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**Andrea Mantegna and the Iconography of Mourners
Aby Warburg's Notion of *Pathosformeln* and the Theory of Aesthetic Response**

This study proposes a novel analysis of *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ* (c. 1470-1480) by Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) and the iconography of mourners. Particularly, it focuses on the role played by the three mourners in enhancing the emotional contagion of the painting. In creating this scene, Mantegna relied on the tradition of the iconography of mourners, which is characterised by particular gestures and facial expressions recurrent across centuries and cultures. Aby Warburg named these types of schemes *Pathosformeln* (formulas of pathos). He also pointed out that humans' creation and comprehension of these formulas resides within a precise mental faculty: the social memory. Warburg's assumption seems to be confirmed by recent neuroscientific and neuroaesthetic research on the perception of emotions, whether in life or in still works of art. As empirical data indicate, observing a situation such as the one depicted on the left-hand side of Mantegna's *Lamentation* activates the same neural network in the beholder as would be activated in those figures, thus mirroring the emotion (i.e. grief) conveyed by their physical and physiognomical expression. This explains the universality of both the representation and (visceral) understanding of the iconography of mourners and the emotion it conveys to people of every period and context. Furthermore, these considerations expose a topic addressed for the first time in this study, that is, the extent to which the beholder empathises with the dead body of Christ, the central figure of the painting, which does not express any emotions.