'. But he never dropped any problem that had once attracted his attention, and so he continued to accumulate notes on an ever widening range of topics.

Since neither writing nor lecturing much appealed to him he only accepted such tasks to oblige or to intervene in a worthwhile debate (as in the National Gallery cleaning controversy of 1961/2). He never believed that a fact had to be published merely because it had escaped the attention of others. One example must suffice. I had come across evidence that Bosch's famous Triptych in Madrid known as the *Garden of Earthly Delights* had once belonged to Henry III of Nassau. As was my

invariable rule, I submitted it to Kurz who opened a drawer in his desk and produced a voluminous folder about the history of this and other works of Bosch which confirmed my hypothesis. He had never thought seriously of publishing these notes on 'Four Tapestries after Hieronymus Bosch' and only wrote them up for the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* to oblige me. The same number of the *Journal* (xxx, 1967) also contains his article on 'A Volume of Mughal Drawings and Miniatures' which he had discovered or rediscovered in the Vatican Library. Glancing at the bibliographical footnotes of these two articles which extend from folklore to the history of the 'Royal Umbrella' gives an idea of the effortless virtuosity with which he could play on the instrument of the Library.

Having been inured to lecturing by a third visit to Jerusalem, Kurz allowed himself to be persuaded—however reluctantly—to accept the Slade Professorship at the University of Oxford in 1970 where he lectured on 'Islamic Art between East and West'. It is hoped that these lectures, which were much admired, will ultimately be published. Apart from a number of articles reflecting his concern with the cultural relations between East and West—'Relations between Prague and Persia at the time of Rudolf II' (1966), 'A Gold Helmet made in Venice for Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent' (1969), 'The Turkish Dresses in the Costume-Book of Rubens' (1972) (with Hilde Schüller Kurz), 'Folding Chairs and Koran Stands' (1972), 'Lion Masks with Rings in the West and in the East' (1973), 'The Strange History of the Alhambra Vase' (1975)—the main fruit of his preoccupation with this topic was his dazzling book on *European Clocks and Watches in the Near East* (1975), which grew out of a lecture he gave at the Warburg Institute in 1973. The subject had attracted his attention through the collection of watches which forms part of the L. A. Meyer Memorial Institute.

But these later studies were only fragments of the larger design he was planning. In the last year of his tenure of the Chair (1974–5) he felt sufficiently prepared to attempt a series of classes on the problem area which was really closest to his heart, what he called 'material culture'. Moving from the history of plants such as millet, corn, coffee to that of spices, sugar, and fruits he ended his last class with an unforgettable justification of these studies. Reminding us of the horrors that so often accompanied the clash of cultures he wanted us to regard the resulting benefits through the exchange of goods and of knowledge as a redeeming feature of the tragic history of mankind.



At the party given in his honour to mark his retirement he spoke of his plan to move with his invalid wife to Jerusalem where the Salomons Foundation had offered them a comfortable service flat. He said without apparent regret that he had done with research—for clearly, in giving up his instrument, the Library, he had no choice but to renounce his mode of life. He died suddenly in his room at the Warburg Institute on 3 September 1975, a few weeks before his official career would have come to an end.

Kurz was of medium height and, as a young man, light of build. Later in life he had become somewhat portly but he remained lively and quick in his movements. His speech, on the other hand, had always been slow, and whether the language was German, English, or Italian it almost resembled a somewhat monotonous chant. Once he had embarked on a topic he was hard to interrupt or to deflect. He had little small talk and either gave a delightful performance or fell silent, unless he had thought of a witticism which summed up his opinion of a person or a situation. Like all good jokes, these epigrams sprang from the context and do not retain their flavour in cold print, depending as they did on the dead-pan manner with which they were delivered. The opening words of a lecture he gave on book illustration in classical antiquity provide as good an example as any of this effect: 'The main centres of book illustration in antiquity', he began gravely, 'are Athens, Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, and Princeton. In the course of this lecture I shall show examples of each of them.' But it was not the quip which counted, but the impressive way in which he subsequently discussed the reconstruction of ancient books proposed in Kurt Weitzmann's *Roll and Codex*, published in Princeton.

In the last analysis his public *persona* was little more than the shell he had developed to protect his vulnerable and almost childlike self. He was as helpless in practical matters as the popular stereotype of the learned Professor has it. Wherever he encountered aggressiveness, ignorance, or pomposity, he shrugged his shoulders and withdrew into his own world. His manners, like those of many shy persons, were somewhat formal and even slightly awkward, but his tact was flawless. His human warmth expressed itself in his love of children and animals, and in his profound response to great art and great music, particularly the music of Mozart and Haydn. His sense of values was incorruptible and his friendship immutable. There can never be many like him.

E. H. GOMBRICH

*Note:* Apart from personal recollections I have used the *Annual Reports of the Warburg Institute* which exist for 1934/5, 1940/1 (in duplicated form), and continuously from 1945/6 as 'reports presented to the Senate of the University of London'. I have also consulted some material in the Institute's archives, kindly placed at my disposal by Miss Anne Marie Meyer.

The Bibliography of Otto Kurz was published in a Memorial Pamphlet issued after his death by the Warburg Institute together with the words spoken at his funeral by J. B. Trapp. Twenty-one of his papers, together with the bibliography and the obituary I wrote for the *Burlington Magazine*, January 1976, were collected in a photographic reprint by the Dorian Press (London, 1977) under the title *The Decorative Arts of Europe and the Islamic East*. A revised English translation of *Die Legende vom Künstler* was published by the Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979, under the title *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, to which I contributed a preface.