

HUNGARY AND THE EXPLORATION OF CENTRAL ASIA

by

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This year (1979) we are celebrating two important anniversaries in the history of the exploration of Central Asia. In 1879 one of the most outstanding scholars dealing with Central Asiatic studies: Professor Paul Pelliot was born. It is no coincidence that the 100th anniversary of his birth will be marked in October in Paris by a conference on the material discovered in the famous Tun-huang Cave. The rich finds made there have opened a new epoch in the exploration of the early cultures of Central Asia. A few months before Pelliot was born the Thousand Buddha Caves in Tun-huang were discovered by the Hungarian scholar Lajos Lóczy, accompanied by Count Béla Széchenyi (the son of István Széchenyi, the famous Hungarian statesman and founder of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) and the Austrian Gustav Kreitner. The coincidence between those two events was, of course, pure chance. The famous cave with its secret library was opened by the Taoist monk Wang only 20 years later, and its importance to Central Asiatic studies was realized only in 1907 by another Hungarian scholar, Sir Aurel Stein. Stein was followed there by Pelliot, who visited the cave in 1908.

However, that Stein should have visited the caves was not mere chance. After his first expedition to Central Asia, Stein received a letter in 1902 from his friend Lajos Lóczy, calling his countryman's attention to the Tun-huang caves and suggesting that exploration of them would probably turn out to be of major importance to the history and art history of Central Asia. Lóczy's prediction was fulfilled beyond all expectations by an outstanding discovery.

The centenary of the discovery of the Tun-huang Caves provides an opportunity to make some reflections on the part Hungary played in exploring Central Asia.

In advance I should like to express a strong conviction that to progress in any area of human knowledge the nationality and mother tongue of the person who contributes something new to the sum of common knowledge is ultimately quite irrelevant. Science cannot be compared to the Olympic Games and it is not my intention to list the number of golds, silvers or bronzes that were won or might have been won by Hungary in the history of Central Asian exploration.

There are two reasons why I feel it is worth talking about the role of Hungary. First, one has to question what special causes and what specific historical background of renewed activity by Hungary and her people led Hungarians to visit so remote a part of the world. Secondly, the bulk of the source material, the background information indispensable to an understanding of the achievements, and even a large part of the published material is in Hungary; much of it is in Hungarian and so poorly accessible to non-Hungarian scholars.

The history of the contacts with Central Asia and the knowledge those contacts brought about can be roughly divided into four periods. The first period lasted up to the conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarians around AD 896. The second period ended with the occupation of the major part of Hungary by the Ottoman Turks in the mid-16th century. Then follows a long period ending at the turn of the 18th century. The last and most important period begins with the age of the Hungarian Enlightenment. I have deliberately closed my subject at the outbreak of the First World War and shall refrain from mentioning any subsequent events, however important.

The great explorations in the past had several, mutually dependent causes, such as commerce, religious proselytising, political ambitions, colonialization, and in the most recent time, simple scientific curiosity as well. However, one almost always finds in the background the historical and economic imperatives of contemporary Europe. Hungary's case is no exception, although there was one specific motivation in Hungary alone of all European nations, that the Hungarians themselves had arrived in their present European homeland from the east, in a relatively late migration that had not been forgotten in the ensuing millennium. Vague memories and later sophistications about a Graeter or Eastern Hungary, the search for brothers who had remained in the east, and the attempt to solve the conundrum of how the Hungarian nation originated all contributed the decision of Hungary and the Hungarians to go east. Of course the conception of an eastern origin for the Hungarians had altered over the centuries, but it had never ceased to influence the motivation, so lending a specific colouring to the variegated history of the European exploration of Central Asia.

From the Tun-huang material it is becoming clearer and clearer just what the Tibetans know about the Turks. That is important at this point insofar as it sheds new light on the historical environment in which the Hungarians lived between the 5th and 9th centuries within the frontiers of the Turkish world. On the other hand almost nothing is known of what experience the several Turkish groups had of Tibet, which they might have shared with the Hungarians. Between the mention of the Tibetan *kha-gan* and *blon-po* on the stele of Kül tegin in 732, the data contained in Kashgari's work written about 1072 and the early Buddhist works translated from Tibetan there is certainly a considerable gap.

I shall not dwell now on Tibetan knowledge of the Turks, in part because it only has an indirect bearing on the Hungarians and in part because I shall try to give some new glimpses of the matter in a short contribution, in connection with the word *tibet* as the name of a kind of cloth.

The second period can be divided into two sub-periods, before and after the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241–2. The Mongol threat to Europe became apparent early in the 13th century. The activities of the Dominican missions to the east, which originally tied in with the eastern threat to the Holy Land, were immediately extended to the Mongols. There are historical reasons why many Hungarians were to be found among them, and they brought the first authentic news to Europe of the Mongols, who came from the unknown Central Asia.

In the 1220s, more than 20 years before the missions of Plano Carpini and Friar Ascelin, Hungarian Dominicans visited Cumania and passed on the first intelligence of the Mongols. About them and about the journey of Friar Otto in 1232 we have as yet only indirect reports, but more is known about the travels of Friar Julian in 1235–6 and 1236–7. Friar Julian only reached as far as the Volga region, and that was on his first journey. His account on the Mongols was studied very seriously at the papal court, and Julian was invited in 1237 by Pope Gregory IX for a personal audience in Rome. Friar Julian's letter written in the same year to Salvius de Salvis, Bishop of Perugia, contains the first detailed description by a European of the origin, history, campaigns, customs and contemporary leaders of the Mongols. Friar Julian also mentions a letter the Mongols sent to the King of Hungary, which was written in *litteris paganis sed lingua tartarica*. Other letters to European rulers are also known of and it is clearly stated by Plano Carpini that the letter in Persian Güyük wrote in 1246 was originally composed in Mongolian, and so there is no reason to doubt that this letter too was written in Mongolian. If Igor de Rachewiltz is right in saying that the hitherto accepted dating of the Yisüngge stele, 1225, needs revising to the 1250s, then Julian recorded the earliest Mongolian texts known to history, since the concluding Mongolian lines of Töregene's Chinese inscription date from 1240. Though Julian's record does not appear to be a word-for-word translation, it does offer an invaluable source of information on the early chancery practice of the Mongols. In the account of Julian's first journey by Friar Riccardus it is stated that the Dominican friars found in the old *Gesta Hungarorum* the history of the immigration of the Hungarians from the east and information on Eastern or Magna Hungaria; they went there because they "felt pity for their pagan brothers". That was the motive with which Hungarian Dominicans set out for the east, of course as envoys despatched or backed by the King of Hungary, whose eastern diplomacy played a key role in Europe at that time.

The report of Julian spread rapidly across Europe and was known to travellers like Plano Carpini, Rubruc or Odoricus de Pordenone, who subsequently visited Mongolia. It is perhaps not without interest that one of Odoricus' manuscripts is now in the possession of the Hungarian National Library and has been described by Professor Ligeti.

The horizon of the medieval Hungarian chronicles written before the Mongol invasion ended at the Ural mountains, the Volga river and the Caucasus. Those written after the Mongol invasion of 1241–2 already report on the Khitans, Mongolia and the western parts of Central Asia. Most of the new knowledge was acquired from the European travellers of the 13th and 14th centuries. However, one cannot omit that some of the information was due to Hungarians. Here I would briefly mention the eastern diplomacy of King Matthias and King Sigismund, later Holy Roman Emperor, and also the Franciscan missionaries. For in 1457 Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini wrote of *missis ex Hungaria viris religiosis* by Pope Eugene IV (1431–1447), and from the same time we know of a Hungarian envoy visiting the court of Ulug Mohammed in 1419–23. Among the motives for the 15th century missions one discovers once more a wish to make contact with the "Eastern Hungarians", whom Aeneas Sylvius declared were *rudēs homines et idolorum cultores, quorum eadem lingua sit cum hungaris Pannoniam incolentibus*.

The growing threat from the Ottoman Empire and their occupation of the major part of Hungary put an end to all Hungarian initiatives towards keeping up contact with the east. Only the Transylvanian principality was able to maintain contacts of its own, and will be seen later, Transylvania was subsequently to play an important role.

Our next source of information comes from the 17th century and is connected with the activities of the Jesuits in China. In the *Historica narratio* of Father Schall (published in 1665) there is an interesting record of a "Western Tatar" nobleman from the Volga region who was a Christian. He related to Father Schall that a Hungarian Jesuit captured by the Ottomans and later sold to the Tatars was living near to the Volga. In a letter to Rome that Hungarian Jesuit had asked not to be redeemed, but for other missionaries to be sent with whose help he could convert his ancient kinsfolk. The most important information for Father Schall was that from that Volga region China might be reached by a short land route instead of the long, perilous and expensive route on sea. The search for safe and shorter continental routes to China was one of the major reasons for travelling in and through Central Asia in the ensuing period.

There were other contacts with the Jesuit mission as well. Father Grueber is known to have crossed Tibet on his journey in 1659–62. But his original goal had been not China but Transylvania, then a quasi-independent Hungarian principality. Father Grueber was born in Linz, Austria, and his close contacts with Hungary and interest in the country can be gauged from the fact that after returning from Tibet he went to Transylvania, where he served as an army chaplain under Prince Apafi (1661–1690). In 1669–70 he lived in Nagyszombat and certainly had contacts with the Hungarian university founded there 35 years earlier. Father Grueber died in 1680 in eastern Hungary, in the town Sárosptak.

Csoma de Kőrös was born in Transylvania more than 100 years after the death of Grueber. It is interesting to speculate about what was known of Tibet in Hungary, especially at the school in Nagyenyed that Csoma attended. I am tempted to give an account of the studies I have done on the matter and to analyse the probable share of Grueber and the other Jesuits. However, I must be brief, and so I shall only mention one detail. In 1799 Gyarmathy's work on the Finno-Ugric affinity of the Hungarian language appeared. In that pioneering study of comparative European historical linguistics the book by Schall is quoted, precisely in connection with the "eastern Hungarians". It is known that it was Gyarmathi who gave the most effective assistance to the young Csoma de Kőrös and encouraged his plans to go east and discover the eastern Hungarians.

Csoma's life and work are well known, and so I shall not dwell here on the role he played in the exploration of Central Asia, but I should like to draw attention to one point. All earlier travellers, whether envoys, diplomats, missionaries or whatever, were in one or another way *sent* to Central Asia; they travelled under the aegis of a political power, or a religious or commercial organization. Csoma set out of his own accord without official support of any kind, but with a set scholarly aim. To understand that unique occurrence in the history of Central Asian exploration, one must look at the historical background to Csoma's decision. The main factors behind it were linked with the peculiarities of the formation of the eastern European nations, the special

role and status of the lesser nobility in political and intellectual life, the position of Hungary Seklers within Hungary, along with the specific features of the Hungarian Enlightenment. So important to Csoma were consciousness of national identity and the problems of its roots that he was prepared to devote his life to solving them.

The same motives guided his younger compatriot Antal Reguly, who travelled between 1843 and 1847 to the Volga region and southern Siberia. Though Reguly never visited Central Asia, we owe to him an interesting study of the Dzungars.

The example of Csoma and Reguly was inspiring enough for many later travellers to attempt to follow in their footsteps. Tivadar Duka, a physician who took part in the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–9 devoted his life in India and later in London to collecting all the materials about Csoma, while himself contributing substantially the sum of knowledge about Central Asia.

The founder of Hungarian Turkish studies, and a man who put a radically new stamp on Turkish and Central Asian studies, was Ármin Vámbéry, who travelled in Central Asia from 1861 to 1864. What he discovered on his travels and what he later achieved are generally known, but what concerns us here is an important change in the aims he set himself. In his book *Travels in Central Asia*, Vámbéry wrote,

It is common knowledge that the Hungarian language belongs to the stock known as Altaic, but whether it should be placed in the Finnic or in the Tataric branch of that stock remains to be decided. That enquiry, which interests us as Hungarians both from the scholarly and the national points of view, was the prime motive and cause of my journey to the East.

But then he adds,

The consequent view that we Hungarians travel to Asia to seek those of our race who were left behind there is an erroneous one. To have espoused such an object, whose attainment would be impossible on both ethnographical and philological grounds, would lay a man open to the charge of gross ignorance. What we are desirous of discovering is the etymological construction of our language, and for that reason we seek precise information from cognate idioms (pp. vii–viii).

Less is known of Vámbéry's compatriot, Vilmos G. Leitner. He was born in 1840 in Pest, studied in Istanbul and Malta, and completed his studies at King's College, London in 1859, where in the same year he was appointed teacher of Turkish, Arabic and Greek. Leitner was the founder of the Oriental school at King's College. In 1865 he was sent out as a civil servant to Lahore in the Punjab, where among many other institutions he founded Punjab University College, whose principal he was in his later years. His expeditions to Kashmir, Ladak, the Tibetan borderland and Dardistan led to the discovery of the Dard language, and he also gained fame for his excavations of Graeco-Buddhist art. His interest in Tibetan can be gauged from the donation he made of a Tibetan Prajnaparamita text to the Hungarian National Library. As early as 1873 he was elected an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

In that same year a strange man called László Berzenczey left Hungary for Central Asia. A prominent figure in the War of Independence, he had had to leave Hungary in

1849. After travelling all over the world he obtained an amnesty, returned and in 1869 became a member of parliament for his birthplace, a town in Transylvania. The route Berzenczey took through Ekaterinburg, Siberia and Tashkent to Kashgar is documented. In 1874 he was captured by Yakub beg in Chakmak and rescued by an British expedition. It is not entirely clear on what route he reached India, from where he returned home in the same year.

In the very same year, Gábor Bálint, later to be professor of Altaic Studies at the University of Kolozsvár in Transylvania, visited Mongolia. He studied the languages of the Volga region, and while among the Kalmucks he also met a Tibetan lama. After a stay in St. Petersburg he proceeded through Siberia to Mongolia. In Krasnoyarsk he hoped to decipher the Turkish runic inscriptions with the help of the Hungarian or Sekler runic script. In Urga he studied the Mongolian language, folklore and ethnography and also learnt Manchu.

Two years later the brothers Ágost and József Zichy traversed Mongolia. The former was an orientalist and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Ágost Zichy studied the ethnography, language and religion of the Mongols.

The next Hungarian scholar, Károly Ujfalvy, was born in Vienna. He was educated in Bonn and Paris, and from his expeditions to Central Asia he brought back rich anthropological and linguistic material. It seems to have been forgotten that Ujfalvy was the first European to discover the Yagnobi language, which proved later of essential importance to an understanding of the Middle Iranian languages and the history of Central Asia, because Yagnobi is the closest living cognate of the Sogdian language which played a key role in the medieval history of Central Asia. Ujfalvy's studies in the Tibetan borderland and Baltistan in 1880 were much assisted by Leitner. Of his aims he wrote:

Im Herzen Asiens, in Ferghana und Kaschgarien, hoffte ich nähere Spuren der Ahnen meines Volkes zu finden. Doch rasch war ich zu der Ueberzeugung gelangt, dass, was meinen grossen Landsleuten Csoma und Vámbéry nicht gelang, mir ebenfalls nicht gelingen sollte und konnte (p. ix.).

We have already mentioned Béla Széchenyi's expedition. His original aim was to reach Lhasa, and recently highly important new information on the expedition was published by Professor Petech and Dr Giuli Tozzi. Once more time only allows me to quote Széchenyi briefly on his reasons for going:

Und wenn ich nun Asien zum Gegenstand meiner wissenschaftlichen Forschungen ausersah, so geschah dies aus dem Grunde, weil ich für diesen Erdtheil, als eine der hauptsächlichsten Wiegenstätten der Menschheit, hervorragendes Interesse hegte, ja weil ich mich sogar der Hoffnung hingegenben durfte, an Stellen zu gelangen, wo ich Spuren unserer Vorahren, oder Völker und Stämme finden würde, die uns Ungarn Sprach- und Stammesverwandt sind (I. p. vi.).

Already in this case the primary motives were the interests of humanity as a whole, and whether or not to seek the "eastern Hungarians" or linguistically related peoples remained undecided.

Széchenyi's studies of eastern Tibetan dialects and Gustav Kreitner's ethnographical and geographical records have still to be dealt with. The undoubted scholar on the expedition was Lajos Lóczy, while the discovery of the Trans-Himalayas is usually credited to Sven Hedin. Fewer realize that the Royal Geographic Society, having some doubts about Sven Hedin's discovery, asked Lóczy to confirm the matter. Lóczy not only backed Hedin, he also affirmed that he himself had discovered the range earlier than Hedin and independently given it exactly the same name. That occurrence resulted from a détour by the Széchenyi expedition. In Calcutta Lóczy lighted upon Csoma's autobiography and decided to follow up Csoma's route into Tibet. He went to Darjeeling and through Kalimpong and Sikkim to the Tibetan borderland. There he climbed the Jelep Pass, which lies only 250 km from Lhasa. He made a detailed map of the region, through which Younghusband was to reach the Tibetan capital 25 years later. On the 4,423 metre high pass Lóczy made a sketch and drew the contours of the Trans-Himalayas, but the discoveries he made in 1878 were not published till 1907 and then only at the urging of Waddel.

Csoma's tomb in Darjeeling became a place of pilgrimage for many Hungarians, of whom I should like to mention just one more: Ferenc Hopp, who visited Darjeeling in 1882. In 1919 Hopp founded the Hungarian Museum of East Asian Arts, where the archaeological material gathered on Jenő Zichy's third expedition is now kept.

It would be not without interest to quote the Count Zichy's handwritten dedication to his fellow members of the Hungarian Parliament in 1897, before he departed on his third expedition, or to quote from his book *La migration de la race hongroise. Principe et résumé de mes recherches historiques*, publishes bilingually, but for sake of brevity I shall confine myself to citing the introduction of his book on his third expedition:

Die improvisierte Geschichte unserer Urvergangenheit, aus welcher die ganze heutige Generation ihre edleren Anregungen empfangen hat, ist infolge der in neuerer Zeit Gott sei Dank dafür, immer mehr sich entwickelnden streng wissenschaftlichen und kritischen Thätigkeit in eine eigenthümliche Lage gerathen. Wir fühlen und wissen, dass es Wirklichkeit gewesen, aber wir sehen, dass die Hülle, in welcher der naive Glaube diese Geschichte vor unsren geistigen Augen erschienen liess, gewissermassen aus Papiermaché besteht, welches unter den Hammerschlägen der Kritik zerstäubt.

Zichy's reaction against romantic ideas occurred gradually, as we have seen, and there were several objective and subjective reasons for it. His role was more one of a patron, as was Széchenyi's, and it was typical of Hungary at that time for organized, costly expeditions to be led and directed by aristocrats. Zichy's third expedition was the most serious undertaking to set out from Hungary before the Great War. It is to Zichy's credit that he learnt the lessons from his first two expeditions and engaged the best scholars of his day to accompany him, among them Béla Posta, who can be considered the founder of modern Hungarian archaeology, János Jankó, an outstanding figure in Hungarian ethnography, and József Pápay, a renowned scholar of Finno-Ugric linguistics. Of the members of the expedition only a few actually accompanied Zichy

to Mongolia, where he discovered the Tonyukuk inscription in the same year as Elizaveta Nikolayevna Kelments and independently of her, sending a copy of it to Radlov. The main area covered by the expedition was southern Siberia, but there they purchased the archaeological collection of Kuznetsov, which also contains materials from Central Asia and is now in the Museum of East Asian Arts.

Interestingly the Hungarian scholar who came next, György Almássy, originally excluded rigidly any problem concerning the prehistory of the Hungarians from his objectives, which he defined as the zoological and botanical description of Central Asia. But as he confessed in the introduction to his voluminous book on his first journey, he did not manage to discard the mantle of his national tradition and the example of his predecessors entirely. His account contains linguistic information and an abundance of ethnographical material on the nomadic way of life, and one can only regret that its publication in the Hungarian language has prevented it from becoming known to a wider public.

Almássy's second journey was less successful, but he invited along the young geographer Gyula Prinz, who when halfway at Narin gol, left Almássy and set out on an independent expedition. In 1909 Prinz visited Central Asia for the second time.

The last great figure was Sir Aurel Stein. Only recently part of the correspondence of his family has been discovered in the archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, where new light is shed on his youth and early ambitions. Apparently he had begun planning a journey to India as early as 1884. In the early Hungarian chronicles it was claimed that the Hungarians who conquered the Carpathian Basin were descended from Attila's Huns, so that the year 896 was only a *secundus introitus*, a reconquering of the former homeland. Although that claim has turned out to be mere scholastic speculation aimed at legitimizing Hungarian rule, the matter of a kinship between the early Hungarians in the 5th century and the Huns remained on the agenda. It can easily be demonstrated that the question of the Huns was the chain that linked Stein's research with matters concerning Hungarian history. Moreover Stein was fully aware of the role the Turkish background had played in the formative period of the Hungarians. In a letter written in Hungarian in 1912 to the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Stein declared, "I am sincerely glad that under the aegis of the Indian Government I was able to work in a field, the historical background of the early Hungarian and Turkish migrations, which is closely linked with the interests of Hungarian scholarly research." Stein went to India on a Hungarian grant. The first post he obtained from the Indian Government was the very one which had been created and later occupied by Leitner: direction of the Oriental College in Lahore.

Leaving aside the merits of Imre Schweiger's discovery of Nepalese art I should like to conclude my paper with a curious story. In 1964 the Museum of East Asian Art bought a piece of a fresco with a head of Devadata from a private owner. The Museum's expert, László Ferenczy, identified it as a valuable piece and pinpointed its provenance. It had originally belonged among the material brought back by Le Coq from his last Turfan expedition. How and when had had this object reached Hungary? The story was as follows: in 1918 Le Coq visited Budapest, and made presentations of three pieces from the Turfan collection, one to Zoltán Felvinczi-Takács, one to Pál

Teleki and one to a member of the Zichy family. The Devadata head is the piece presented to the Zichy family, most probably to István Zichy. Why did Le Coq give such an unusual present and why to those three gentlemen in particular? Ferenczy is surely right in supposing that Le Coq wished to attract some good publicity to the Turfan collection. But he can give no answer as to why the gifts were made to those particular persons.

The Csoma de Kőrös Society was founded in 1920 with the aim of studying and the Oriental background of the Hungarian prehistory. However, the initiative and first consultations were made in 1918. Pál Teleki, István Zichy and Zoltán Felvinczi-Takács, together with Gyula Németh were the founders of the Csoma de Kőrös Society. Whether Le Coq was consulted or not, we do not know. But Le Coq made a good choice and selected people who would continue the work concerning Central Asia. That is the last, small chain which connected Hungary and Central Asia at the end of the First World War and simultaneously the first that connects with the Csoma de Kőrös Society, under whose auspices we are gathered here.

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