

A MAN OF MANY EMPIRES: THE EUROPEAN IMPERIAL INTERACTIONS OF ARMINIUS VAMBÉRY ON HIS RETURN FROM CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract: The Hungarian-born scholar and explorer, Arminius Vambéry (c.1832-1913) was well-known in nineteenth-century Europe for his pioneering travels to Central Asia in the early 1860s, where he disguised himself as a dervish in order to visit places which were generally considered dangerous and off-limits to Europeans. These remarkable exploits subsequently brought him celebrity, fame, and influence, as well as key connections that permitted him to succeed in society despite his impoverished social and economic background. Using Vambéry's two autobiographies from 1883 and 1904, this study examines how Vambéry was initially received by the upper echelons of society on his return from his Central Asian travels by briefly presenting his self-reflections on his experiences in Great Britain, France, and Austria. By contrasting his own perceptions of these encounters with three different imperial spaces, it aims to outline how Vambéry depicts his reception by European society, as well as how his initial interactions with European royalty are presented on the pages of his memoirs.

Keywords: Arminius Vambéry, Austria, autobiographies, Central Asia, empire, France, Great Britain, memoirs, nineteenth century, royalty

1. Introduction

As is well-known, the nineteenth century was an era of immense sociopolitical change which brought about many of the societal and commercial factors still recognisable in our modern world. With advances in technology, transport, and communication fomenting the rise of industrialisation and wider developments in culture, society, and the arts (see Figs *The Europeans*), maximalist ideological and geopolitical aims saw European colonialist expansion reach its apex, directly impacting vast swathes of the planet. Accordingly, these circumstances created many opportunities for Europeans to leave their

native continent to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Of their number, several left literary traces behind in the form of travelogues, memoirs, and autobiographies (see Gruber; also Schär and Toivanen).

Though it has been advanced that the present vogue for memoirs is largely the product of the current century (see Rak), other forms of life writing - such as autobiographies and travel literature - have long held considerable popular appeal among the reading public (see Karlsdottir Stubsteid 89). The objectives of the authors in writing such works may of course have varied over time, particularly in the nineteenth-century context when “acquiring knowledge and disseminating information became an important ingredient of nationalism” (Gooptu 397). Noting the comparative ease of travel by railway and steamship, these growing opportunities for mobility meant that travel-oriented volumes evolved from being merely descriptive chronicles towards “more personal and subjective forms of expression which captured the feelings, thoughts, and introspection” of their respective authors (Davey 283-284). Yet, notwithstanding their status as important cultural artifacts, the place of memoirs in scholarly research remains a point of discussion. Indeed, as Jūra Avižienis outlines, “since [memoirs] are framed neither as history nor literature”, these works instead “flounder in a no-man's land” (Avižienis 42). This is despite the fact that the insights contained in literary memoirs and similar such works can often be utilised as a fundamental resource for specialists, be they for biographical or informational purposes in a specific social or cultural context (see Kuromiya 293) or more widely (see Wallach). Thus, in providing alternative or supplementary perspectives to the historical and sociocultural record (see Jackson 472-473), the tradition of such narratives from the colonial era (Hoorweg 269) can be viewed as particularly relevant and important to current research and scholarship.

Among the numbers of those nineteenth-century Europeans who sought adventures elsewhere can be found the subject of the present study: the scholar, explorer, and polyglot Arminius Vambéry, born in Habsburg Hungary in either 1831 or 1832 and who passed away in 1913, the year before the outbreak of World War One. A well-known European figure during his lifetime, Vambéry's reputation was initially built on the published accounts of his extensive travels in Central Asia in the mid-1860s. Born in modest circumstances to a humble Jewish family in provincial Habsburg Hungary, Vambéry's father died when the future explorer was just an infant. Though he was to suffer from lifelong lameness, Vambéry attended grammar school, but lacked the funds to pursue higher education at university. After working as a live-in private tutor for wealthy families, his philological interests meant that after his

late teenage years he decided to seek his fortune eastwards. As a keen linguist, he headed to Ottoman Istanbul, where for several years he taught and learnt different languages and perfected his skills in Turkish, gaining entry to elite diplomatic circles and to the inner world of the Sublime Porte (see MTAK “Ármin Vámbéry's Life”).¹

Subsequently, after a brief return to his native land, the young Hungarian then embarked on travels even further east, experiencing life in the Persian Empire before moving on – in disguise as a dervish – to what was then known as Turkestan, an area which was immensely strategic in the then-ongoing cat-and-mouse struggle between the British and Russian empires as they vied for regional influence and power. There, according to his books, Vambéry's escapades extended to meeting with the rulers of some of these Central Asian domains, such as the Emir of Khiva, as well as experiencing some hair-raising adventures and narrow escapes on his journeys (see MTAK “Vámbéry's Second Eastern Journey”). On returning to Europe, Vambéry's scholarly research and literary accounts of his intrepid travels in this then little-known region (to Europeans) brought him fame and fortune. He was celebrated by society, and - as will be presented here – received audiences with emperors. He was awarded a university professorship and was invited to be a member of several learned societies. Combined with his remarkable facility in dozens of languages, Vambéry's abilities, personality, and character assisted him in transcending his outsider status that his religious and modest social origins signified at that time, thereby ensuring him remarkable academic and professional success in middle age and later life.

The present study builds on the author's earlier article which sought to examine Vambéry's polyglot self-reflections on his language skills during his early residence in Istanbul in the late 1850s and early 1860s (Hoyte-West “Speaking Turkish like an Effendi”). Building on that analysis, this study aims to ascertain Vambéry's interactions with various European empires on his return from Central Asia, as depicted on the pages of his two memoirs, which were written in English and published in London in 1883 and 1904 respectively – as an aside, Vambéry's own versions of these works (with amendments) appeared subsequently in other languages. Utilising these source materials, the aim of this contribution is to observe how his first interactions with European royalty and high society are portrayed and discussed following his return from Central Asia. Accordingly, in providing a brief portrait of

¹ The spelling used by MTAK (“Vámbéry”) reflects updates to Hungarian orthography since the nineteenth century.

this self-made man via a reflective close reading (see Ohrvik) of the selected texts, it offers an exploratory case study of Vambéry's personal and professional reception within three different European imperial spaces.

2. Approach and geopolitical context

After several decades of relative obscurity, Vambéry has once again received critical and popular attention both in his land of his birth as well as further afield. As also summarised in the author's previous study (Hoyte-West "Speaking Turkish like an Effendi" 8-9), the hundredth anniversary of Vambéry's death spurred renewed interest in the scholar and his legacy, including an English-language website curated by the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (see MTAK "Ármin Vambéry And His Legacy"). To mention English-language scholarly works, two important books have appeared in the past decade: David Mandler's academic biographical and analytical study from 2016 (*Arminius Vambéry and the British Empire: Between East and West*) and a recent comprehensive biography by Anabel Loyd in 2024 (*The Dervish Bowl: The Many Lives of Arminius Vambéry*). These volumes are supplemented by other English-language articles and studies which deal with different aspects of Vambéry's life and writings (for example, see Gholi and Mosaabad; Hamilton; Landau; Sárközy, etc.).

To turn to the present article, Vambéry's distinction as a polyglot was the initial impetus for the author's recent study on the self-evaluation of his language skills during the early adult years he spent in Ottoman Istanbul. Building on this analysis, which analysed the Hungarian scholar's autobiographies to outline how the ambitious young man was able to use his linguistic talents for self-advancement to reach the upper echelons of imperial Ottoman society, it was decided to examine how Vambéry reflected on how he was perceived by European society following his return from Central Asia in the mid-1860s and the subsequent publication of his book. As with the earlier analysis, this involves the literary and textual analysis of Arminius Vambéry's two memoirs, which – as mentioned previously – were both originally written in English: the 1883 publication *Arminius Vambéry, His Life and Adventures Written by Himself* (the 1884 edition will be used) and the second volume of the subsequent two-volume work *The Story of My Struggles: The Memoirs of Arminius Vambéry* (1904). Therefore, using a similar case study-based approach to the author's previous analysis (Hoyte-West "Speaking Turkish like an Effendi" 9), the present study will examine two interlinked questions – namely, how Vambéry portrays his reception by European society in his memoirs; and how he portrays

and discusses his interactions with European royalty and various other imperial officials. Though the Russian and Ottoman empires also feature indirectly by virtue of the subject matter and Vambéry's expertise in Central Asia, the excerpts presented and discussed in this article deal directly with three major imperial powers – Great Britain, France, and Austria.

At this juncture, it is important to note that the mid-1860s were a time of immense colonial activities on the part of many major European powers, and both Great Britain and France had – for some time – established large overseas empires. The Victorian era (1837-1901) saw the seemingly inexorable rise of British colonialism, which grew to encompass possessions on almost every continent, controlling vast swathes of territory and resources around the world. The main jewel in the crown was India, whose fundamental importance was demonstrated by the additional title of Empress of India awarded to Queen Victoria following the Royal Titles Bill of 1876 (Miles 264). The strong links between the so-called 'subcontinent' and Great Britain ran deep, with a large number of colonial administrators, civil servants, and military personnel required to administer and secure the vast colony. Yet the resources, wealth, and access of India also proved tempting to other empires, such as Russia (Cheshire 85). Under Tsar Alexander II (1855-1881), it was actively seeking to expand its territories, gaining increasing amounts of land in Central Asia through military victories against the Turkic-ruled khanates, seeking also to incorporate their inhabitants and make imperial Russian subjects of them (Gaibulina 16-19). With the Crimean War (1853/4-1856) still a recent memory (in which Great Britain, France had aided the Ottoman Empire in its fight against the Russian Empire), these advances were naturally of keen interest to the British, conscious of the changing geopolitics of the region and, ultimately, the proximity to India. Indeed, this tension between these two major powers was to be known as the 'Great Game' (Yapp 181-183), and with Central Asia remaining largely unknown to most Europeans, Vambéry's deep knowledge and first-hand accounts of the region were to prove of immense value to the British authorities not only in the immediate aftermath of his travels, but also over the course of time.

At the time of Vambéry's visit, France's imperial trajectory had indeed been complex. As outlined by Weber et al., the previous few decades had indeed been tumultuous following the Revolution of 1789 and the overthrow of Louis XVII, including the proclamation of the First Republic, the rise of Napoleon and the First Empire, the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, the Second Republic, and subsequently, the

Second Empire headed by Napoleon III (1852-1870), whom Vambéry would cross paths with during his visit. Much of France's nineteenth-century colonial ambitions had been centred on Africa and what was then known as Indochina, in addition to its possessions in the Caribbean, but its relations with the Ottoman Empire were also steadfast. Like Great Britain, it had also fought on the Ottoman side against the Russian Empire in Crimea and, as the Ottoman Empire made moves towards modernisation (including improvements in technology, communication, and transport – see Jarosz 89-93), France was instrumental in contributing to its economic and cultural development (Raccagni 340-341). Thus, though not directly involved in the Central Asian situation to the same extent as Great Britain, nonetheless the French Empire played an important political and socioeconomic role in the Ottoman context and, by extension, in its wider sphere of influence.

Moving to Vambéry's native land, Hungary formed part of the Habsburg Empire (after 1867, Austria-Hungary), composed of a contiguous territory which sprawled across a large portion of central Europe. The vast empire contained multiple nationalities, languages, and religions, which, following the momentous upheavals of 1848,² had reached a situation of political and administrative accommodation in the late 1860s. This meant that Austria and Hungary were split into separate imperial and royal entities, the Dual Monarchy, which were both ruled by the same monarch, Franz Joseph I (1848-1916), but with numerous differences relating to how they were administered (Cohen 247). It remains a point of discussion as to whether the Austro-Hungarian empire could be considered as a colonial power in the traditional sense, although it is argued that the later occupation (1878) and annexation (1908) of the former Ottoman-ruled lands of Bosnia and Herzegovina did display colonial tendencies (see Rampley 1-2; Ruthner 6, etc.). In addition, the term has also been discussed with regard to other locations under Habsburg rule, such as the small peripheral crownland of Bukovina, situated on the easternmost margins of the Austrian-ruled lands (Hoyte-West "Habsburg Bukovina – A Colonised Entity?").

3. Vambéry's observations on European society

As mentioned previously, Vambéry's travels to Central Asia were preceded by a sojourn in Istanbul as a young man. Arriving virtually penniless, his language abilities allowed him to offer lessons in a wide

² As an aside, during his first sojourn in Istanbul, Vambéry was to meet with several Hungarian émigrés who had fled the Habsburg lands after the revolution (Loyd 26).

range of tongues, thus not only allowing him to earn a living but also access to the Ottoman and foreign diplomatic and political elite. In recounting his experiences of the year 1860 in this first autobiography, which was written almost a quarter of a century after his residence in the imperial capital, Vambéry muses on this time in his youth:

I recall now, in the midst of my European life, with undisguised pleasure, the generous hospitality I have met with, at the hands of the noblest Turks, in their own houses. The easy affability of persons of high positions in the State, the utter absence of all pride or overbearing superciliousness are virtues, indeed, which would often be looked for in vain in our civilized West. The stupid pomposity, ridiculous arrogance and pitiable ignorance of certain aristocracies present a miserable picture, when contrasted with the behaviour of the Asiatic grandees, whom it is the custom to sneer at in Europe. The Oriental is particular about nobility of blood only in the matter of his horses and sporting dogs, whereas, with us, the select are boasting of such «animal advantages». (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 27)

In coming from a modest social and economic background with no ties to the aristocracy and the elite, in this excerpt Vambéry thus seeks to contrast his experiences in the 'East' with those that then prevailed in old Europe. He is remarkably unrestrained in his choice of language – perhaps surprisingly so, given that at the time these words were written, Vambéry had of course obtained a degree of celebrity in various social circles in several countries, particularly in Great Britain. In this regard, in addition to highlighting the generosity and welcoming nature of his Ottoman hosts, the excerpt also serves to highlight the position of the Hungarian scholar in terms of his views on the then-popular (but now discredited) approaches relating to race and ethnicity in nineteenth-century academia, many of which were used to justify the ideological and expansionist agenda underpinning European colonialism. Though undoubtedly products of their time, it can be argued that Vambéry's autobiographies do not abound in the crude racial stereotypes or notions of supposed European superiority when contrasted with certain other such texts from the same period (in some travelogues and memoirs about the Caribbean, for example). An example of Vambéry's own views on the matter comes from Mandler (62-64) who notes how, in a discussion following a public lecture on the topic in 1865, the Hungarian scholar strongly and vocally objected to the content of the

lecture which had demeaned the intellectual capabilities of black Africans.

In reiterating his status as an outsider owing to his social and religious background, Vambéry's remarks on the contrast between European and Ottoman societies is also underlined elsewhere, noting in "what country of Europe an unknown stranger might succeed, solely by dint of his eagerness to learn, in obtaining access to the most distinguished circles, and gaining their goodwill and protection" (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 28). Through additionally highlighting Vambéry's own attempts to get on in life, his first autobiography also contrasts the scholar's views on the European context vis-à-vis the situation in Istanbul, where the concepts of elite connections and networking in order to advance socially and economically appear to have been radically different.

4. Vambéry in Great Britain

Great Britain was to prove to be an important country for Vambéry's personal and professional life, and his efforts and accomplishments would bring him significant renown in high society. On future visits, he was the personal guest of Queen Victoria at Sandringham in 1889 (Loyd 279-280) and also deepened his acquaintance with the then Prince of Wales, later Edward VII (1901-1910), ultimately receiving the CVO (Commander of the Royal Victorian Order) from him in 1902 as a personal gift of the sovereign (Loyd 288). According to his first memoir, however, Vambéry's first visit to the British Isles was the result of advice from Joseph Eötvös, the then vice-president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 325). Eötvös was a Hungarian nobleman, author, and scholar who had supported Vambéry in his previous travels; thus, he advised his younger compatriot to head to England as in London he would be "almost sure of a warm reception, and of a real acknowledgment of your merits" (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 325). During his various travels, Vambéry had also made the acquaintance of and received recommendations from different British diplomats and officials, a fact which was also to ease his acceptance by society there. Notwithstanding the social codes of the time, it is recorded that Vambéry had to totally change his manners and outward appearance in order to fit in with British upper-class society (Mandler 65), especially given the changes to his behaviour that would have been occasioned by his prolonged period of disguise during his Central Asian adventures.

As also noted above, Vambéry's visit to Great Britain occurred at a time (the summer of 1864) when Central Asia was extremely important

for British imperial interests, yet which remained largely unknown owing to a lack of regional knowledge and expertise. Eötvös's assurance that Vambéry would be warmly received by the British was confirmed by the pages of the memoirs, and he meets a number of political, literary, and cultural figure (Loyd 198-208). Among diplomats, Vambéry met with the former British ambassador to Teheran, Sir Henry Rawlinson, and Sir Roderick Murchison, the President of the Royal Geographical Society, was among the academic dignitaries he became acquainted with. By chance, he also introduced himself to the future Edward VII in an unexpected and informal setting, a club in London (Vambéry *The Story of My Struggles* II: 248-249), where the Hungarian initiated a conversation that would lead to a warm acquaintance of many years standing (Loyd 206). Accordingly, Vambéry underlined that he "came, therefore, very soon in contact with the leading political men of that time, such as Members of Parliament, political writers, retired civilians and military officers of India, and, consequently, got the opportunity of an interview with Lord Palmerston" (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 339).

As illustrated by the opportunity to meet with the then Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, Vambéry was able to mix with high society, firmly gaining entry to the highest echelons of political power. This is also underscored by his assertion that though he met with "all kinds and all shades of politicians; and whilst the philological and ethnographical results of my travels found an interest with only a very limited number of scholars" (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 343). As such, this reflects the political value (rather than scholarly or linguistic) that British society attached to Vambéry. As would be demonstrated, his knowledgeable expertise would later become useful for British interests. Yet, despite the celebrity status accorded to him in London on that initial visit, he noted that few concrete steps – particularly with regard to securing his financial well-being – were forthcoming:

In the first place I have to confess that in England, notwithstanding the noisy, brilliant receptions I had, and all the attention paid to me, no one ever made me any actual proposal with a view to my future benefit, and no one seemed at all disposed to turn to account my practical experiences in the service of the State or of private enterprise. (Vambéry *The Story of My Struggles* II: 241)

Thus, though his activities in Great Britain would be of seminal importance to him in later life, Vambéry's recollections of that time in

his autobiographies are unmistakably tinged with disappointment. Though he was well-received in the country, as Loyd (203) describes, Vambéry “remained a curiosity”.

5. Vambéry in France

After his sojourn in London, Vambéry proceeded across the English Channel to the French Empire, where he was also received by Parisian high society. As the following excerpt details:

After having been introduced to some of the best circles, I was told by Prince Metternich that the Emperor would like to give me an audience [...] One afternoon the Prince took me to the Tuileries, and we had just entered the gate of the Pavillon d’Horloge, when I saw Napoleon III on the staircase as he took leave of the Queen of Spain, who had called upon him. On noticing Prince Metternich, with whom the imperial family was on very good terms, the Emperor seized his arm, and beckoning in a friendly manner to me, walked to the interior apartment. (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 347)

This “Prince Metternich” appears to have been Richard von Metternich (1829-1896), the Austrian ambassador to the French Empire and son of the celebrated politician and diplomat. As such, it is apparent that Vambéry again also had access to the apex of society, especially by virtue of the emperor’s request to meet him at the Louvre Palace, immediately after the visit of the Spanish queen. Yet, Vambéry was distinctly unimpressed by Napoleon III:

I remained nearly half an hour with the Emperor. I am sorry to say he did not make upon me at all the impression of such a great man as he was then throughout the world supposed to be. (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 349)

Indeed, this opinion was only to become more scathing with the passage of time. As the following excerpt from his second autobiography demonstrates, Vambéry found the monarch physically and intellectually wanting, not only because of his “pale eyes and artificial speech” (Vambéry *The Story of My Struggles* II: 275), but also because:

the vision of this thick-set man, with his flabby features and pale, faded eyes, made a miserable impression upon me. And still more lamentable was the result of my half-hour's

interview with him. (Vambéry *The Story of My Struggles II*: 273)

Yet, among other reasons for this strong dislike, Anabel Loyd observes that the emperor wished to discuss the origins of the Turkmen people with Vambéry, displaying a perhaps-unaccustomed “level of ethnographic enquiry” (Loyd 210) from the monarch that may potentially have caused the scholar unease. In addition, the political aspect of their discussion may have also underpinned Vambéry’s antipathy towards the monarch, as well as the fact that he commented, in an indirect manner, on Vambéry’s lameness. Nonetheless, Vambéry did concede the emperor could be “affable and pleasant” (Vambéry *The Story of My Struggles II*: 275).

Even more so than in London, Vambéry’s time in Paris was also the subject of great interest from the print media of the time. Perhaps analogous to the modern-day cult of celebrity, Vambéry’s exploits and activities resonated widely with the public. Indeed, Vambéry wrote about how much he disliked

the intruding call of reporters, who interviewed me and published the next day totally false reports of my conversation with them” (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 350). Indeed, as Vambéry continues, someone had even written “a novel about my travels, in which I was represented as a champion of romantic propensities, with whom a Tartar princess fell in love, and who, having obtained in this way some throne in Asia, was now on a political errand in Europe to secure the friendship of England and France in the contest against Russia. (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 350).

Given Vambéry’s own desire for advancement, it may seem somewhat strange that – as recorded in his autobiographies – he was not so impressed with his time in France, despite the rapturous reception that he received there and his audience with Napoleon III. It may be surmised that the long periods of travel – both eastwards and then subsequently in Europe – may have tired him out; in any case, the Hungarian wished to return to his native land.

6. Vambéry in Austria

The return to the Habsburg lands brought Vambéry a different reception. Having perhaps become habituated to high society and the whirlwind receptions that accompanied his presence, the Hungarian’s

arrival in Vienna was to prove a harsh dose of reality, as Vambéry recalled four decades later:

The Lord-High-Steward, Prince A., whom I had to see before the audience, regardless of the recommendations I brought from the Austrian Ambassador in London, received me with a coldness and pride as if I had come to apply for a position as lackey, and while royal personages of the West, and later on also Napoleon, had shaken hands with me and asked me to sit down, this Austrian aristocrat kept me standing for ten minutes, spoke roughly to me, and dismissed me with the impression that a man of letters is treated with more consideration in Khiva and among the Turkomans than in the Austrian capital. (Vambéry *The Story of My Struggles* II: 262)

As the above excerpt details, Vambéry's perceived status (or lack of it) in the Austrian context was telling. Having previously met on seemingly equal terms with foreign aristocrats and royalty, Vambéry clearly felt slighted by his treatment in waiting for an audience with the emperor. Yet, things changed significantly on meeting the man himself:

It was during my first audience with the Emperor-King of Austro-Hungary that the kind-hearted monarch asked me whether I intended to remain in the country, and what he could do in my favour. (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 352)

Vambéry mentioned his wish of becoming a university professor in the city of Pest, in his native Hungary, noting that

the kindly emperor added: "Your sufferings deserve a remuneration, and I shall look into your case". Two or three months had scarcely elapsed, when I got my appointment with the modest salary of one hundred pounds a year, which sum the Hungarian Minister for Public Instruction very soon doubled; and this, together with the income derived from the small sum I got for the English, French and German editions of my book, fully sufficed to cover my expenses - nay to enable me to found a family. (Vambéry *His Life and Adventures* 352)

Indeed, this appointment proved transformational though – as outlined by Loyd (214-216; 226-231) – Vambéry's subsequent and lengthy tenure as a professor did not occur without controversy, given

his lack of formal academic qualifications, challenging personality, and his wide-ranging ambitions. Indeed, despite his fame and reputation, it appears that Vambéry did feel somewhat neglected by Austro-Hungarian society (Mandler 58), despite receiving, *inter alia*, a gold medal from Franz Joseph and becoming a Knight of the Imperial Order of Leopold in addition to numerous fame and honours from abroad. As Loyd (352-353) summarises, by the end of his life Vambéry's distinctions included imperial and royal decorations from Japan, Persia, Mexico, Great Britain, as well as multiple honorary fellowships and other meritorious garlands.

Yet, in terms of his initial interaction with Franz Joseph, it is the generous nature of the monarch that shines through in that instance. One of Europe's longest-reigning rulers, the emperor was born in 1830, around a year or so before Vambéry, and has been described as essentially someone of "integrity and decency" (Mutschlechner). Indeed, a further example of the emperor's kindness was illustrated in the case of the last illness of the celebrated Austrian composer Anton Bruckner, who during his final illness was accommodated – at Franz Joseph's behest – in a ground-floor lodge at Vienna's Belvedere Palace (Howie 147-148). Accordingly, the benefit that Vambéry gained through the Emperor's actions was fundamental to his trajectory, affording him the opportunity not only to go beyond his humble origins and gain a professional foothold in a domain that would otherwise have been challenging to enter in his native land, but also to improve his personal circumstances through marrying and subsequently becoming a father.

7. Concluding observations

The foregoing analysis has aimed to illustrate how the European imperial interactions of Arminius Vambéry on his return from Central Asia were depicted by him in his two autobiographies. As with the previous analysis of his reflections on his own language-related capabilities, Vambéry's own reflections on how he was initially perceived by European society following his return from Central Asia are eminently insightful. They detail a mixed reception by European high society, whereby he meets with aristocrats and politicians, achieving a degree of recognition and even celebrity.

In the various national contexts, this includes interest and respect from the British side, perhaps impressed by his language skills and the geopolitical knowledge gained by his remarkable feats, but with few concrete rewards. In France, too, Vambéry is an object of interest and adulation, yet in Austria he receives a somewhat colder welcome. Thus, though the British and French may have accepted him warmly (in spite

of Vambéry's low opinion of Napoleon III), financial, scholarly, and other status-related aspects were initially not forthcoming. Perhaps ironically, given Vambéry's description of how he felt he was treated when waiting for an audience with the emperor, it was Austria – via Franz Joseph's personal intervention – that was to give him the necessary fillip to begin his scholarly career.

As such, the initial reception and interaction with the three European imperial spaces presented here can be said to represent a microcosm of some of the complex social codes of the time, especially for those from other, non-dominant social, religious, or ethnic backgrounds. Accordingly, there is potential for this brief study to be expanded – for example, by analysing how Vambéry would continue to interact with these spaces over the course of the rest of life. Additionally, it would also be beneficial to contrast Vambéry's observations with memoirs and autobiographies written by other travellers and explorers from that era, with the aim of examining how those figures described their official welcome and receptions on their return from distant or dangerous places. Yet, given the multitude of challenges that Vambéry undoubtedly faced during his early years and as a young man, this study has demonstrated that those initial interactions with European imperial milieux after his Central Asian trip were key in laying the foundation for his future success in life.

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UN HOMME DE PLUSIEURS EMPIRES : LES INTERACTIONS IMPÉRIALES EUROPÉENNES D'ARMINIUS VAMBÉRY À SON RETOUR D'ASIE CENTRALE

D'origine hongroise, l'universitaire et explorateur Arminius Vambéry (c. 1832-1913) était bien connu dans l'Europe du XIXe siècle pour ses voyages en Asie centrale. Au début des années soixante du XIXe siècle, il s'est déguisé en derviche afin de visiter des régions généralement considérées comme dangereuses pour les Européens. Ces exploits lui ont ensuite apporté la célébrité et l'influence, ainsi que des relations importantes qui lui ont permis de réussir dans la haute société européenne. À partir des deux autobiographies de Vambéry (publiées en 1883 et 1904), et en présentant brièvement ses réflexions sur ses expériences en Grande-Bretagne, en France et en Autriche, cet article examine comment le jeune hongrois a été accueilli par l'haute société à son retour de ses voyages en Asie centrale. Pour contraster ses propres perceptions de ces rencontres dans trois espaces impériaux différents, l'article vise à souligner comment Vambéry a décrit sa réception par la société européenne, ainsi que la façon dont ses premières interactions avec la royauté européenne sont présentées dans ses mémoires.

Mots-clés : Arminius Vambéry, l'Autriche, les autobiographies, l'Asie centrale, l'empire, la France, la Grande-Bretagne, les mémoires, le XIXe siècle, la royauté