

Freud between Oedipus and the Sphinx

A reproduction of Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres' neo-classical painting 'Oedipus and the Sphinx' famously hung over Freud's couch in his consulting room at Berggasse 19 [figure 1]. Nobody doubts the significance of the figure of Oedipus to the development of Freud's thought, but the presence of the Sphinx in this picture raises a series of questions about Freud's interests which have not been as extensively explored. Indeed, this is far from being the only depiction of the Sphinx which graced Freud's study. A large etching of the 'Sphinx at Giza' was displayed amongst his bookshelves and a terracotta figurine was amongst his most prized objects.¹ These representations of the Sphinx testify to Freud's broader fascination with Egyptian culture – a fascination which, as we have seen, manifests itself both in his writings and his collection of antiquities.

Judith Butler and George Steiner have wondered: 'what would happen if psychoanalysis were to have taken Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure?'.² I want to reformulate their question to ask, what would happen if Freud had taken the Sphinx rather than Oedipus as his point of departure? With this counterfactual, I hope to deepen the exploration already undertaken in the previous two articles about Egypt as an origin myth for psychoanalysis – an origin both for the development of the self and for the history of humanity. One possibility, suggested by Edward Said in his last work *Freud and the Non European*, is that Freud's turn to Egypt opened psychoanalysis to a less Eurocentric perspective. For Said, Freud's foregrounding of Egypt and his interest in the crossover of "non-European" and

“European” cultures testified to his openness and his frustration with the nationalist and racist theories which were so prevalent at the end of his life.³ Said’s claims are compelling but as he would have been the first to note, Freud’s Egyptomania could equally be captive to orientalizing fantasies.⁴ In what follows I trace the evidence for Freud’s fascination with Egypt and, reading it hieroglyphically (as he would invite us to do) I speculate about its possible impacts on psychoanalysis as art and/or science.

Ingres’ first version of ‘Oedipus and the Sphinx’ – the painting whose reproduction Freud displayed – was completed in 1808. Ingres originally painted the picture in Rome where he was studying at the French Academy. In common with other students at the academy, Ingres was required to produce figure studies and the original version of this painting was focused on Oedipus and the representation of his bodily form. Ingres had asked his model to use the same pose as the classical statue of Hermes with the Sandal which is displayed in the Louvre. As François de Vergnette writes: ‘The clarity of the contours, the muted use of chiaroscuro and the slight surface relief given to the figure of Oedipus add an archaic flavor to the picture. This archaism had its roots in Ingres’s taste for Greek vases.’⁵

But it is the impact of a different Mediterranean culture which can be felt in Ingres’ depiction of Oedipus’ counterpart. While Oedipus embodies the Winckelmannian Hellenic ideal, the Sphinx is represented in all her *oriental* glory. Ingres painted this image just ten years after Napoleon had lead his troops and ‘savants’ into Egypt. Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaign gave rise to a widespread fascination with ancient Egyptian culture and impact on the arts was immense. In choosing to represent Oedipus in his encounter with the Sphinx, Ingres was able to draw on this new

aesthetic of orientalism.⁶ Even before Napoleon's expedition, the Sphinx had become a potent visual representation of the mystery of ancient Egypt and of ancient Egypt as mystery. Ingres reworked this image during the course of his career and gave the Sphinx an ever greater prominence. In Ingres' depiction, the Sphinx's orientalism is inextricable from her femininity. It is above all her sensuality, if not to say, her sexuality which he foregrounds. Her protruding, shapely and very human breast stand metonymically for her person (this is even more evident in the later version of this painting which hangs in the Baltimore Walters Art Museum). In one visual metaphor, the painting conflates the Greek triumph over Egypt, the male conquest of the female, and the human subjugation of the beast.

Where the ancient Egyptian Sphinx was generally represented as male, Ingres follows Greek tradition in representing the Sphinx in her female form. Yet, as Said and others have shown, orientalism is a device of feminization and the feminization of the Sphinx is abetted by Ingres' orientalizing of the figure. Indeed, much of the power of the painting derives from the opposition between Oedipus' classicism and the Sphinx's orientalism – a theme which will dominate much of Ingres' later work. Rather than a specific reference to the ancient Sphinx, *this* Sphinx takes over the generalised quality of an oriental femininity. She is feminine by virtue of being Egyptian. The Egyptian identity of Ingres' Sphinx's is inseparable from her femininity.

The complex overlaying of gender and orientalism in Ingres' depiction of the Sphinx invites the wider question of Freud's relationship to Egyptian culture. Indeed, while Freud, like Ingres was undoubtedly attracted to the scene of Oedipus' encounter with

the Sphinx, as a *Greek* story, elements of his interpretation bear the marks of an Egyptian rendering. As Richard Armstrong has argued, “Freud chose [...] to read the Sphinx as simply a symbolic encounter with *the Father*, in spite of a long tradition of iconography going back to antiquity that depicts the Sphinx in feminine form”.⁷ Freud writes in the essay ‘Dostoevsky and Parricide’:

The hero [Oedipus] commits the deed [patricide] unintentionally and apparently uninfluenced by the woman; this latter element is however taken into account in the circumstances that the hero can only obtain possession of the queen mother after he has repeated his deed upon the monster *who symbolizes the father*.⁸

Rather than seeing in Oedipus’ triumph over the Sphinx a prelude to his conquest of his mother, Freud sees it as a repetition of the annihilation of his father. The Sphinx represents the father who must be overcome in order to fully possess the mother. Freud idiosyncratically interpreted the riddle of the Sphinx as being about the question of ‘where babies come from’⁹, an infantile question which Freud claimed was at the origin of the instinct for scientific research. In his masculinization of the Sphinx, Freud at once removes the mother from the literal primal scene of procreation and the symbolic primal scene of psychoanalytic investigation. As Armstrong puts it: ‘Freud’s ideological maneuver, which will color the entire enterprise of this new science, effectively turns the empirical romance into a *paternal* romance, a tale that comes to elaborate the Father as the source and origin, but also as the gap the son will fill and as the pattern of his desire’.¹⁰ Perhaps Freud turned his gaze away from Greece to Egypt, that is from Ingres’ breasts towards the virile profile of his etching of the Sphinx of Giza as he contemplated the meaning of the riddle of Sphinx?¹¹

Freud's paternalization of the sphinx in his rendering of the Oedipus story here seems to separate him from Ingres yet, Freud shared with Ingres a deep association between Egypt and the feminine. The first substantial reference to Egypt in Freud's work occurs in *The Interpretation of Dreams* where in addition to drawing an analogy between the methods of dream interpretation and the decipherment of hieroglyphics, Freud recounts the only dream he remembers from his childhood:

It is a dozens of years since I myself had a true anxiety-dream. But I remember one from my seventh or eight year, which I submitted to interpretation some thirty years later. It was a very vivid one, and in it I saw my beloved mother, with a peculiarly peaceful, sleeping expression on her features, being carried into the room by two (or three) people with bird's beaks and laid upon the bed. I awoke in tears and screaming, and interrupted my parent's sleep. The strangely draped and unnaturally tall figures with birds' beaks were derived from illustrations to Philippon's Bible. I fancy they must have been gods with falcons' heads from an ancient Egyptian funerary relief.¹²

In Freud's own interpretation of this dream about his mother he denies that the anxiety was linked to death but links it instead to a repressed 'obscure and evidently sexual craving that had found appropriate expression in the visual content of the dream'.¹³ Here again, like with the Sphinx, the feminine is associated with the bestial. The mystery of Egypt is deeply bound up with a fascination with the theriomorphic. In discussing the visual content of the dream, Freud directs us to his first childhood encounter with Egyptian antiquity – his immersion in the richly illustrated Philippon bible, a book from which the young Sigmund Freud was educated by his father [figure 2].¹⁴ As the essay by Simon Goldhill in this volume explores, Freud's discovery of Egypt in his family bible was not arbitrary. The European relationship to Egypt, was profoundly mediated by its biblical

representation.¹⁵ And the Phillipson Bible brings together many of the strands of this complex reception history. Ludwig Phillipson, after whom Freud's family edition of the Bible was named, was a German Rabbi and a prominent member of Haskala, the Enlightenment intellectual movement dedicated to the modernisation of Jewish life and culture. In 1839 he produced a German translation of the Hebrew Bible which was based, in part, on Moses Mendelssohn's bilingual text – itself a founding document of Jewish Enlightenment. The distinctive feature of Philipppson's translation was that in addition to a textual commentary it was accompanied by a richly illustrated cultural commentary. The illustrations were wood engravings by Gustave Doré and they represented animals, temples and pagan gods – a provocative act since the Hebrew Bible forbids such images in religious contexts (an aspect of the Jewish faith which would profoundly affect Freud's later interpretation of the history of Judaism). That Freud discovered Egypt in the context of a self-consciously rationalising edition of the bible speaks to the convergence of religious and secular forces which characterized late nineteenth-century Egyptomania.¹⁶ Egypt was the land of Jewish affliction but as the two previous articles demonstrated, for a Godless Jew like Freud, Egypt also represented an alternative genealogy of Western culture which by-passed the privileged narratives of the Classics and the Bible.

While Freud directs us to the Philipppson bible, it is difficult not to be reminded of another seminal German-Jewish text, the Bird Head Haggadah. There is no evidence that Freud knew of this particular Haggadah although the Passover Seder is said to be one of the few Jewish rituals that the Freud family observed.¹⁷ The Haggadah was published in 1300 in Southern Germany and is illustrated with human figures who have pronounced birds heads and beaks. These bird-headed figures are thought to

represent the Jewish people while the non-Jewish and non-human figures are depicted with blank faces. In Freud's description of his dream he lingers over his Jewish mother's very human facial features while reserving the birds heads for the characters who carry her body. By invoking the Egyptian gods from the Philippson Bible, Freud may be burying a reference to Judaism under his invocation of Egyptian culture. Perhaps in this dream, the relationship between Egypt and Judaism is already being figured as a palimpsest?

Elsewhere, when Freud discusses birds in the context of a different dream, Leonardo's, he is led directly from Leonardo's discussion of a vulture to the corpus of Egyptian mythology. As Daniel Orrells' article has already discussed, Freud identifies the vulture from Leonardo's dream with the vulture headed Egyptian goddess Mut and he notes that that the hieroglyph of the vulture also stands for the word mother. In pointing out the similarity between Mut and the German word for mother – Mutter, Freud was perhaps recalling, as Richard Armstrong suggests, the dream about his own *liebe Mutter*.¹⁸ “Now this vulture-headed mother goddess” Freud writes “was usually represented by the Egyptians with a phallus; her body was female, as the breasts indicated, but it also had a male organ in a state of erection”.¹⁹ By equating the vulture's tale in Leonardo's dream simultaneously to his mother's teat and to the phallus, Freud finds a mythological parallel for Leonardo's phantasy in the phallic mother of Egyptian mythology. “In the goddess Mut, then, we find the same combination of maternal and masculine characteristics as in Leonardo's phantasy of the vulture”.²⁰ As Orrells' article in this collection shows, this identification leads to Freud's complex and paradoxical account of Leonardo's homosexuality.²¹

As his earlier account of his own dream shows, Egyptian mythology seems to have played a specific role in Freud's work as it was tied to the enigma of female desire whose evasive solution he compared, quoting Heinrich Heine, to the decipherment of hieroglyphs (just as he would compare dream interpretation itself to hieroglyphics): "Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity – *Häupter in Hieroglyphenmützen* [heads in hieroglyphic bonnets]".²² In Heine's poem the riddle against whom those hieroglyphic bonnets were knocked was, in fact, the riddle of 'Mensch' rather than *Weiblichkeit*. And in fact, in the figure of Mut Freud discovers not so much a figure of femininity as one of hermaphroditism. Just as an (Egyptian) father lies behind the Greek female Sphinx, the Egyptian mother god in Freud's rendering possesses a phallus.

Rather than the enigma of femininity, then, Egypt seems rather to hold as its secret the promise of gender fluidity. In fact, in a quotation already discussed by Orrells in a different context, Freud will move from the specific example of Mut to a more general claim: "Mythology can teach us that an androgynous structure, a combination of male and female sex characters, was an attribute not only of Mut but also of other deities like Isis and Hathor. It teaches us further that other Egyptian deities such as Neith of Sais – from whom the Greek Athena was later derived – were originally conceived as androgynous, i.e. as hermaphrodite".²³ Freud finds in Egyptian mythology an archive of ambiguously gendered divinities. But in a gesture which repeats his reading of the Sphinx, Freud will read Greek mythology through an Egyptian lens to reveal a more complex construction of gendered identity. Freud is thus led from Egyptian mythology to the expression of a more universal idea: "[Al] these hermaphrodite divinities are expressions of the idea that only a combination of

male and female elements can give a worthy representation of divine perfection”.²⁴ Where Freud’s originary Greek myth (Oedipus) establishes and maintains the severance of the sexes, his Egyptian myths point to their inseparability. The former binarizes, the latter puts sex on a spectrum. As Carl Schorske writes: “Some of Freud’s boldest later inquiries into female psychology and the pre-oedipal mother (“Female Sexuality” [1931], “Contributions to the Psychology of Love” [1918]) might be traced back to the study of Egyptian culture that so fired his imagination in the prewar years. They suggested new psychoanalytic ideas that could break through the essentially male confines of most of his cultural theory”.²⁵

Yet, as Schorske and Armstrong have argued this Egyptian path was ultimately the path not taken. For while Freud’s interest in Egypt was maintained, his interest in Egypt as a place which challenged the rigidities of gendered was soon replaced by a different set of associations.²⁶ Egypt takes centre stage in Freud’s final major work *Moses and Monotheism* which was published from London in 1939, the year of his death. In this book Freud makes the scandalous claim that Moses was not a Jew but an Egyptian. Freud contradicts the biblical narrative by speculating that Moses was born into a family of Egyptian nobles and that he was a follower of the pharaoh Akhenaten who lived about 1351-1334 BC. Akhenaten had abandoned traditional Egyptian polytheism and introduced the exclusive worship of the sun god Aten. It is Akhenaten’s monotheism which Freud believed lies behind the Jews’ own adoption of a monotheistic religion. In addition to the suggestion of the Egyptian origin of monotheism, at the heart of Freud’s provocative rewriting is the claim that the Jews, in their impatience with the harsh strictures of his monotheistic religion, murdered Moses. The history of ancient Judaism is the site of an oedipal murder whose

consequences for the Jewish people continued to be felt well into Freud's lifetime. Central to Freud's argument is a claim that monotheism represented a significant advance in thought. This cultural advance was represented by Freud in overlaying gendered and ethnic terms. He uses an analogy from Greek culture – from Greek tragedy - to explain this intellectual triumph:

We can far more easily grasp another process of later date. Under the influence of external factors into which we need not enter here and which are also insufficiently known, it came about that the matriarchal social order was succeeded by the patriarchal one – which, of course, involved a revolution in the juridical conditions that had so far prevailed. An echo of this revolution seems still to be audible in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. But this turning point from mother to father points in addition to a victory of intellectuality over sensuality – that is, an advance in civilization, since maternity is proved by the evidence of the senses while paternity is a hypothesis, based on an inference and a premises. Taking sides in this way with a thought-process in preference to a sense perception has proved a momentous step.²⁷

It is to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and its decisive redistribution of gender roles that Freud turns to ground his account of the intellectual advance of the Egyptian and Jewish people.²⁸ The triumph of the “intellectuality” over “sensuality” which Freud saw as key to the advance in civilization represented by the Greeks has the same relationship to the development of abstract thought that Freud sees as Moses' and Akhenaten's gift to the Jews. To quote Schorske again: “In his first Egyptian dig, Freud's findings were related to bisexuality, the phallic mother, the union of opposites in religion and even in language in the second dig, undertaken in search of the origins of the Jews, we find a different Egypt, one wholly characterized by masculine cultural achievements, with *Geistigkeit* and instinctual repression at the center.”²⁹

Freud's discovery of Akhenaten as a figure of manly *Geistigkeit* stands in opposition to his earlier depiction of Egypt. But it is not just that in his transition from Mut to the pharaoh, that his depiction of gender undergoes a shift. Freud's account presents an extremely partial picture of the pharaoh himself. Oddly, as Schorske points out, Freud fails to draw on the one major psychoanalytic study of Egyptian culture: Karl Abraham's "Amenhotep IV".³⁰ This long article was written in 1912 in response to Freud's Leonardo essay – Freud wrote elatedly to thank Abraham for the essay.³¹ Freud's loyal disciple had turned to the figure of Akhenaten to explore in detail and through a specific example the bisexuality and hermaphroditism that Freud had previously associated with Egyptian culture. Abraham presents Akhenaten as an androgynous figure who lived under the influence of his powerful mother. "His libido must have been fixated on his mother to an unusual degree, whilst his markedly negative attitude to his father is equally evident".³² In Abraham's essay Akhenaten is celebrated not just as a great intellectual but as a sensual aesthete.

In contrast to Freud's one-sided portrayal, Abraham's more rounded description of Akhenaten reflects the account of the pharaoh that was emerging amongst Egyptologists at the turn of the century. Although the first proper record of Amarna, the site of Akhenaten's capital city, was made by scholars of Napoleon's Egyptian expedition in 1798-1799, it was only in 1880s with the chance discovery of 379 clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform script that the unique character of Akhenaten's reign came to light. The first major archaeological exploration of Amarna was undertaken by the Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) the first Professor of Egyptology in the United Kingdom. Among other sites in the central city, Petrie excavated the Great Temple of Aten which was key to understanding Akhenaten's religious innovations. We can

certainly hear echoes of Freud's later assessment in Petrie's much quoted verdict on the pharaoh: "Khuenaten [as Akhenaten was known to Egyptologists at the time] stands out as perhaps the most original thinker that ever lived in Egypt, and one of the great idealists of the world".³³

Yet, what Petrie's excavations revealed was how Akhenaten's intellectual revolution was accompanied by an artistic revolution. The development of the 'Armana style' gave rise to a new more 'naturalistic depiction' of the human form. Notable were the representations of Akhenaten and his queen Nefertiti herself – their genders often indistinguishable. Abraham had referred to Akhenaten's delicate and effeminate physique – an impression left by many of the statues and reliefs found at Armana. Already in Petrie's time scholars were suggesting that Akhenaten's feminine physique may have been a conscious attempt by the king to differentiate the art of his reign from that of previous periods.³⁴ His androgynous form, it was also argued, could be seen as an attempt to portray Akhenaten as a combination of both the male and female divine. Aten, the creator god, had both male and female attributes: "mother and father of all human kind". In representing himself in this way Akhenaten may well have wanted to signal his special affinity to the ambiguously gendered god. Recall Freud on Mut: "[A]ll these hermaphrodite divinities are expressions of the idea that only a combination of male and female elements can give a worthy representation of divine perfection".³⁵ Rather than turning Akhenaten into a figure of resolute masculinity, Freud could have included him and Aten both in his hermaphroditic pantheon.

Flinders Petrie was an almost exact contemporary of Freud and is generally considered to be one of the founding figures of modern archaeology. David Gange

has shown the extent to which Petrie's Egyptology was motivated by and implicated in the religious debates of the late nineteenth century. His father had been a member of the Plymouth Brethren and Flinders was first inspired to go to Egypt to test the theories of Piazzi Smyth (enthusiastically supported by his father) that the "dimensions of the Great Pyramid were dictated and controlled by Providence in order to enumerate cosmological distances, planetary dimensions and key events in world history (both past and future)."³⁶ When Petrie's meticulous site plans and measurements disproved Piazzi Smyth's theory, Petrie reluctantly abandoned its specifics but, as Goldhill has argued in this volume, religious arguments and attempts to validate the bible still played a significant part in his archaeological excavations. It is also difficult to make sense of Petrie's career without reference both to the colonial presence which made his excavations possible and to the discourses about ethnic and racial identity which upheld the imperial mission.

Yet these religious and colonial contexts are generally sidelined in the narrative about Petrie in favour of his identity as a pioneer of scientific methodology in the preservation of artifacts. During his excavation of many of the most important sites in Egypt, he urged Egyptologists to sift through seemingly insignificant debris to painstakingly build up a picture of human existence. In fact, he pioneered a method called 'sequence dating' or contextual seriation which has become an established method of relative dating in archaeology. When Petrie excavated at Diospolis Parva in Egypt he found that the graves he was uncovering contained no evidence of their dates and stratigraphy could not be used to establish their chronology. Petrie instead looked to the contextual material – primarily potsherds – and exhaustively listed the contents of each grave on a strip of cardboard. He then rearranged the papers around

until he arrived at a sequence he was satisfied with. His sequence was determined by looking at the concentrations of certain designs on what would otherwise have been insignificant finds. While Freud would turn to ‘fragments’ of memory to understand the psychic history of his patients, Petrie would use discarded potsherds to reconstruct the development of Egyptian civilization.

In the first half of this article I asked what difference it would have made to psychoanalysis if Freud had taken the Sphinx rather than Oedipus as his point of departure. I answered that he might have been pressed more to sexuality as spectrum than a binarism, an idea he did in fact entertain at various points. In this second part I would like to pose a different but related counterfactual: what difference would it have made to Freud’s archaeological metaphor if he had elected Petrie rather than Schliemann as his archaeological hero? Here I will be building on the argument of Goldhill’s article which explored the deep implication of Freud’s archaeology in the religious debates of the late nineteenth century. Goldhill also shows that despite it being rich and suggestive for Freud’s theory and practice, the metaphor of archaeology was tenuous and often misleading. Yet the metaphor remained a powerful tool to Freud despite the many flaws in its logic, flaws which Freud himself at times acknowledged.³⁷ It would at least have been truer to Freud’s practice, I argue, if he had followed the model of Flinders Petrie rather than the one of his professed exemplar. Recent scholarship has often made the argument that Freud turned to archaeology to give scientific legitimacy to his still controversial theories.³⁸ Yet, it has also been pointed out that Freud’s archaeological referents were more ‘Romantic’ than ‘scientific’. Whether one thinks of his admiration for the maverick amateur Schliemann or his identification with Norbert Hanold the protagonist of Wilhelm

Jensen's novella *Gradiva*, Freud's archaeological imaginaire tended more towards the quixotic than the scholarly.

Moreover, the monumental finds with which Schliemann is associated seem to be at odds with the metaphoric potential of archaeology for Freud. As Dietmar Schmidt argues: "In the early twentieth century, psychoanalysis tries to investigate a specific logic of the appearance and the incident of what is taken to be unintended in everyday communication and human behavior. What before hardly seemed to be worth systematic research, now becomes a privileged field, in which the meaningful signs of a hidden and unwelcome past appear. For representing this new field of research Freud often makes use of archaeological metaphors. But in quoting the knowledge and the techniques of archaeology, he evokes imaginary landscapes of a reappearing human past, which is not depraved and repressed but glorious and precious."³⁹ One recalls Freud's programmatic statement in 'A Case of Hysteria':

In the face of the incompleteness of my analytical results, I had no choice but to follow the example of those whose good fortune it is to bring to the light of day after their long burial the priceless though mutilated relics of antiquity. I have restored what is missing, taking the best model known to me from other analyses; but like the conscientious archaeologist, I have not omitted to mention each case where the authentic parts end and my construction begins. (Freud, SE: 7, 14)

Can one really think about the beauty and grace of Freud's 'Gradiva' bas-relief as a 'mutilated relic'. Would Freud's archaeological metaphor not find a better referent in the potsherds of Amarna than the 'face of Agamemnon' at Mycenae?

It is to ancient Greece and Rome rather than to Egypt that we have tended to turn to understand Freud's interest in archaeology. There are good reasons for this, of course. The wider context of Freud's Classical education explains why the striking descriptions of archaeology in his writings are largely drawn from the Classical world. One thinks, for instance, of his visually arresting description of Rome as a "psychical entity" in *Civilisation and its Discontents*:

Now, let us make the fantastic assumption that Rome is not a place where people live, but a psychical entity with a similarly long, rich past, in which nothing that ever took shape has passed away, and in which all previous phases of development exist beside the most recent. For Rome this would mean that on the Palatine hill the imperial palaces and the Septizonium of Septimus Severus still rose to their original height...

Here far from emphasizing its mutilation, it is the recoverability of the past which is foregrounded. There is no doubt that Freud's reconstruction of the past here exists in a chaotic and destabilising juxtaposition. History becomes a synchrony of discordant historical moments. But what the Freudian account loses in terms of reliable historical narrative, it gains in the assumption that nothing which happens in the past is ever truly lost to the historical record. If the tools of the historian or the analyst are sufficiently finely tuned they will be able to recover the concrete historical moments that have left material remains on the physical landscape. Nothing, in this account "passes away". One of the most puzzling aspects of Freud's depiction of Rome is the extent to which the traces of the past are so manifest to the viewer. In Freud's account, the tourist needs no archaeologist to discern the historical movements of Rome's development. By analogy one is led to believe that the analyst is able to read his patient's psychical history, as it were, as an open book. Freud's neglect of the

process of recovery in the Rome analogy effectively leaves both the archaeologist and the analyst out of a job.

A more promising model emerges in his earlier reading of Jensen's *Gradiva*. Here it is not so much what can be recovered as what has been "repressed" that is at the forefront of the analogy:

There is, in fact, no better analogy for repression, by which something in the mind is at once made inaccessible and preserved, than burial of the sort to which Pompeii fell victim and from which it could emerge once more through the work of spades. Thus it was that the young archaeologist was obliged in his phantasy to transport to Pompeii the original of the relief which reminded him of the object of his youthful love. The author was well justified, indeed, in lingering over the valuable similarity which his delicate sense had perceived between a particular mental process in the individual and an isolated historical event in the history of mankind.

The dialectic between what "has been preserved" and what is "inaccessible" which had been so strangely occluded in Freud's vision of the Eternal City is brought out in its complexity when Freud turns to Pompeii. Here it is the difficulty of "the work of spades" which is insisted upon. In the Pompeian analogy it is not just the fragility of the past which is emphasised but also the fallibility of the process of its recovery. In this version, repression, phantasy and transference all take their place in the Freudian depiction of the work of the archaeologist. It is Pompeii's status as a buried city which makes it such a productive analogy for Freud's understanding of the mind.⁴⁰ For it was specifically to a the process of 'excavating a buried city' that Freud alludes in first theorization of the metaphor in 'A Case of Hysteria':

Thus it came about that in this, the first full-length analysis of a hysteria undertaken by me, I arrived at a procedure which I later developed into a regular method and employed deliberately. This procedure was one of clearing away the pathogenic psychical material layer by layer, and we liked to compare it with the technique of excavating a buried city.

Yet, the process of Pompeii's burial seems to differ markedly from the dynamics of repression it is thought to illustrate. Pompeian life is abruptly interrupted by a freak act of nature. The memory of the city is lost through blunt *external* trauma rather than through some *internal* process of repression. Despite his frequent references to Pompeii, could it be that Freud had another 'buried city' in mind?

While the discovery of Pompeii was central to the emergence of an antiquarian archaeology in the eighteenth century, the excavations at Amarna were key to the development of Petrie's nineteenth century 'scientific' archaeology (a 'scientific' archaeology which, as we have seen, was nevertheless still deeply implicated in debates about biblical authenticity). Amarna was the archetypal buried city of the *tournant de siècle* and there was great interest in the site following the chance discovery of the cuneiform tablets which elucidated the exceptional character of Akhenaten's reign. Amarna, known as the city of Akhetaten –meaning horizon of Aten – was established by Akhenaten as his new capital city in around 1346BC. It was some twenty years later abandoned shortly after Akhenaten's death when his son King Tutankhamun decided to leave the city and return to Thebes. Akhenaten's son and successors were involved in a deliberate attempt to erase the memory of this unique site. In an act of *damnatio memoriae*, Akhenaten's name was excised from the list of pharaohs and hidden from the historical record until his identity was recovered

by Petrie and his associates. This process of burial and concealment seems a much better analogy than Pompeii for the dynamics of repression.

That Freud became fascinated by this story is evident from the central role he gives it in *Moses and Monotheism*:

Amenhotep [IV]'s reign lasted only seventeen years; soon after his death in 1358 the new religion was swept away and the memory of the heretic king proscribed. From the ruins of his new capital, dedicated to his God, and from the rock tomb inscriptions belonging to it, we derive the little knowledge we possess of him. All we learn of this remarkable, unique person is of great interest. (SE:...)

In Freud's last major work he thus diagnoses the excavations of Amarna and the emergence of the story of Akhenaten as instance of the return of the repressed. But rather than analogy, *Moses and Monotheism* sets psychoanalysis up as a rival to archaeology:

With our present psychological insight we could, long before Schliemann and Evans, have raised the question of where it was that the Greeks obtained all the legendary material which was worked over by Homer and the great Attic dramatists in their master-pieces. The answer would have had to be that this people had probably experienced in their prehistory a period of external brilliance and cultural efflorescence which had perished in a historical catastrophe and of which an obscure tradition survived in these legends. (SE: 23, 70).

Freud and Schliemann are here seen as competitors and in Freud's fantasy chronology the spades of psychoanalysis discovered the remains of Troy long before Schliemann set sail. Homer's *Iliad*, like Moses' religion is, for Freud, the neurotic symptom of a

repressed trauma. “Early trauma- defence-latency-outbreak of neurotic illness – partial return of the repressed. Such is the formula which we have laid down for the development of a neurosis. The reader is now invited to take the step of supposing that something occurred in the life of the human species similar to what occurs in the life of individuals”. (SE: 23, 80).

By setting up Egypt up as alternative to Greece as the site of Freud’s archaeological imaginings, *Moses and Monotheism* also suggests that Petrie might have come to rival Schliemann in his pantheon of archaeologists. That Freud may have had Egyptian as much as Greco-Roman antiquity in mind as he formulated his archaeological metaphor is perhaps already evident in a passage from the ‘Rat Man’ discussed in a different context Goldhill:

I then made some short observation upon *the psychological differences between the conscious and the unconscious*, and upon the fact that everything conscious was subject to a process of wearing-away, while what was unconscious was relatively unchangeable; I illustrated my remarks by pointing to the antiquities standing about in my room. They were, in fact, I said, only objects found in a tomb, and their burial had been their preservation: the destruction of Pompeii was only beginning now that it had been dug up.⁴¹

Vered Lev Kenann in her recent book *The Ancient Unconscious* beautifully analyses the switch in this passage from Freud’s attention to the antiquities in his own collection to a “completely different archaeological register” in his reference to Pompeii. “The sudden shift in Freud’s thought reflects a doubt concerning the possibility of keeping the revealed unconscious completely detached from the dynamics of consciousness”.⁴² But there is something else happening in the slippage.

Although Pompeii is vividly associated with the process of burial it would be odd to characterise its major finds as ‘objects found in a tomb’. No, the antiquities that Freud clearly had in mind here were not Roman but Egyptian. It is no surprise that it was Egyptian objects he would use to illustrate his point. As Joan Rafael Leff writes: “Among the 2300 or so antiquities acquired personally by Freud in his lifetime, some 600 objects are Egyptian. The place of honour above the patients' couch in his consulting room in Vienna was occupied by an enormous mounted photograph of the great temple of Abu Simbel. A large drawing of the sphinx at Gizeh hung on the wall. The doors to Freud's library were propped open by two massive Egyptian stone reliefs depicting Osiris. [...]The shelves are cluttered with hundreds of ancient Egyptian statuettes and bronze votive figurines. Particularly prized by Freud were a set of agricultural Ushabti tomb-servants, a Nile funerary ferry with canopy and galley slaves, a human-headed soul (BA), and a wooden *falcon headed god Horus* which, in Vienna, was placed next to the chair in which he sat during analytic sessions.”

Reflecting on the role of Egypt in Freud’s history of the Jews Peter Sloterdijk writes: “From that point on, the history of ideas takes the form of a massive game of displacement in which motifs from Egyptian universalism are acted out by non-Egyptian protagonists”.⁴³ Whether one thinks about the occlusion of the Sphinx in the formulation of the Oedipus complex, the concealment of Akhenaten behind Moses or the overlaying of Amarna with Pompeii, Egypt figures in Freud’s work as a site of displacement. And as Freud’s archaeological metaphor makes clear, archaeology is itself a science of necessary displacement – of removing things from their place. In the nineteenth century, the big finds of archaeology made major journeys from the

colonies to the metropolis. And Freud himself is displaced at the end of his life to London with his thus doubly displaced collection.

But what can one achieve by making the role of Egypt more manifest, what can we gain by turning ones attention back from Oedipus to the Sphinx or by highlighting Petrie at the expense of Schliemann? For Edward Said, as we have seen, paying greater attention to Freud's 'non-Europeans' could lead to a less monocultural understanding of psychoanalysis. He admired Freud's gesture of what he calls "irascible transgressiveness" in writing *Moses and Monotheism*. And far from reading the book as an abandonment of the Jews at the time of their greatest peril, Said instead argued that it was attempt to surmount pernicious nationalism and racism. At a time when questions of racial purity had become pervasive, Freud instead, argued for the hybrid identity of one of the world's great religions and the intricate cross-over between European and non-European cultures in the history of civilization. For Said, Freud's book was an example of late style, it spoke of an old Eurocentric who in the twilight of his life questioned some of his most basic assumptions about history and identity. Recentring Egypt, then, would pose a complex series of questions to the identification of psychoanalysis as a 'Jewish science'. Egypt and Judaism were clearly intricately linked for Freud, but his Egyptianisation of Judaism is both a rebuke of the Orthodox Judaism of his father *and* an answer to an anti-Semitism which so often hid under the mantle of philhellenism.

But by looking more specifically at questions of archaeology, the articles in this volume have argued that the turn to Egypt gives us an insight into psychoanalysis' deep implication in – rather than opposition to - the histories of religion, race and

colonialism which Said so powerfully critiqued. Ranjanna Khanna writes: “In order to understand the vexed relationship of psychoanalysis to materiality, it is crucial to examine the ways in which psychoanalysis developed in its own historical context, that is, through the language of colonial disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology”.⁴⁴ Archaeology whether Egyptian or Classical was intricately tied into the nationalist and imperial histories of the nineteenth century. And Freud’s act of collecting must be understood, also, from this perspective.⁴⁵ Turning from Classical to Egyptian archaeology serves to make this implicit legacy more explicit. Egyptomania was profoundly marked by the racial anxieties of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Flinders Petrie’s archaeology may have been ‘scientific’ but it was crucially tied to his interest in race – the excavator of Armana was also the author of *Racial Photographs from the Ancient Egyptian Pictures and Photographs*. And while Freud’s interest in Akhenaten challenges the illusion of Moses’ ethnic ‘purity’, Petrie’s interest in Akhenaten’s heredity is on a continuum with his openly eugenicist writings.⁴⁶ If we keep Ingres’ sensuous oriental Sphinx in mind next time we consider the Oedipus Complex, we might go further in rethinking psychoanalysis’ relationship to its own ‘dark continents’.

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



¹ See J. Forrester “‘Mille e tre’: Freud and Collecting”, in J. Elsner, J. and R. Cardinal eds *The Cultures of Collecting* (New York 1994), 224-251 and L. Gamwell and R. Wells *Sigmund Freud and Art: His Personal Collection* (New York and London 1989). On the visual presence of Egypt in Freud’s study see G. Pollock, Griselda ‘Freud’s Egypt: Mummies and M/others’, *parallax* 2007, vol 13.2, 56-79 and J. Raphael-Leff ‘Freud’s ‘Dark Continent’, *parallax* 2007, vol 13.2 41-55 and on the role of Egypt more generally see M. Bergstein, Mary ‘Freud’s Uncanny Egypt: Prolegomena, *American Imago* Vol. 66, No. 2, Dreaming of Lydia (Summer 2009), 185-210.

² J. Butler *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York 2000), 57; based on a discussion in G. Steiner *Antigones* (Oxford 1984), 18.

³ E. Said *Freud and the Non European* (London 2003)

⁴ See D. Fuss *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers that Shaped Them* (New York and London 2004) and S. Ahmed *Queer Phenomenology*, (Durham NC 2006) who explore Freud’s study from the perspective of these oriental fantasies. Fuss quotes the poet H.D.’s recollection of Freud’s office: “Today, lying on the famous psychoanalytic couch, . . . wherever my fantasies may take me now, I have a center, security, aim. I am centralized or reoriented here in this mysterious lion’s den or Aladdin’s cave of treasures” (Fuss 2004: 89).

⁵ <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/oedipus-explaining-enigma-sphinx>

⁶ On Ingres and orientalism, see s. Siegfried, Susan *Ingres: Painting Reimagined* (New Haven and London 2009), 104-120

⁷ R. Armstrong, Richard A *Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World* (Ithaca NY 2005), 82

⁸ Freud SE 21, 188

⁹ As Armstrong (note 7), 55 notes ‘it was a good five times in print that Freud declared this to be the real meaning of the riddle of the Sphinx’.

¹⁰ Armstrong (note 7), 83

¹¹ This association with the masculine may be confirmed by another picture which prominently hung over Freud’s couch: “Above the analytic couch Freud hung a colorful print of the temple at Abu Simbel. With his sensitivity to the meaning of words, Freud may have appreciated that, this temple that penetrates deep into Mother Earth, has a name that translates “father symbol” (“abu” from Hebrew, “Simbel” from German).” Gamwell (1989)??

¹² SE 5: 583

¹³ SE 5: 583

¹⁴ In his *Autobiographical Study* talks of his ‘deep engrossment in the Bible’ from the time he was learning to read and that this early encounter had a profound effect on his later interests.

¹⁵ For the entanglement of Egyptology with biblical archaeology, see D. Gange *Dialogues with the Dead: Egyptology in British Culture and Religion* (Oxford 2013).

¹⁶ For this history, see the essays by Goldhill and Orrells in this volume as well as the important work by Gange (note 15).

¹⁷ On Freud and the Bird Head Haggadah, see S. Schneider, Stanley and J. Berke ‘Freud’s Atonement’, *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, vol 14 2011, 531-541.

¹⁸ Armstrong (note 7), 70 sees a reference to Freud’s mother dream lying behind the identification of Leonardo’s vulture with Mut .

¹⁹ Freud SE XI, 94

²⁰ Freud SE XI, 94

²¹ See also W. Davis ‘Freud’s Leonardo und die Kultur der Homosexualität’, *Texte zur Kunst*, 5/17, 1995, 56-73 and D. Orrells *Classical Culture and Modern Masculinity* (Oxford 2011). Not the least of these paradoxes is the fact that Leonardo never actually talked about a “vulture” – Freud seems to have been working from a German text of Leonardo’s notebooks which had mistranslated the Italian word “*nibio*” which is a kite not a vulture. See Strachey’s editorial note SE XI, 60-62. See also W. Andersen *Freud, Leonardo DA Vinci, and the Vulture’s Tail: a Refreshing Look at Leonardo’s Sexuality*, (New York 2001).

²² SE 22; 113

²³ Freud SE XI, 94

²⁴ Freud SE XI, 94

²⁵ C. E. Schorske ‘Freud’s Egyptian Dig’, *The New York Review of Books*, May 27, 1993

²⁶ Schorske (note 25)

²⁷ Freud SE 23, 113-4

²⁸ For an analysis of this passage in terms of Freud’s “matriarchy manqué” see Armstrong (note 7), 244-9

²⁹ Schorske (note 25)

³⁰ K. Abraham ‘Amenhotep IV (IKHNATON): A Psychoanalytic Contribution to the Understanding of his Personality and the Monotheistic Cult of Aton’, in H. C. Abraham ed. *Clinical Papers and Essays on Psycho-Analysis* (London 1955)

³¹ Freud did, however, suggest some alterations to the argument, in particular, de-emphasising the role of Akhenaten’s mother in favour of his relationship to his father. Abraham’s essay plays a role in the story of the breakdown of Freud’s relationship with Jung. It was during a discussion of Abraham’s theories about Akhenaten’s relationship to his father that Freud fainted in Jung’s presence. See A. Bentinck van Schoonheten *Karl Abraham: Life And Work, A Biography* (London 2016)

³² Abraham (note 30), 267

³³ Petrie, cited in M.S. Drower, M. S. (1995) *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology* (Madison 1995), 198

³⁴ On different interpretations of Akhenaten's androgyny see D. Montserrat *Akhenaten: History, Fantasy and Ancient Egypt* (London and New York 2002).

³⁵ Freud SE XI, 94

³⁶ Gange (note 15), 131

³⁷ I'm thinking here of Freud's comments in *Civilization and its Discontents* where, after presenting the analogy between the mind and the city of Rome, Freud concedes a series of objections to the comparison: "There is clearly no point in spinning our phantasy any further, for it leads to things that are unimaginable and even absurd. [...] Our attempts seem to be an idle game. It has only one justification. It shows us how far we are from mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms." Freud SE 21, 70-71

³⁸ See Armstrong (note 7) and J. Le Rider *Freud, de l'Acropole au Sinai: Le retour à l'Antiquité des Modernes viennois* (Paris 2002)

³⁹ D. Schmidt 'Refuse archaeology: Virchow--Schliemann—Freud', (translated by Andrew Gledhill) *Perspectives on Science* 9 (2):210-232 (2001)

⁴⁰ He might also have reflected on the eruption of Vesuvius as an isolated historical event yet one which is characteristic of the earth on which we live where lava churns beneath its surface and occasionally erupts destructively. Could this geological process not speak to the functioning of the unconscious? I thank Bonnie Honig for this observation.

⁴¹ SE 10, 174

⁴² V. Lev Kenaan *The Ancient Unconscious: Psychoanalysis and the Ancient Text*, (Oxford 2019), 39

⁴³ P. Sloterdijk *Derrida, an Egyptian : on the problem of the Jewish pyramid*; translated by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge 2009), 16

⁴⁴ R. Khanna *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham NC 2003), 37

⁴⁵ See the powerful critique of the scholarly euphemisms used to describe the act of collecting looted objects in A. Azoulay *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, (London 2019).

⁴⁶ See D. Chalis *The Eugenic Ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie* (London 2014).