

Freud and Egypt: Between Oedipus and the Sphinx



Abstracts

Simon Goldhill (University of Cambridge)

Digging the Dirt: Freud's archaeology and the lure of Egypt

Freud's obsession with archaeology is well-known. How should we understand this foundational metaphor for the psychoanalytical process through the contrasting cases of Greece -- ever the origin and base of Western culture for 19th-century thinking -- and Egypt -- repeatedly troped as mysterious, ancient and other?

Daniel Orrells (Kings College London)

Freud and Leonardo in Egypt

The nineteenth-century fascination with ancient Greece provided a language to explore the complexities of modern sexual identity seemingly in all its varied forms. Freud's turn to Oedipus was part of this cultural moment. Homeric epic, Greek lyric poetry, Plato's dialogues and the body beautiful of Greek sculpture all offered different vocabularies for talking about same-sex desire. But when Freud sought to understand Leonardo's homosexuality, he turned away from Greece to an Egyptian mother goddess. This talk explores what was at stake in Freud finding Leonardo in ancient Egypt.

Phiroze Vasunia (UCL)

Egyptomania before Freud

The fascination with ancient Egypt extends from the Bible and the Greeks and Romans into the modern period. What are the main features of this Egyptomania and how do they contribute to Freud's interest in Egypt? We look at a few significant moments in the history of Egyptomania and discuss their significance for Freud and his thought.

Claus Jurman (University of Birmingham)

Freud's Egypt – Freud's Egyptology: A look at early 20th century Egyptology in Vienna and beyond

This presentation will provide an overview of the development of Egyptology in Vienna during the first decades of the 20th century and introduce some of its key figures such as Hermann Junker of the University of Vienna and Hans Demel of the Kunsthistorische Museum. The latter is known to have advised Freud on purchases of ancient Egyptian antiquities and provided certificates of authenticity. Freud's connections with Egyptologists do not end there, however, as is exemplified by Meena Gunn, the wife of the eminent British Egyptologist Battiscombe Gunn, who studied psychoanalysis with Freud in 1924. Finally, the paper will offer a glimpse into the role ancient Egypt played in Viennese popular culture during the 1920s, which formed not necessarily a source, but a backdrop of Freud's engagement with the Pharaonic civilisation.

Griselda Pollock (University of Leeds)

Freud's Egyptian Moses, Mummies, Mothers and other Revenants: A Political-Cultural Reading

From the movies (The Mummy, 1932) to a journey around the antiquities that confronted Freud at his desk and in his consulting room, to Freud's last theoretical masterpiece, Moses and Monotheism, Pharonic Egypt as it had been rediscovered through 'modern' archaeology haunted the psychoanalyst. My presentation offers a reading of Moses and Monotheism in both the context of the traumatic historical moment in which it was written as a work of anti-fascist analysis and the meaning of Egypt in the formation of Judaic cultural memory that Jan Assmann has outlined. It can be argued that Judaism was constituted 'traumatically' as the systematic negation of the Egyptian imaginary, yet it was considered by Freud to originate in the Akhenaten monotheistic experiment and thus be the precious tracing of such a vision into the present, how does his reading of Moses and Monotheism speak back to the attempted negation of Judaism by Fascism in the 1930s? What is at stake for us in political and cultural history of Freud's Egypt?

Joan Raphael Leff (UCL Anna Freud Centre)

Speculations on the pre-oedipal significance of Egypt for Freud

In this illustrated talk, I will trace a filigree of early Egyptian imagery and mythical configurations inlaying Freud's internal world yet finding little expression in his theoretical work. I postulate that a cluster of traumatic events during the first two years of his life compelled him to repeat what could not be remembered. Charged affects remained unprocessed in Freud, who alone of all psychoanalysts did not have an analysis, manifesting in an uncanny dread/allure of 'prehistoric' Egypt as a dark and dangerous era relating to the archaic feminine/maternal matrix and fratricidal murderousness. My argument relies on Freud's own dreams, early childhood memories, fainting episodes, and personal letters as well as his collection of archaeological artifacts, suggesting that these chosen relics serve more than an ornamental function.

Michael Eaton

**FRAGMENTS – WHEN SIGMUND FREUD DID NOT MEET FLINDERS PETRIE.
A Psycho-Archaeological Autumnal Entertainment.**

Freud and Petrie never met – if they had it would doubtless not have been a pleasant encounter. Ever the practical digger, Petrie would have had scant regard for someone he'd consider a dilettante collector of antiquities and would have been outraged by Freud's use of archaeology as a metaphor for analytic practice. Freud expressed no interest in the dirty realities of excavation but he did, however, possess several of the archaeologist's books and had a life-long fascination with Egyptian mythology. Petrie had excavated the city of Akhenaten, the 'heretic pharaoh' whose life and thought was the inspiration for Freud's controversial hypothesis about the origins of monotheism. Michael Eaton will present a sample of this work-in-progress, an imaginary dialogue between two patriarchs: the Father of Psychoanalysis and the Father of Archaeology.