Австро-унгарски влияния в българското образование: случаят на учителя Калман Кирил Ронже [Austro-Hungarian influences on Bulgarian education: The case of teacher Kálmán Kiril Rongé]. By Penka Peykovska. Издания на Българо-унгарската историческа комисия 14 [Publications of the Bulgarian–Hungarian Historical Commission 14]. Sofia: Institute of Historical Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2025. 148 pp.

The modernization of the Bulgarian territories liberated from Turkish rule began in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Due to the dearth of trained Bulgarian specialists, this process depended heavily on adopting the experiences of developed foreign countries. This included Austria–Hungary, which sought to open up the Bulgarian market and strengthen its cultural influence in the region after 1878. This was done in several ways. First, young Bulgarians were trained at foreign universities. They then brought new ideas and experiences with them when they returned home. Second, foreign experts were invited to offer guidance on the economy, public administration, culture, and education. The educational policies imported from abroad had a positive impact on the development and renewal of Bulgaria's education system, and agents of other nationalities also participated in their implementation, including teachers arriving from the Habsburg Empire and Hungary who undertook to teach in Bulgaria.

One of these figures was Kálmán Rongé (later he adopted the name Cirill to emphasize his positive attitude towards the host country), a Hungarian-born teacher who was trained in Austria–Hungary but spent most of his professional career in Bulgaria. Penka Peykovska's biographical study of Rongé highlights the role of cultural mediators and innovators (who can be considered cultural brokers if they are at home in both cultures and participate in cultural transfer in both directions) in spreading the Central European pedagogical models in the Balkans. Rongé (Zrenjanin, 1844–1894) actively participated in the development of the modern Bulgarian education system and adopted and implemented Austrian and Hungarian teaching methods in the field.

Although some studies have been written about Rongé in Bulgarian (primarily from the perspective of educational history and pedagogical methods), they have tended to focus on his activity in Bulgaria and contain little objective information, relying mainly on unreliable information from memoirs rather than archival materials. It is worth noting that this kind of in-depth research, drawing

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on completely new sources on the subject of a nineteenth-century Hungarian émigré figure, is rare nowadays.

Peykovska's work is a valuable contribution to the study of the efforts of the Hungarian émigré communities, and one can only hope that it will be followed by similar studies on related figures. The volume described here is based on the intact estate that Penka Peykovska accidentally discovered in the historical archives of the St. Cyril and Methodius National Library (NBKM–BIA) in Sofia. This material contained a great deal of new information about Rongé's life, and it was supplemented with material from Hungarian archives and journals, Rongé's publications and manuscripts, and sources from the Shumen State Archives (such as the previously unused memoirs and estate of Dimitar Stefanov Gabrovski, secretary of the Sumen Society for Hygiene, which was founded by Rongé).

The specific objectives of the volume are threefold: 1) to reconstruct Rongé's teaching career, 2) to examine how he interpreted the process of education, knowledge transfer, and pedagogical training (i.e., to describe his innovative views), and 3) to define his role and place in Bulgarian educational and pedagogical culture. Peykovska attempts to reconstruct and explore the pedagogical concepts and practical methods that Rongé applied in his teaching to solve the various problems that arose, including many of his own ideas, which were innovative from a pedagogical point of view and went well beyond the pedagogical knowledge he acquired during his own training. In her effort to define Ronge's precise place in Bulgarian pedagogical culture, Peykovska takes into account the various contradictions surrounding his personality and pedagogical practice and how he fit into Bulgarian society (compared to other similar figures of foreign origin).

Rongé's pedagogical views and practical methods show that he was well acquainted with the German reform pedagogy that emerged in Central Europe in the 1880s. His methods reflect a new attitude towards children characterized by trust, respect, love, and patience. He also clearly rejected coercive measures and teaching methods that were reduced to mere knowledge transfer without any educational purpose. Rongé had already attempted to promote these concepts in newspapers in the 1880s. However, his articles on educational issues, sent to various magazines and political newspapers, were not published in Bulgaria. He therefore turned to the practical application of his ideas in the schools, which was met with incomprehension by some of his colleagues and superiors, and this conflict finally led to his departure from the principality.

Peykovska therefore seeks to present not only Rongé's life and professional career, but also his professional background in Austria–Hungary (where he studied and what determined the roots of his activities). She also touches more generally on Austria–Hungary's influence on everyday politics and its tools in nation-building (the Bulgarian case is worth comparing with the parallel Bosnian experience, where Austria–Hungary's role was overwhelming, or with the developments in Albania a generation later).

The volume consists of four chapters which cover 1) Rongé' origin and school years during the Thun reforms; 2) his first stay as a teacher in Ottoman Bulgaria at the elementary school in Sumen (1869–1873); 3) his return to Austria–Hungary and his study trip to France for further training; and 4) his second teaching period in Bulgaria, which had recently become an independent state (1879–1889). The chapters are followed by a concluding section on the sources used and Rongé's further career as a teacher in Sarajevo, Bosnia.

As a pedagogue and reform figure in Bulgaria, Rongé adopted the most democratic and humanistic ideas from representatives of European pedagogical thought, adapted them to the specific conditions of Bulgarian society, and developed his own original method for the study of foreign languages, which he successfully applied in practice. He believed that reforms to the educational system could fundamentally change the lives of the Bulgarian people and society and that the Bulgarian state could thus survive in the long term. His personal devotion to this cause is demonstrated perhaps most clearly by the fact that he even took a Bulgarian/Orthodox first name. At the same time, it is clear from the volume that the propagators of new ideas and methods had to overcome serious difficulties. The implementation of new concepts and the introduction of innovative pedagogical practices did not meet with unanimous welcome among the traditionalist cultural-political elite (at the highest level of administration stood another Austro-Hungarian citizen, the Czech Konstantin Ireček).

Could one persuasively consider Rongé a cultural broker? A cultural broker is someone who feels himself at home in several cultures. This was arguably true of Rongé, who lived in a Bulgarian community in Bánát, was a Hungarian citizen with French as his native language, and spent years as a teacher in Bulgaria. Another characteristic of cultural brokers is that they are virtually unknown or remain in the third line, not serving as diplomats or prominent, recognized scholars, which was also true of Rongé. The essence of the cultural broker as a historical phenomenon is that their careers and contributions offer paradigmatic illustrations of global stories and phenomena within a national

historical framework. Although a true cultural broker is able to handle conflicts well (and Rongé had several unresolved conflicts with his superiors), the conflict itself had several layers: a French-speaking Hungarian citizen, a teacher, came into conflict with his Czech-speaking superior, Ireček, a leading scholar from Cisleithania, who also served the Bulgarian state as a modernizer and historian, although not as a member of an "empire-building nation."

This short book is one of the first discussions of the role of a cultural broker written by a Balkan author. The volume also highlights an existing dual problem: the host environment is not receptive to innovations, and not all the arriving "experts" were top-tier professionals, as they often chose this professional path out of necessity (though also sometimes out of a sense of dedication to a cause). These problems arise at the birth or reorganization of every new state (one could think of the recent examples of Bosnia and Syria), and thus the lessons of this case extend beyond local space and time.

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