“The apartment is doing well”. The Freuds at Berggasse 19

Special exhibition at the Sigmund Freud Museum, starting 31 January 2017

Opening: 30 January 2017, 7pm

The exhibition “The apartment is doing well”. The Freuds at Berggasse 19 focuses on the private life of the Freud family at their home in Vienna. Various moves within the building, amalgamations of apartments, and changing uses of rooms over the years have left many traces: letters, original objects and photographs tell of an eventful family history that took place here for almost half a century – from taking up tenancy in 1891 to fleeing to London in 1938.

Quotation-style visualisations of the apartment and its interior from the Gründerzeit period give a sense of middle-class homes and everyday life at the turn of the century, bringing to life the atmosphere that characterised life at Berggasse 19. A dressing table (German: Psyche) belonging to the family is to be presented for the first time: this vanity recently returned to its original site at Berggasse 19 thanks to a generous donation of the Vienna Medical Chamber. The show focuses on the interplay of domestic structures and family relations along with the busy comings and goings at the Freuds’ home, often enough for professional reasons. The exhibition also looks into the question of the extent to which Sigmund and Anna Freud’s personal experience and life influenced their psychoanalytic work.

The apartment is doing well

The special aura of the office rooms at Berggasse 19 has been described by many authors. However, not only did Sigmund Freud receive his patients, develop the new theory of the unconscious and compose most of his writings and letters here: he also lived here, in this tenement from the Gründerzeit period, built in 1889, together with his family from 1891 until their expulsion in 1938.

The father of six spent almost half a century as a tenant at Berggasse 19, together with his wife Martha, the children and his sister-in-law Minna Bernays, and at least two servants – and as of 1925, various dogs. The rooms changed many times over the years: changes in the family and the quickly growing crowd of children resulted in several moves, conversions and use of the rooms for different purposes – the mutual influence of building structures and social behaviour are also reflected by the living situation and various mentions in letters. Particularly the family’s letters on show here testify to these aspects, affording a glimpse of everyday life and family relations. The title of the exhibition itself “The apartment is doing well” is taken from a letter by Anna Freud to her father in 1910. Numerous letter notes, quotations from theoretical writings, and visual documentations of the family’s interior illustrate the extent to which the family and private setting also influenced the early development of psychoanalysis – regardless of the division between living and working areas practised by Sigmund Freud. The descriptions gleaned from private letters create an impression of the interior in which the history of the Freud family at Berggasse 19 was able to unfold until their expulsion in 1938.

The “Fließ letters” thus form one important part of the exhibition: alongside theoretical deliberations and an exchange of views among experts, Freud’s correspondence with the Berlin-based ENT specialist Wilhelm Fließ also features countless private messages concerning his fast-growing family and their life together. Freud’s letters to Fließ testify to the inevitable overlaps entailed by living and working in the same place.
Family life before Berggasse

During the fours years of their engagement, in which Freud lived in Vienna and his wife-to-be Martha in Hamburg, both wrote about 1500 letters to one another, some of which were concerned with their plans and dreams about having an apartment together. The most relevant of these “bridal letters” are on show here and are an important source of information concerning Freud’s life as a bachelor.

In April 1886, the almost thirty-year-old Freud rented his first own apartment in Rathausstraße. The same year, Sigmund and Martha moved in to their first joint home, that already included office rooms, in the imperial “Stiftungshaus” on Schottenring. This building, that no longer exists today, and that replaced the burnt-down Ringtheater, was known in Vienna as the “Sühnhaus”, literally the “atonement house”.

The Freuds at Berggasse 19

In 1891, the Freuds moved to Berggasse, a spur-of-the-moment decision, as he himself described it: Freud saw a “To let” sign outside No. 19, viewed the apartment and immediately signed the rent agreement.

For the first five years he had his offices in the rooms facing the street on the mezzanine floor (apartment number 5) – today’s special exhibition rooms. From November 1896 until early summer 1908 he practised on the upper ground floor below (apartment number 4). When the second apartment (number 6) on the mezzanine floor, where his sister Rosa Graf had lived, became vacant in 1908 Freud rented it and moved his office into the three rooms facing the courtyard. From then on, the rooms along Berggasse were used for various purposes. As of 1908, the smaller rooms, for example, were the “boys’ rooms” for the children Martin, Oliver and Ernst. Once the sons had left home for good, Anna Freud took over both rooms in 1921, furnishing one room as her bedroom. She is assumed to have opened her psychoanalytic office in 1923; she already began gathering her first experience working with children and adolescents in 1921 – with Arthur Schnitzler’s daughter Lili taking “lessons” with her, for example. Anna Freud’s correspondence with Lou Andreas-Salomé and Berlin psychoanalyst Max Eitingon is a source of information about the patients who would come to see her in this treatment room (sharing the waiting room with Sigmund Freud’s analysands). Letters to and from Lou Andreas-Salomé also reveal that Anna’s Alsatian Wolf was in the room during her analysis sessions. Sigmund Freud, a dog owner as of 1928, would later follow suit.

Following the birth of their fifth child Sophie in 1893, Freud was forced to spend his nights in his “library room” – he talks for the first time about making notes of his dreams after sleeping in this room. The assumption that Freud began his self-analysis here, laying the foundations for the later-to-be-“founding document” of psychoanalysis – *The Interpretation of Dreams* – would seem justified. Martha Freud’s unmarried sister Minna Bernays moved in to Berggasse 19 in summer 1896. She would later use Freud’s “library room”: the room that she made her salon in 1921 had been Anna Freud’s bedroom, for some time, presumably, together with her sisters Mathilde and Sophie, who moved out in 1909 and 1913 respectively.

What is known for sure is that it was in this room that Sigmund Freud observed his grandson “Ernstl” playing with a wooden reel in front of Anna Freud’s mirror the game that he described as “Gone” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

The Freuds had their first bathroom installed in September 1910, having the kitchen enlarged in the course of this work. All three daughters in Vienna reported on this major intervention to their father, who was at the time on a trip to Italy. No further building work was performed until 1938, as evidenced by letters between Anna Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé: when Ernst Freud, now an architect, proposed a number of innovations to the family’s private rooms, his sister Anna reacted with resistance. Although her treatment room featured a shelf by Viennese designer Felix Augustfeld, neither the aesthetic upheavals of turn-of-the-century Vienna nor the Bauhaus style left any notable traces in the parental rooms.
Everyday rituals and hospitality

Documents and pictures relating to the habits and social life of the Freud family are on show in their former dining room: everyday family life followed a regular schedule. Family meals were an important ritual: breakfast at 7am, lunch at 1pm, and dinner at 7pm. They structured Freud's long working day and were the moments at which he was available to his relatives as head of the family. In view of the fact that he would arrive on the dot for meals, and alluding to the apostles of the town hall clock in Prague, Anna Freud called her father “little clock man”. Sigmund Freud’s working day began at 8 o’clock in the morning, often lasting until well after midnight. He would receive patients until midday, after which he liked to go for a walk along the nearby Ringstraße. Afternoon was devoted once again to analysands, evenings to writing.

The house was open to friends at all times – Martha Freud referred to the dining table as a “table of ministers”: never would fewer than nine people gather for meals, and the sliding-leaf table was always extended and set for the maximum number. Members of the Wednesday Psychological Society such as Otto Rank were regularly invited to dinner ahead of the meetings.

Sexual theory and education

Sigmund Freud's *Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, first published in 1905, broke away from conventional notions of sexuality. In various writings he pointed out that he derived his insights into child sexuality from analysing adults and only as of 1908 from observing children directly. In fact, he found ample opportunity to observe various expressions and activities of child sexuality at first hand in his own home. In his 1958 biography *Sigmund Freud: Man and Father*, Martin Freud suggested that he had served as the object of his father’s psychoanalytic investigation without being asked.

As early as 1907, in his piece on “The Sexual Enlightenment of Children”, Freud already spoke out against the common contemporary practise of “frightening off thinking”, for example in the form of the fable of the stork. Parents and schools should treat and teach sexuality “like anything else that is worth knowing about”. Nevertheless, he avoided educating his own children in matters of sexuality. In other respects, however, Freud inclined towards modern educational concepts: Martin Freud referred to the upbringing that he and his siblings had enjoyed as “different” to what was customary at that time and as “liberal”. There was certainly no lack of discipline, however.

Living standards in Vienna

The 9th International Housing Congress in 1910 was an opportunity to publicly discuss the scandalous shortage of housing in Vienna combined with the lack of sanitary facilities in newly built tenements, and the rapidly increasing rents. The majority of the population of Vienna was still living in slums; along with the aristocracy and the haute bourgeoisie, only a relatively small middle class consisting of civil servants, salaried staff, and tradesmen could afford to improve the quality of their living standards. As recently as 1917, 95% of all apartments in Vienna had no plumbing.
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