

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

*At home: The Old Vienna General Hospital (1693 and after)
29 Sept. 1994, two years after moving out of dermatology.
A pro tempore necrologue.*

پر آب دو دیدہ وپر از آتش دل رباعیات حافظ

...in den Augen Tränen, mit Feuer in der Brust; these are Hafiz words. *Why Persian?* Abraham Romeo Seligmann (1808–1892) first professor of history of medicine in Vienna translated a Persian medical treatise for the first time (into Latin) and thereby qualified for M.D., later for 'Docent', in Vienna in 1830 and 1833.

Buildings like people, once they are without special function lose dignity, luster, importance. No doubt, the hospital premises are located in a prime downtown area, earmarked to house other university institutions but medicine. In future years egyptology will pervade the hall that first served Ferdinand Hebra and Moriz Kaposi as an auditorium, slavonic studies will reside where Sigmund Freud spent his hours on call, and the like will happen to Theodor Billroth's lecture hall etc. *A desecration?* Never. Yet, incomprehensible for physician and medico-historian alike [1–3].

And today? Yard II, the historic home of dermatology and venerology in Vienna is adorned by the statue of the hospital's benefactor, Joseph II. A more than twohundred year-old *Cercis siliquastrum* still delights the visitor with its purple blossoms each

spring, as much as it must have delighted Carl Ludwig Sigmund (1810–1883), Hebra's pal and first professor of syphilis. Right across, next to the old Hebra department, a *Paulownia imperialis*, planted in 1990 upon the centenary of the Austrian Derm Society, for the first time blossomed this year. The marble plaque below has already been devastated by vandals. Façades are smirched by graffiti, break-ins are the rule, faucets ripped off the walls, – *horror vacui* looms all around.

Walking across the old premises into the area of the new high risers is an ego trip into the past for all but the very young. One's own past shrinks, becomes delapidated, mummified. I admire all those who simply moved over, look out of another window today, do their work, and act as if nothing has happened.

- 1 Neuburger M: Wiener Allgemeines Krankenhaus 1784–1934, Tyrolia, Innsbruck–Wien, 1935.
- 2 Grois B: Das Allgemeine Krankenhaus in Wien und seine Geschichte. Maudrich, Wien 1965.
- 3 Lesky E: Meilensteine der Wiener Medizin, Maudrich, Wien, 1981.