

**THE ADVENTURES OF A HUNGARIAN ORIENTALIST
IN BULGARIA IN 1920S:
GYULA GERMANUS AND THE BULGARIAN PEN CLUB**

ZSOLT ANDRÁS UDVARVÖLGYI

Doi 10.32979/PUM.SPH.2023.2.12

In my study, I present the activities of Gyula Germanus (1884–1979), Hungarian Orientalist, writer, literary historian, traveller, and university professor in Bulgaria. The Hungarian researcher, who was then also the secretary of the Hungarian PEN Club, stopped in Sofia on his way to Istanbul in 1926 and on his initiative Bulgarian writers, poets, journalists, and artists gathered and founded the Bulgarian PEN Club. He returned to his Bulgarian friends several times afterwards, travelled the country, had many adventures, and remembered this period with fondness for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, he helped his colleagues in Sofia to build the international reputation of the Bulgarian PEN Club. The Hungarian scholar, who had converted to Islam in Delhi in 1930 and was mainly interested in Arabic literary history and linguistics, was proud of his invaluable role in the establishment of the Bulgarian and Egyptian PEN Clubs. However, there is more contradictory information in sources and memoirs about the specific dates of his travels to Bulgaria, as sources mention 1926, but Germanus mentions 1927 or 1928 as the year of his first stay in Sofia. In my paper I will outline the details of Germanus' books, his memoirs, and relevant parts of the literature on the Bulgarian PEN Club.

Introduction

I believe that the founding and initial activities of the Bulgarian PEN Club are an important chapter in the history of Bulgarian literature. The circumstances of its founding have already been discussed by Bulgarian researchers, but the activities of Gyula Germanus (1884–1979), a Hungarian Orientalist and writer who later converted to Islam and who was an unquestionable contributor to the founding of the Bulgarian PEN Club, have not yet been fully explored. There are contradictory sources about the date of Germanus' first stay in Sofia and there are also no unanimous documents about his exact programmes.

First, I would like to briefly outline the facts known so far. As summarised by Georgi Konstantinov¹, chair of the Bulgarian PEN centre², in 2006: “The Bulgarian PEN Center was created in 1926. Then the president of the world writing community PEN was the Nobelist John Galsworthy³, who had a keen interest in the Bulgarian literature. His positive attitude towards Bulgarians was not limited to literature alone. In 1927 Galsworthy published an appeal towards the world community to help Bulgaria deal with the aftermath of the catastrophic earthquake in the region of Chirpan. The establishment of the Bulgarian PEN Club (that was its original name) itself was also the work of the renowned Hungarian scholar and essayist Julius Germanus. On his way to the Near East, he lived for some time in Sofia, where he met with Bulgarian writers. He introduced them to the ideas of the PEN movement, which was expanding its influence in Western Europe. A particularly important part of these ideas was the pursuit of creative communication among writers from all over the world who were full of resignation and criticism after the end of World War 1. Shortly after Germanus’s departure about forty renowned Bulgarian writers united under the Bulgarian PEN Club. A protocol preserved from the club’s first meeting shows the names of Elisaveta Bagriana⁴, Dora Gabe⁵, Angel Karaliychev⁶, Elin Pelin⁷, Kiril Hristov⁸, Dobri Nemirov⁹, T.G. Vlaikov¹⁰, Vladimir Polyanov¹¹, Yordan Stubel¹² and others. The first board was elected as well: Prof. D. Shishmanov¹³ chairman, Dora Gabe secretary, and Prof. Alexander Balabanov¹⁴. Thus, a creative and humanistic organization was created on Bulgarian soil, which will overcome the trials of time that brought about new military situations and all sorts of totalitarian pressure. But during its 80-year existence our PEN

¹ Konstantinov, Georgi (1943–) is a Bulgarian poet and writer.

² PEN International – Bulgarian Centre. Internet: pen-international.org/centres/bulgarian-centre (accessed on 28 September 2022.)

³ Galsworthy, John (1867–1933) was an English novelist and playwright. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1932 and he was the president of PEN International (1921–1932).

⁴ Bagryana, Elisaveta (1893–1991) was a Bulgarian poetess.

⁵ Gabe, Dora (1888–1983) was a Bulgarian Jewish poetess.

⁶ Karaliychev, Angel (1902–1972) was a Bulgarian writer of children’s literature.

⁷ Elin Pelin, born Stoyanov, Dimitar Ivanov (1877–1949) was a Bulgarian writer.

⁸ Hristov, Kiril (1875–1944) was a Bulgarian poet, fiction writer, playwright and translator.

⁹ Nemirov, Dobri (1882–1945) was a Bulgarian writer.

¹⁰ Vlaykov, Todor Genchov (1865–1943) was a Bulgarian writer, public figure and politician.

¹¹ Polyanov, Vladimir (1899–1988) was a Bulgarian writer and theatre director.

¹² Stubel, Yordan (1897–1952) was a Bulgarian poet.

¹³ Shishmanov, Dimitar (1889–1945) was a Bulgarian writer, literary scholar and political leader.

¹⁴ Balabanov, Alexandur (1879–1955) was a Bulgarian professor, literary scholar and critic.

did not for once abandon its pursuit of high art and its moral will for peace and humanism.”¹⁵

In her excellent, detailed and very thorough study entitled “The Bulgarian PEN Club: A Study in Interwar Cultural Internationalism”, Irina Gigova writes about the founding of the Bulgarian PEN Club: “There are two accounts of the section’s birth: one from poet Dora Gabe, the other from the short-story writer Vladimir Polianov. Both belonged to the Union of Bulgarian Writers, Gabe since 1924 and Polianov since 1922. Both had interests in foreign literature and had spent long periods abroad: Gabe in France, Switzerland, Austria, and Poland before and after the wars, and Polianov as a student in the early 1920s in Vienna, Graz, and Munich. Both cited their contacts abroad as inspiration. Interviewed in 1968, Gabe credited Polish colleagues at the Zakopane home of Maria and Jan Kasprowicz¹⁶ (1860–1926) for her introduction to the concept of the International PEN and the benefits of a national section. She relayed the information to the Union of Bulgarian Writers back home and soon after the Bulgarian PEN was born.

In a second origin story, Vladimir Polianov recalled reading about the 1926 Berlin PEN Congress in the German press. He was struck by its transformative potential, which he described to readers of the socialist daily *Narod* (The People) in mid-June: »If all writers of the world unite, they would represent an unprecedented and undefeatable force. Ironsmiths, miners, bakers, bank tellers have their syndicates and through them—power. Political parties represent power. Nothing could be compared, however, to the power of the pen and the spirit.« Organized and united, he asserted, authors could overcome hatred, discrimination, misunderstanding, and war. More importantly, with 28 national centers led by well-known authors such as John Galsworthy, Jules Romains¹⁷, Anatole France¹⁸, and Arthur Schnitzler¹⁹, a Bulgarian PEN section could lead Bulgaria out of its international isolation and afford it an international stage for self-defense and action. This press report made Polianov a natural person of contact, when in late August 1926 Julius (Gyula) Germanus, secretary of the recently founded Hungarian PEN Club, stopped in Sofia on his way to Turkey. He sought contacts with the Bulgarian PEN Center, assuming its existence, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs linked the two men. The encounter solidified Polianov’s interest in the initiative. On his way back from Istanbul, the Hungarian orientalist became the first official guest of the newly founded Bulgarian section, followed in November by Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore²⁰ coming from Belgrade and on his way to Hungary.”²¹

¹⁵ KONSTANTINOV 2006, 1.

¹⁶ Kasprowicz, Jan (1860–1926) was a Polish poet, playwright, critic and translator.

¹⁷ Romains, Jules (1885–1972) was a French poet and writer.

¹⁸ France, Anatole (1844–1924) was a French poet, novelist and journalist.

¹⁹ Schnitzler, Arthur (1862–1931) was an Austrian author and dramatist.

²⁰ Tagore, Rabindranath (1861–1941) was a Bengali poet, writer, playwright, composer, philosopher, social reformer and painter.

²¹ GIGOVA 2019, 7–8.

Ádám Mestyán, a Hungarian researcher who has published a detailed and thorough study on the life of Gyula Germanus, also mentions the year of 1926 in his work entitled “Materials for a History of Hungarian Academic Orientalism: The Case of Gyula Germanus”, in connection with the Bulgarian PEN Club: “...the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore arrived in Budapest during his European tour in the autumn of that year. The Hungarian PEN gave a dinner in his honour on 30 October 1926. It is here that Germanus, back from a PEN-dinner in Sofia, probably met and spoke with Tagore. [...] Germanus continued being secretary of the Hungarian PEN Club until 1943 and participated in many PEN Club gatherings in Belgrade, Sofia, Oslo, Dubrovnik, and Edinburgh.”²²

In the light of all this, it is strange and peculiar that the scientist, who kept meticulous records of his life and work, an up-to-date list of publications, carefully preserved almost all his notes, official documents and other papers, and—last but not least—had an unrivalled memory, consistently mentions 1927 as the year of his journey to Istanbul via Bulgaria, and not 1926! I believe that in this case the sources must be correct and that Germanus, decades later, may have been deceived by his memory.

What the Hungarian press reported

On 29 March 1927, the daily newspaper “Magyarország” [Hungary-daily] published a detailed article about the visit of Bulgarian writer and novelist Vladimir Polyanov, secretary of the Bulgarian Pen Club, to Budapest. According to the article, Polyanov had interrupted his trip to Paris for a few days and sought an opportunity to raise the idea of Hungarian-Bulgarian literary contact with prominent Hungarian writers. The young Bulgarian writer is serving the cause of Hungarian-Bulgarian friendship with unparalleled agility. “When Gyula Germanus, the secretary of the Hungarian Pen Club, visited Sofia last year,” said Polyanov, “it was on his initiative that we founded the Bulgarian Pen Club.” So, he also claimed in this interview that Germanus’ trip took place as early as 1926! Polyanov continued: “I have been in Budapest for two days now, I have been everywhere, I have talked to many people, and I am sorry to say that we do not know each other. There is no interest in Hungary for your country to be the intellectual leader of the Balkan states. The Hungarian and Bulgarian Pen Club could do a lot in this area. I raised the idea of a visit to Bulgaria by Hungarian writers to Jenő Heltai²³, Menyhért Lengyel²⁴, Gyula Germanus and others. I think that members of the Hungarian Pen Club could make a tour of Bulgaria and give lectures in some cities.” Polyanov added that “Hungarian writers should have the opportunity to get to know Bulgaria, because Bulgarian culture is a »terra incognita« for most Hungarians. One Hungarian writer asked me if we had a theatre, and another writer asked about our writers.”

²² MESTYÁN 2014, 21.

²³ Heltai, Jenő (1871–1957) was a Hungarian writer, poet, journalist, producer.

²⁴ Lengyel, Menyhért (1880–1974) was a Hungarian writer, dramatist and screenwriter.

The Bulgarian writer then gave the journalist a brief summary of the Bulgarian theatre and literary life: "...we also have a national theatre and opera in Sofia. In Bulgaria, plays by Ferenc Herczeg²⁵, Ferenc Molnár²⁶, Menyhért Lengyel and Gábor Drégely²⁷ are performed. We have famous actors, Sava Ognianov²⁸, who is also an excellent director, Serafov²⁹, and our famous singer Anna Todorova³⁰, who performs at the Paris Opera. Christina Morfova³¹, who performs in Prague, opera and concert singer Peter Raychev³² and others. The Hungarians have world-famous, excellent writers. I do not want to make comparisons, but I will list our excellent writers. Ivan Vazov³³ is known in many countries. His novel "Under yoke" was published in many languages. Elin Pelin is famous for his village stories, Georgi Raichev³⁴ has written psychologically subtle narratives. There is Yordan Yovkov³⁵, Nikolai Rainov³⁶, who has adapted Bulgarian legends. Nikolai Liliev³⁷ is our finest lyricist. The older Bulgarian writers were mainly brought up under Russian and French influence. Our hope for the future lies in the talent of new Bulgarian writers. We ask the Hungarians to visit us, to get to know our land, our people, our customs, and we, young Bulgarian writers, will reciprocate their visits. The Hungarian and Bulgarian people are sympathetic to each other, let us use this sympathy to develop rapprochement. All we ask is that the Hungarians begin the rapprochement, because natural law also requires that the father should precede the child." Polyanov spoke with great enthusiasm about the rapprochement between Hungarian and Bulgarian writers and said that "as soon as he returned from his trip to Paris, he would continue the work he had begun with the greatest enthusiasm."³⁸ The open-minded and sympathetic Polyanov's initiative was certainly listened to by Germanus, who returned to Sofia that year and again in 1928. It would, however, be beyond the scope of this study to examine the whole development of Hungarian-Bulgarian literary and artistic relations between the two world wars.

²⁵ Herczeg, Ferenc (1863–1954) was a Hungarian writer, playwright, journalist, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and MP.

²⁶ Molnár, Ferenc (1878–1952) was a Hungarian author, stage-director, dramatist and poet.

²⁷ Drégely, Gábor (1884–1944) was a Hungarian writer, playwright.

²⁸ Ognyanov, Sava (1876–1933) was a Bulgarian actor.

²⁹ Sarafov, Krastyo (1876–1952) was a Bulgarian actor.

³⁰ Todorova, Anna (1892–1972) was a Bulgarian mezzo-soprano opera singer.

³¹ Morfova, Christina (1887–1936) was a Bulgarian operatic soprano.

³² Raychev, Peter (1887–1960) was a Bulgarian tenorist.

³³ Vazov, Ivan Minchov (1850–1921) was a Bulgarian poet, novelist and playwright.

³⁴ Raichev, Georgi (1882–1947) was a Bulgarian writer.

³⁵ Yovkov, Yordan (1880–1937) was a Bulgarian writer.

³⁶ Rainov, Nikolai (1889–1954) was a Bulgarian writer, poet, artist and scholar.

³⁷ Liliev, Nikolai (1885–1960) was a Bulgarian poet and writer.

³⁸ [NO AUTHOR] 1927a, 6.

Another article proves that Germanus had also visited Sofia in 1927 and had given a lecture. On 11 October 1927, the Budapest Newspaper reported that “Dr. Gyula Germanus, teacher and secretary of the Hungarian Pen Club, gave a lecture entitled »The Heart of Hungary« in the main hall of the Sofia Academy of Arts, at the invitation of the Bulgarian Pen Club, before a distinguished audience, in which he described the history and architectural monuments of Budapest. The Hungarian scholar was introduced to the audience by former Minister of Public Education Ivan Shismanov³⁹, who emphasised in his speech that it was thanks to the zeal of Professor Germanus that the Pen Club of Bulgaria was founded.”⁴⁰

Briefly about the life and work of Gyula Germanus

Before describing Germanus's travels in Bulgaria in the 1920s, I feel it necessary to briefly summarise who he was and why his life's work is important. Gyula Germanus (1884–1979), an Orientalist, writer, linguist, literary historian, traveller, university professor, member of parliament, who was the first Hungarian to make a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1935, following the Islamic precepts—from then on, he was also called “Hajji”—, died in his hometown of Budapest on 7 November 1979. His books are still popular today, and his articles and studies have been published in Arabic and in many Western languages. Germanus was a master of sophisticated scholarship, entertaining teaching, nurturing loyal disciples, building relationships and, it is only fair to say, individual advocacy. Her serene and jovial character, her tireless and tenacious work ethic, her unrivalled command of language and her captivating delivery all contributed to her renown and reputation. Mátyás Rákosi⁴¹ was a student of him at the Academy of Oriental Studies, Count Pál Teleki⁴² was his mentor at the Faculty of Economics, and after 1956 he also communicated with the leaders of the Kádár⁴³ regime. During his long life, he was not spared domestic and foreign adventures and intrigues. He was well known in the Islamic world for fifty years, invited to India by the Nobel Prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore, and in Egypt in the 1930s he became friends with Taha Hussain⁴⁴, Mahmoud

³⁹ Shismanov, Ivan (1862–1928) was a Bulgarian writer, ethnographer, politician and diplomat.

⁴⁰ [NO AUTHOR] 1927b, 16.

⁴¹ Rákosi, Mátyás (1892–1971) was a Hungarian Communist politician, MP, Secretary General of the Hungarian Communist Party (1945–1948), First Secretary of the Hungarian Working People's Party (1948–1956), Prime Minister of Hungary (1952–1953).

⁴² Teleki, Pál (1879–1941) was a Hungarian count, aristocrat, geographer, scholar, professor, Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, MP, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Hungary (1920–1921, 1939–1941).

⁴³ Kádár, János (1912–1989) was a Hungarian communist politician, MP, Minister of the Interior (1948–1950), First Secretary (later: General Secretary) of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (1956–1985), Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Hungary (1956–1958, 1961–1965).

⁴⁴ Taha, Hussein (1889–1973) was an Egyptian writer, essayist, novelist.

Teymour⁴⁵, and other greats of Arabic literature. He met Mustafa Kemal Atatürk⁴⁶, Mahatma Gandhi⁴⁷, Jawaharlal Nehru⁴⁸, Lawrence of Arabia⁴⁹, Saudi kings, Indian maharajas, and Western statesmen too. In 1926 he became secretary of the Hungarian PEN Club and helped to found the Bulgarian and Egyptian PEN Clubs. He was a professor in several departments and institutes of several universities, and for many years headed the Department of Arab Literature and Cultural History at Eötvös Loránd University. He was elected a member of several academies, except for Hungarian. He also served with great dedication on the Dictionary Committee of the Arab Academy of Egypt. I believe that Gyula Germanus was a scholar of great stature and wisdom, and that he left a remarkable legacy for posterity.⁵⁰

Germanus' travels in Bulgaria

Gyula Germanus' involvement in the Hungarian PEN Club and the founding of the Bulgarian and Egyptian PEN Clubs is a significant part of his life. In his best-selling book "A félhold fakó fényében" ["In the Faded Light of the Crescent"], which has been published in several editions, he recalls this period. The following are the most relevant parts of the book for my topic:

"In 1926, John Galsworthy visited Hungary, and, because of his visit, the Hungarian Pen Club was founded, of which he asked me to be its secretary because of my language skills. This duty stimulated me to further literary and scientific work. In 1928⁵¹, in recognition of my book on the Turkish Revolution, I was invited to Turkey by the government of Mustafa Kemal. I set off along the familiar route, conveniently stopping at rest stops along the way. In Belgrade, I was received by the secretary of the Serbian Pen Club, Vidakovic, and a gala dinner was hosted in my honour by Serbian writers—Manojlović⁵², Velyko Petrović⁵³, Stefan Petrović⁵⁴ and others, all of whom spoke perfect Hungarian.

⁴⁵ Teymour, Mahmoud (1894–1973) was an Egyptian playwright, academic.

⁴⁶ Kemal, Mustafa Atatürk (1881–1938) was a Turkish military officer, statesman, founder and first president of the Turkish Republic (1923–1938).

⁴⁷ Gandhi, Mahatma, originally known as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) was a lawyer, politician and leader of the Indian independence movement.

⁴⁸ Nehru, Jawaharlal (1889–1964) was an Indian lawyer, politician, first Prime Minister of independent India (1947–1964).

⁴⁹ Lawrence, Thomas Edward (1888–1935) was an English military officer, writer, archaeologist, one of the leaders of the Arab national uprising, adviser to Emir Faisal.

⁵⁰ I used the following sources for Germanus's biographical data: HEJAZI 2006; KISS [no date]; KUBASSEK 2009, 1261–1263; UDVARVÖLGYI 2019, 63–68.

⁵¹ This is certainly a typo, the first trip, according to other sources, was in 1926. I think that Germanus, looking back from the decades, may have mixed his trips to the Balkans in 1926, 1927 and 1928.

⁵² Manojlović, Todor (1883–1968) was a Serbian poet, playwright, essayist.

⁵³ Petrović, Veljko (1884–1967) was a Serbian poet, short story writer, diplomat and academic.

⁵⁴ Petrović, Stefan (?–?) was a Serbian writer.

My next stop was Sofia. I was delighted to disembark in this remote town, which evokes so many historical memories in the soul of every Bulgarian. I visited the editorial office of a daily newspaper and inquired about the Pen Club. They had only heard of it but did not know of its existence. Diligent phone calls followed, and that evening the literary elite of Sofia gathered for dinner: Professor Balabanov, whose unkempt hair and red cheeks, nose red with wine and good humour immediately won from me the title of »Bulgarian Bacchus«. He was a professor of Greek at the university, but his knowledge of Latin, German, French, English, and Turkish was just as perfect. There was the eminent writer Vladimir Polyanov, later director of the National Theatre in Sofia, Mrs Dora Gabe, famous poetess, Syrak Skitnik⁵⁵, painter and writer, and many others. In the joyful atmosphere of the dinner, we discussed and founded the Bulgarian Pen Club. We sent a letter to John Galsworthy and to the English Secretary General Hermon Ould⁵⁶, and I promised to spend a longer period in Bulgaria on my return from Turkey to deepen cultural relations. With this promise I travelled on to Constantinople.” The new Turkish Republic that was taking shape, however, quickly became disillusioning and depressing for Germanus, repelled by the many forced modernising measures of the Atatürk’s state, and he continued his memories such: “I was afraid of the new Ankara, which had turned the old swampy »Engürü« into a modern capital, with its big buildings, stiff tenements, many liquor stores and dance halls. I said goodbye to Atatürk in a letter and rushed home.”

In Sofia, my new Bulgarian friends were waiting for me. In my absence, the Bulgarian Pen Club was founded, and its management announced that as one of its founders, I would be its guest. Their cordiality was overwhelming. I had to visit Bulgaria to get to know better the land from which this industrious, modest and honest people had sprung. I was taken to Chamkoria, where the »Bistritsa« hunting lodge, »Queen Eleonora«⁵⁷’s favourite residence, stands alone in the dense forest. I admired the rich library, in which I found Petőfi⁵⁸’s poems. I have made many trips to the Bojana Monastery at the foot of Mount Vitosa, where the Queen sleeps in her eternal slumber in the frescoed chapel. It offers a beautiful view of houses of Sofia. Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Varna, Trnovo’s Eagle’s Nest, Kyustendil, all welcomed you with almost open arms. I was taken to the Rila Monastery, where unkempt bearded monks guard the embalmed right hand of Saint John. The peoples of the Balkans suffered together under the yoke of the Turkish sultans, but they could not get along among themselves. In Macedonia, Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian gangs fought each other for decades. They fought each other in the hills, and

⁵⁵ Skitnik, Syrak (1883–1943) was a Bulgarian painter.

⁵⁶ Ould, Hermon (1886–1951) served as Secretary of English and International PEN Club from the beginnings of the organisation until his death in 1951.

⁵⁷ Eleonore Reuss of Köstritz (1860–1917) was Tsaritsa (Queen) consort of Bulgaria (1908–1917).

⁵⁸ Petőfi, Sándor (1823–1849) was a Hungarian national poet and was one of the key figures of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.

even when the sultan's soldiers imposed a bloody order among them, they did not reconcile. After the World War, Macedonia remained a hotbed of violence. The Bulgarian freedom fighters claimed most of Macedonia to Bulgaria, the loser of the war, and continued to fight with this death's-head motto on their caps, »Svoboda ili smrt« (»Freedom or Death«).⁵⁹

This is followed by a somewhat lighter and more boulevard episode of his Bulgarian adventures, about which he wrote in his book: "The hot blood of my youth has not yet quite coagulated. In Sofia, I met a member of the Macedonian comité. I accepted his invitation gladly and a few days later I was in a big car with a few intimate friends on my way to Macedonia. My companions were Vladimir Polyanov and his beautiful young wife, »Milyachka«, and Professor Balabanov's wife. The latter, nicknamed »Anchurka«, was originally a Sudeten-German girl. She kept her long, well-groomed blond hair and dazzling white complexion. But she spoke Bulgarian fluently and learned the customs of her new homeland. On blood-soaked roads, the car trundled through the Strachina gorge, whose steep, barren cliffs still bore wrecked cannon base, discarded Turkish rifles and shreds of clothes gutted by crows. Sveti Vrach was our first stop. In the depths of the forest, a sulphurous spring was bubbling up, and in the moonlight, we bathed in the bay of a stream flowing down from the mountain, the water of which was warmed by the spring. We dried our bodies with towels hung on the trees. We looked like fairy-tale nymphs and fauns. Afterwards we had a delicious trout dinner.

Bulgaria is perhaps the richest country in Europe for hot springs. You would think that where you stick your stick in the ground, mineral water would bubble up. Our destination was the farm of Macedonian leader Vaptsarov⁶⁰, who lives in the Eltepe swamps. Called the »King« of the Eltepe Mountains, he and his comrades fought for decades against Serbs, Greeks, and Turks - for Bulgarian Macedonia. He was a warrior of huge stature, with a fierce face, and his followers obeyed his orders with death-defying obedience. For years, while he and his armed soldiers roamed the woods, his wife, »the gentle soul of the Golden Eagle«, sought solace in reading the Bible. We stayed for days at »King« Vaptsarov. Accompanied by thirty or forty Macedonian warriors armed to the teeth, he showed us the natural beauty of Eltepe." Germanus then went on to describe their adventures in the Macedonian mountains in a detailed, sensationalist and journalistic style. There is talk of the vicissitudes of horse riding, especially for ladies in skirts, and then of the risks of crossing a ford and the beauty of the idyllic mountain scenery. The Macedonian warriors shot at stones while a delicious and filling lunch was being prepared.

Then Germanus "could not resist the suggestion that they should go up to the viewpoint at the top of the mountain, from which there was an even more magnificent view into the distance, beyond the Greek border, towards Nevrokop. He set off

⁵⁹ GERMANUS 1984, 133, 137–138.

⁶⁰ It is probably about this Vaptsarov: Vaptsarov, Yonko (1880–1939) was a Bulgarian politician and freedom fighter.

up the steep with about ten Macedonians. Inspired by their courage, two of their lady companions, Milyachka and Anchurka, also started up. The only way to get up there was on foot because there was no road, only a few paths were visible out of the bushes. The rest of their companions lay down in the grass and started playing cards. Their guide on the hike was Marko, the shaggy-haired warrior. After a long and difficult journey, while the Macedonian fighters had to carry the exhausted women up to the roof, they reached the top. Here they took minutes to recover and began to admire the view below. All around them, snow-capped mountain peaks, streams tumbling silvery in deep ravines. Through a gorge, rolling hills beckoned them through a blue haze of mist. This was Greek Macedonia, from which an ominous column of smoke used to rise high above, signalling the enemy troops gathering in the forest. They settled in a clearing surrounded by thick bush on the hilltop. Their escorts dispersed to gather firewood and light a bonfire to keep them warm. One of them suddenly put his index finger over his mouth, warning them not to speak! They became aware of bear tracks and crept without noise on into the thicket to shoot the bear. Left alone in the clearing, they waited anxiously to see what would happen to them and the bear. Germanus continued: “A good quarter of an hour passed in this trembling, in which not only the cold, but also a good deal of fear, played its part. All at once a burst of gunfire shook the air, then another and another. They had shot the bear, they thought hopefully, and nothing was wrong. But what if it had escaped the guns and was heading towards us wounded? Milyachka and Anchurka looked at us with reproachful eyes, as if we had invited them straight into the jaws of death. We returned their looks in silence and did not move. Surely the approaching bear will acknowledge this benignly. Long minutes passed in this way. Finally, we heard soft shuffling and the rustling of dry twigs. Ivan, Marko and the others emerged from the bush, carrying a lot of trout in their hands. The bear was not found, it escaped unseen, but they shot into the tarn, so that they could catch the stunned trout with their bare hands.”

The return journey was also difficult and rough. They were tired, stumbling all over the way down. In the end, all four of them had to be carried down on the shoulders of the Macedonian fighters. In the morning they started their way back home to Vapcarov’s quarters in Bansko. Days later, they bid a grateful farewell to Vaptsarov, the »King of Eltepe«, and returned to Sofia by car.⁶¹ Germanus concludes his account of the adventure thus. “I have not forgotten my Macedonian adventure, when Vaptsarov’s heroic life was crowned with a heroic death, and all the brave-hearted believers of him have long since been passed away. After Bulgaria, I spent only a few days in Belgrade in the company of Serbian writers, and then hurried home to Budapest to work again, to study, to teach at the university.”⁶²

To mark the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Hungarian PEN Club, Germanus wrote a memoir entitled “Emlékezés a Pen Clubra” [“Remembering the

⁶¹ Germanus described their adventure in much the same way in his article below: GERMANUS 1927, 8.

⁶² GERMANUS 1984, 138–147.

Pen Club”]⁶³, which he read at the Fészek Artists’ Club in Budapest on 12 February 1966, and the manuscript was published by his wife, Kató Kajári, in her book “Kelet vándora” [“Wanderer of the East”]: “In 1927, while travelling in Turkey, I disembarked in Belgrade and made contact with the Yugoslav Pen Club. [...] I continued my journey towards Istanbul, but I interrupted it again for a short stop in Sofia. This charming city in a remote location has always beckoned me with its Turkish memories and the many cultural creations of the people of (liberated) Bulgaria. I wondered if there was a Pen Club here and visited the editorial office of a major Bulgarian daily newspaper to enquire. The editors were meeting, wondering if they had heard of a similar writers’ association, but they did not know for sure. They started making phone calls, and as a result, that very evening, in a restaurant, a few writers and artists gathered around me, and we decided to form the Bulgarian Pen Club. Professor Alexander Balabanov, a great scholar and teacher of classical languages, welcomed me in Turkish. Syrak Skitnik, a painter and writer, was a Macedonian, and Dora Gabe, a poetess, was a Bulgarian from Dobruja. Vladimir Polyanov, novelist and writer, and his wife Milyachka spoke excellent German. I conversed with the others in French and English. No sooner had the delicious dinner ended than a letter began to be drafted by us to Hermon Ould, the secretary general of PEN in London, whom I asked to send to Sofia the statutes and organisation of PEN, to serve as a guideline for the Bulgarian group. I bid farewell to my suddenly met friends by saying that when I returned to Sofia from Istanbul in six weeks’ time, I would be welcomed here by the newly formed Bulgarian Pen Club.

And so, it was. Not only was it established, but it flourished, and a year later, in 1928, I had the opportunity to see its success on another visit. This time I arrived in Bulgaria as a guest of the Bulgarian Pen Club, accompanied by my wife. On the way, we were received in Belgrade, in the company of Manojlovič, Vidakovič and Valjko Petrovič, at the Kral Sirbaki Hotel, the Yugoslav Pen Club. In the night we travelled by Danube ship to Lom-Palanka, where Vladimir Polyanov, secretary of the Bulgarian Pen Club, was waiting for us and accompanied us by train down to Sofia. We stayed in Bulgaria for a month. I gave lectures in Sofia, then we visited the Rila Monastery, the nest of the Bulgarian Macedonian freedom fighters, Eltepe, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Varna, in the company of the writers, and returned to Belgrade with a rich experience.”⁶⁴ The sources thus clearly prove that the “seed” sown by Germanus and his Bulgarian friends fell on good “soil” and the Bulgarian Pen Club began to develop in a beautiful and spectacular way. To the end of his life, Germanus was proud to have been actively involved in the founding of Pen Clubs in two nations.

Conclusion

⁶³ GERMANUS [no date].

⁶⁴ GERMANUS 1985, 41–43.

Germanus was a jovial, extroverted, inquisitive man, driven by a thirst for knowledge and a desire to learn about unknown languages, religions, peoples, and cultures throughout his entire life. I believe that his adventure in Bulgaria, which was only a small episode in his life's work, was a good example of this, but he nevertheless managed to make a significant contribution to the organisation of literature in the Balkans. Germanus had an undisputed merit in founding the Bulgarian and Egyptian PEN Clubs. He got off the train in Sofia in 1926 (or 1927?) without knowing a single Bulgarian writer, poet, novelist or another artist. And when he resumed his journey to Istanbul a few days later, his newfound Bulgarian writer, poet, journalist, and professor friends bade him farewell, saying they would expect him back as soon as possible. I think this is further proof that Germanus was a master of making and maintaining contacts and was even able to put aside his original objectives and research for the sake of a good cause, namely the promotion of the PEN Club.

Bibliography

GERMANUS 1984

GERMANUS, Gyula: *A Kelet varázsa. A félhold fakó fényében* [The magic of the East. In the Faded Light of the Crescent]. Budapest, Magvető, 1984. Internet: mek.oszk.hu/00600/00663/00663.htm#6 (accessed on 15 September 2022.)

GERMANUS 1927

GERMANUS, Gyula: Macedónia szívében [In the heart of Macedonia]. *Pesti Napló* [Pest Journal-daily] 78/229. 1927, 8.

GERMANUS [no date]

GERMANUS, Gyula: *“Emlékezés a Pen Clubra”* [“Remembering the Pen Club”]. Manuscript. In: Magyar Földrajzi Múzeum [Hungarian Geographical Museum], Érd, Hungary, Germanus Gyula-hagyaték [Legacy of Gyula Germanus], 28. doboz [box]. [no date].

GERMANUS 1985

GERMANUS, Gyula: Galsworthy és a Magyar Pen Club [Galsworthy and the Hungarian Pen Club]. In: GERMANUSNÉ KAJÁRI Katalin: *Kelet vándora* [Wanderer of the East]. Budapest, Magvető, 1985, 39–59.

GIGOVA 2019

Irina GIGOVA: The Bulgarian PEN Club: A Study in Interwar Cultural Internationalism. *East European Politics & Societies* 34/3. 2019, 1–27. Internet:

journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0888325419877681?journalCode=eepa
(accessed on 20 September 2022.)

HEJAZI 2006

Yasser HEJAZI: *The Moment of Awakening A Hungarian Orientalist Finds Islam*. Apr. 12, 2006. Internet: archive.islamonline.net/?p=15108 (accessed on 12 August 2018.)

KISS [no date]

KISS Dávid Sándor: *Germanus Gyula*. [no date]. Internet: www.terebess.hu/keletkultinfo/germanusgyula.html (accessed on 17 May 2012.)

KONSTANTINOV 2006

Georgi KONSTANTINOV: 80 Years of the BULGARIAN P.E.N. CENTER. 2006. In: *BALKANI Publishing*. Internet: www.balkani.eu/indexen.php?b=news&bb=20012006140906 (accessed on 8 September 2022.)

KUBASSEK 2009

KUBASSEK János: Germanus Gyula-kiállítás Érden – Az iszlám világ tudós kutatója. [Gyula Germanus exhibition in Érd – Researcher of the world of Islam]. *Élet és tudomány* [Life and Science] 64/40. 2009, 1261–1263. Internet: www.eletestudomany.hu/content/aktualis_20091002_germanus_gyula_kiallitas_Erden_az (accessed on 18 June 2010.)

MESTYÁN 2014

MESTYÁN Ádám: Materials for a History of Hungarian Academic Orientalism: The Case of Gyula Germanus. *Die Welt des Islams* 54. 2014, 4–33. Internet: dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/12574/mestyán_Germanus_WDI2014.pdf?sequence=1 (accessed on 4 October 2022.)

[NO AUTHOR] 1927a

[NO AUTHOR]: A bolgár Pen-klub titkára a magyar írókat meghívta Bulgáriába. [The secretary of the Bulgarian Pen Club invited Hungarian writers to Bulgaria]. *Magyarország* [Hungary-daily] 34/71. 1927, 6.

[NO AUTHOR] 1927b

[NO AUTHOR]: Magyar tudós előadása Bulgáriában. [Lecture by a Hungarian scientist in Bulgaria] *Budapesti Hírlap* [Budapest Newspaper-daily] 47/230. 1927, 16.

UDVARVÖLGYI 2019

UDVARVÖLGYI, Zsolt: Negyven éve hunyt el Germanus Gyula keletkutató, utazó, egyetemi tanár. [Forty years after the death of Gyula Germanus, Ori-

entalist, traveller and university professor]. *Valóság* [Reality] 62/11. 2019, 63–68.