

Life, Achievements and Global Reception of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös*

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The foundation of Tibetan Studies in the early 19th century is closely linked to one person, Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, a Transylvanian Hungarian. In this paper, I will present the life and academic achievements of Csoma de Kőrös and will talk about his contribution to learning and reception in a global context.

Importance

“No foreigner has studied Tibetan more successfully than Csoma did.” These words of one of the most outstanding Indian scholars, Rajendralal Mitra (1823/24-1891), the first Indian president of the Asiatic Society of Bengal refer to Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (4 April 1784?–11 April 1842), who, in his own words, was a Siculo-Hungarian from Transylvania. His name is well known to Tibetologists who consider him the founder of Tibetan Studies and to Hungarians who admire his perseverance in travel and scholarship dedicated to the search of the relatives and origins of the Hungarians. His life is extraordinary in as much as the son of a poor family at the periphery of Europe, through his determination and humility, becomes an outstanding traveler and emerges as the founder of a modern scholarly discipline. He also stands as an example of East Central Europe's contribution to the academic discourse of contemporary Europe.

On his Asian journey, Csoma arrived in Ladakh in 1822 and spent several years in Tibetan monasteries studying Tibetan language and literature. Although he did not find Tibetan links or references to the Hungarians, he compiled the first scholarly Tibetan-English dictionary and wrote the first Tibetan grammar in English and presented Tibetan Buddhism to the world in dozens of scholarly articles. According to O. P. Kejariwal, the author of a monograph on the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Csoma's Dictionary marked a milestone in the history of the Asiatic Society and increased its profile in a way in which few other events had, and Csoma became “the father of Tibetan studies” in the eyes of later scholars. (Kejariwal, 1999)

Life

Alexander Csoma de Kőrös – or Kőrösi Csoma Sándor, as he is called in Hungarian, – was born in 1784, or, according to the most recent research, perhaps in 1787 or 1788 in Transylvania (in today's Romania). His ethnic group, the Széklers, popularly claimed continuity with Attila's Huns of the fifth century considering themselves to be a branch that did not withdraw to the East after the death of king Attila (and returned as the Hungarians in the ninth century) but settled in Transylvania.

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After the village school, Csoma was allowed to continue his education in the renowned Protestant college of Transylvania, the Bethlenianum of Nagyenyed (today Aiud, Romania). The students that were provided “free” education – the so-called gratista – in reality, paid for it with some form of manual labor for the college. At the age of 22, he has passed his exams successfully. While working as a teacher of the lower-level classes, he embarked on his further studies, three years of philosophy and four years of theology, the training of a Protestant clergyman. It was certainly in this period that he became acquainted with the various theories concerning the origins of Hungarians. The question of positing Hungarian within European languages became topical under the influence of the emerging science of Indo-European studies, which presented almost all languages of Europe, but not Hungarian, as branches of the same great Indo-European tree. The idea of the Hungarian-Uyghur relations had adherents among the professors of the college. Csoma, likely basing himself on their notions, developed his idea that he would find the ancient Hungarian homeland and the Hungarians “left behind” somewhere in Central Asia or possibly among the Uyghurs.

Along with Latin and Greek, he also learned Hebrew and French in the college, as well as German and Romanian in the nearby Saxon and Romanian settlements. In 1815, he won the so-called “English stipend” of the college, which he used, the following February, to fund a visit to the University of Göttingen. Göttingen has for long been an outstanding center of learning with famous students including, among others, the mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauß (1777 - 1855), the politician Otto von Bismarck, the philosopher Edith Stein. For a period, the Grimm brothers were also teachers there. This university with its professors of international reputation and its vast library offered Csoma excellent possibilities to broaden his knowledge. Oriental studies were becoming a specialized university subject at this time, and a number of their renowned representatives held academic chairs in Göttingen. One of them, the famous Biblical professor and Orientalist Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, often called the founder of modern Old Testament criticism, was also responsible for overseeing the affairs of students coming from the college of Nagyenyed. It was he who taught Arabic and Turkish to Csoma.

After a brief period at Nagyenyed, Csoma left Transylvania in late 1819 with a temporary passport and set off to the East to find the old Hungarian homeland. He journeyed partly on ~~the~~ ship and mostly on foot through the Balkans, the Mediterranean, Iran, Bokhara, Afghanistan, Punjab, and Kashmir, and by the middle of April 1822, he arrived in Leh, the capital of Ladakh, one of the westernmost centers of Tibetan culture. He planned to reach central Asia by journeying to Yarkand but found this itinerary very difficult, costly and dangerous. Therefore, after twenty-five days he turned back to Leh. It was on his way back that he met the British officer William Moorcroft, whom he accompanied to Leh, where they stayed together.

Moorcroft was a well-paid British veterinary surgeon and the manager of the East India Company's stud, who wanted to find an overland route to renew the British Indian horse stock from Central Asia via Afghanistan. Indian history shows that it was people with connections to this horse stock that were, again and again, successful in conquering India. Moorcroft ~~was also instrumental in~~ **also made an attempt at** providing the pashmina goats, indigenous to high altitudes of the Himalayas, for the British by entering in disguise into Tibet. This venture, eventually, did not succeed. Although Moorcroft carried the goats to India when the British sent them over to Britain in separate ships for the males and the females, one of the ships sunk.

Moorcroft's expedition at the time of meeting Csoma included a Persian speaking member who also knew Tibetan. Both Moorcroft and Csoma picked up the rudiments of the language from him. Moorcroft, while dismissive of Csoma's search for "some obscure points of History", was fully aware of the importance of Ladakh and Tibet in general for the British in these early years of the Great Game. He was also impressed by the fact that Csoma **was had been** able to travel the dangerous route he intended to take in the opposite direction, and in which Moorcroft eventually met his death in 1825.

This encounter triggered a decisive change in the life of Csoma. He traveled to Kashmir with Moorcroft and received from him a copy of the very first book on Tibet, the *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, the edited reports of eighteenth-century missionaries. It was, eventually, Moorcroft who spurred Csoma to his Tibetan studies. Csoma – perhaps hoping to find new sources about the history of ancient Hungarians in the literature of the Tibetans, a nation neighboring the Uyghurs and an absolute terra incognita at that time. Unable to continue his journey to Central Asia – Csoma stayed in Leh and began to learn Tibetan **with the help of through** Persian **as an intermediate language**. After acquiring the rudiments of the language, he decided to perfect his knowledge "through the many and interesting volumes conserved in the monasteries". Thus he asked for the support of Moorcroft, who eventually provided him with the most necessary materials, and wrote recommendations for him both to the kalön [bka' blon] – the chief royal minister – of Leh and to the head of the settlement of Zangla, Sangye Phuntsog (Sangs-rgyas Phun-tshogs), who would later become the teacher of Csoma. Kőrösi left Kashmir on May 2, 1823, and arrived in Leh on the first of June. Here he was given gifts and a further letter of recommendation from the kalön, who directed him to Zangla, where he arrived nine days later.

Kőrösi stayed in Zangla for sixteen months (from June 20, 1823 to October 22, 1824). There, he learned **properly** Tibetan **properly** and began to familiarize himself with Tibetan literature amidst appalling conditions such as passing a Tibetan winter without fire. He studied several works "from the two-part collection of translations from Sanskrit" – that is, from the Kanjur [Bka' 'gyur] and the Tanjur [Bstan 'gyur], about 330 volumes of Tibetan canon, literally thousands of pages. He also made a special mention of a long Sanskrit-Tibetan glossary that is of utmost importance to his work. This was most probably the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, a famous dictionary of Buddhist terminology compiled in the 9th century, which later would form the basis of Csoma's third, posthumous monograph. An interesting traditional Tibetan way of learning was that Csoma received answers to many of his questions in writing. Csoma's Tibetan manuscripts, the so-called "Alexander-books", treasured now at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, include a manuscript with Lama Kunga Choleg's [Kun-dga Phoc-legs] answers to Csoma's questions.

Csoma laid the foundations of his later work in the sixteen months spent in Zangla. In this period he not only mastered the Tibetan language, but he also acquired knowledge of a remarkable part of the canonized literature, and – as is revealed by his later writings and some letters concerning him – he composed a glossary of about 30,000 words during this period.

Csoma continued his Tibetan studies in two subsequent stays with Sangye Phuntsog. After finally entering British India in 1830, he spent the remaining 12 years of his life in Bengal. Working mostly in the capital city of Calcutta, ever in simple conditions, he published the achievements of his research and studied Sanskrit and Indian vernaculars to find traces of any linguistic interaction with Hungarian. When in 1842 he judged the political situation

favorable for a journey to the Uyghurs via Lhasa in Tibet, he set off to achieve his original goal. However, he died on his way on 11th April in Darjeeling.

Csoma was a consistently independent scholar who did not accept any individual gifts (not even a coat from one of his visitors) but only money from public funds. While he ~~had~~ repeatedly received support from the British, had British friends and several contemporary westerners praised his erudition and simplicity, his relationship with the ruling power was not always genial. When he first reported his service to the British at the then Indo-Tibetan border in 1824, the British looked on him with suspicion. (The commander of the border town Subathu at that time was the Scottish Captain Charles Pratt Kennedy, considered as the founder of Shimla, who later became one of the principal supporters of the Hungarian scholar) A recurring early grievance of Csoma against the British was that they considered him a spy. When he was eventually cleared and admitted to the colonial circles, he was ridiculed. He wore “native” clothes until Captain Kennedy asked him to change them into European ones. Another instant of British colonial antipathy is that of H.H. Wilson, the Secretary of the Asiatic Society, who hindered the publication of the Tibetan dictionary. Wilson wrote, “I do not think that the Literature of Tibet voluminous as it **is** offers much that will add to the stock of knowledge.” While fully aware of Csoma's work at the Himalayas, in 1926 the Asiatic Society published a poorly edited Tibetan-English dictionary in Serampore. The Hungarian scholar was about to fall into neglect. His work gained renewed British support only when the professor of Chinese at Paris, Julius Klaproth, published a devastating article on the Serampore dictionary and ridiculed the British trying to penetrate Tibetan culture from the South. This then triggered on criticism of the Asiatic **S**ociety from London. When eventually readmitted on the British payroll, Csoma did not take his monthly salary of 100 Rs. apart from the first two months. He also refused British approaches that fell outside the scope of what he promised to do. He did not go back to Afghanistan to collect Moorcroft’s belongings, did not record the temperature of Kanam and did not take part in the Bhutan expedition. On a journey to north Bengal, he wrote politely to James Prinsep, the subsequent Secretary of the Asiatic Society, “Since I intend to prosecute only my philological researches, and will abstain from every statistical, political, or even geographical inquiry, if I shall write but seldom to you, and at that time also shortly, I beg you will excuse me.”

When he left Calcutta to learn Bengali in Titalia he refused to be lodged in the house of Major Lloyd, claiming that living in the major’s house would result in losing the trust of the ‘natives’, and he took a simple Indian hut instead.

Achievement

There have been Jesuit and Capuchin missions to Tibet already in the eighteenth century and missionaries prepared at least two dictionaries and a general book but all lacked good edition.

1. The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has preserved in manuscript the extract of the Latin-Tibetan Dictionary, which was commenced in 1708 by the Capuchin Friars Giuseppe da Ascoli and Francesco Maria da Tours and completed by F. Domenico da Fano (1674-1728). The latter took it to Rome in 1713 and made this extract for two French scholars. The manuscript contains about 2,500 words in Tibetan script.
2. The *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, published in 1762 in Rome, presents the reports of the Italian missionaries and includes a rudimentary grammar and a glossary. It was edited poorly by a non-specialist called Agostino Antonio Georgi.

3. The so-called Serampore Dictionary (Schröter's *A dictionary of the Bhotanta or Boutan language*) prepared by Francisco Orazio de la Penna and published in 1826, was originally in Italian then a translator with no knowledge of Tibet translated it into English.

Csoma's dictionary, grammar, and articles were the first truly academic forays into the culture of Tibet.

Since the Renaissance, it has been a commonly accepted view that language and textual studies hold the key to the understanding of a culture. It was also believed at Csoma's time that the study of a culture's classical language(s) is the foundation of such understanding. Csoma has provided the tools that his times deemed necessary for entering into a scholarly discourse on Tibet.

Csoma's work has been collected into four volumes for the bicentenary of his birth in 1984: 1. Dictionary, 2. Grammar, 3. Sanskrit-Tibetan Vocabulary, called *Mahāvyutpatti*, 4. Studies. Apart from this published work, he catalogued the Tibetan manuscripts acquired by the Asiatic Society from Nepal. Csoma not only presented the language but also the written classical culture of Tibet through his articles. He described the Tibetan canon, the Kanjur (A) and the Tanjur (B), and presented a version of the life of the Buddha (C) on the pages of *Asiatic Researches*. Most of his works published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (JASB) are presentations of the Tibetan material rather than theoretical studies. Many of them are titled "notes", "enumeration", "remarks" or "notices".

A list of Csoma's studies

Asiatic Researches (1836-1839)

- A. Bka'-wgyur: 1. Analysis of the Dulva (175-227); 2. Analysis of the Sher-chin (265-273); 3. Phal-chen (273-278); 4. Kon-tsheg (278-284); 5. Analysis of the Mdo Ka-Na (284-320); 6. Pa - A (320-358); 7. Myang-Hdas (359); 8. Analysis of the Gyut Ka-Na (359-388); 89. Pa-Zha (388-424).
B. Bstan-wgyur: Abstract of the content of the Bstan-Hgyur.
C. Notices of the Life of Shakya (i.e. Buddha).

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1832-1840)

1. Geographical Notice of Tibet: JASB I (1832), 121-127.
2. Translation of a Tibetan Fragment: JASB I (1832), 269-276.
3. Note on the Origin of the Kala-Chakra and Adi-Buddha Systems: JASB II (1833), 57-59.
4. Translation of a Tibetan Passport dated A. D. 1688: JASB II (1833), 201.
5. Origin of the Shakya Race translated from the La, or the 26th volume of the mDo class in the Ka-gyur, commencing on the 161st leaf: JASB II (1833), 385-392.
6. Tibetan Symbolical Names, Used as Numerals: JASB III (1834), 5-8.
7. Extracts from Tibetan Works: JASB III (1834), 57-61.
8. Analysis of a Tibetan Medical Work: JASB IV (1835), 1-20.
9. Interpretation of the Tibetan Inscription on a Bhotian Banner, taken in Assam, and presented to the Asiatic Society by Captain Bogle: JASB V (1836), 264.

10. Note on the White Satin-Embroidered Scarfs of the Tibetan Priests: JASB V (1836), 383.
11. Notices on the Different Systems of Buddhism, extracted from the Tibetan Authorities: JASB VII (1838), 142-147.
12. Enumeration of Historical and Grammatical Works to be met with in Tibet: JASB VII (1838), Part II, 147-152.
13. Remarks on Trans-Himalayan Buddhist Amulets: JASB IX (1840), Part II, 905-907.
14. A Brief Notice of the Subhásita Ratna Nidhi of Saskya Pandita, with extracts and translations: JASB XXIV (1855), 141-165. P. XXV (1856), 257-294.

Although his dictionary is considered to be the first scholarly one, it has its shortcomings. He did not organize the word order according to the traditional Tibetan alphabetical order relying on the so-called radical consonants. His Tibetan grammar describes the grammar on the pattern of Latin-based grammars, as was usual at that time but would be deemed unpractical today. The biggest mistake happened with the third volume, the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, “a valuable and most extensive polyglot vocabulary (of which M. Rémusat attempted a small portion in Paris from Chinese works).” After the publication of his dictionary and grammar, Csoma was keen on leaving Calcutta and did not insist on its publication. It was decades later, that his biographer Duka dug out this forgotten manuscript and presented it to the world and eventually Denison Ross undertook its publication (vols I 1910 [1911], II 1916 and then Chatterjee vol 3. 1944).

Although his dictionary is reprinted again and again (e.g. Mañjuśrī 1973) and is now available online, its importance lies in the fact that it provided the basis for all later Tibetan dictionaries.

On publication, Csoma's works were sent out to the most important academic centers in Europe, and scholars were now able to engage in the study of Tibetan. Academia at Csoma's time was more open to the study of a wide range of languages and first, it was scholars of other cultures of the Orient who undertook the study of Tibetan in Calcutta, St Petersburg, Germany, Paris, Vienna and elsewhere. It is also worth mentioning that Csoma taught Tibetan to the future secretary of the Asiatic Society, Solomon Caesar Malan (April 22, 1812 – November 25, 1894).

In 1841 the Mongolist Isaak Jacob Schmidt's Tibetan-German Dictionary (with a German-Tibetan Index) was published, followed two years later by a Tibetan-Russian version. This was preponderantly a translation of Csoma's dictionary into German, with a rearrangement of entries according to Tibetan practice. Philippe Édouard Foucaux (1811-1894) published the first Tibetan grammar in French in 1858.

Csoma's biographer, Theodore Duka (1825-1908), was a Hungarian lieutenant of the 1848-49 war of independence who took refuge in Britain and became an army doctor in India and married into the British aristocracy. His take on the life of Csoma was markedly pro-British as was already pointed out almost immediately by Sir William Wilson Hunter (1840-1900), one of the leading Orientalists of his times and Vice President of the Royal Asiatic Society. Hunter's writing on Csoma, however, was less accessible to later scholarship than Duka's monograph.

The French philosopher, journalist, statesman, and possible illegitimate son of Napoleon, Jules Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire (1805 –1895), professor of ancient philosophy at the Collège

de France in *Le Boudha et sa religion* (Paris: Didier, 1860) wrote highly appreciative lines on Csoma concerning the discovery of Buddhism and summarised in French Duka's assessment and biographical account. Scholars and explorers who referred systematically to Csoma's results include the English geographer, explorer, and writer Sir Clements Robert Markham (1830-1916), Laurence Austine Waddell (1854–1938) a British explorer, Professor of Tibetan, Professor of Chemistry and Pathology, the explorer of Chinese Turkestan Sven Hedin (1865-1952) and the French scholar of Buddhism Léon Feer (1830-1902). The editor of his *Mahāvvyutpatti* was no one else than Denison Ross (1871-1940), the first director of the School of Oriental and African Languages, one of the foremost institutes in the world for the study of Asian languages.

Csoma's work in its entirety can be accessed on the internet (<http://www.archivum.kcst.hu/index.html>) and the electronic *The Csoma Archive* of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (<http://csoma.mtak.hu/>) has been included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2009.

Modern studies in English are scarce (Fox, 2001 and Marczell, 2007) and since the publication of Duka's work no authoritative monograph appeared in English that includes the research of the past 130 years.

Modern Western Reception

Csoma de Kőrös is considered to be a national hero amongst the Hungarians and his native village was renamed after him. A visit to his tomb in Darjeeling is normally part of any Hungarian Head of State's visit to India. Yet recent western scholarship and popular writing are ambiguous towards him.

According to one of the most influential books on the Orient in the past fifty years, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Europeans, including scholars, held up what Said calls "Orientalist discourse", an uncritical common acceptance of the superiority of Western culture over that of the east, and served colonial or neo-colonial interests, whether aware of it or not. The word "Orientalist" acquired a pejorative sense in recent academic English and departments and faculties of oriental studies changed their names into Asian Studies or similar.

Some scholars also presented Csoma as working for British Imperial interests in a Saidian 'Orientalist' framework since he was a western scholar active within the intellectual environment of the British Empire. It was the British agent William Moorcroft who persuaded him to undertake the study of Tibetan, a language and culture strategically important for the British. Later, it was in the capital city of British India and in British service that he published his works, and his tomb in Darjeeling is among those of the British colonial officials. His studies were indeed invaluable for the Empire and a Saidian approach is made easier by the markedly pro-British attitude of his biographer, Theodore Duka.

Efforts to present Csoma in a Saidian framework emphasize the British agent Moorcroft's role in directing Csoma towards Tibetan studies and quote his statements of allegiance to the British Crown. One of the most distinguished American experts on Buddhism, Donald S. Lopez, cited Csoma saying that his research was done to fulfil his "heavy obligations to the [British] Government [of India]," and hinted at Tibetan resistance saying that Csoma worked "with, it appears, only the grudging cooperation of a lama." In another sentence, however, Lopez distinguished between Csoma's motivation and those of the Empire by stating that the

“coincidence of the interests of nationalism, represented by Csoma de Kőrös’s search for Hungarian origins, and of empire, represented by Moorcroft’s conviction that a knowledge of Tibetan language would prove of value to the British, resulted in the creation of a science and a profession called Tibetology.”

Lopez’s views fit well into the rhetoric of late-twentieth-century Asia scholarship aiming at distancing itself from the earlier ‘Orientalists’ by presenting in negative light the scholars who worked before 1978. Accordingly, Lopez portrays Moorcroft as “a self-appointed spy” and claims that Csoma was “what Said would call a gifted amateur enthusiast.”

Two other writers, Edward Fox and George Allen, present an entirely different image of Csoma, namely that of an eccentric scholar. Edward Fox in his short biography *The Hungarian Who Walked to Heaven: Alexander Csoma de Koros (sic!) 1784-1842*, published in 2001, tells with exotic detail how Csoma was educated at his austere Calvinist school. He considers Csoma's journey to the East as a pilgrimage to discover the roots of the Hungarian people and describes how he came to study the Tibetan language and the vast Tibetan Buddhist canon in freezing conditions in a tiny cell in the Himalayas, which led to the compilation of the first "relatively" reliable Tibetan-English dictionary.

According to Charles Allen, an accomplished writer of bestselling books on British involvement in South Asia, Csoma was an eccentric wanderer and it was just a coincidence that he produced scholarly work. Allen in his *Buddha and the Sahibs* (2002) follows up the western discovery of Buddhism. His attitude rejects the Saidian paradigm and emphasizes that the explorers of Buddhism contributed to the increase of global knowledge. Allen, whose ancestors for generations have been colonial administrators in India, relates in a captivating style how one of the world's oldest religions has been discovered in the west. His book is not an academic monograph but rather a popular enterprise that includes substantial research. Along with the presentation of the development of western knowledge on Buddhism Allen also provides exotic personal details on its major exponents. For example, he tells how the British resident in Nepal, B. H. Hodgson, one of the first explorers of the Sanskrit sources of Buddhism, lived at his residence in the company of a tiger, a mountain sheep, a wild goat, four bears, three civets and three dozens of beautiful pheasants.

According to Allen, Csoma was an enthusiastic crank, obsessed with the question of the origins of the Hungarians, who out of naivety took seriously Moorcroft's stipend. He forced himself on the British, who always looked at him with curiosity. Allen underlines that in dirtiness Csoma was a match to his Lama and that he slept in the same garment he wore during the day. All this caused a great deal of puzzlement to the British since it was difficult to find accommodation for the unwashed foreigner and he was first put up at the home of Ramkamal Sen, the treasurer of the Asiatic Society — and later in a back room of the Society. Although Allen also quotes some appreciative statements on Csoma, he emphasizes that all his European acquaintances, Moorcroft, Gerard, Wilson and even his compatriot, Ágoston Shöft, somehow regarded Csoma an eccentric. It was Csoma's eccentricity that eventually resulted in his death. He spent a night in the forest at the foothills of the Himalayas in spite of knowing that it was a malaria-infected area and most travelers, therefore, passed through it fast at daytime. Csoma mentioned to the doctor in Darjeeling that he had malaria several times and did not take medicine for it.

It can be admitted that without the influence of the British Empire — in the person of Moorcroft and his other friends and later on the Asiatic Society, — we might not have seen

any fruits of Csoma's scholarship, since he did not find and therefore did not publish anything substantial about the origins of the Hungarians in Asia. As there is no authoritative monograph in English on Csoma and on certain points of his life we lack any material, lacunae in his biography give scope to a Saidian interpretation. Lama Sangye Phuntsog, for example, was reluctant only during one period of their cooperation, the reason for which is unknown. For most of the time, however, between 26th July 1823 and 22nd Oct 1824 in Zangla and for three years in Kanam in 1827-30, they were able to work together intensively and the Lama offered to work two years longer than originally planned in Kanam. As a monument to Lama Sangye Phuntsog's cooperation, Csoma also put his name on the cover page of his dictionary. As if to remind the readers that learning exists outside European academia, he mentioned after his name "learned Lama of Zangskar". Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (1840-1899), a medical doctor from Pest, in 1866 reported how the Tshilinggi Dasa (European disciple) [phyi gling gi] was remembered fondly in the Phuktar (Phugtal) Monastery. A Tibetan informant who remembered Mr. Tashi Morup, whose father knew Csoma closely, stated in 1928 that "Sangye Puntsog was very fond of Skander beg (Mr. Alexander) and taught him everything he knew."

Beyond the Scientific

Csoma, though equipped with western scholarship, came from the periphery of European cultural circulation. He defined himself not as a subject of the Hapsburg Empire but rather as a Székler Hungarian. His patriotism prompted him to state his nationality on the cover-page of his books: 'Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, Siculo-Hungarian of Transylvania'.

Notwithstanding his gratitude towards the British, or rather his faithfulness to his promise, Csoma's ultimate motivation for research was not the service of the British Empire but firstly a universal human curiosity in exploring the unknown, about which he said, "the delight I've felt during my studies and discoveries of the secrets of these ancient matters defies all description." Secondly, it was a patriotic enthusiasm to find the kinsmen of the Hungarians in the East. He was not working to present the Oriental people as the 'others' but was searching for relatives.

It was romantic enthusiasm for his homeland and his delight in scholarship that gave him the strength to live in uttermost simplicity both in Tibet, where in his room "the cold was so intense as to make it a task of severity to extricate the hands from their fleecy resort to turn over the pages", and in Calcutta, where, as a librarian of the Asiatic Society he lived in a small back room.

Because of his deep understanding of Buddhism, Alexander Csoma de Kőrös is held in high regard among Buddhists and Indians. His statue, as well as his room, is still reverently preserved at the Asiatic Society in Kolkata.

Csoma de Kőrös with the training of a protestant priest was able to appreciate and present to the world the Tibetan Buddhism, a culture that in the west today is considered to be one of the most important representatives of a world religion. His simplicity and extraordinary perseverance became an example for scholars in Hungary, Transylvania and beyond.

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