



The Sphinx on the Table: Sigmund Freud's Art Collection and the Development of Psychoanalysis

Janine Burke

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Sigmund Freud's collection of Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities is one of the art world's best-kept secrets. Over a forty year period he amassed an extraordinary array of nearly three thousand statues, vases, reliefs, busts, rings and prints.

For Freud, psychoanalysis and his art collection developed together in a symbiotic, nourishing relationship, each informing and enriching the other. Freud used myth to illustrate controversial theories like the Oedipus complex, situating ancient symbolism in a modern context. He explored the archaeology of the mind, unearthing his patients' dreams and memories while creating a personal museum of ancient treasure. Freud compared the process to analysis, where he, "cleared away material, layer by layer", to the technique of excavating a buried city.

To create a portrait of Freud the art collector, Janine Burke builds a vibrant, richly detailed and intimate image of his life and times, tracing Freud's taste for beautiful things back to his earliest years. *The Sphinx on the Table* is set against the glittering, decadent, backdrop of fin-de-siecle Vienna where an artistic flowering took place in painting, theater, writing and architecture.

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