For a Post-Imperial Discipline: On Dora d'Istria and Hugo Meltzl's Travels

Mihnea Bâlici
Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca
Corresponding author email: mihnea.balici@ubbcluj.ro

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Abstract: The establishment of *Acta Comparationis* Litterarum Universarum (1877–1888) in Kolozsvár/Klausenburg/Cluj represents a key moment in the history of comparative literature, shaped by nineteenth century technological progress and the political fallout from the 1848 national-ist movements. This article traces the transnational mobilities of Acta's two central figures, Hugo Meltzl and Dora d'Istria, and their impact on the journal's vision of Weltliteratur and its polyglot ideals. While Acta sought to protect national literatures and linguistic identities, these authors' projects remained paradoxically tied to inter-imperial frameworks. Using a materialist lens attentive to the class dimensions of their travels, the article argues that Meltzl and Dora d'Istria's mobility shaped their comparative methods and ideological stances, re-vealing a tension between internationalist aspirations and pragmatic solutions that reinforced nationalist biases.

Key-words: Hugo Meltzl, Dora d'Istria, mobility studies, comparative literature, nationalism, *Acta Comparationis* Litterarum Universarum

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Transnational mobility played a pivotal role in early comparatism's ambitious search for a scientific basis to literary research. By transnational mobility, I refer to any type of movement driven by various academic trajectories and intellectual projects: research travel, international education, exchange programs, and exploratory travel facilitated by association with various European cosmopolitan elites. Hugo Meltzl (1846-1908) and Dora d'Istria (1828-1888) were both mobile agents of the second half of the nineteenth century and foundational thinkers in the early comparatist domain. Their projects are especially relevant when it comes to their relation to the development of *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* after its inception in Kolozsvár/Klausenburg/Cluj (1877-1888). Despite their divergent starting points, both ultimately arrive at a form of moderate, flexible nationalism. I see *Acta* as the theoretical middle ground of these biographical projects, *qua* a moderate mediation of the tensions of the historical moments that seeks to preserve *both* small, emerging national identities *and* great, quasi-imperialist cultural clusters. This argument calls for a revision of the hagiographical genealogy often attached to the first journal of comparative literature.[1]

Hugo Meltzl and Dora d'Istria's international travels, education, and experiences account not only for their broadly understood "internationalism," but also for the pro- and counter-imperial ambiguities in their work. Unlike earlier analyses of other philologists' travels—such as Emily Apter's, which I discuss below—my reading of their trajectories is materialist. I argue that this ambiguity is structurally determined by the nature of their transnational trajectories and their class positions within the complex history of Eastern and Central Europe during the nineteenth century. Hugo Meltzl's travels across Europe—from Transylvania to Heidelberg, Leipzig, and back—were crucial in shaping his vision for comparative literature and the founding of *Acta*. Exposure to diverse intellectual traditions, such as Goethe's *Weltliteratur* in Leipzig and transnational folklore studies in Heidelberg, influenced his commitment to polyglottism and later decaglottism, balancing universalist ideals with local cultural preservation. Similarly, Dora d'Istria's journeys—from Wallachia to Russia, Switzerland, Italy, and beyond—shaped her vision of a modernized Oriental Europe. The nationalism from which the two derive their claims is the same that led to the creation of

1. See Haun Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: On Memes, Hives and Selfish Genes," in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 3–42.

the World Republic of Letters,[2] caught in the same contradiction between (a) an internationalist direction (which privileges the autonomy of the aesthetic) and (b) a nationalist one (which underlies the aesthetic of the political). Meltzl starts from position (a), while Dora d'Istria conceives her initial project as being dominated by direction (b). However, the two converge in a project aimed at a pragmatic internationalism of allegedly "developed" European nations: the early comparatist discipline endorsed by *Acta*.

Protecting the National: from *Acta Comparationis* to Emily Apter and Back

Acta, Samuel Brassai (1797/1800-1897)[3] and Hugo Meltzl's journal, is built on a loose transnational infrastructure. This infrastructure is the one that positioned Transylvania within a web of connections facilitated by the technological advancements of the nineteenth century, including not only the development of a railway system across the European continent,[4] but also the founding of the General Postal Union at the Bern Conference in 1874.[5] Meltzl expressed a laudatory stance towards the Conference, in which he foresaw the grounds for bringing Goethe's dream of *Weltliteratur* to reality.[6] Overall, *Acta Comparationis* functioned as a hub within this network, attracting other comparatists around the world, many of whom were travelers and/or exiles. Other articles in this special issue focus on Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari, Herbert Augustus Strong, and Rasmus B. Anderson. Like the Introduction to this issue, I turn to another central figure in the journal, Elena Ghica Koltsova-Massalskaya, also known as Dora d'Istria.

The journal's internationalism is evident. Even if 50 percent of *Acta*'s content is written in German and 20 percent in Hungarian,[7] 30 percent of the magazine's material was written in a variety of other languages (from Icelandic and Romani to Portuguese and Dutch). The only technical limitation was the editors' dependence on the European printing press, which had exclusive access to the Latin alphabet. This led to an almost visually performative element in the way the magazine was printed. The programmatic multiplicity of languages manifests itself in the theoretical program of the journal.[8] However, despite its transnational orientation, the journal's mission was marked by contradictions. While formally defending the right of each culture to preserve its own linguistic identity and simultaneously avoid cultural commodification, *Acta*'s core mission was in fact "to spread the Gospel of Beauty,"[9] conceived as the object of inquiry for the "science of the future, comparative literature."[10] This axiomatic universalism gave rise to various pragmatic negotiations within the theoretical premises of Meltzl's journal.

The core issue of recent criticism has been to explain the reason behind *Acta*'s decision to shift its focus from the principle of polyglottism to the more pragmatic one of decaglottism[11] after its first year of publication. The third part of Meltzl's "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur" was overlooked in David Damrosch's reference to *Acta Comparationis* in his 2020 *Comparing the Literatures*,[12] contributing to an idealized image of the Transylvanian journal and casting Meltzl as the most liberal actor in his emerging field. However, Angus Nicholls's attempt to bring this forgotten section back into the academic public's attention[13] reveals the fact that *Acta*'s premises were in fact contradictory. The programmatic texts show a gradual deradicalization of Meltzl's project: from a fully-fledged internationalist position to a revised form of contextual nationalism. On the other

2. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

3. For more information about the other editor of the Transylvanian journal, see Levente T. Szabó, "À la recherche… de l'editeur perdu. Brassai Sámuel and the first international journal of comparative literary studies," in *Storia, identità e canoni letterari,* ed. Ioana Both, Ayşe Saraçgil, and Angela Tarantino (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2013), 177–188.

4.Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatca, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022), 53–56.

5. See Bernhard Sigert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

6. Hugo Meltzl, "Die Erste Decennalfeier der Idee der Weltpost: Zur Erinnerung an den IX. October 1874," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, no. 155-158 (1884): 27–28.

7. David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Golden Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 44

8. Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichen den Litteratur," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 15 (1877): 308; Hugo Meltzl, "Preliminary Tasks of Comparative Literature (1877)," in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*, ed. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44.

9. "[A] Szép evangéliumának terjesztése." Meltzl, "Előszó," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 1 (1877): 4.

10. "Zukunftswissenschaft, der vergleichenden Litteratur." Meltzl, "Zur vergleichenden Aesthetik der Lyrik," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 2 (1877): 39.

11. Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Ulteralur. III. Der Dekaglottismus," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 24 (1878): 494–501.

12. Damrosch, *Comparing*, 30–39.

13. Angus Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology in the Early Years of Comparative Literature: The *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*," *Comparative Literature* 76, no. 3 (2024): 301–303.

side of the spectrum, Dora d'Istria's trajectory began with an anti-imperialist ethos in support of the emerging Balkan states, but eventually evolved into a revised form of a hegemonic civilizational project, built around Oriental Europe and following a Eurocentric model. It is no surprise, then, that the two converge in the moderate, deradicalized philological project of proto-comparatism. To explore this transition, my essay focuses on two of these transnational actors who straddle across languages and cultures and enable us to envision the current territory of Romania at the crossroads of several inter-imperial vectors.[14] One is Meltzl from Transylvania, and the other is Dora d'Istria from the Romanian Principalities. Drawing on these two case studies, the present article attempts to answer the following question: what is the connection between the fading of the programmatic polyglottism of early comparatism in the nineteenth century and the mobilities of these two authors from the European periphery?

Mobility is an important part of this theoretical endeavor. However, this phenomenon serves different functions across historical moments, as Apter has already exemplarily shown. In her article on Eric Auerbach and Leo Spitzer's time in Istanbul, Emily Apter revisits Edward S. Said's reading of the former. The Palestinian-American scholar regards the philologist as a vital link in the humanist genealogy of comparative literature. For Said, *Mimesis* is "not [...] only a massive reaffirmation of the Western cultural tradition, but also a work built upon a critically important alienation from it."[15] He sees in it the potential to engage the Eurocentric tradition from an exogenous perspective. In other words, *Mimesis* anticipates the repeated attempts made by comparative literature and postcolonial thinking to "provincialize Europe."[16] Apter expresses dissatisfaction with Said's analysis, demonstrating that Auerbach's myth of intellectual isolation in Istanbul is problematic. Instead, she attributes to Spitzer the role of a potentially anti-imperialist comparative philologist in exile. Apter goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Spitzer's anti-authoritarian attitude is linked to the continuity he perceived between the National Socialist project in Germany, which he had fled in 1933, and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's modernization project in Turkey,[17] which focused on Europeanization, forced secularization, and linguistic standardization.

Apter shows that transnational mobility—here: exile—serves as a catalyst for the comparative program. My analysis does not extrapolate from Apter's observations a standardized, replicable framework that necessitates the conflation of access to mobility with comparative thinking. While I acknowledge that Apter's work provides valuable insights that can enrich our understanding of the broader objectives within this literary discipline, I contend that a more materialist analysis remains to be fully developed and applied in the case studies I discuss here. The origins of early comparatism diverge from the philological endeavors of early twentieth-century comparatists, as they were shaped by the travels of upper-class agents, rather than by the experiences of subaltern exiles fleeing the rise of European fascism. Meltzl and Dora d'Istria emerged in the wake of the national struggles that erupted around 1848. Unknowingly, they witnessed the direct consequences of the Herderian revolution in the peripheries and the moments when its idealist and revolutionary fervor had diminished. Operating within the frameworks of philological and culturalist discourse, both Dora d'Istria and Meltzl sought to sustain something that resembled the Kantian vision of quasi-federalized nation-states.[18] The glimpse of such a post-imperial future—where the affix "post-" does not imply a departure from, but a more "civilized" continuation of the imperial past—was enabled by the experience of transnational mobility. In the following, I frame the historical and biographical context of these forms of uprooting. I subsequently trace a few threads of Dora d'Istria's and Meltzl's ideological and aesthetic systems as shaped by their travels.

Contextualizing Early Comparatism

The travels of Hugo Meltzl and Dora d'Istria differ significantly from those of economic migrants—whether nineteenth-century industrial or agricultural workers—expats fleeing totalitarian regimes, or today's globalized labor force. Terminology matters: Meltzl's mobilities were academic (studies in Leipzig and Heidelberg) or research-driven (travels to German states, Italy, and North Africa), distinct from later regional writers' experiences.[19] Similarly, the concept of "exile," central to Spitzer, Auerbach, and Said, does not fully cover Dora d'Istria's experience, as

14. For a more generous definition of inter-imperiality, see Laura Doyle, *Inter-Imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020).

15. Edward S. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 8.

16. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

17. Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 2014).

18. Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1795).

19. Borbála Zsuzsanna Török and John Neubauer, *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe: A Compendium* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).

other scholars have argued,[20] since her uprooting was not as violent as that of the German-Jewish philologists. Therefore, I analyze their movements—whether academic *peregrinatio* or intellectual exploration—as forms of upper-class mobilities across European empires. (Meanwhile, labor migrations from Transylvania to North America were underway,[21] making Meltzl and Brassai's project of creating a Goethean *Weltliteratur* complementary to the emergence of a transnational, though not particularly cosmopolitan, world-system.)

Meltzl and Dora d'Istria's separate trajectories are intertwined throughout the changing borders of the Austrian/Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian, Holy Roman, and (later) German Empires. The central itinerary of *Acta*'s main editor was embedded within the Hungarian- and German-speaking world, while Dora d'Istria's spans culturally Gallocentric and/or Latin territories (Russia, Switzerland, Italy, the Balkan peninsula and its "Oriental" soon-to-be-nations such as the Romanians, the Albanians, and the Greeks). In both cases, the proto-comparatists display an ambivalent relationship toward the problem of the nation-state and the emancipation of peripheral cultures, whether these were deemed "literatureless"[22] or not.

The year 1848 is the main node in the following narrative. At that time, Dora d'Istria was 20 years old, while Meltzl had just been born two years earlier. However, the aftermath of 1848 proves more consequential to their intellectual biographies than the revolutionary moment itself. The historical, cultural, and intellectual origins of nationalist thought have been extensively examined by Joep Leerssen, whose work provides a comprehensive exploration of the subject.[23] Not only did he trace the main ideas that stood behind the revolutionary moment, but he also showed that philology and linguistics played an important role in the development of an anti-Napoleonic and historicist form of nationalism, especially through the works of Jacob Grimm[24] or August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben.[25] The anti-Napoleonic sentiment is an important factor not only in the development of Johann Gottfried von Herder's program, but in the entire history of nineteenth-century nationalism.

After vernacular languages became institutionally and culturally established in the core countries of the European continent,[26] the ensuing conflict between the French and German models became central to the national emancipation movements, both before and after 1848.[27] While the French model promoted an uncritically universalist cultural framework, the German model—through Herder's project of rehabilitating small nations—"reaffirmed the connection between politics and literature and established a second pole in the world of letters."[28] Nations such as the Hungarians, Romanians and others embraced what Pascale Casanova terms "the Herder effect,"[29] as it offered a vital response to imperialist practices. In the territory of present-day Romania, this dynamic was shaped by the competing emancipatory nationalisms of the Hungarians and Romanians. Both movements were driven by intermediary social classes challenging the hegemonic structures of their societies: the proto-capitalist Hungarian gentry opposed the local aristocracy, while the Romanian educated upper-class elite contested the older nobility.

Both movements offered answers to imperialist practices from the emerging liberal social strata. They were catalyzed by similar intermediary social classes contesting the hegemonic strata of their societies: the proto-capitalist Hungarian gentry against the local aristocracy, and the Romanian educated upper-class elite against the older nobility. Meltzl and Dora d'Istria's affiliation with these emerging classes profoundly shaped their perspectives, even though the ever-evolving and occasionally contradictory aspects of their thinking resist complete systematization into a coherent philosophy or theory. The more fundamental question I aim to address is: How is it that the German-speaking figure in our study appeared deeply immersed in an internationalist perspective, while the French-speaking Romanian noblewoman was predominantly influenced by Herderian and Germanocentric ideals? The answer lies in an intricate web of factors, particularly their respective travels and experiences across Europe.

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20. Angela Jianu, "Dora d'Istria: Un dar făcut Europei," in *Grădina rozelor: Femei din Moldova, Țara Românească și Transilvania (sec. XVII-XIX)*, ed. Violeta Barbu et al. (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2015), 331–338.

21. See Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017).

22. "[L]itteraturlosen." Meltzl, "Vorläufige (II)," 311; Meltzl, "Preliminary Tasks," 45.

23. Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

24. Leerssen, *National Thought*, 131–132.

25. Joep Leerssen, "Viral Nationalism: Romantic Intellectuals on the Move in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 2 (2011): 259–265.

26. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

27. See Michael Jeismann, *Das Vaterland der Feinde: Studien zum nationalen Feindbegriffund Selbsverstandnis in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1792—1918* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992).

28. Casanova, *The World*, 103.

29. Casanova, *The World*, 77–81.

a) Hugo Meltzl: For a Post-Imperial *Weltliteratur*

Hugo Meltzl was born in 1846 into a Transylvanian Saxon family from Szászrégen/Sächsisch Regen/Reghin, at the beginning of this highly turbulent historical moment following the Metternich regime in the Austrian Empire.[30] Most of the Hungarian population in the respective region adhered to Lajos Kossuth's emancipation movement.[31] Meltzl's Saxon family decided to direct their son to the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár/Klausenburg/Cluj, an institution in which the language of instruction was Hungarian, despite his brother's German-centered career path in Law and politics.[32] However, Meltzl's background was that of a noble family working in administration.[33] I follow Mladen Medved's argument that Kossuth's April Laws reflected the interests of the local gentry, a category class to which Meltzl himself belonged. The Laws aimed to dismantle the feudal relations that defined Hungarian society before 1848 and to promote industrialization and the implementation of capitalism in the Eastern part of the Empire.[34] Hungary's economic growth fueled increasing demands for autonomy. Thus, after the Habsburgs' defeat by Prussia in 1866, Hungary proposed the 1867 Compromise,[35] creating the dual Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Although these events were decisive for him and his ethnic community, Meltzl was witnessing these historical clashes from afar. According to a résumé found by Horst Fassel,[36] Meltzl began his *peregrinatio academica* in Heidelberg in 1866, where he studied philosophy and theology. He was following un the footsteps of a historical wave of academic exchanges between Hungarian/Transylvanian students and Heidelberg, which stopped after 1848 and started again in a quantitatively impressive manner in late 1860s.[37] From 1868 to 1972, Meltzl continued his studies in Leipzig. Some exegeses suggest that he also spent time in Vienna and Berlin. However, his résumé attests that he frequently traveled to Transylvania to prepare for the Hungarian teaching qualification exam. In 1872, Meltzl officially moved back to Kolozsvár/Klausenburg/Cluj and became the first German language and literature professor of the city's newly founded University. In other words, he came back to what was supposed to be a multinational state. Ironically, the polyglot journal *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Unviersarum* appeared in Dualist Hungary, "a nationalizing state that tried to make all its inhabitants into Magyar-speaking Hungarians,"[38] especially in the recently annexed region of Transylvania.[39]

The model promoted by Meltzl and *Acta* appears to align with an internationalist framework, as evidenced by Meltzl's foundational texts, which aim to disentangle culture from the constraints of politics and nationalism. This perspective is further echoed in his lectures on German literature, where he critiques the notion of a national literary history. However, this does not imply an adherence to the French model discussed by Casanova. Rather, Meltzl extends Goethe's vision of globalizing German literature to its logical conclusion, elevating each vernacular language to a universalist status akin to that of French.[40] Meltzl's conception of a "science of the future" is informed not only by this distinctive intellectual history but also by the political interplay between nationalism and internationalism within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As both a driver of modernity and a force for national cohesion, the Hungarian gentry—of which Meltzl was a member—could have offered a more progressive cultural legacy to the stagnant Empire, while simultaneously preserving the imperative of a Hungarian national movement.

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30. For more information on the Habsburg context leading to 1848 and the Metternich system, see Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2016), 51–102.

31. For example, even Meltzl's future colleague, Brassai, became one of the editors of a nationalist newspaper from Kolozsvár/Klausenburg/Cluj, *Vasárnapi Ujság,* which will shortly disappear in the wake of 1848, but will give the name to another irredentist Hungarian publication from 1852 until 1921.

32. Levente T. Szabó, "Cultural Brokers, Forms of Hybridity and the Emergence of the First International Comparative Literary Journal," *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities* 22, no. 2 (2017): 70.

33. Szabó, "Cultural Brokers," 70.

34. Mladen Medved, "Transition to Capitalism in Croatia, Hungary and Austria (1830s to 1867/8): A Study in Uneven and Combined Development," (PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest, 2018), 90–109.

35. Medved, "Transition to Capitalism," 159–161.

36. Horst Fassel, "Hugo Meltzl von Lomnitz (1846–1908): Der erste Ordinarius für Germanistik in Klausenburg und seine Beziehungen zu den Universitäten in Heidelberg und Leipzig," in *Peregrinatio Hungarica : Studenten aus Ungarn an deutschen und österreichischen Hochschulenvom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Márta Fata, Gyula Kurucz, and Anton Schindling (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 10.

37. László Szögi, "A külföldi egyetemjárás tömegessé válása a 19. század második felében," in *Pedagógia, oktatás, könyvtár*, ed. Helga Csóka-Jaksa, Gábor Szeberényi, and Éva Schmelczer-Pohánka (Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Egyetemi Könyvtár és Tudásközpont, 2014), 109–124.

38. Rok Stergar and Tamara Scheer, "Ethnic Boxes: The Unintended Consequences of Habsburg Bureaucratic Classification," *Nationalities Papers* 46, no. 4 (2018): 584–585.

39. The tensions between the two editors and the emerging nationalist field of *Hungarologie* in local literary studies are documented at large by Levente T. Szabó, "Negotiating the Borders of Hungarian National Literature: The Beginnings of the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* and the Rise of Hungarian Studies (Hungarologie)," *Transylvanian Review* 1 (2013): 47–61.

40. See Hugo Meltzl, "Német, franczia vagy angol?," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 3 (1877): 66–67.

This historical context morphed the former student's itinerary. I believe that the pragmatic resolution of this ideological contradiction—being both against and in favor of cultural uniformization—through decaglottism can be explained by tracing Meltzl's previous mobilities. As Horst Fassel has demonstrated, the export of Hungarian literature played a significant role in Meltzl's *peregrinatio academica.* During his years in Leipzig and Heidelberg, the young student began translating and popularizing the works of Sándor Petőfi and József Eötvös.[41] The latter's son, Loránd Eötvös, was Meltzl's colleague at Heidelberg, and their relationship might have helped shape the young comparatist's scientific approach towards philology. Therefore, the Saxon student had always been immersed in this diplomatic mission of promoting the Hungarian heritage abroad. However, the motivation behind this was not nationalist *per se*, as Petőfi is "cited as the author who has most decisively achieved [a] breakthrough to classicism,"[42] a feat only the advanced German culture had accomplished. The critical history of national German literature Meltzl offered in his introductory course is also built on similar Germanist arguments.[43] In other words, Meltzl used the centralizing nation's tools to universalize minor cultures—and their dominant social classes—from the periphery.

Consequently, the journal gradually shifts from its earlier radical transnational *praxis* as Meltzl begins to focus exclusively on "ten modern literatures with truly world-literary characteristics in Europe"[44] (*i.e.*, German, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Icelandic, and Hungarian; Russian is excluded[45]) as transactional bridges to smaller and subaltern cultures. This universalist-*cum*-nationalist perspective rests on two main ideas: the Goethean legacy of *Weltliteratur* and literary evolutionism. The first posits a teleological development of literary history, which would ultimately lead to the so-called *Zukunftswissenschaft,* the object of which is *Weltliteratur*. The Goethean legacy of this idea comes from Meltzl's Leipzig experience. His understanding of universalism is associated with the young scholar's professor from his former university years, philologist and translator Johannes Minckwitz (1812-1885), who would also become an active collaborator to the journal. The pillar of Meltzl's program implies a sort of an empiricist approach to literary studies. The examination of literary origins—which are not seen as territorially fixed, but geographically and ethnically dispersed—seems to pave the way for a more complex and material understanding of the previous worldling hypothesis coming from Minckwitz. In turn, it is likely that Meltzl's interest in the question of origins started to grow under the influence of his Heidelberg professor Adolf Holtzmann (1810-1870).

In one article, Minckwitz invokes Goethe as a foundational figure in the development of his universal "interior rhythm" theory.[46] He insists that "the acquisition of world literature is only possible through the art of translation" and that "the Germans seem indeed to be called upon, more than any other people, to one day set the example of a world literature."[47] Minckwitz's translation-centred and philo-Germanic approach to *Weltliteratur* was implicitly transferred to Meltzl's program. However, Minckwitz's ambitious attempt to conceive a global theory of translation starting from German linguistic ubiquity and from the formal question of an essential rhythm inherent to poetry and prose[48] is aligned with Meltzl's quasi-universalist views. If literary specificity is to be found in all languages, then the medium becomes secondary to form and, ultimately, to essence. This universalist approach to literary studies is to be shown in other contributions of *Acta Comparationis*' editor. His reverence for Minckwitz is to be shown in his outright criticism of Swiss literary historian Heinrich Kurz. Kurz's dismissal of the Leipzig's professor's philological theories is countered by the comparatist's insistence that the excentricities of Minckwitz are similar to those of Schopenhauer and Wagner.[49] After Minckwitz's death in 1885, Meltzl publishes a homage piece referring

41. Horst Fassel, "Hugo Meltzl von Lomnitz (1846–1908): Der erste Ordinarius für Germanistik in Klausenburg und seine Beziehungen zu den Universitäten in Heidelberg und Leipzig," in *Peregrinatio Hungarica: Studenten aus Ungarn an deutschen und österreichischen Hochschulen vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Márta Fata, Gyula Kurucz, and Anton Schindling (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 453.

42. Nicholls, "Aesthetics," 323.

43. Hugo Meltzl, "A kritikai irodalomtörténet fogalmáról. Egyszersmind bevezetésül a német irodalom új korának történetéhez," reading at the University of Cluj-Napoca, October 1873 (Bécs: Faesy és Frick cs. k. udvari könyvtárosok kiadása, 1875), 16.

44. "[Z]ehn moderne Litteraturen mit wahrhaft weltlitterarischen Erscheinungen in Europa." Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben", 494.

45. Nicholls, "Aesthetics," 314.

46. Johannes Minckwitz, "Der Begriff der Metrik für alle Sprachen," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarul*, 46 (1879), p. 1005-1009.

47. "[D]ie Gewinnung einer Weltlitteratur ist einzig und allein möglich durch die Uebersetzungskunst [...] die Deutschen scheinen in der Tat vor allen anderen Völkern berufen, dereinst das Beispiel einer Weltlitteratur aufzustellen." Johannes Minckwitz, "Beitrage zur Sprachvergleichung. Prosa, Poesie, Rhythmus und Uebersetzungskunst (III)," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 36 (1878): 854.

48. Johannes Minckwitz, "Die ästhetische Kritik in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der Metrik. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Textkritik des Horaz," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 77-78 (1880): 1513–1520.

49. Hugo Meltzl, "Schicksale der Minckwitz'schen ästh.-prosod. Reformen in der Schweiz," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 29 (1878): 579.

to his mentor as someone "who (according to the Basel professor Nietzsche's sharp expression) is not able to think and judge in a herd-like manner."[50] It is worth noting that Minckwitz's polemical attacks were often directed at the German *intelligentsia* of his age and, amongst others, the philologist and critic Karl Lachmann (1793-1851).[51] As Fassel shows, the opposition to Lachmann and the Berlin school of philology mostly influenced Meltzl in his Heidelberg years.[52]

On Heidelberg's side of the story, Holtzmann's primary addition to the scientific battles of his time was his rejection of Lachmann's hypothesis about the origin of *Niebelungenlied*. While Lachmann insisted on the primacy of a unique creator in the epic poem's original construction, Holtzmann proposed a theory of *Niebelungenlied*'s transnationality, given its multiple sources that can be found scattered across European and Asian folk cultures.[53] Although Holtzmann was not part of *Acta*'s authorial board, he is frequently mentioned in the journal's pages. Minckwitz engages with Holtzmann's controversial theory when referring to the diachronic alterations through transcription and translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[54] In his 1880 homage, Meltzl describes Holtzman as, "next to J. Grimm, undoubtedly the greatest Germanist."[55] It is even possible that Meltzl held Holtzmann in higher esteem than Jakob Grimm. In 1885, he published an article tendentiously titled "J. Grimm is not the founder of fairy tale research," in which he argued that Grimm—despite being the nationalist cornerstone that Leerssen investigated—was not a competent scientist, having adulterated original German folkloric material into commodified fairy tales.[56] Meltzl would oppose Grimm's nationalism to Goethe's internationalism, demonstrating once again his fidelity to the Leipzig model of *Weltliteratur.* However, many of Meltzl's interests in non-canonical literatures originated in Heidelberg, from his teaching on the Nordic saga in Kolozsvár/Klausenburg/Cluj to his participative approach in studying European folklore with exogenous ("exotic") origins, which would greatly influence other folklorists and contributors of *Acta*, such as his former student and expert in Romani studies, Heinrich Adalbert von Wlislocki. This trajectory eventually led Meltzl to accept Lajos Podhorszky's false hypothesis regarding the existence of a Bulgarian Stone Age epic poem.[57]

In conclusion, Meltzl's intellectual trajectory and editorial endeavors in *Acta Comparationis* reflect a complex negotiation between nationalism and internationalism, shaped by his Transylvanian Saxon heritage, his academic *peregrinatio*, and the broader socio-political transformations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His engagement with the Goethean ideal of *Weltliteratur*, coupled with his commitment to literary evolutionism and translation, reveals a dualistic approach: one that sought to universalize literature while remaining deeply rooted in the cultural and intellectual traditions of Central Europe. Meltzl's work, influenced by figures like Minckwitz and Holtzmann, embodies a persistent tension between the universalist aspirations of his journal and the nationalist undercurrents of his historical moment.

b) Dora d'Istria: Deprovincializing the Oriental Periphery

Dora d'Istria's aristocratic origins are fundamental to understanding both her theoretical and political stances. Her politically oriented intellectual career is determined by her upbringing. Unlike Meltzl's family, which belonged to the regional administrative class, Dora d'Istria's lineage was part of the ruling elite of Wallachian society.[58] Her uncle was the ruler of the Southern Romanian Principality, while her father worked, even if only *de facto*, as the state's unofficial prime minister.[59] She also had multiethnic—Greek and Albanian—origins, which ultimately drew her closer to the activity of Balkan nationalist movements.

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50. "[D]er (nach des Baseler prof. Nietzsche schneidigem aus druck) nicht «heerdenmässig» zu denken und nachzuurteilen vermag." Hugo Meltzl, "Johannes Minckwitz," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, 173-174 (1886): 2997.

51. Direct criticisms of Lachmann can be found in Minckwitz, "Der Begriff," 1005–1009.

52. Fassel, "Hugo Meltzl," 452.

53. See Mary Thorp, "The Unity of the Nibelungenlied," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 4 (1937): 475–480.

54. Minckwitz, "Beitrage zur Sprachvergleichung. Prosa, Poesie, Rhythmus und Uebersetzungskunst (II)," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 34 (1878): 79–85.

55. "[N]eben J. Grimm zweifelsohne der grösste germanist." Meltzl, "Adolf Holtzmann," 1393.

56. Hugo Meltzl, "J. Grimm ist nicht Begründer der Märchenforschung (Notgedrungene Mahnung)," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 169-170 (1885): 2951–2959.

57. Hugo Meltzl, "Podhorszky: Ein Volksepos der Steinzeit. Erhalten in dem bulgarischen Epos von des Sonnengottes Ehe mit der Wylkana. Anmerkung der Herausgeber," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 44 (1879): 971-974.

58. The Romanian Principalities were under the strain of two conflicting Empires. Throughout the early part of the nineteenth century, the Phanariot regime was weakening, and Russia sought to assert more control in the region. Before Dora d'Istria's birth in 1828, both Wallachia and Moldova experienced revolts against the conservative elites, the most notable being the 1821 revolt led by Tudor Vladimirescu. Nonetheless, actual Western-inspired reforms were introduced by means of external, imperialist "aid." A major development was the adoption of the Organic Regulations (1831-1832) imposed by the Russian authorities in both Moldova and Wallachia, establishing a more structured bureaucracy and setting the stage for the abolition of feudal privileges.

59. Antonio d'Alessandri, *Gândirea și opera Dorei d'Istria: Între Orientul European și Italia* (Bucharest: Pavesiana, 2011), 61.

Dora d'Istria's so-called "exile" took place in 1842, when her father—Mihail Ghica, the brother of the Wallachian Prince Alexandru Dimitrie Ghica—was removed from the Government and fled the Principality to escape rising tensions between the *boyars* and the Prince.[60] Six years later, the local liberal boyars revolted, advocating for the unification and independence of the Romanian Principalities. By then, Dora d'Istria's travels to Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, and Venice during her youth had already played a significant role in her intellectual development. Equally important were her encounters with personalities such as Ion Heliade Rădulescu, P. P. Pappadopoulos, and even Alexander von Humboldt,[61] who broadened her political and historical outlook and led her to become increasingly sympathetic to Herderian ideas. Her return to Wallachia in late 1848 came right after the suppression of the nationalist movement with the help of Russian troops in September. In 1849, she married Prince Aleksandr Kolțov-Masalski, at the time an officer from the Russian army in the Danubian Principalities, with whom she moved to the Tsarist Empire in the same year. Due to her passionate advocacy for the Eastern nations' right of self-determination, her relationship with Tsarist authorities became strained. She relocated to Switzerland in 1855, where she published her first book under the penname of Dora d'Istria, *La vie monastique dans l'Église orientale*.[62] While there, she had also befriended Edgar Quinet,[63] Herder's first translator into French, and started a dialogue with Lorenzo Valerio and Giorgio Asproni[64] (although she would ultimately disagree with Asproni's republican ideas and more broadly with Giuseppe Mazzini's influence inside the Italian *Risorgimento*). Later, Dora d'Istria moved to Italy in 1861, living in Naples, Turin, and Genoa, before settling in Florence in 1871.

Her negative feelings towards republicanism and socialism are reflected in her stance towards the Unification of the Romanian Principalities in 1859 under Alexandru Ioan Cuza, who enacted significant reforms, including land redistribution, secularization of church property, and the establishment of a national education system. She would harshly criticize this transitional regime and especially the agrarian reform of 1864. Her monarchist views were coherent with her class position. Unlike the Marxist critique of the agrarian law formulated by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea in his 1910 *Neoiobăgia*,[65] Dora d'Istria opposed Cuza's reforms because she believed his "communist" measures violated the ancestral property rights of the upper class (to which she belonged as a landowner) and undermined the goals of unionism.[66] After Cuza was expelled by the local aristocracy and the Prussian-born King Carol I ascended the throne in 1866, she lost interest in Romanian nationalist causes, as her travels to other Southern and Eastern states became more frequent.

Two new emancipation battles came to the forefront of her political commitments in the Balkans: the irredentist cause of the Greeks against the Ottoman Empire and the cultural consolidation of the stateless Albanian people. In the case of Greece, an already-existing state from 1830 onwards, it is important to note that her Hellenocentrism was motivated not only on historicist reasons (the Greeks are seen as the heirs of a prestigious European ancient civilization), but also on strategic considerations. The geopolitical role of a strong Greek state, in her view, was to form a Balkan belt against the Islamic world.[67] By aligning herself with a Westernizing perspective on Greek culture, Dora d'Istria positioned herself within a longstanding tradition that perpetuated an essentialist, Western-centric interpretation of the origins of European civilization. However, as Josephine Quinn has recently demonstrated, the notion of the inherent "whiteness" of ancient civilizations is largely a retroactive construct.[68] Although Dora d'Istria does not explicitly address the issue of race, her emphasis on degrees of civilization as shaped by identity

60. d'Alessandri, *Gândirea și opera*, 68–70.

61. d'Alessandri, *Gândirea și opera*, 62–69.

62. Dora d'Istria, *La vie monastique dans l'Église orientale* (Paris: Cherbuliez, 1855).

63. d'Alessandri, *Gândirea și opera*, 117–128.

64. d'Alessandri, *Gândirea și opera*, 155–194.

65. Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, *Neoiobăgia: Studiu economico-sociologic al problemei noastre agrare* (București: Editura Librăriei SOCEC, 1910).

66. In a letter to Tullo Massarani, Dora d'Istria describes Cuza as "the man who wanted to be Romania's Napoleon III. A former *aide-de-camp* to the Prince of Moldavia, Grégoire-Alexandre Ghika, Alexandre-Jean I was destined, like the *domni* elected by the Romanians, to quickly lose his popularity. Seeing his downfall approaching, he staged a coup d'état like the French Caesar and promulgated the famous "rural law" to win over the peasants." In original: "[C]elui qui voulait étre le Napoléon III de la Roumanie. Ancien aide-de-camp du prince de Moldavie, Grégoire-Alexandre Ghika, Alexandre-Jean I était destiné comme les *domni* élus par les Roumains à perdre promptement sa popularité. Voyant sa chute prochaine, il fit comme le César français son coup d'état, puis il promulgua la fameuse «loi rurale» pour s'attacher les paysans." Raffaello Barbiera, *Una nobile vita: carteggio inedito di Tullo Massarani, scelto, ordinato e postillato da R. BARBIERA* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1909), 215.

67. "Soldiers of Christianity, let them not expose themselves to hearing the Muslims repeat that the kingdom of Jesus is the kingdom of discord, and that Christians hate each other even more than they hate the enemies of the cross!" In original: "Soldats du christianisme, qu'ils ne s'exposent pas à entendre les Musulmans répéter que le royaume de Jésus est le royaume de la discorde, et que les chrétiens se haïssent encore plus qu'ils ne détestent les ennemis de la croix!" Dora D'Istria, *Excursions en Roumélie et en Morée*, vol. I (Paris: Cherbuliez, 1863), 238.

68. Josephine Quinn, *How the World Made the West: A 4,000-Year History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024).

markers—such as religion—appears to reinforce the enduring association of whiteness with the European civilizational project.

As a result, Dora d'Istria advocated for "a confederation between the nations of the East,"[69] which would further facilitate their Europeanization. Still, the appointment of Prince Otto of Bavaria as the first King of Greece in 1833 revealed a similar trap with the one the Romanian state fell into in 1866. The need for a local, Orthodox monarch was, in her view, essential to the Oriental European nationalist cause. Subsequently, her support for the Albanian people makes the problem more difficult to frame inside a Manichean logic. A new ethnical origin narrative is brought into play: the Pelasgians as the precursors of the Albanian people. This argument comes from Louis Benloew's 1877 study, titled *La Grèce avant les Grecs: étude linguistique & ethnographique. Pélasges, Lélèges, Sémites & Ioniens.* (Dora d'Istria's first contribution in the Transylvanian journal was an extended review of this book.[70]) However, the dilemma of Dora d'Istria's position stems from the religious problem: the Albanian people comprised both Christians and Muslims who shared the same cultural heritage. This ecumenism of Dora d'Istria's thought could be a sign of what I call the attempt to "deprovincialize" the periphery. Given the religious and ethnic diversity of Eastern Europe, Dora d'Istria's primary aim has always been to advocate for a modernized federation of autonomous nation-states. These states would be territorially defined by the geographical boundaries of their historical and civilizational origins, while also aligning with the Enlightenment ideals that fueled the democratic uprisings of 1848.

Thus, Dora d'Istria's criticism of imperialism was never directed against Westernizing tendencies. On the contrary, the Western model was always an integral part of the emancipation process she envisioned. For instance, while she went to great lengths to advocate for Eastern women's rights in the nineteenth century, she remained openly polemical toward progressive politics from the Western world.[71] On the one hand, she insisted on sovereignty as a *sine qua non* condition of national liberation. On the other, synchronization, institutional and ideological modernization, and technological and economic development were always central to Dora d'Istria's thought. This civilizational bias is evident in her correspondence with Hugo Meltzl and in her contributions to *Acta.*

Nicolae Iorga would go on to publish most of Dora d'Istria's personal letters at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her first letter to *Acta,* written in 1877, starts by addressing both journal's editors,[72] but the latter material will be exclusively dedicated to Hugo Meltzl, attesting to the crystallization of a productive intellectual friendship. One of the main subjects of their correspondence seems to have been exactly this interest that Dora d'Istria manifested in Asian folkloric poetry, especially in that of the Turks and—as the next letter will show us—of the Finno-Ugric peoples. After reading Petőfi's poems (likely on Meltzl's recommendation, as she is talking about a translation done by the Saxon editor), the author of the *La vie monastique* affirms: "the chivalrous spirit of those Magyar heroes whose exploits are still remembered is often found in the valiant sons of the *Turanian race* who civilized the Far East [my emphasis],"[73] only to later conclude that such a civilization "offers us more than one example of this devotion of the feudal chief which was believed for so long to belong exclusively to the Germanic race."[74]

Setting aside the regrettable Orientalist undertones (which were all too common throughout the nineteenth century), the Turanian race theory—invoked here in relation to both the Turks and the Magyars and positioned as an imagological counterpart to German civilization—is particularly noteworthy. Even if his name is not mentioned here, the terminology is probably referring to comparative philologist and Orientalist Max Müller's usage of the term.[75] Müller is also the father of the Aryan race theory, insisting on the common ancestry of European and Indian civilizations.[76] Though the Turanian race theory never gained the same popularity, its later associations with Turkish nationalism—particularly in the context of Atatürk's reforms—are significant, especially given the philological

69. d'Alessandri, *Gândirea și opera,* 228.

70. Dora d'Istria, "La Grèce avant les Grecs. Elude linguistique et ethnographique par Louis Benloew, Doyen de la Faculté des Lettre» de Dijon (Paria, Maisonneuve—25, quai Voltaire)," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 15 (1877): 297–307.

71. d'Alessandri, *Gândirea și opera,* 336.

72. Nicolae Iorga, "Lettres de Dora d'Istria," *Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen* 4-6 (1932): 136.

73. "[L]'esprit chevaleresque de ces heros magyars dont les exploits sont dans toutes les memoires se retrouve bien souvent chez ces vaillants fils de la *race touranienne* qui ont civilise l'Extreme Orient." Iorga, "Lettres," 137.

74. "[…] nous offre plus d'un exemple de ce devouement du chef feodal qu'on a cru si longtemps appartenir exclusivement a la race germanique." Iorga, "Lettres," 137.

75. Max Müller, *The languages of the seat of war in the East. With a survey of the three families of language, Semitic, Arian and Turanian* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1855).

76. Unfortunately, and against Müller's volition, this theory will lead to the development of Nationalist Socialist Aryanism after the First World War

critiques that figures like Spitzer and Auerbach would later formulate in exile.[77] It is interesting that she is referring to the Turanian ancestry with such reverence in this letter, given the fact that her sympathy for the nationalist cause of the Balkan peoples means opposing and fiercely criticizing the Ottoman Empire.

Dora d'Istria's philological and ethnographic project, also present within *Acta*'s contributions, is centered on the folkloric productions of non-European (Turanians[78] and Khazars[79]) or European cultures, such as the Greek and Albanian[80] or even the Romanians. The latter are the subject of two studies in the 1884 *Acta Comparationis* issues,[81] in which the author describes the *hora* as the expression of the "melancholic genius of a martyred people"[82] and draws a transhistorical parallel between the wedding traditions of the Romanians and the myth of the abduction of the Sabines, "without them knowing it."[83] However, as the panoramic image of Dora d'Istria's project shows, the endeavor to identify the transnational and disparate roots of local cultures is politically inflected. Her letters to Meltzl attest to the pivotal role Hungary occupies in this seemingly cosmopolitan imagination: "Situated between the East and the West, Hungary has a position which is in no way unfavourable for the exchange of ideas between the two parts of our continent, between *the Aryan race and the Turanian race.*"[84] The Hungarian people have a civilizational advantage that the Ottoman Turanians do not: they lead a Christian, democratic, albeit nationalist monarchy; therefore, they are Western. Their roots are on the same pedestal as the Germans and the Latins. Once again, *Acta* serves as the platform where such a polycentric yet hegemonic vision of civilizational and literary development is articulated. Here, it is deeply intertwined with Dora d'Istria's class origins—which made her reluctant to radical internationalism and republicanism—and travels, which endowed her with a sense of an alternative version of Western Europe in the ethnically and culturally richer Balkan world.

Concluding Remarks: Notes on Vienna's 1873 World Fair

The exploration of mobility and multilingualism in the formative years of comparative literature, as exemplified by Hugo Meltzl and Dora d'Istria, offers critical insights for reimagining the discipline of world literature today. Their trajectories—shaped by academic peregrinations, intellectual exile, and inter-imperial navigation—reveal how transnational movements catalyzed comparative methods, while simultaneously embedding ideological contradictions. Though rooted in an ambition to protect small national literatures, their projects were paradoxically underpinned by the ideal of higher civilizational stages as reflected in the history of literary forms, illustrating the fraught interplay between cultural preservation and hegemonic systems.

An anecdote might help illuminate the above-mentioned contradiction between the equalitarian postulates and the hegemonic realities of the post-imperial context. On May 1, 1873—one year after Meltzl returned to Transylvania and four years before *Acta Comparationis* was launched—Franz Joseph opened a massive world fair in Vienna. Five times the size of the 1867 Paris Exposition, it featured cultural displays from twenty-five countries, European and beyond, arranged geographically: Austrian and Hungarian exhibits were centrally-positioned, while others were placed around them, symbolizing the Empire's supposed role as a bridge between East and West. Archduke Carl Ludwig claimed the fair would "ensure the recognition of our fatherland's contribution to humanity through work and instruction."[85] Yet, as Pieter Judson convincingly demonstrates, the fair's design also showcased an implicit hierarchy: while all cultures were nominally represented, Austrian, Hungarian, and other major European cultures were elevated as exemplary. "Literatureless" groups within the Empire, such as the Romanians and Galicians, were portrayed with an emphasis on their "primitivism." A telling example would be that of Karl J. Schröer's official report of the Fair,[86] in which he insisted on the architectural backwardness of the small nations'

77. Günay Göksu Özdoğan, "The Case of Racism-Turanism: Turkism during Single-Party Period, 1931–1944: A Radical Variant of Turkish Nationalism" (PhD diss., Istanbul: Boğaziçi University, 1990).

78. Dora d'Istria, "Une remarque sur les touraniens (Extrait d'une lettre)," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarul* 24 (1878): 492–493.

79. Dora d'Istria, "La poesie des persans sous les Khadjars," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 33 (1878): 55–68.

80. Dora d'Istria, "La vie klephtique dans l'empire persan," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarul* 53 (1879): 1115–1121.

81. Dora d'Istria, "Danses at chansons nationales des roumaines (I)," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarul*, no. 145-148 (1984): 2565-2583; and "Danses at chansons nationales des roumaines (II)," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarul*, no. 149-150 (1984): 2615–2616; 2619–2620.

82. "[G]énie mélancolique d'un peuple martyre." Dora d'Istria, "Danses (I)," 68.

83. "[S]ans qu'ils s'en doutent." Dora d'Istria, "Danses (II)," 122.

84. "Placée entre l'Orient et l'Occident, la Hongrie a une position qui n'est nullement defavorable pour l'echange des idees entre les deux parties de notre continent, entre la race aryenne et la race touranienne." Iorga, "Lettres," 138.

85. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 317.

86. Karl J. Schröer, *Officieller Ausstellungs-Bericht. Das Bauernhaus mit seiner Einrichtung und seinem Geräthe* (Vienna: k. k. Hofund Staatsdruckerei, 1874).

material heritage. This led to furious criticism in Romanian and Galician newspapers.[87] The Fair's dynamics parallel the program of *Acta Comparationis*. This paradox—displaying diversity while reinforcing dominance—exposes an underlying ideology embedded in imperialism behind upper-class mobilities in the nineteenth century, where such movements are framed by and support rather than challenge imperial structures.

Meltzl's travels—from Transylvania to Heidelberg, Leipzig, Vienna, and back—played a pivotal role in shaping his vision for comparative literature and the founding of *Acta*. These academic journeys exposed him to diverse intellectual traditions: from Johannes Minckwitz's translation theory in Leipzig to Adolf Holtzmann's transnational approach to canonical texts in Heidelberg, all of which deeply influenced his thinking. Meltzl's experiences abroad informed his commitment to polyglottism and his later pragmatic shift to decaglottism, reflecting the complexities of balancing universalist ideals with local cultural preservation. Similarly, Dora d'Istria's travels—from Wallachia to Russia, Switzerland, Italy, and beyond—were crucial in shaping her vision of a modernized Oriental Europe. Her exposure to diverse political and intellectual landscapes allowed her to advocate for Balkan self-determination, critiquing Western imperialism, while also adapting Eurocentric lenses to local contexts. These experiences informed her contributions to *Acta*, where she sought to propose alternative civilizational models in the study of folklore. Both cases illustrate that *Acta* functioned as a cultural intermediary—much like the Vienna World Fair, which navigated the Empire's clashing ethnicities—by offering a moderate space to mediate historical tensions. It sought to balance the preservation of emerging national identities while simultaneously acknowledging and accommodating the homogenizing influence exerted by larger, dominant cultures.

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87. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 320.

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