

REZSŐ MILLEKER AND POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine and to present the political geographical work of Rezső Milleker. Although political geography was not his main specialty, time to time he tried to create something of scientific value in this field of science, but the attention of professional circles and the success avoided him. By evaluating these works we try to answer the question, where his place was in Hungarian political geography between the two world wars.

Keywords: Milleker, political geography, Zeitschrift für Geopolitik, ethnic maps

There is an unwritten rule that says, a written tribute should suit the scientific work of the celebrated person. Professor Szabó is essentially a physical geographer, therefore it would be appropriate, for us to present a study in this topic. However, the authors of this article are practitioners of human geography, thus an intermediary solution had to be found. It was the celebrated scientist who helped us in this matter, as his field of research was not limited only to physical geography, but it also included history of science, which stands much closer to us.

The guidance in this case was the study written by the professor about the history of the Geography Institute of University of Debrecen between first and the second world war (Szabó, 1990). Naturally, this study also included a brief evaluation of the work of professor Rezső Milleker, leader of the Institute. Since a part of Milleker's scientific activity, his role related to political geography also matches our field of interest, it was obvious to have the opportunity to pay

tribute to Professor Szabó with a short article on such topic.

1. Rezső Milleker: brief summary of his carrier

In September 1914, at the age of only 27, Rezső Milleker was appointed professor of the Geography Department at the University of Debrecen, and so he became the youngest professor of Hungarian geography to date. The issue with this however, was that behind the appointment was no serious scientific achievement, while the other two candidates, Gábor Strömpl, but especially Gyula Prinz were already recognized experts at the time (Fodor, 2006). Milleker was given a great opportunity at a young age to build his professional carrier, however, he could not take full advantage of it, and until his death in 1945 he did not have truly appreciable scientific accomplishments. Practically he was an outsider to our geography between the two world wars, as Ferenc Fodor put

it: „...Milleker stands completely outside the system, who is only his own center, but does not belong to a single discipline in his uniqueness.” (Fodor, 2006, p. 281).

Of course this does not mean Rezső Milleker has been a university professor for three decades without doing anything. Quite the opposite, he worked a lot, but did not satisfy his ambitions in scientific research. He was an excellent organizer, so he organized and led a lot of university programs, also his diverse editorial activities need to be highlighted. No coincidence Ferenc Fodor ranked Milleker among the administrators of geography (Fodor, 2006).

Thus, it is not surprising, that he had little time and opportunity for professional activity, but it may not have bothered him. Looking at this list of publications, it seems he dived into several topics, but in the end, he did not take through any of the research directions consistently. Hence it is difficult to say, in what field he left a worthwhile mark. According to Mihály Haltenberger, „...his volcanological study and political geography are remarkable among his works.” (Haltenberger, 1948). Interesting about this is, that his work in the latter field is not covered in the in later literature, although he wrote his most extensive study on this subject. In 1917, and then two decades later, in 1937, he devoted a professionally evaluable study to the this topic (Milleker, 1917, 1937).

Based on the above, by evaluating the two mentioned works, we are looking for the answer to the simple question of where Milleker can be placed in the Hungarian political geography between the two world wars?

2. Basics of political geography

The title of the small shaped, 136-page book was undoubtedly promising, but the author already cooled the expectations in the preface. There he stated that the book was the complete material of a series of lectures given in the last months of 1916. This was realized

within the popular college course of the University of Debrecen, ergo it was promotion course for science. The question may rightly be asked, why did Milleker present such a rather complicated topic in front of laymen? There were at least two reasons for this, one of which he himself mentioned. „The events of the present have triggered the global politician in everyone. Nowhere is it more visible than in the geographical literature, where political geography is beginning to become dominant. Unfortunately, in majority of the time authors lack even the most basic knowledge and reach out to the most difficult and complicated issues with the same ease with which they deal with local party politics.” (Milleker, 1917).

Milleker was therefore dissatisfied with the standard of contemporary domestic political geography, and there was truth in it. What also could have inspired him to give lectures and publish the book, was his affinity for popularizing science. He considered this important, and a significant part of his later work were publications of this kind.

The book reviewed political geography divided into three chapters. The first part was a detailed historical review of political of geography, because Milleker said „political geography is ancient”, so he reached far back into the past. He started with Hippocrates, and according to him Herodotus also wrote political geography, followed by Plato and Strabo. He then presented the views of Machiavelli and Bodin, emphasizing the latter even more, followed by some prominent personalities of the enlightenment. In his opinion, the thoughts of Turgot and Herder contributed the most to the development of political geography during this period.

He considered the role of Ritter to be prominent in the history of the evolution of political geography, but he also saw the adverse consequences of his views. The one who eventually corrected and made political geography an independent field of science was Ratzel, whose work, of course, has been discussed in detail by Milleker, particularly

with regard to his conception of the state, to which Milleker connected other authors conceptions of the state.

In doing so, he basically prepared the second chapter, where he explained his own view regarding the state. He examined the conditions for the development of the state, the perceptions related to it, the operation mechanism of the state, and the relations between the state, society and economy. Since the above mentioned were given as part of promotional lectures, Milleker illustrated them with exact examples. One of the interesting moments of the chapter is that the author judged Kjellén's concept of the state quite negatively.

The last chapter dealt with another primary category of political geography, the borders. He presented the created borders from several perspectives, focusing most specifically on naturally and artificially created, as well as on the good and the bad borders. The historical approach was dominant here as well, illustrating the message with specific examples.

In the introduction of the book Milleker additionally stated, the work "does not want to be a scientific handbook built on traditional methodologies." He specifically pointed out "In the review, please take this into account" (Milleker, 1917). A review did not follow however, as the book did not attract the attention of professional circles at all. According to the summary of Ferenc Fodor: "Unfortunately, he did not clarify the nature of the problem at all, nor could it be controlled, nor did the geographical criticism take note of it." (Fodor, 2006).

Milleker could hardly be surprised that the profession did not take note of his work, as even he did not consider it to be of scientific nature. That is why the question may arise, why he did not move forward on the subject doing research of scientific value. It was clear from the book that he was familiar with the foreign literature on political geography, so this research base was already at his disposal. One of the reasons can be found in Milleker's

relationship with Géza Czirbusz. Czirbusz was one of the first Hungarian geographers to turn his attention to political geography, and that might had some sort of impact on his teaching assistant, Rezső Milleker. This is shown by a short article published by Milleker in 1913 on Serbian Adriatic politics (Milleker, 1913). During the first world war Czirbusz already payed attention to political geography, and as a result he published a book entitled Geopolitics in 1919 (Czirbusz, 1919). Presumably, Milleker did not want to compete with his former boss, who, moreover, played a major role in Milleker's appointment to the professorship in Debrecen.

However, Czirbusz died in the summer of 1920, so this concern disappeared. However, a much more important factor arose that could have diverted Milleker from researching in political geography. Very serious scientific work was carried out to help the peace negotiations after the First World War, and Hungarian political geography, of which central figure was Pál Teleki, grew out of these. The group formed around him was the core of Hungarian political geography between the two world wars. Besides that, of course, there were geographers who dealt with political geography occasionally, but Milleker was not one of them.

Thus, it came as a surprise that two decades after publishing his book on political geography, he once again appeared with a subject relevant study in the leading geopolitical journal of the era, the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*.

3. Ethnic geographical maps as a base of geopolitical decisions

Evaluating the study, of course, it should be taken into account that it was written for a foreign professional audience, so it also had to explain things that were well known to Hungarian readers. Therefore Milleker began his study with the problems of fragmentation of the unit of the Carpathian Basin. In his view, drawing good borders is an specific art,

but in drawing post-World War I borders, not artists but dilettantes were the ones, who decided.

As the national perspective played an important role in defining Hungary's new borders, several ethnic maps appeared after the war, which were drawn according to different perspectives, were not always based on reliable data, and in some cases were even biased. Based on this, Milleker took a look at the different types of ethnic maps and critically valued their pros and cons. The final conclusion of the professionally correct analysis was that the most interesting map in this line was linked to Pál Teleki (the so-called red map). However, he thought that Teleki's cartographic solutions were not entirely satisfactory either.

According to Milleker, a complete solution was still lacking regarding ethnic maps and maps showing population distribution in general. In his opinion, a good ethnic map would have to answer many questions, but most of them focused on quantitative indicators while not paying attention to qualitative aspects. An interesting suggestion related to his views was that the maps showing the distribution of the population should not be made adjusted to administrative borders (e.g. settlement, district), but rather it should focus on the presentation of the living space of an ethnic group.

Another thing he saw as a problem with ethnic maps, was that they were usually small in scale, so details could not be portrayed. Therefore, maps must be large in scale by all means. What he thought could and should be presented on these detailed maps, he illustrated with Transylvanian and other examples.

However, not even at the end of the study became clear, what kind of geopolitical decisions the proposed new types of ethnic maps could be used for. Thus, the situation of Milleker's 1917 book repeated itself, namely the title promised more than what the reader ultimately received.

4. Concluding remarks

If we want to answer the question proposed at the beginning of the study, where can Milleker be placed in Hungarian political geography between the two world wars, the best answer would be: somewhere on the edge. He has twice tried to create something remarkable in the fields of political geography and geopolitics, but the profession has noticed neither. Just as his scientific publishing activity.

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