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# Miniatures of Europe

## Comparing Historical Master Narratives from Nineteenth-Century Belgium and Habsburg Central Europe

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**Abstract.** The study offers an unusual comparison: it sets out to compare historical master narratives from Belgium and Habsburg Central Europe. The first part justifies this approach by pointing out that Belgian and Austrian historians found themselves in a similar situation in the nineteenth century: their rivals considered their respective communities artificial constructs, as they lacked a national basis. Thus, Belgian and Austrian historians had the task of historically legitimizing their respective communities. These attempts are presented and evaluated, showing how the Belgian attempt was much more successful than its Austrian counterpart. The second part of the study examines nineteenth century Belgian and Hungarian representations of the reign of Joseph II, who not only ruled both territories but represented the same dilemma for historians in the nineteenth century in both countries: his modernizing measures greatly corresponded to nineteenth-century notions of progress; on the other hand, they also threatened cherished national institutions. The study shows the dividing lines between the various interpretations of Belgian and Hungarian historians treating this issue.

**Keywords:** Belgium, Habsburg Monarchy, Hungary, Nationalism, History of Historiography, Intellectual History

*This study is dedicated to my teacher, Gábor Czoch on his 60th birthday*

This study is a comparative analysis of nineteenth-century historical master narratives from Belgium and Habsburg Central Europe. Although these regions have very different social, economic, and political development, the hypothesis behind this uncommon comparison is that the historical master narratives of these regions show structural similarities that are worth exploring.[1] The article will first compare

1 For a comparative approach to Belgian and Hungarian nineteenth-century history, see: Erdődy, "A modern polgári nemzetté válás útjai."

Austro-German imperial narratives with Belgian works. The two states faced similar dilemmas: their respective histories were the sum of regional histories, and those regions had been independent from one another in the past. They were also made up of different ethnic-linguistic groups. Their rivals interpreted these circumstances in the very same way, claiming that both states were mere artificial creations compared to their own nations, which they considered 'organic.' The way Belgian and imperial Austro-German historiography is treated today is a perfect demonstration of how historical interpretation is determined by a community's contemporary self-image: Belgian master narratives in the nineteenth century are compared to national historiographies (Dutch, French, and even Czech),[2] whereas imperial narratives are either completely forgotten or treated as something as outdated already in their time as the Habsburg imperial idea itself.[3] While it is undoubtedly important for a historian to concentrate on those tendencies of the past that prevailed, it is also crucial that they put on a sort of 'veil of ignorance' in order to grasp the experiences and expectations of contemporaries, rather than the outcome of their actions, which only posterity will know.[4] The study of Austrian imperial narratives may yield further benefits: in his excellent study, Jo Tollebeek saw the merits of presenting Belgian national master narratives in examining the general problems of national histories.[5] In the first part of the present study, we hope to be able to approach this issue by comparing the failed Austrian tentative to the successful Belgian example. Nevertheless, I have to stress that due to my linguistic limits, in the case of Belgian narratives, I am only relying on French language sources and will not be dealing with Flemish and Dutch works. Although the picture will not be complete, I am convinced that crucial points can still be raised and, most importantly, the validity of the comparison can be demonstrated.

The second main part of the study will compare Belgian and Hungarian historical master narratives. The two countries were situated in completely different regions of Europe and underwent different social, economic, and cultural development. Yet it is often forgotten that in a sense, during the Austrian domination of the eighteenth century, they had what can be called a 'common history.' The nineteenth-century representation of this common past will be examined through the case of Joseph II's reign. The reforms introduced by Joseph's enlightened absolutism posed the very same dilemma for both communities: the promise of modernizing measures at the expense of losing cherished national institutions.

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2 For a Dutch–Belgian comparison: Beyen and Majerus, "Weak and Strong Nation in the Low Countries."

3 Pohl, "National Origin Narratives in the Austrian–Hungarian Monarchy."

4 I borrowed the term 'veil of ignorance' from John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*.

5 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation and the Nation-State," 331.

## Community master narratives

This analysis is asymmetric in two aspects—in fact, it is my experience that perfectly symmetric historical comparisons usually remain the dream of first-draft research proposals. On the one hand, as mentioned above, in the case of Belgium, I will be relying exclusively on sources written in French. On the other hand, the majority of the examined French-language Belgian historical master narratives (by which I mean works providing a complete synthesis of the history of the given community) were published in the first half of the nineteenth century, whereas the majority of their Hungarian and Austro-German counterparts were produced during the second half of the century. This is only a seeming discrepancy: in Belgium, it was during the first half of the century that the most influential major narratives were written. Even later, during the sixties and seventies, these are the works that are referred to; also, in his own *Histoire de Belgique* published in the early 1900s, Henri Pirenne lists these historians, namely Juste, Moke, and Namèche among others, as predecessors of his own work. One could argue that the mistake would be to cling to the dates rather than to consider the influence of the narratives.

It is also problematic that while some of the works examined were produced in a period when professional historiography did not exist and accounts were written by enthusiastic autodidacts (such as Juste), others were produced by professionally trained members of academic institutions (such as Pirenne, Huber, and Marczali). This problem can be overcome if we concentrate on the genre of the master narrative instead of the factors listed. These works aim at directly forming collective memory; they are driven by the desire to discover the past, as well as by a certain 'fantasy' which helps conceptualize the series of events as constituting one great history that has a certain course of development.[6] Historical events and figures must be judged according to the extent to which they helped or hindered advancement on this trajectory. This fantasy also accords a certain mission to the community concerned and territorial-historical cohesion to its history.

The literature usually ties this form of history writing to the 'nation' and defines it as 'national history.' However, it should not be overlooked that not only nations are in need of this type of historical narratives. As we will see in more detail later, intellectuals of post-revolutionary imperial Austria also laid claim to such histories. It is probably wiser to talk about 'community histories' or 'community master narratives,'[7] given that communities larger or smaller than the nation may also

6 Beyen, "Who is the Nation," 68.

7 I have already used the concept of community histories in an article: Tarafás, *Oesterreich ist eben Oesterreich*.

need such narratives: their members need a narrative of the past which forms their imagination in a way that they perceive themselves as a community.[8]

Communities in the "century of history" (Gabriel Monod) were in great need of coherent, well-elaborated community histories. During the nineteenth century, history was a constant reference point for people who sought orientation in the present. Historical thinking was far from being mere nostalgia; it was part of a world view of a specific age.[9] History was a kind of language through which intellectuals expressed their opinions and preferences about contemporary issues. The case of Etienne Constantin de Gerlache (1785–1871, the first prime minister of the independent Belgium) is exemplary in this regard: his work published in 1839, originally discussing events of the last decades of Belgium's life, became a comprehensive history of Belgium, as the author constantly felt obliged to examine his community's entire history in order to explain and express his opinion on the recent past.[10] To point out another example from Habsburg Central Europe, we find a similar way of thinking in the historical work of fin-de-siècle Hungarian politician, Ákos Beöthy.[11]

The question of representativity is also more complicated than it might appear at first sight. It is not enough to consider the copies sold or the editions published: while they are important indicators, they are not the only ones. The essence of a master narrative is that it serves as a model for historical narratives in terms of structuring the past and defining its meaning.[12] Middle-school textbooks and political pamphlets regularly cite them, especially when the prestige of history as a discipline is growing during the century. Thus, they deserve the attention they are given.

## Artificial creations or providential necessities?

During the heyday of community master narratives between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the World War I, in the German city of Gotha, the publisher Friedrich Andreas Perthes issued a series titled *Geschichte der europäischen Staaten*.[13] The series featured typical examples of national history writing by the most prominent historians of the time. Writing a few years apart, the two authors, Henri Pirenne and Alfons Huber, however, admitted that they were rather uncertain

8 Here, I am referring, of course, to the category of imagined community developed by Benedict Anderson: Anderson, *Imagined communities.*

9 Varga, *Árpád a város fölött,* 25–26.

10 Gerlach, *Histoire du royaume des Pays-Bas*.

11 Beöthy, *A magyar államiság fejlődése, küzdelmei.*

12 Thijs, "The Metaphor of the Master," 69.

13 For the history of these editions, see: Tollbeek, "Exegi Monumentum."

about whether they could do what the editors requested. Both authors included a preface to their work in which they explain the difficulty of their task.

In his work on Belgian history "from the origins to the early fourteenth century," Henri Pirenne (1862–1935) complained about the grave difficulties of his task which arose from the fact that Belgium had forged a different path of development than other 'normal' states.

> "The peculiar conditions which the Southern Netherlands was subjected to, at least up to the beginning of the fifteenth century, certainly do not allow its history to be treated in exactly the same way as that of the great nation-states surrounding it, namely Germany, England, and France."

At first glance, this history seems "to consist only of a series of disjoined monographs placed arbitrarily under a common title."[14] In the French edition, Pirenne depicted the abnormality of Belgian history even more explicitly:

> "All the motives by which one usually explains the formation of States are also lacking. One would look in vain whether it be for geographical unity, unity of race, or political unity."[15]

The Austro-German Alfons Huber (1834–1898) reported similar difficulties in the preface to his *Geschichte Österreichs*. He stated that "a history of Austria is undoubtably harder to write than the history of any other state." This is because unlike the formation of other significant states, that is, on a national basis, Austria is "an artificial construct […] not a tree that has grown ever more powerful branches and leaves from a foundation, but a complex of three originally separate constructions."[16]

These two historians faced a difficult situation that did not originate solely in the perceived abnormality of their communities, but also in another issue which they do not address in their prefaces. As leading historians, it was their task to defend their communities from the harsh attacks they had to endure. In the Belgian as well as in the Austrian case, the attacks came from significant rivals who questioned the legitimacy of these communities, claiming that they were nothing more than artificial creations without a 'proper' past; accordingly, their members were not united by honest loyalty but by the opportunist obedience of a bureaucrat.

In the case of Belgium, Dutch historians belonging to the Great-Netherlands Movement criticized the Belgian state for being nothing more than the artificial construct of a few diplomats.[17] Such criticisms were formulated in France as well.

14 Pirenne, *Geschichte Belgiens,* viii.

15 Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, vii.

16 Huber, *Geschichte Österreichs,* v–vi.

17 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation and the Nation-State," 332.

According to the *Encyclopédie nouvelle* in the 1830s, "Belgium has no history, […] [she] has no centre, no nationality of its own: she has no name."[18] The phenomenon is a perfect example of how the categorisation of a community tells much more about the motivations of the categorisers than about the actual categorised.[19] The motivation is clear: members of the Great Netherlands Movement as well as several French political voices intended to have (part of) Belgium integrated into their respective countries.[20]

Austria had to endure similar attacks mostly from her greatest rival in the process of German unification. The Prussian school of historians, which was among the most ardent propagators of the *kleindeutsche* solution, maintained its harsh attitude against Austria even after the establishment of the Prussia-dominated Reich. In his *Deutsche Geschichte in Neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, Heinrich von Treitschke wrote about Austria (Vienna):

> "Here in the center of the immense family estate called Austria, in this tangle of countries and peoples brought together by marriages [*zusammengeheiratet*] of rulers, one had never suspected any of the moral forces that hold a national state together."[21]

Nevertheless, already since the eighteenth century, important attempts aimed at reinforcing the vision of an independent Austrian and Belgian community are noticeable. In Austria, it was the reign of Maria Theresa that made it necessary to conceptualize the monarch's different lands as an empire in its own right, which is completely independent from the German Reich.[22] The absolutist, centralizing ruling style of Maria Theresa and her son made such a concept necessary, as loyalties binding people to regional authorities (the competences of which these monarchs intended to diminish) had to be turned to the central power in Vienna.[23] The most famous outcome of this patriotism was Joseph von Sonnenfels's *Über die Liebe des Vaterlandes,* which defined the *Vaterland* as the Habsburg state and placed it above all other possible objects of political loyalty.[24] In the Southern Low Countries, an important attempt was made for synthesising a Belgian national history, which emphasised the specificity of the Austrian Netherlands.[25]

18 Leroux and Reyanud, eds, *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, 554–55. Cp. Tollebeek, "Historical Representation," 338.

19 Cp. Jenkins, *Rethinking ethnicity,* 64.

20 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation," 332.

21 Treitschke, *Detusche Geschichte in Neunzehnten Jahrhundert,* 598–99.

22 Szabó, *Kaunitz and enlightened absolutism,* 4.

23 Judson, *The Habsburg Empire,* 49, 62.

24 Horwath, "The Altar of the Fatherland," 49–50.

25 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation," 330.

Austria and Belgium in the nineteenth-century are quite different: the former is an old Central European empire, while the latter is a small, young country situated between the great powers of Western Europe. Nevertheless, they have similar problems when it comes to defining their history because their respective communities' pasts seem to lack the features that this kind of narrative requires: territorial coherence, the community as agency, and a clearly definable mission to legitimate the community's place in the world.

Concerning territorial unity, Belgian historians followed the strategy of concentrating on one concrete region and compressed Belgian history into the history of that territory. For Louis Dewez (1760–1834), it was Brabant which fulfilled this task, while later historians mostly chose the Duchy of Brabant and the country of Flanders.[26] Henri Guillome Moke (1803–1862) reflected on the question explicitly in the 1843 edition of his *Histoire de la Belgique*. According to him, taking each province into separate consideration would have dire consequences.

> "First of all, there is no more Belgium: for detached limbs do not make a body; then social history becomes impossible: for only by comparison and approximation does one understand the progress and the effect of institutions."[27]

Moke also considered that such a historical account would simply be boring for the reader, because for each province certain issues would need to be repeated.

Political disunity in Belgian history was also a major issue. Dewez considered that before the fourteenth century "Belgium had, so to speak, no fixed existence in the political order, and it is for this reason that it does not have a complete and followed history." For Dewez, this seemed to pose unresolvable problems: if a historian chooses a large-scale historical perspective, Belgian history becomes unrecognizably lost in French and German history, whereas if the historian decides to concentrate on the small-scale history of the various provinces, Belgian history is equally lost—this time in the particular histories of small provinces. This absurd situation ends with the reign of the Burgundian dukes; however, after this "brilliant era" when the history of Belgium "was able to form a body of national history" everything returns to the previous conditions; that is, Belgian history is confused with those of the great powers that determine her fate.[28]

To overcome this problem, so vividly described by Dewez, Belgian historians defined something that literature compares to a certain *Volksgeist*.[29] Théodore

26 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation," 339; Verschaffel, "L'ennemie préféré," 76.

27 Moke, *Histoire de la Belgique,* ii.

28 Dewez, *Histoire générale de la Belgique,* Introduction.

29 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation," 340.

Juste (1818–1888), the author of one of the most famous Belgian master narratives, considered that despite the series of foreign dominations, the special character of Belgium was never lost.[30] In the 1860 work of Louis Hymans (1829–1884), it is the "spirit of liberty" and the tradition of constitutionality that are the constant factors for Belgium during the many vicissitudes of her history; they unify this history.[31] Besides constitutional continuity, Etienne de Gerlache defines national characteristics ("a calm, positive, religious nation, attached to her old habits"[32]) and the mission of being the representative of Catholicism among the powers that represent protestants and philosophers.[33] These constant features are maintained in the midst of "foreign domination," the most remarkable factor in Belgian narratives.[34]

In an excellent study, Marnix Beyen compares Dutch and Belgian master narratives. By analysing the usage of such notions as 'Belgium' and 'Belgian,' Beyen comes to the conclusion that 'Belgium' and the 'Belgians' (as a collective) are rather passive actors in the Belgian national history, compared to Dutch narratives.[35] However, at times, this passivity can be seen as an integral part of the special mission of the Belgian nation. For Gerlache, Belgium's great mission is guarding the superiority of law over power, which is one of the primary tasks for civilization. Belgium is most suited for this role because she has so often been the victim of wars and treaties between great powers, established without her consent.[36] For Juste, also, Belgium has its place in the world primarily as a mediator between great powers, which is essential for peace. According to Juste, it was Cardinal Richelieu who conceptualized this role of the Belgian provinces.[37]

According to Beyen, instead of 'Belgians' as actors, the emphasis is on individuals who are presented as the actors forming history. Beyen considers that this is related to the liberal convictions of Moke and Juste, which made them suspicious of the state and inspired their preference for the individual.[38] Perhaps, this phe-

30 Juste, *Histoire de la Belgique,* vol. II, 410.

31 Hymans, *Histoire poulaire de Belgique,* 8.

32 Gerlache, *Histoire du Royaume des Pays-Bas,* v.

33 At one point, the engaged Catholic Gerlach has an argument with Louis Dewez over the personality of Philipp II, whom Dewez saw as a hypocritical tyrant, which Gerlache rejects as baseless accusations (Gerlache, *Histoire du Royaume des Pays-Bas,* 29). This is an early example of the contrast between the liberal and clerical historical perspectives, which will clash more radically during the second half of the nineteenth century.

34 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation and the Nation-State"; Verschaffel "L'ennemi préféré," 76.

35 Beyen, "Who is the Nation."

36 Gerlache, *Histoire du Royaume des Pays-Bas,* xvi.

37 Juste, *Histoire de la Belgique,* vol II, 402.

38 Beyen, "Who is the Nation," 83.

nomenon is related to the great nineteenth-century cult of the Belgian pantheon. From the 1840s to the late 1870s, the state enthusiastically supported the creation of pantheons with the greatest figures of Belgian history, from statues and paintings to voluminous encyclopaedias.[39]

The pantheon was also the genre that first conceptualized patriotic Austrian historiography. The pioneering figure in establishing it was Joseph von Hormayr (1781–1848), a controversial figure. The peak of Hormayr's intellectual activity coincided with the middle of the Koselleckian *Sattelzeit.* This may explain how he developed concepts that later turned out to be inherently contradictory. The Tyrolian historian, who was head of the Archives in Vienna, elaborated a vison of history in which the linguistically defined nation became the history-forming protagonist.[40] In the meantime, Hormayr and his collaborators pledged loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty and devoted their literary activity to the legitimization of the Monarchy. Using the highly useful categories developed by Pál S. Varga, these intellectuals served both the 'state-based' and the 'tradition-based' community idea.[41]

Hormayr was of the opinion that Austrians had to put an end to the practice that the history of the Habsburgs was written by their political and religious enemies. Instead, he argued, the history of Austria had to be a real 'Austrian history,' compiled not only for scholars but for the larger population as well, so that it could contribute to the sense of belonging to the same empire.[42] In short, Hormayr argued for an Austrian community history. His major work was the twenty-volume *Oesterreichische Plutarch* published between 1807 and 1820, which begins with the biography of Rudolf Habsburg and is centred around the dynasty. Besides Rudolf, its greatest hero is Maria Theresa, but in general, all Habsburgs are bestowed with the most positive human qualities; Hormayr goes as far as to attempt to blanch over such controversial figures as Ferdinand II.[43]

A major work which intended to show that the Habsburg Empire was not the outcome of mere chance and clever marriages was the six-volume *Geschichte*

39 Tollebeek and Verschaffel, "Group Portraits with National Heroes," 92–94.

40 Fillafer, *Afklärung Habsburgisch,* 40–41.

41 S. Varga, *A nemzeti költészet csarnokai.* S. Varga shows how these ideas were inherently contradictory and that the imperial (state-based community) project of Hormayr's circle was constantly undermined by their views on the nation (tradition-based community), some authors claiming for example every nation's the right to its own constitution, which was certainly flying in face of the Habsburg project. Perhaps it speaks to the chaotic nature of the *Sattelzeit* that it was not only Hormayr and his circle that failed to discover these contradictions but so did the ever-vigilant censorship of the *Vormärz* as well.

42 Robert, *L'idée nationale Autrichienne et les guerres de Napoléon,* 292.

43 Robert, *L'idée nationale Autrichienne et les guerres de Napoléon,* 279.

*Oesterreichs*[44] by Hermann Meynert (1808–1895) published between 1843 and 1847.[45] Meynert aimed at showing the origins of the Empire even in the "darkness of prehistoric times *[Vorzeit]*" and demonstrating that Austria was a 'natural unity' and not an 'artificial tendency:' the peoples of Austria came under the *österreichische Gesammtheit* not by violence but by necessity. One of the greatest challenges of these histories of Austria is which territories to present, to what extent, and how. The structure of Meynert's work takes the path of dedicating the first two volumes to the history of the Austrian core-lands up to 1526. The following two volumes deal with the histories of the Bohemian Lands and Hungary, respectively, starting from the origins to their "union *[Vereinigung]*" with Austria in 1526. The last three volumes discuss the history of all three parts of the Empire up to Meynert's own time.

Meynert's undertaking can be considered a significant step, because we witness a historical definition of Austria that is independent from the Habsburg dynasty. Nevertheless, it came under the harsh criticism of perhaps the greatest theoretician of the Austrian community history, Joseph Alexander von Helfert (1820–1910). In a book published in 1853, as the secretary of state under Minister of Religious Affairs and Education Leo von Thun, Helfert expressed his views on how Austrian history should be written. As Hormayr was driven in his patriotic mission by the defeat Austria suffered from Napoleon, for Helfert, it was the crisis of 1848–1849 that made him critically rethink the ways in which Austria dealt with her history. His criticism of Meynert consisted in pointing out that although the historian presented the history of the Empire's peoples, he did not shed sufficient light on the factors that predestined their unification.[46] Meynert's structural solutions were also dismissed by Helfert: according to him, one should introduce the history of Bohemia and Hungary not only at the point of their unification in 1526; instead, the histories of the lands should be presented synchronically.[47] What needs to be shown through this history is that the existence of Austria is a providential necessity; it is in the highest interest not only for Europe's balance of power but foremost for her own peoples. Helfert uses the notion of "national history *[Nationalgeschichte]*." He aims at applying a political concept of the nation in order to decisively break from ethnic-linguistic interpretation that prevailed during "the days of agitation, the memory of which is so distressing," that is, of course, during the revolutions of 1848–1849.[48]

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44 Meynert, *Geschichte Oesterreichs seiner Völker und Länder.*

45 Robert, *L'idée nationale Autrichienne et les guerres de Napoléon,* 27–28.

46 Helfert, *Über Nationalgeschichte,* 56–57; Cp. Robert, *L'idée nationale Autrichienne et les guerres de Napoléon,* 28.

47 Helfert, *Über Nationalgeschichte,* 59.

48 Helfert, *Über Nationalgeschichte,* 1–2.

The authors of the most important master narratives on Austrian history followed Helfert's instructions on the synchronic method and discussed in parallel the history of the Austrian core lands, Hungary, and Bohemia. The Ausgleich of 1867 did not shatter them in this practice contrary to what some authors of the *Reichsgeschichte,* a university textbook for imperial history, taught at the faculties of humanities and law. Hans von Voltelini (1862–1938) argued that after the Ausgleich, Hungary (Transleithania) should not be included in the history of Austria, as it was already a separate state. Helfert was quick to react and dismissed Voltelini's suggestions, staying true to what he had proposed some fifty years earlier.[49]

Unlike Voltelini, the master narratives followed the synchronic method, meaning that the representation of the territory is practically uniform. However, there are still important differences among their authors, which is most apparent when studying the usage of the notion of *Gesamtstaat*. In his five-volume work on Austrian history, Franz Krones (1835–1902) presented the *Gesamtstaat* as the central idea in Austrian history unfolding progressively from the tenth century. For him, *Gesamtstaat* is not only the centralized administration, but a higher idea of Empire.[50] One cannot find this view in Franz Martin Mayer's (1844–1914) popular two-volume work.[51] In his presentation, *Gesamtstaat* is solely the centralized administration and has no other idealized value. In the case of Mayer, a certain indifference is discernible towards Austria, which is, in his description, no providential necessity but rather the outcome of eventualities of history and of the Habsburg marriages. Mayer's true protagonist is rather the German communities of Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary.

Richard von Kralik (1852–1934), who was a literary man but also wrote historiographical works reviewed by professional historians, produced the most enthusiastically patriotic master narrative of Austrian history. He followed Helfert's instructions the most fully, pointing out the origins of Austria, going back as far as antiquity. For Kralik as well, Austria is a providential necessity, and he even argues that the dynasty was far from being a central factor in its creation, as this is a result of much higher historical forces. "It is not because the House of Habsburg, at that time and elsewhere, acquired prospects and rights to Hungary and Bohemia that Austria *[Gesamtösterreich]* exists, but the Habsburgs had to acquire these rights because the idea of Austria *[Gesamtösterreich]* urged it to do so with world-historical necessity."[52]

49 Stourzh, "Der Umfang der österreichischen Geschichte," 19–21. Nevertheless, Voltelini himself admitted that the history of Hungary must be included to a certain extent, as otherwise several phenomena in Austrian history would be incomprehensible.

50 Krones, *Handbuch der Geschichte Oesterreichs von der ältesten bis zur neuesten Zeit*.

51 Mayer, *Geschichte Österreichs mut besonderer Röcksicht aud das Kulturleben*.

52 Kralik, *Österreichische Geschichte,* 80.

Evidently, for Kralik, the *Gesamtstaat* is not a mere technique of government but an ideal closely related to the above quoted *Gesamtösterreich*.

It might seem that Krones and Kralik share similar views. However, at closer inspection, this impression proves false, as the two authors represent radically different ideas on the mission of Austria. For Krones, this mission is to reconciliate the nations of the Empire, respecting their individual cultures. Accordingly, he dismisses the Germanising tendencies in Austrian history. Kralik, on the other hand, does not reject the Germanising measures, as he does not see Germanification as a government's arbitrary arrangements, but as the natural progress of culture. Using the categories of Moritz Csáky, we can label Kralik's view as a classical example of the concept of *Mitteleuropa,* which implies German cultural superiority, whereas Krones's views can be related to the concept of *Zentraleuropa,* which regards the pluralistic culture of Central Europe as the region's major characteristic which must never be forcibly modified in favour of one or another nation.[53]

In his study, already quoted above, Marnix Beyen concludes that the 'Belgian people,' the 'Belgians' or 'Belgium' are much less the central actors of Belgian master narratives than the Dutch people in their Dutch counterparts.[54] If we consider the same question from the Belgian–Austrian perspective, it will be the Belgian narratives that come out in a much more favourable light. 'Austria' and the 'Austrians' as a collective are rarely the defining actors of history; in fact, it is only Kralik who regularly uses these notions. It is also Kralik alone who uses the term *Vaterland* consistently and regularly, which was a central notion for expressing political loyalty to Austria at least since Sonnenfels's above quoted work.[55]

At the end of our survey, we should return to the starting thought of our presentation: Henri Pirenne and Alfons Huber writing the history of their respective communities for the same publisher in Gotha. As we have seen, Pirenne diagnoses the difficulties facing every student of Belgian medieval history. However, he concludes that a Belgian history is unthinkable only for those who can conceptualize history only as the history of the political sphere. Instead, Pirenne proposes to concentrate on civilization which enables him to see Belgium as a microcosmos of Western Europe: Belgium is the meeting point of Germanic and Romanic civilizations. The reception and harmonization of these two great civilizations is where the originality of Belgium lies. The events seen from this perspective cease to give the impression of chaos, and the existence of a proper, organic Belgian history becomes clear. For this, one must concentrate on civilization (in the German edition *Kultur*), rather than on politics.[56]

53 Csáky, *Das Gedächtnis Zentraleuropas*.

54 Beyen, "Who is the Nation," 82.

55 For more on this subject: Tarafás, "Oesterreich ist eben Oesterreich."

56 Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique,* vii–x.

We witness something completely different in Huber's work. As we have seen before, the historian diagnoses the difficulties just like Pirenne. However, he does not provide an alternative perspective in the way his Belgian colleague does. For him, the fact that Austria's development cannot be integrated into the habitual, nation-obsessed perspective of history writing leads to the assumption that Austria is an artificial construct.[57] In the rest of the preface, the historian enumerates the possibilities of discussing this artificial construct's history, but he does not provide a new theoretical/methodological framework within which Austrian history would gain a new perspective.

One should certainly not ignore the fact that Pirenne was one of the greatest, most innovative historians of his generation, respected by such emblematic figures as Marc Bloch who even quotes him in his famous methodological work.[58] Although Huber was also a major figure of his generation, this remarkable craftsman of medieval and early modern history had nothing to say about History. Huber was an engaged Austrian patriot[59] but he was too intellectually honest to recite ideological slogans, and too much of a traditional positivist to elaborate such concepts of history as Pirenne did. Perhaps Huber's attitude can also be partially explained by the so-called anti-idealism of the Austrian mentality as well as the self-image of the positivist scholar that united scientists and scholars even after the disciplinary fragmentation.[60] Another Austrian peculiarity may also be remembered: therapeutic nihilism, the central notion of William M. Johnston's book on the Austrian mind.[61] The notion originally referred to Austrian medicine and meant that doctors were more interested in the diagnosis of a disease than its treatment. Johnston argues that the notion applies not only to medicine but to other fields as well—in fact, we can see that Huber acted according to this notion: he diagnosed a problem but did not feel the need to elaborate a solution the way Pirenne did.

Nevertheless, the concept of "miniature of Europe" that we find in Pirenne's work was also present in Habsburg Central Europe. In the 1830s, János Csaplovics saw Hungary as a miniature of Europe because of the country's multi-ethnic makeup. Needless to say, this concept was absorbed by the nationalist ideology of the century which aimed at presenting Hungary as a nation state, or at least as a multi-ethnic state where the Magyars were rightfully superior. Austria, as a whole, was also seen

57 Huber, *Geschichte Österreichs,* v–vi.

58 Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier de l'historien,* 63–64.

59 He was among those who urged the introduction of *Reichsgeschichte* at the faculties of law and humanities so that the future intelligentsia would get a sense of what is Austria (Fellner, "Alfons Huber").

60 Fillafer and Feichtinger, "Habsburg Positivism," 193.

61 Johnston, *The Austrian Mind.*

as a miniature of Europe, or even the world, as in the poem by Friedrich Hebbel: "Oesterreich ist eine kleine Welt, in der die Grosse ihre probe hält." However, in my view it was not until Moritz Csáky's major works published since the 1990s that this idea has matured into a fully elaborated historical concept. Csáky refused to see the cultures of the region as homogenous entities and understood them as 'spaces of communication' which are constantly connected and mutually influence each other. In his view, the culturally pluralistic region of Habsburg Central Europe presents several phenomena and problems that are structurally similar to those that we experience in Europe.[62]

Naturally, in historical research one as to be suspicious when arriving at an explanation that relies heavily on personal talents (or lack thereof) of certain individuals without pointing to a greater, structural element. In our case, besides what has already been described, the state's attitude towards the cause of its respective community's historical culture should be pointed out. In Belgium, the state played an eminent role in fostering the historical culture. As already mentioned, the Belgian state made important investments in the pantheonization of Belgium's historical heroes. A royal decree from as early as 1835 ordained erecting statues to freedom fighters, great rulers, famous scientists, and artists from Belgium's past. Besides statues, they also financed paintings and lavish book editions on historical heroes.[63] Even in top-level government circles, politicians were aware of the importance of history: Interior Minister Charles Rogier told the king that the knowledge of Belgium's history was more important than ever before. The political elite after 1830 was in great need of historical legitimacy: given their liberal values, they aimed at interpreting the events of 1830 more as a rebirth than a revolution. For this, history served them well.[64] In this spirit, already in the mid-1830s, a *Commission Royale d'Histoire* was established. In 1845, an award was founded for works on national history. In an article reporting on the award ceremony, the author explained that national history had to trickle down to the masses from the intelligentsia and inspire love for their homeland, which in turn will inspire loyalty to their state.[65]

This quasi-political role of the intelligentsia was precisely what the Austrian state most feared and wanted to avoid at all costs in the *Vormärz* period. The success of Joseph von Hormayr at the beginning of the nineteenth century was ephemeral. The historian took part in the 1809 Tyrol uprising against Napoleon and was part of an association called the *Alpenbund*, disapproved by the government. However,

62 Csáky presents this view in several articles and interviews. The latest: Csáky, *Das Gedächtnis Zentraleuropas*.

63 Tollebeek and Verschaffel, "Group Portraits with National Heroes," 93–94.

64 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation and the Nation-State," 334.

65 Tollebeek, "Historical Representation and the Nation-State," 337.

there was another reason for his downfall: as soon as he urged cooperation between the government and the intelligentsia, Hormayr fell out of favour[66] because the French revolution taught the Austrian political elite that any involvement of the intelligentsia in politics posed a deadly danger to the status quo, even in the case of those who seemed to have supportive motivations.[67]

This notion of fearing free thought left its mark on Austrian universities, which were despised in other German countries. Austrian universities were not workshops of free-spirited research but training schools of lawyers, doctors, and other functionaries.[68] The emphasis was on functionality, and not on scientific freedom and fantasy: universities were not considered to be a safe haven of the *artes liberales*, but places of education and discipline, where teaching was conducted through textbooks approved by the ministry.[69] Moreover, there was a neurotic fear of foreign ideas. This made its impact on history as well; however, auxiliary sciences underwent considerable development, as they were considered to give useful qualifications to future functionaries.[70]

A major paradigm-shift took place with the revolutions of 1848, which radically changed the perception of the intellectual's political potential. In historiography, it was Joseph Alexander von Helfert who defined the new role of the historian in supporting Austrian unity by working on the Austrian *Nationalegeschichte*. An institution was also founded, the *Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* which had two major tasks: giving a thorough education in the auxiliary sciences, and training historians with a vision of an Austrian *Naitonalgeschichte.* In the first task, the *Institut* was undoubtably successful, becoming a world-renowned workshop of auxiliary sciences. Concerning the second task, however, it fell short of Helfert's expectations. After the short-lived directorate of Albert Jäger, the *Institut* was taken over by the Prussian Theodor von Sickel, who was superior to Jäger in craftsmanship but was completely indifferent to Austrian patriotic ideals.[71] Ultimately, post-1848 Austrian historiography proceeded in developing expertise in auxiliary sciences, a field which already had

66 It is worth noting that after his fall from grace, Hormayr eventually moved to Munich, Bavaria. His hatred of Metternich's rule turned towards the Habsburg dynasty as a whole. At the end of the day, Hormayr who elaborated the 'state-based' as well as the 'tradition-based' community narrative, ended up being a *Habsburghasser* creating the basis of yet another narrative. This would have an impressive career among Austria's enemies: the image of Austria being nothing more than a "Zusammenheiratet Länderkonglomerat" (Heer, *Der Kampf,* 183).

67 Robert, *L'idée nationale Autrichienne et les guerres de Napoléon,* 478–88.

68 Lhotsky, "Geschichtsforschung und Geschichtsschreibung in Österreich," 412.

69 Surman, *Universities in Imperial Austria,* 31–33.

70 Lhotsky, *Geschichte des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung,* 15.

71 On this process, see: Beld, "Le Comte Leo Thun et l'Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung," as well as Lhotsky's above quoted major work.

strong foundations, but failed to complete its new task designed by Helfert. Although there were further attempts at transmitting a unified image of Austria (such as the above-mentioned *Reichsgeschichte*) they all fell short of expectations.

## Joseph II's controversial heritage

Over the more than one century between the death of Joseph II and the outbreak of the World War I, he was one of, if not the most controversial figure in Habsburg history. In his remarkable book, *Aufklärung Habsburgisch,* Franz L. Fillafer called Josephinism the *große Erzählung der österreichischen Geschichte*. In the late *Vormärz* period in Cisleithania, for German liberals, the Josephinist period embodied everything they associated with Enlightenment, primarily the subordination of the Church to the state, religious freedom, and German dominance in the Monarchy; whereas they associated the Church and everything they perceived as anti-German and counter-Enlightenment with the Baroque period. Major elements of this narrative survived well into the twentieth century and resulted in a distorted image of the Enlightenment not recognizing either the conservative and clerical versions of the Enlightenment or its roots in the Baroque.[72]

During the second half of the nineteenth century, various political groups showed their relationship to Joseph II's person in different ways: while some regarded him as their predecessor and, hence, a source of their historical legitimacy, others strove to reconcile their hostility towards Josephinism with their otherwise unconditional loyalty to the House of Habsburg.[73] Franz Joseph himself famously took the eighteenth-century monarch's name in order to emphasise his openness to reforms. German nationalists saw Joseph as one of their heroes, interpreting the monarch's favouritism for the German language as a nationalist act, although there was no nationalist agenda in it.[74] Liberals saw Joseph with his centralizing, modernizing, and Germanizing measures as their forerunner, while the Catholic Church regarded Joseph II's reign as the most sombre period in the empire's history, due to the monarch's attacks against the Church's authority.[75] Nevertheless, conservative clericals did not uniformly condemn Joseph: the above quoted Richard von Kralik emphasised Joseph's legacy in strengthening the *Gesamtstaat,* which in the historian's eyes outweighed his anti-clerical measures by far.[76]

72 Fillafer, *Aufklärung Habsburgisch,* 67–68; also see the book's introduction.

73 Wingfield, "Emperor Joseph II in the Austrian Imagination," 67–69.

74 Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 79.

75 Wingfield, "Emperor Joseph II in the Austrian Imagination," 70.

76 Kralik, *Österreichische Geschichte,* 253.

These controversies erupted most harshly in 1880, the anniversary of Joseph's rise to power in the Hereditary Lands: German liberal and nationalist associations organised impressive celebrations, but official circles remained rather prudent or passive. The archbishop of Vienna went as far as prohibiting Viennese schools from dedicating the morning mass to the monarch's memory. In view of all this, it should not be surprising that when the Hungarian historian Henrik Marczali went to Vienna to examine the available archival sources for his book on Joseph's period, he was warned that he had better refrain from mentioning the late monarch's name in the *Hofburg*.[77]

As for Belgian and Hungarian intellectuals, there was a common difficulty when trying to situate the reign of Joseph II in the history of their respective communities. The frontlines seemed to be even more turbid in the case of the Hungarians than in that of the Austro-Germans and Bohemian Germans. As the majority of Hungarian and most Belgian historians shared the very essentials of liberal values, such measures as advancing religious tolerance and abandoning feudal privileges, as well as eliminating censorship were all in line with their most cherished ideals and their experiences of modernity. In the meantime, some of Joseph's measures also attacked their 'national' institutions or, what is even more problematic, the very essence of these reforms was to dismantle the institutions perceived as essentially 'national.' In this section, I will study the ways in which Belgian and Hungarian historians dealt with this complex phenomenon, and how in these two countries as well, Josephinism can be regarded as a *große Erzählung*.

In the Belgian narratives examined, the period of Maria Theresa and that of her son Joseph are in sharp contrast. The reign of Maria Theresa (which is associated with the regent Charles de Lorraine) is depicted as a period of general bliss, while Joseph's epoch is seen as an era of great turmoil culminating in the Brabant Revolution. The two rules represent two extremities in Belgian history. For Gerlache, the two monarchs have significance that transcends their person: they represent the ideal and the condemnable way of practicing power.

> "But they [the Belgians] would have loved William, and they would have served him loyally if he had taken for models Maria Theresa and the good duke of Lorraine, instead of imitating Joseph II."[78]

It is also Gerlache who puts Maria Theresa and Joseph in the harshest contrast, speaking of the "piety" of Maria Theresa and the "intolerant fanaticism" of Joseph. Authors less hostile to Joseph establish a similar opposition:

77 Marczali, *Emlékeim,* 137.

78 Gerlach, *Histoire du Rayoume des Pays-Bas,* xv.

> "The calm which the people had enjoyed under the happy reign of Maria Theresa was disturbed by that of Joseph II."[79]

Most authors consider the institutions and privileges, foremost the *Joyeuse entrée* (the 1356 charter of liberties considered by many as the Magna Carta for the Low Countries), attacked by Joseph to have been outdated. Moke affirms that the ancient privileges no longer fulfilled current needs, their diversity was inconvenient, and their deficiencies were serious.[80] Juste claims that the *Joyeuse entrée* was not "at the level of the progress of civilization."[81] The harshest criticism comes from Hymans who affirms that Belgian civilization as a whole was a half a century behind the rest of Europe.

Accordingly, liberal authors see Joseph's reforms, which aim at improving this situation, as forward-looking measures. Juste celebrates the reforms concerning religious tolerance, which is also what Hymans appreciates most in the monarch's legacy, and harshly condemns the clerical opponents of these reforms. For Hymans, Joseph's reforms are so significant that he discusses them already at the beginning of his book, where he makes general remarks on Belgium's history. Hymans considers that with his reforms in Belgium, Joseph preceded the French revolution, establishing essential enlightened measures. For the author, this accomplishment distinguishes Belgium just as much as such phenomena as the birth of tolerance in the sixteenth century or the system of constitutional monarchy.[82]

Nevertheless, Joseph's procedure, and especially the autocratic character of his rule, are condemned as completely mistaken by all authors. According to Juste, with the aggressive implementation of his reforms, Joseph contradicted the teachings of the encyclopaedists whom he sought to follow. In Juste's account, this created a paradoxical situation in which anachronistic attachment to the outdated *Joyeuse entrée* gained a noble character, as it became a revolt against injustice. For Moke, Joseph's measures caused such turbulence as only seen during the most brutal revolutions, which justifies the Brabant Revolution, even though it sought a past to which there was no possible return. Here we witness the coexistence of the two concepts of revolution: the disruption of the ancient world order (the French Revolution's *tabula rasa*) and the more ancient meaning, the return to the lawful, ideal past.[83] Hymans also condemns the monarch's method, whose flaws he blames on the fact that Joseph was a theoretical mind without the ability to consider the practical outcomes of his

79 Dewez, *Histoire Générale de la Belgique*, 184.

80 Moke, *Histoire de la Belgique*, 443.

81 Juste, *Historie de la Belgique*, vol. II, 325.

82 Hymans, *Histoire Populaire de Belgique,* 47.

83 Cp. Koselleck, "Historische Kriterien des neuzeitlichen Revolutionsbegriffs."

ideals. Nevertheless, the historian criticizes the Brabant Revolution equally sharply, as he believes that it was filled with "the hatred of all novelty, the pride of small, blinded minds" which eventually caused its failure. Joseph's greatest fault was that he did not recognise the necessity of gradual development. In order to truly reach the accomplishments of the French Revolution, Belgium would have had to undergo a true intellectual and moral development.

The Catholic Étienne de Gerlache offers a completely different view. The statesman does not consider Joseph's reforms to be necessary or timely measures. The historian is hostile even to Joseph's person, which he considers to be filled with jealousy and futile hunger for recognition. Although he does acknowledge the monarch's will to serve the betterment of humanity, in his view, this is decisively outweighed by his intolerant fanaticism.[84]

Gerlache places Joseph into a rather consistent, general vision of Belgian history into which the author uncompromisingly integrates every single Belgian historical phenomenon. For him, Belgium's most important characteristic is her Catholic spirit, which is the reason he gives for why this territory stayed under the reign of Philip II, and why Belgian people did not fuse with the French during the conquest of the revolutionary wars.[85] In this way, Gerlache manages to legitimate the existence of Belgium through her Catholic spirit against her two most significant critics: France and the Netherlands. Joseph II fits into this vision perfectly. The monarch represents a special type of despotism that outplaced the Calvinist despotism of earlier centuries: that of philosophy. Joseph is the son of the eighteenth century philosophy which attacks the very basics of religious, social, and political order.[86] The monarch's conflict with Belgium is not the conflict of tradition versus fast-paced progress, but of despotic philosophy versus the Belgian Catholic spirit.[87] For Gerlache, Joseph does not embody the future, but is the perfect child of his own time's philosophical school. Accordingly, his failure is not due to his excessively fast introduction of progressive ideas, but quite simply, to his clumsiness. Naturally, in this light, Gerlache does not consider the Brabant Revolution "just but untimely;" instead, he sees it as a clash of the ancient Catholic Belgian civilization with the forces that try to subvert it. This vision of Joseph II and the Brabant Revolution remained dominant for Belgian Catholic thinkers, as one can see for example in Charles Pollet's 1867 book, *La Belgique sous la domination étrangère depuis Joseph II jusqu'en 1830.*[88]

84 Gerlach, *Histoire du Rayoume des Pays-Bas,* 117, 121.

85 Gerlach, *Histoire du Rayoume des Pays-Bas,* xiv.

86 Gerlach, *Histoire du Rayoume des Pays-Bas,* 108–109.

87 Gerlach, *Histoire du Rayoume des Pays-Bas,* 111–112.

88 On Pollet's book, see the joint study of Tom Verschaffel and László Csorba.

There is another distinguishing aspect of Gerlache's account: the author's treatment of Austria and the Austrians. While the other historians examined identify Austria quite simply with the dynasty, labelling the Spanish side 'Austrian' as well, Gerlach speaks of Austria in the same manner as he speaks of such states as France.

> "They [the Belgians] endured these different regimes; but they became neither Spanish nor Austrian, neither French nor Dutch."

While the other Belgian authors examined treat the non-national other by simplifying it to its dynastic component, Gerlach implicitly nationalizes Austria and speaks of the Austrians in the same manner that he speaks of the 'Spanish' or the 'French.'[89]

Contrary to what one experiences examining Belgian historical master narratives, in which the reign of Maria Theresa and that of Joseph II represent the summit and the low point of Belgian history, in Hungarian historical master narratives, the reigns of the two monarchs do not constitute each other's counterparts. Maria Theresa's person and reign belonged to the handful of historical phenomena that seemed to be judged equally positively both in Trans- and in Cisleithania. Consequently, for intellectuals who strove to reinforce the imperial Austro-Hungarian identity, Maria Theresa represented the ideal object of study and of historical cult, as one can witness in the major work of historian Alfred Arneth as well as the operatic masterpiece *Der Rosenkavalier,* the libretto of which was written by the emblematic Austrian patriot, Hugo von Hofmannsthal.[90] Nevertheless, we can hardly find traces of this enthusiasm in Hungarian master narratives. There is a certain continuity between the regimes of Maria Theresa and her son. It is already in Maria Theresa's age that historians speak of thrusting Hungary into the state of a mere colony. This is true not only for the independentist oriented scholars but of most Habsburg loyalists as well: "[From that point on] our homeland's relations to the Austrian provinces were that of a colony."[91]

Similarly to what we have seen in the case of some of our Belgian sources, for Hungarian historians as well, Joseph II's reign had historical significance that went beyond the decade during which he ruled the country. This phenomenon is related to the complex problem of how Hungarian historians interpreted and used the concept of the 'nation.' The second half of the nineteenth century saw the gradual and implicit identification of the estate notion of 'nation' with the modern meaning of the concept in Hungarian historical works. This led to the protagonist of Hungarian national history becoming the lower nobility. The case of the Golden Bull, a medieval law issued in 1222, assuring the nobility's rights and privileges, is an illustrative

89 Gerlach, *Histoire du Rayoume des Pays-Bas,* xv.

90 Wandruszka, "Die Historiographie der theresianisch-josefinischen Reformzeit," 21–24.

91 Frankl, *A magyar nemzet története,* 333.

demonstration. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, history textbooks mostly referred to the Golden Bull as a law stipulating the nobility's privileges, whereas in later works, the Golden Bull was presented as the guardian of the nation's rights and privileges.[92] This way of thinking was heavily criticized by Austro-German authors who claimed that the Hungarian 'national freedom' was only the freedom of the privileged classes which oppressed the masses in the country.[93] It is worth noting that even Gerlache mentions that the so-called "Hungarian constitutional freedom" (with which he otherwise sympathised) only included the nobility, a small portion of the country's population.[94]

Identifying the lower nobility with the entire nation becomes problematic for Hungarian authors when arriving at the reign of Joseph II. It is indisputable for these Hungarian historians that, in this period, the privileges of the nobility hindered the development of Hungarian society. Meanwhile, they maintain that the same privileges, the 'ancient constitution of Hungary,' are what guaranteed the 'freedom of the nation' and the 'independence of the country.'

There is a clearly discernible difference between Mihály Horváth (1809–1878), famous historian of the Reform Era,[95] and the other authors examined who created their works after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 *(Ausgleich)*. This difference is due to a general change in Hungarian nationalism, which meant the fading of the romantic idea of progress, giving way to a more autotelic nationalism. Up to his later years, Horváth maintained many aspects of the former. During the founding of the Hungarian Historical Association in 1867, he claimed that "nationality cannot be our goal in itself, it is only a tool for reaching higher goals that one can define as progress, betterment, and humanity."[96] Horváth's portrayal of Joseph is the most favourable towards the monarch. In his eight-volume synthesis, which he started in the 1840s as a school textbook, then gradually developed until its final publication in the early 1870s, Joseph is depicted as a noble spirit, only comparable

92 Lajtai, *Magyar nemzet vagyok,* 491.

93 On this issue, see: Tarafás, "Oesterreich ist eben Oesterreich."

94 Gerlach, *Histoire du Rayoume des Pays-Bas,* 130.

95 Horváth was regarded as the most prominent Hungarian historian also in Austria. Austro-German authors in fact used to selectively quote him in order to support their claims about Hungarian history, using the authority of the most important Hungarian historian.
Another quintessential historian was László Szalay, a contemporary of Horváth; however, he is not cited in this article, as his work on Hungarian history did not treat the reign of Joseph II. At the beginning of the century, a few *grand récits* were published on Hungarian history in German and Latin; however, these never reached a large audience, nor did they treat the cardinal questions of Hungary's history. Cp. R. Várkonyi, *A pozitivista történetszemlélet,* 12.

96 Horváth, "Horváth Mihály beszéde," 4.

to King Matthias Corvinus.[97] The historian mostly puts the blame for Joseph's 'despotic traits' on the Viennese court which failed to give the monarch an adequate education.[98] In explaining how Joseph's originally noble intentions turned into disaster, Horváth differentiates between two types of freedom: one which means that one class of society is not oppressed by another, and the second which protects every class from the despotism of the state. While Joseph cared much about the former, he completely eliminated the latter, which led to his downfall, as this behaviour denied him the sympathy of ordinary people that could have supported him against the "nobility, the privileges of which were restricted."[99] Joseph's main mistake was to pursue otherwise "noble and humanitarian and great goals" by disregarding the legislature of a "constitutional nation."

Other historical *grand récit*s written during the last quarter of the nineteenth century tend to emphasise the harms done to 'national freedom.' Although the authors are more hostile towards Joseph than Horváth, one could not find a harsher condemnation of the monarch than in Gerlache's account. József Szalay (1857–1885) and Lajos Baróti (1856–1933) acknowledge some positive outcomes of Joseph's measures. However, these were unintentional, in fact counter-intentional: Joseph's decree which intended to make German the official language of the administration in Hungary provoked support and interest in the Hungarian language even among those who had been indifferent towards it. Concerning most of the monarch's other measures, the authors claim they are not worthy of mention, as they "perished as soon as they were born. They are only a hurtful memory in our nation's history."[100] The conservative and clerical author Vilmos Fraknói (1843–1924) also condemns Joseph's practice of neglecting the country's constitution; nevertheless, he acknowledges that if the reforms had been introduced in a constitutional manner, they would have been a blessing for the country.[101]

Ignác Acsády (1845–1906) gave a distinctive account of the phenomenon. Acsády was one of the most original Hungarian historians of his time, producing pioneering work on social and economic history. The historian always had great sympathy for the oppressed masses. Accordingly, he did not follow fully the abovementioned trend with regards to the concept of nation: instead of implicitly making the lower nobility the protagonist of national history, as many of his peers did, Acsády spoke of "two nations," the oppressed and the oppressor, the latter benefitting from

97 Horváth, *Magyarország története,* 470.

98 Horváth, *Magyarország története,* 468–70.

99 Horváth, *Magyarország története,* 510–11.

100 Szalay and Baróti, *A magyar nemzet története,* 260–74.

101 Frankl, *A magyar nemzet története,* 352.

every freedom, while the former deprived of basic human rights.[102] In the meantime, speaking of Joseph, even though he acknowledges the humanitarian nature of the monarch's reforms, the national aspect becomes dominant, as nationalism was the other important element in Acsády's profile. In the meantime, the historian emphasises that it was the peasantry who resisted Joseph's Germanising measures the least compromisingly, rather than the corrupt nobility, which had long forgotten its mother tongue anyways.[103]

The most complex account of Joseph's reign is given by Henrik Marczali (1856–1940). This is no surprise, since Marczali produced his main study of Joseph's period based on a decade of conscientious research, giving a nuanced image of the monarch's legacy. In an exhaustive chapter of the ten-volume historical synthesis published in honour of the 'Hungarian Millennium' during second half of the 1890's, Marczali proved to be more balanced than any of his peers discussed above. He refused to take the side of either the 'national' or the 'progressive' aspects; instead, he revealed the complex contradictions of the period. He shows that the ancient constitution only guaranteed the rights of a privileged few, while large masses of the nation could not find their place in it, which was a "slur on the face of Hungary."[104] At the same time, this "slur," the ancient constitution and the few privileged clinging to it, is the sole guarantee of the "independence" of the country: the "freedom" of the nation lies on the "virgin shoulders" of the nobility.[105] This is a dilemma, according to Marczali, staying unresolved even after the passing of Joseph (whom he depicts as a good-willed despot), and would only be resolved by the generation of the Reform Era.[106]

## Conclusion

In this study, I have taken the task of giving a comparison of historical master narratives from Belgium and Habsburg Central Europe. In this endeavour, my primary aim is to follow the initiatives of significant historians who have pointed out the need to compare Habsburg Central Europe with western countries, which in the common imagination are thought to have little to share for a comparative approach.[107]

The major structural similarities promised in the introduction could be detected in certain areas which make such a seemingly unusual comparison not

102 Acsády, *Magyarország három részre oszlásának története,* 186.

103 Acsády, *A Magyar Birodalom története,* 534.

104 Marczali, *Magyarország története III. Károlytól a Bécsi Congressusig,* 422–24.

105 Marczali, *Magyarország története III. Károlytól a Bécsi Congressusig,* 427–28.

106 Marczali, *Magyarország története III. Károlytól a Bécsi Congressusig,* 599.

107 E.g., Judson, "»Where our commonality is necessary…«."

only possible but potentially fruitful. In the first part of the paper, I have shown how Belgium and Austria were depicted in the same manner by their respective rivals: as being abnormal communities who have no histories and who only survive with the help of their soulless bureaucrats. In the 'century of history,' historical legitimacy was particularly important for Europe's communities, hence their historians carried the heavy task of legitimizing their respective communities. By examining solutions offered by Belgian and Austro-German historians, the article has formulated some hypotheses which could be examined further. The state's attitude to this intellectual endeavour and the extent to which historians accepted the nation-obsessed world-view of their contemporaries stand out as major factors.

The second section of the paper shifts attention from Austro-German scholars to their Hungarian peers. The interpretation of Belgian and Hungarian 'common history,' the reign of Joseph II, also demonstrates important structural similarities. For both communities, the main dilemma was the clash between Joseph's reforms, which most authors considered forward-looking, modernizing measures, and national institutions. Furthermore, Joseph seems to bear an importance that goes beyond his person and short reign for both communities. Most of the Belgian as well as the Hungarian authors present a similar explanation: Joseph was full of noble, humanitarian ideas, but he wanted to implement these ideals too rapidly and in a despotic fashion, while honest cooperation with national institutions could have led to success. Nevertheless, the frontlines between historical interpretations were drawn differently. In Belgium, it is the liberal-Catholic antagonism, the impact of which one can witness in the opposing narratives of Gerlache and Hymans. In Hungary, the main difference, although not as harsh as in the Belgian case, is between Horváth, representing the Reform Era's idea of nationalism, and other authors active mainly in the *fin-de-siècle* era.

The comparison of community histories that seem to be largely different in their contexts may further improve our knowledge of how European communities deal with their past. It also draws attention to common structural elements instead of the definitive differences that dominate the discourse on Western and Central Europe.

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