

# The visual revival of “Old Vienna”

**Conference Paper**

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**Publication date:**

2014

**Permanent link:**

<https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-a-010345011>

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a cura di  
S. Adorno, G. Cristina, A. Rotondo

Catania, 12-14 settembre 2013



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Monastero dei Benedettini

*atti a cura di*

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### **VI. *Città immaginate: sguardi sulla città contemporanea***

Harald R. Stühlinger

## **The visual revival of Old Vienna. The photographs of the city wall of Vienna in 1858**

### **Introduction**

At the end of 1857, the Emperor Franz Josef demanded that the baroque fortification ring, encircling the entire inner city of Vienna, should be demolished to make way for a large-scale urban development. Although the bastions and walls had long fascinated amateur photographers, it was not until 1858 when the Secretary of State finally commissioned the Imperial State Printing Office to depict the 2.5 mile long construction for public posterity. The large-scale calotypes<sup>1</sup>, taken in the last days of the historical fortification, developed a significant independent existence after a small album of the prints was given to the Austrian sovereign.

This paper aims to lay out the media history and to describe the semantic metamorphosis of the commissioned photographs of the city wall of Vienna taken by the Imperial State Printing Office between 1858 and 1860.

### **Stately campaigns**

Upon receipt of the State Commission in 1858, Alois Auer, the director of the Imperial State Printing Office encouraged the department of photography to launch an extensive photographic campaign<sup>2</sup>, with the photographic activity reaching its peak around the year 1860. While there is extensive depiction of the city wall, including the bastions and

the gates, the most expansive photographic landscape is from the top of the wall of the 3-mile long construction looking out towards the outer city districts. In all, between March 1858 and 1860, Auer's employees took 55 known salt paper prints.

The city gates were historical objects and functioned as local monuments. Since they were not only important architectonic but also iconographic and semiotic elements within the urban fabric of the city, the city gates were photographed the most. Seven of the existing 13 gates were documented though pictures of the newer gates are missing<sup>3</sup>. Looking at the locations of the camera of the 55 photos [fig. 1] it becomes evident that only three quarters of the city wall was photographed. These sections represent the oldest and most historical parts, though the south western part of the city wall was only rebuilt in the 1820's after the demolitions of the French occupation army.

### **The images meet the public**

Before the final images were broadly disseminated, a photographic album was given to the Emperor on the occasion of the opening of the first part of the new quay. It was the Secretary of State who handed over to the Emperor<sup>4</sup> the photographs of the newly commenced campaign of urban development. The lost album consisted of only two images depicting the state of the *Rothenthurmthor* area both before and during the demolition of a portion of the city wall as well as the construction less than five weeks later of the new quay being celebrated by the Emperor [fig. 2, 3]. Notwithstanding the limited photographic images, the monarch could be reassured that the first section of his government's immense undertaking was successful; showing on one hand, the former fortified city and, on the other, the liberated, open city.

In the following years, the original photographs were put on display at public exhibitions, amongst which the 1873 World Exhibition held in Vienna stands out. This was the occasion where the transformation of Vienna through the photographic medium was on display to not only a local audience, but to an international one as well<sup>5</sup>. The photographs were presented to promote the achievements of the ambitious urban transfor-

mation undertaken since the demolition of the city wall by showing the old and the new look of the city. While the topoi of Old-Vienna was not explicitly mentioned, this changed with the critiques which arose during the 1870s.

For this paper, only one of the many newspapers published in Vienna at that time was taken in account as it used the photographs from the Imperial State Printing Office as the basis for their illustrations. Already in 1872, the founding year of the newspaper, a series started with the title *Images from Old-Vienna*<sup>6</sup>. Within three months four woodcuts based on the photographs of the city wall were presented on the cover of the newspaper<sup>7</sup>.

At the end of 1891, Leopold Stieböck started with the first volume of his magazine *Old-Vienna, Monthly Magazine for Viennese Kind and Language*<sup>8</sup>. Following the article *A Panorama of the Bastions of Vienna from the Year 1858*, a series of photos from the Imperial State Printing Office was printed in the last two years of that office's existence. Over the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Viennese public as a whole was provided with nostalgic images of the historical city through different kinds of mass media.

After the World Exhibition, the remaining historical city centre and images of vanished parts of the town gained a special interest. Painters and water colour specialists, like Franz Poledne, Johann Wilhelm Frey, Hans Blaha and others produced views of the old city, either depicting still existing but about to be eliminated or those which had already disappeared. In the latter case, historic photographs were used as models, among which those of the Imperial State Printing Office played an important role.

Whereas for his painting of the *Kärnthnerthor*; Johan Wilhelm Frey's realism depicted the three figures of its photograph from the Imperial State Printing Office, Blaha added two carriages and many figures [fig. 4, 5, 6].



Franz Poledne was a favourite artist of the high bourgeoisie and aristocracy and beside other vedutas, he painted the *Stubenthor* [fig. 7, 8]. Comparing the photograph from the Imperial State Printing Office with his painting, one can observe Poledne's artistic freedom in adding not only figures and carriages but also in exaggerating the third dimension of the buildings. While Poledne did not constrain himself too much to the ante types, Johann Wilhelm Frey<sup>9</sup> made his painting of the *Stubenthorbastei* [fig. 9, 10] the exact image of the vintage photographs from the Imperial State Printing Office. It is not only identical in form but also in content; he even refrained from painting any figures in the urban scenery. Poledne also painted this scenery but the once watercolour painting is lost today, but what remains is not a unique painting but the proof of a mass media product [fig. 11].

A painting by Hans Blahas shows that the interest in the old city and the demand for historical views of Old-Vienna lasted until World War I. The constant progress achieved in printing techniques and within the *Kaiser Jubiläumsausstellung* of 1898 were the circumstances which led to the production of two series of postcards totalling 32 images, out of which 26 were made after photographs from the Imperial State Printing Office. The postcards were published under the title of *Old-Vienna* and were reproductions of the historic photographs but with puffy edges, a subtitle and an imprint [fig. 12, 13]<sup>10</sup>.

### ***Old-Vienna nostalgia***

The radical alterations in Vienna subsequent to the demolition of the old city and the building boom beginning in the 1860s led to controversy regarding the urban structure and image of Vienna. At the time of the 1873 World Exhibition, Friedrich Schlögl published a book with great acclaim, in which he effectively conveys this conflicting sentiment. In his book, Schlögl gathered texts which had been edited in the *feuilleton* of Viennese newspapers<sup>11</sup> under the title *Viennese blood*. «The era of demolition is cruel to the Old Vienna – or rather to the feelings of the old Viennese people. To which the most beloved memories are ruined

piece by piece and soon the last remaining parts of our former home of cosiness will have disappeared, to make place for advancing apostles of a new era, for the spacious needs of a modern metropolis»<sup>12</sup>. The vast construction site of the *Ringstraße* area encircling the inner city, but also smaller sites all over the historical centre prompted on the one hand a new wave of criticism about the new construction, but on the other hand of intellectual interest.

In the introduction of the first issue of the above-mentioned magazine, *Old-Vienna*, one reads: «Still we are sitting in the old city and we hear the beat of the wings of a new time which does not want to own a memory of Old-Vienna»<sup>13</sup>. At the *fin de siècle* not only was the notion and topoi of *Old-Vienna* fixed but its semi-scientific elaboration was put forward. In the eyes of the critical writers and other interested subjects in society, demolition was unavoidable and therefore the declared aims were a «profound knowledge of the ontological Viennese» and an «exact and extensive study of the language and etymology» in order to keep up the typical Viennese nature. «If the walls of our historic alleys and places shall fall piece by piece, the same destiny should not be for the language and the character, not the points of view and the expressions of the sentiments of our ancestors, which have lived, jested and grumbled within those places. That Vienna may not disappear»<sup>14</sup>. And finally the author targets the sentimental and patriotic feelings of the reader. «One may make the reproach that the Viennese has a tendency to happy-go-lucky and sometimes the accusation of lacking piety might be applied in one or another case, still in the most intimate corner of a true Viennese heart rests the indestructible love for the historical site, for each little remaining bit of “Old-Vienna”»<sup>15</sup>.

### **Catalyst images**

Looking at the media history of the large-scale calotypes from the Imperial State Printing Office, the motivations behind the use of the historical pictures depended on the emotions being elicited for decades after their production. The *feuilleton* of different newspapers played an eminent role in intertwining of the visual objects with the intellectual propagation

of the topoi of *Old-Vienna*. «The trenchant every-day-literature of the popular writers in the *feuilleton* generally strengthened the atmosphere of melancholy»<sup>16</sup>. Naturally, the connection between the different images – both visual and literary – did not occur directly, but simultaneously and in different medias. If one looks at the reproductions of the original photographs, it appears that the unique specimen of the water colour painting was an essential and important development within the nostalgic movement towards the old city. While initially produced for a rather small market, the innumerable and repetitive appearances of the images through the different medias affected opinion, critique and sentiment.

One pivotal question is how the images of the old city wall are related to the discourse around the topoi of Old-Vienna. The last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were marked by crucial changes in urban life, architecture and infrastructure. Not only did the city of Vienna expand making it difficult for even its inhabitants to perceive the city as a whole (and understand it properly), but the social structure changed due to immigration from all over the empire. With the end of the eclectic style and the rise of Art Nouveau as well with the densification of the urban infrastructure, the city changed its face tremendously. The disappearance of essential referential points of identity gave rise to polyphonic critique.

In the case of the photographs of the city wall, these images were surprisingly popular decades after the walls had ended their existence. One reason might be the stories and myth cultivated through recollected images. By 1880, the fortification ring had already disappeared for about a generation. The parents and grandparents who still knew this edifice would have most likely told their children stories about it. These stories would have been romanticized by the photographic images triggering inquisitiveness and perhaps some kind of longing. What was triggered for sure was myth; for instance the myth of Old-Vienna as an invulnerable stronghold of the occident, defending Europe twice against the Ottomans.

The pictures of the old city create a field of tension between the depicted historical status and the existing built environment. The more time passes on, the more the urban structure and its architecture changes,

the more this field of tension changes with it. «In times of dramatic sociological alterations the city's image creates permanency, in times of great material destruction the city's myths are retaining continuity»<sup>17</sup>. For the progressives in society it turns into a too distant time-space-slice and becomes irrelevant; whereas for the nostalgic public it triggers more than ever the vision and phantasm of the mythical old city. If the distance in memory between old and new is exaggerated this tension fades; if the historical content lies too far back in history the former link gets weaker and eventually disappear.

One notion of cultural critique which can be found in the intellectual discourse at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is that of velocity. The modern metropolis was for many the equivalent to radical changes, to rapid urban development and to faster than ever city life. For the nostalgic public, this was felt like a threat and in order to sublimate they turned to the city's written and imaged history: its historic existing or vanished buildings alike and cityscapes. Photographs or paintings and drawings based upon photographs served as the visual containers to keep up the image of Old-Vienna. The massive appearance and the visual iteration of the images of the city wall strengthened the image of the vanished historic town and helped, for a number of years, a portion of the inhabitants to identify with the old city.

The dissemination of these images occurred beyond Vienna itself, because these images of Old-Vienna were being transmitted through the photo postcards to the rest of the world.

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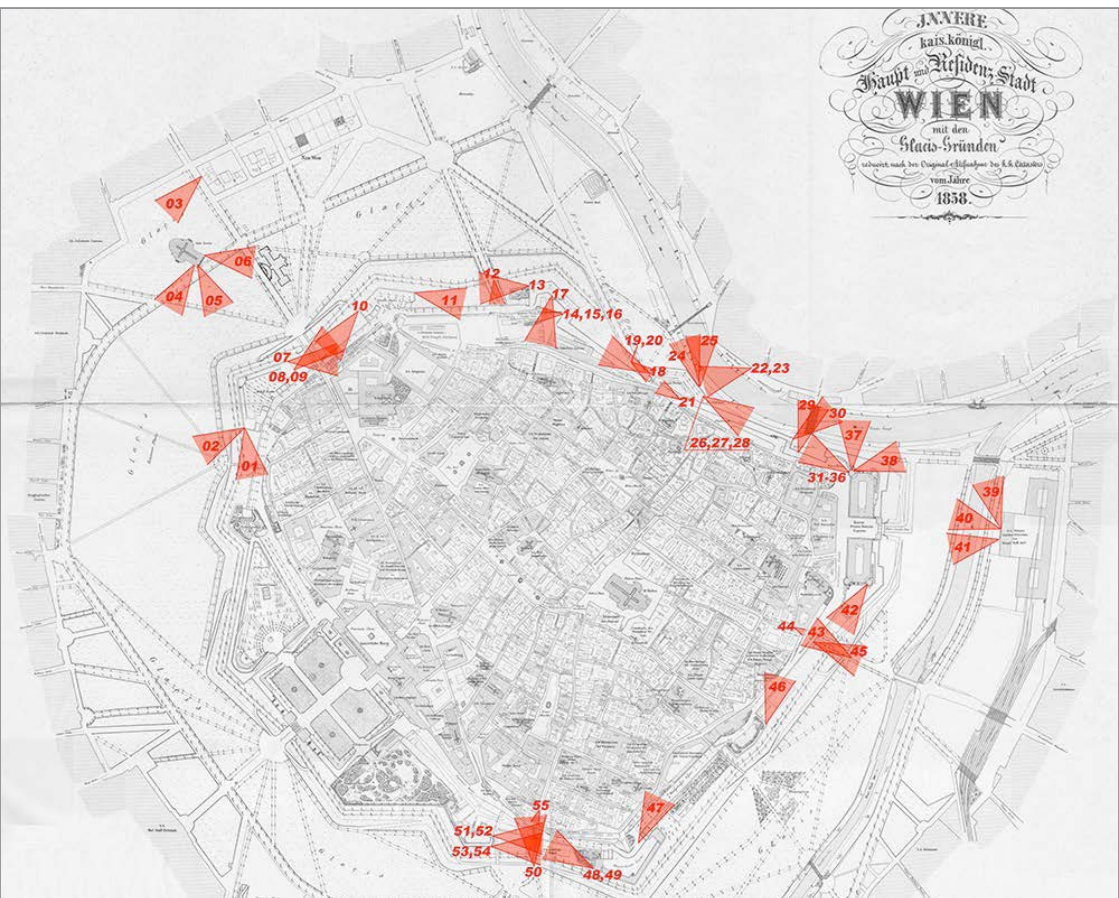
## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The calotypes are held by several Viennese public and private collections and their size is approximately 35 by 45 cm and they were made after glass negatives which were produced in wet collodium.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. Panoramas, stately owned buildings, Imperial ships etc.

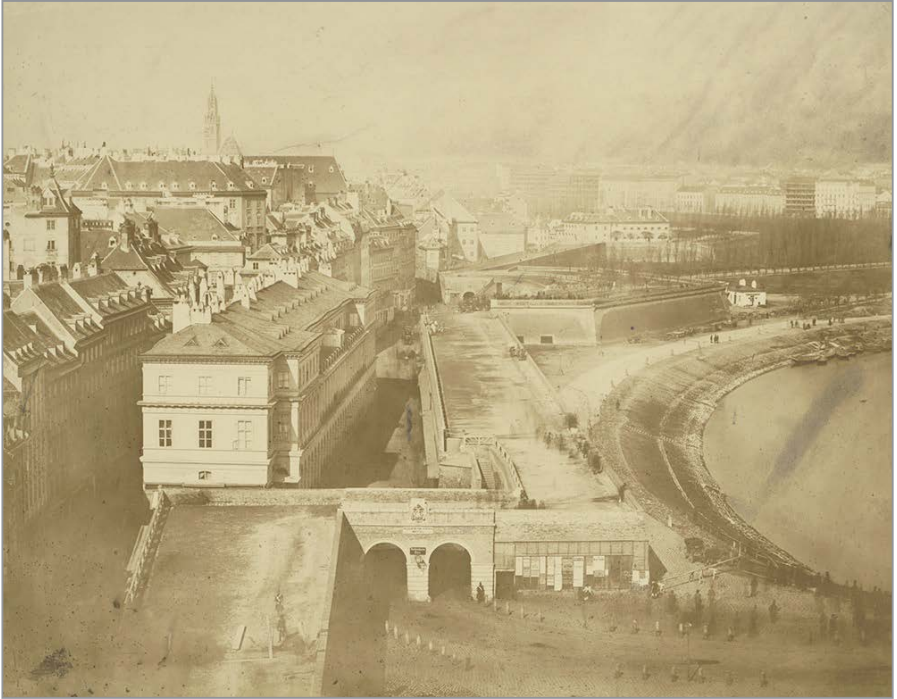
<sup>3</sup> Neues Kärnthertor and Karolinenthor, as well as the Kaiser Franz Josephs Thor and the mighty and today still existing Burgtor.

- <sup>4</sup> «Wiener Zeitung», no. 100, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1858, p. 1589.
- <sup>5</sup> In 1858 during the exhibition for the competition of the city enlargement, in 1865 during the Internationale photographische Ausstellung in Berlin, the World Exhibition in Vienna held in 1873, in 1888 during the Jubiläums-Gewerbeausstellung and in 1898 at the Kaiser Jubiläumsausstellung.
- <sup>6</sup> Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1872, p. 1.
- <sup>7</sup> And again in March 1892 two more pictures after photographs of the city wall, made it onto the cover of this newspaper.
- <sup>8</sup> Original German title: *Alt-Wien*, Monatsschrift für Wiener Art und Sprache. It was published at the Jakob Dirnböck'schen Buchhandlung in Vienna, but in the ninth year its publication was ceased.
- <sup>9</sup> Several paintings are held by the collection of the Wien Museum in Vienna.
- <sup>10</sup> Publisher: Verlag C. Ledermann jun., Wien I. Photographer: Phot. V. Ch. Scolik, Wien VIII. – Gesetzlich deponirt. *Alt Wien*, no. 26. Title: Franz Josefs-Kaserne mit Franz Josefsbastei.
- <sup>11</sup> He was contributing to several newspapers: «Figaro», «Der Wanderer», «Neue Wiener Tagblatt», «Deutsche Zeitung», «Wiener Luft» as a supplement to «Figaro» and «Heimgarten».
- <sup>12</sup> K. Rossbacher, U. Tanzer (Hg.), Friedrich Schlögl, *Wiener Blut und Wiener Luft*, Skizzen aus dem alten Wien, Salzburg-Wien 1997, p. 191.
- <sup>13</sup> *Alt-Wien*, «Monatsschrift für Wiener Art und Sprache», editor Jakob Dirnböck's Buchhandlung, Heft November 1891, p. 1.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ivi*, p. 2.
- <sup>15</sup> *Alt-Wien*, «Monatsschrift für Wiener Art und Sprache», editor Jakob Dirnböck's Buchhandlung, Heft Dezember 1897, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>16</sup> A. Klaffenböck, *Literarische Positionen zu Alt-Wien*, «Alt-Wien, Die Stadt, die niemals war», Exhibition catalogue Wien Museum, Wien, 2004, p. 218.
- <sup>17</sup> W. Sonne, *Alt-Wien oder die Vergänglichkeit der Stadt*, «Alt-Wien, Die Stadt, die niemals war», Exhibition catalogue Wien Museum, Wien, 2004. p. 37.

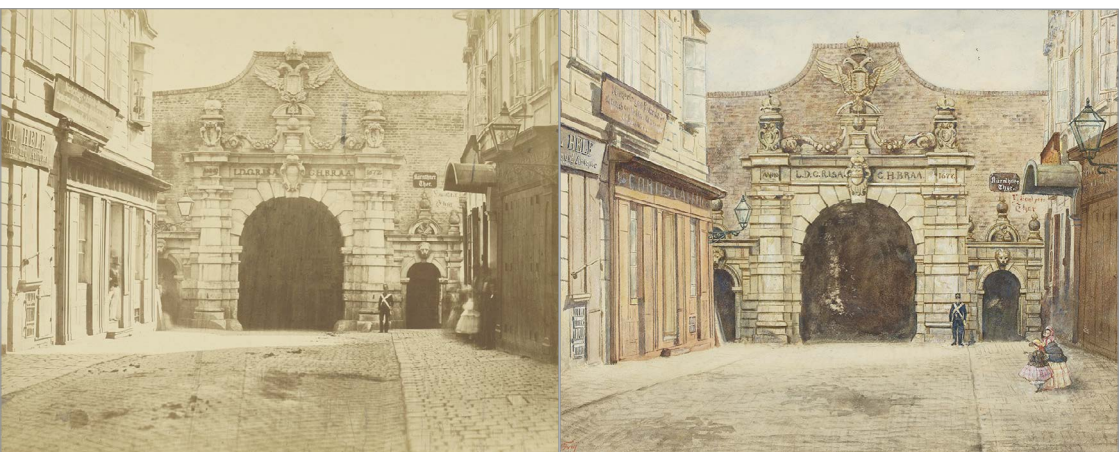


**Fig. 1** H.R. Stühlinger, K. k. Kataster, City plan of Vienna of 1858 with location of cameras for the 55 images of the city wall





**Fig. 2-3** Imperial State Printing Office, Rothenthurmbastei before demolition, 1858, and during demolition, April 1858 (Vienna, Wien Museum)



**Fig. 4** Imperial State Printing Office, Old Kärnthnerthor, view from the city, 1858, (Vienna, Wien Museum)

**Fig. 5** Johann Wilhelm Frey, Old Kärnthnerthor, view from the city, water colour painting, s.d., (Vienna, Wien Museum)



**Fig. 6** Hans Blaha, Old Kärnthnerthor, view from the city, water colour painting, 1913 (Vienna, Wien Museum)





**Fig. 7** Imperial State Printing Office, Stubenthor, view from outside the city, 1858 (Vienna, Wien Museum)

**Fig. 8** Franz Poledne, Stubenthor, view from outside the city, water colour painting, s.d., (Vienna, Wien Museum)



Stubenthorbastei (Alt-Wien), (N. e. Aquarelle v. F. Poledna a. d. Sammlg. d. Stadt Wien.)

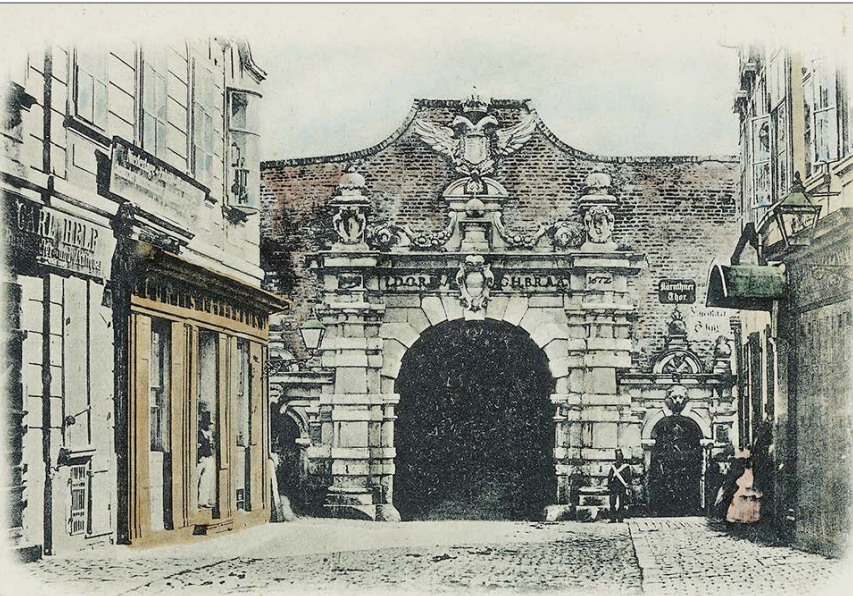
**Fig. 9** Imperial State Printing Office, Stubenthorbastei, view from atop the Franz Josefs Caserne, 1858 (Vienna, Wien Museum)

**Fig. 10** Johann Wilhelm Frey, Stubenthorbastei, water colour painting, s. d. (Vienna, Wien Museum)

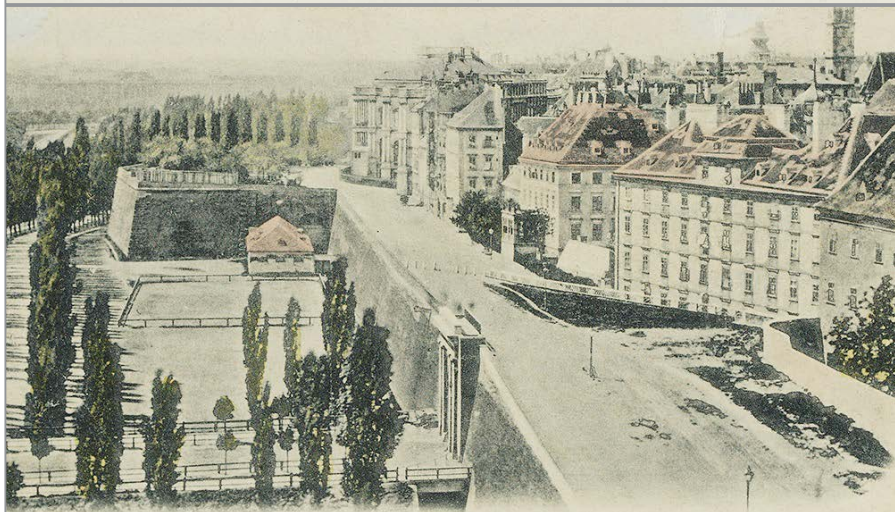
**Fig. 11 J.** Löwy, Stubenthorbastei, postcard after a painting of Franz Poledne, three-color half-tone (Vienna, Wien Museum)



Verlag C. Ledermann jun., Wien I. -  
Phot. v. Ch. Scollik, Wien VIII. - Gesetzlich deponirt.



„Alt-Wien“ Nr. 7.  
Kärnthner-Thor (Stadt-Seite).



„Alt Wien“ Nr. 11.  
Stuben-Thor mit der Bastion

Verlag C. Ledermann jun., Wien I. -  
Phot. v. Ch. Scollik, Wien VIII. - Gesetzlich deponirt.

Fig. 12-13 Picture postcard nr. 7 and 11, of a series printed in 1898