

REFLECTIONS ON FREUD'S LETTER FROM FLORENCE, SEPTEMBER 7, 1896

As I was preparing for the 1997 Florence symposium on psychoanalysis and art, I thought about Freud's first visit there in September 1896. Knowing that he would certainly have written or telegraphed almost daily to his family, I thought it possible that there would be extant correspondence from that trip. A search uncovered this hitherto virtually unknown letter of Freud's in the Sigmund Freud Collection in the Library of Congress. It was shown for the first time at the symposium, in the very place where it had been written almost exactly one hundred years before, during Freud's first memorable visit to Florence.

To use Freud's archeological metaphor, this fascinating recovered "antiquity" is also a statement about its author and his object world. The length and breadth of the letter, what Freud observed and selected to report, the order and acuity of his descriptions, his emphasis, attitude, and mood, his composition and organization, and his choice of audience are all very significant. Freud was a great traveler, and had just experienced an exhilarating stay in Venice. This was the city he had visited during his first trip to Italy in the summer of 1895, shortly after the Irma dream. Encouraged by Fliess to visit Italy, and following in the footsteps of Goethe, Freud made some fifteen vacation trips to Italy before World War I put a stop to them.

Complaining like many a modern traveler of the high cost of food and lodging, Freud commented on the practical issues while noting that the beauty of art and nature at times compensated for everything.

The author and editor thank Stefano Pallanti of the Istituto di Neuroscienze, Firenze, for the photos that accompany this article. Anticipating discussion of Freud's letter from Florence, he unearthed in a Florentine archive actual photos of the place where Freud stayed, showing the historical setting, and the room and objects that he saw.



VILLA E TORRE DEL GALLO, ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPH.

