"Touched a nation's heart":

Sir E. Denison Ross and Alexander Csoma de Kőrös

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The papers of Sir Edward Denison Ross (1871–1940) at the Archives of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) include a series of letters from Hungary, which thank him for his contribution in bringing the world's attention to Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (1784–1842).[1] *Some of these letters were produced collectively by learned societies and signed by dozens of male and female members, but many were also written by ordinary people expressing their admiration for Csoma, the scholar who had walked most of the way from Transylvania to India in search of the roots of the Hungarian language and people. This lively response was a result of a lecture that Ross delivered on 5 January 1910 at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta which became a sensation in Hungary in a matter of weeks. This article therefore looks at the phenomenon of how Ross's purely academic research, to use Albert von Le Coq's words, "touched a nation's heart" and earned him a celebrity status in Csoma's homeland. It is particularly interesting to uncover the motives behind this great publicity and show how it was orchestrated by two young Hungarians in Calcutta for not entirely unselfish purposes.*

Alexander Csoma de Kőrös[2]

Csoma was born in 1784 in the Transylvanian village of Kőrös (in present-day Covasna County, Romania) into a Protestant family belonging to the military caste of Szeklers, who had been serving as frontier guards against the Ottoman expansion. With the prospect of becoming a Pastor, the young Csoma entered the famous Bethlen College at Nagyenyed, where for the first time he became interested in the origins of the Magyars. It was also in this scholarly environment that his linguistic aptitude became apparent and by the time he graduated in 1815, in addition to Hungarian and Romanian, he had already mastered Greek,

[1]I would like to thank the Library of SOAS for giving me access to see the papers of Denison Ross. I am also grateful to Ursula Sims-Williams from the British Library for her interest in this study from its very inception, and also for sharing her own knowledge of the historical background. My special thanks to Ágnes Kelecsényi from the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for showing me the relevant letters from the Stein and Goldziher Collections, and for also sharing with me her research on the history of the Csoma bust created in 1910 and the correspondence surrounding it. She also kindly provided two of the photographs appended as illustrations to this paper. E-mail: galimre@gmail.com

[2]Csoma's name is written in a variety of ways and not always correctly. In Hungarian, where the surname is placed before the 'first' name, he was originally Csoma Sándor, to which the name of his native village Kőrös had been added as a modifier, producing Kőrösi Csoma Sándor. This simply means Sándor (i.e. Alexander) Csoma from Kőrös, which became more commonly written in the French manner as Alexander Csoma de Kőrös. Furthermore, although today this toponym is spelled as "Kőrös" (with a double acute accent over the first vowel, standing for a protracted "ö" sound), back in Csoma's times, and even in 1910, it was commonly spelled "Körös" (with identical umlaut over both vowels). I shall use the modern standard spelling, unless quoting from earlier sources.

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Latin, Hebrew, French and German. Following this, he won a scholarship to the University of Göttingen in Germany, where he had a chance to study with some of the best scholars of the time, including the theologian and Orientalist Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1753–1827). Two years later he returned to Nagyenyed with the determination to travel to Central Asia to locate the Yugar tribes which he believed to be related to the Magyars.[3] Although he was offered a teaching position in his old high school, he was not to be deterred and after an additional several months of studying Slavonic languages, in January 1820 he set off for Constantinople, from where he was to travel to Moscow and then further East. An outbreak of the plague, however, forced him to avoid the Ottoman capital and travel to Alexandria where he perfected his knowledge of Arabic.

As the plague followed him to Egypt, he continued his journey through Aleppo, Mosul and Baghdad, from whence, dressed as an Armenian merchant, he joined a caravan for Tehran, arriving there in October 1820. This is where he met Henry Willock (1790–1858), the British chargé d'affaires, who helped him financially to continue his journey. Leaving the city in March of the following year, Csoma reached Bokhara but, owing to the military disturbances in Russian Central Asia, was not able to go directly to Chinese Turkestan and thus travelled to Lahore and then to Kashmir and Ladakh. From here he wanted to cross the Karakorum Pass to Yarkand but was unable to obtain permission to cross the Chinese border. On his way back to Lahore, he met William Moorcroft (1767–1825), an employee of the East India Company who was visiting Ladakh at the time. Although since leaving his home Csoma had already added Arabic, Turkish and Persian to his repertoire, he spoke no English and, in a rather unusual manner for this part of the world, communicated with the Englishman in Latin. Moorcroft provided financial support from official funds for the Hungarian traveller and persuaded him to study Tibetan - and English - so that he could prepare a dictionary.

Csoma promptly began his studies with a lama at Zangla in the Zanskar Valley and stayed there until late 1824. After this, he descended to the border town of Sabathu where he was arrested on suspicion of being a Russian spy. In order to clear himself of the charges, he had to submit a report about himself and his activities. Since his introverted personality prevented him from publishing a travel account or any other record of his impressive experiences, this report, written in 1825 and addressed to Captain Charles Pratt Kennedy (1789–1875) assistant to the resident at Delhi, remains the fullest account of his journey and objectives. Months passed in waiting until his statement was corroborated by a letter of recommendation from Moorcroft, after which he was set free and received an additional stipend. He returned to the Zanskar Valley to resume his studies for more than a year. From 1827, he studied in the Sutlej Valley in a monastery at Kanum, known for its great library. The French doctor James Gilbert Gerard (1793–1835) visited the village and left a gripping account of Csoma's living conditions during this time:

> I found him at the village of Kanum, in his small but romantic hamlet, surrounded by books, and in the best health. He had not forgotten his reception at Sabathú, and was eager to manifest a

[3]Louis Ligeti identified Csoma's Yugars as the Yögurs of the Gansu region in Northwest China, also known as the Yellow Uighurs, see Lajos Ligeti, "A jugarok földje", *Magyar Nyelv* XXVII, 1930, pp. 300–314; Ligeti, "Les pérégrinations de Csoma de Körös et le pays des Yugar", *Revue des études hongroises* XII, 1934, pp. 233–253.

> feeling springing from gratitude. A year and more had passed since we met, and he seemed glad and proud to show me the fruits of his labours. He has been most persevering and successful, and were not his mind entirely absorbed in his studies, he would find a strong check to his exertions in the climate, situated as he is and has been for four months. The cold is very intense, and all last winter he sat at his desk wrapped up in woollens from head to foot, and from morning to night, without an interval of recreation or warmth, except that of his frugal meals, which are one universal routine of greasy tea; but the winters at Kanum dwindle to insignificance compared with the severity of those at the monastery of Yangla (i.e. Zangla), where Mr. Csoma passed a whole year. At that spot he, the Lama, and an attendant, were circumscribed in an apartment nine feet square for three or four months; they durst not stir out, the ground being covered with snow, and the temperature below the zero of the scale. There he sat, enveloped in a sheepskin cloak, with his arms folded, and in this situation he read from morning till evening without fire, or light after dusk, the ground to sleep upon, and the bare walls of the building for protection against the rigours of the climate. – 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 . . . . Mr. Csoma himself appears like one of the sages of antiquity, living in the most frugal manner, and taking no interest in any object around him, except his literary avocations, which, however, embrace the religions of the countries around him.[4]

Csoma stayed in Kanum for three years, working on the dictionary and reading through Tibetan manuscripts. In 1831 he travelled to Calcutta where he became employed by the Asiatic Society of Bengal as a librarian, cataloguing Tibetan books and working on his dictionary. During this period he published in the Society's journal a number of articles on Tibetan geography and philology, and in 1834 his *Dictionary* came out.[5] He continued his research in Tibetan, Sanskrit and other languages until 1842 when he decided to resume his quest and reach the land of Yugars by crossing Tibet. In a stroke of ill fate, soon after his departure he contracted malaria and died in Darjeeling before reaching Tibetan territory. He was buried in the English cemetery of the town and three years later, in 1845, the Asiatic Society erected a stone on his grave.

Csoma never reached the land of Yugars, nor was he able to provide any lasting clues to the origins of Hungarian language and people. Instead, he made his contribution in the newly emerging field of Tibetan studies, an accomplishment largely unconnected with his original goals. Mastering Tibetan and Sanskrit at a time when this was still beyond the reach of Western scholarship; he had been the first European to work with primary Buddhist texts in their original language. Yet in his homeland he has mainly been known for his efforts at finding the roots of the nation. Decades after his death, his figure grew into that of a celebrated hero, epitomising the figure of a patriot who disregarded his personal welfare and devoted his life solely to benefiting his country.[6] This popular image of Csoma remains much the same to this very day.

[4]Tivadar Duka, *Life and Works of Alexander Csoma de Körös* (London, Trübner and Co., 1885), pp. 82–84.

[5]Alexander Csoma de Körös, *Essay towards a Dictionary, Tibetan and English* (Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1834).

[6]This is not to say, of course, that Csoma's accomplishments went unrecognized or unappreciated back home during his lifetime. There were several publications informing the public of his activities. In 1820, shortly after his departure, the *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* (Scientific Collection) announced the plans of this "renowned Hungarian traveller". Six years later the same journal published the happy news that "Our Körösi is still alive!" etc.

His posthumous recognition was to no small extent due to the work of his biographer, Theodore Duka (1825–1908), a Hungarian national who had fled after the defeat of the anti-Hapsburg uprising of 1848–1849. He lived in London from 1850 where he studied medicine. In 1854 he became a British subject and obtained a commission on the medical staff of the Bengal Army. After his retirement he devoted his time to arranging the material that he had gathered in India related to Csoma into a biography. The Hungarian version of the book came out shortly after the Trübner edition but while the English original had limited impact, the Hungarian translation marked the beginning of a Csoma cult which grew out of the nationalistic atmosphere of the turn of the century. In 1904, at the centennial anniversary of his birth, nation-wide celebrations were held in Hungary. This was also the year when his native village of Kőrös was renamed in his honour as Csomakőrös.

Sir E. Denison Ross

Sir Edward Denison Ross was one of the top linguists of his day who played a vital role in reading and deciphering many of the manuscripts excavated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Central Asia. Initially specialised in Persian literature, with time he took up the study of other Oriental languages, such as Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, and various Turkic dialects. In 1901, he was appointed Principal of the famous Calcutta Madrasah, a post he was to hold for over a decade. During his time in India, he was an active member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and from 1911 was also in charge of the Imperial Record Office (see: Figure 1). He returned to England in 1914 to accept a position at the British Museum, where he hoped to work on the Central Asian material acquired by Sir M. Aurel Stein.[7] As the war broke out, he used his linguistic proficiency at the Postal Censorship and the Department of Military Intelligence, deciphering letters written in languages inaccessible for other censors.[8] When the School of Oriental Studies (today's School of Oriental and African Studies – SOAS) was established in 1916, he was made the first Director and remained in this position until his retirement in 1937.[9]

Ross's connection with Csoma began while serving as the Philological Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In 1907, when examining the manuscripts stored at the archives of the Society, he came across "a large folio volume of many hundred pages written in a most careful hand", which turned out to be an unpublished work of Csoma, a translation of a large Sanskrit-Tibetan vocabulary called *Mahāvyutpatti*.[10] Realising the value of the work and the enormous amount of labour behind it, Ross urged the Society to publish it; his proposal was readily accepted, provided that a suitable editor could be located. According to Ross, Csoma's manuscript needed editing principally because of its sometimes obsolete transliteration and the English glosses. While the Tibetan text was perfectly correct, the

[7]For Ross' cooperation with Stein, see Ursula Sims-Williams, "Behind the scenes: some notes on the decipherment of the Sogdian manuscripts in the Stein collection", in *Exegisti monumenta: Festschrift in Honour of Nicholas Sims-Williams*, (ed.) Werner Sundermann, Almut Hintze and François de Blois (Wiesbaden, 2009), pp. 469–478.

[8]Denison Ross, *Both ends of the candle: The autobiography of Sir E. Denison Ross* (London, 1943), p. 166.

[9]For a more detailed account of his life, see "Obituary: Sir Edward Denison Ross", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1940), pp. 832–836.

[10]Denison Ross, "Kőrösi Csoma Sándor", *Kőrösi Csoma-Archívum*, p. 335.

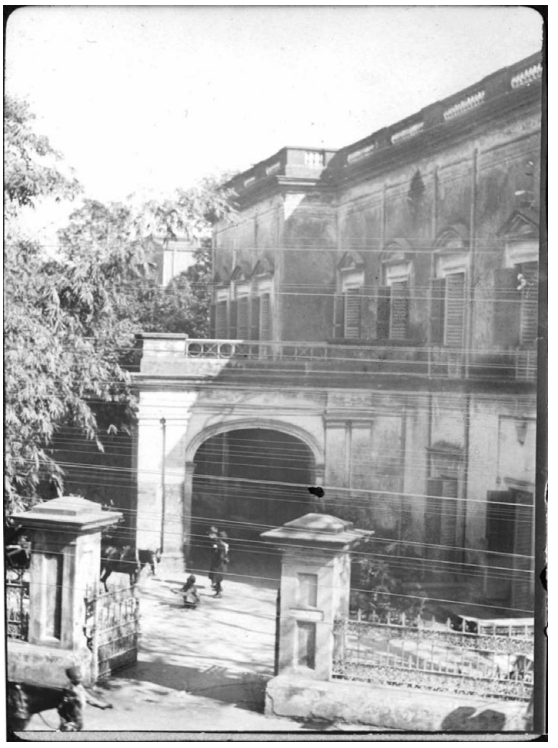

Fig. 1. The Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1910 (Courtesy of LHAS).

English contained mistakes both in terms of its language and in the rendition of Buddhist terminology, as the field had advanced considerably since the time of Csoma.

The Council of the Society put Ross and Dr Satis Chandra Vidyabhusana in charge of the editorial work and Ross, with his usual appetite and enthusiasm for ever newer languages, promptly began learning Tibetan. He spent the summer months at Darjeeling where he found a lama by the name of Lobzang to study with.[11] Every morning, he studied Tibetan with the lama (see: Figure 2).[12]

The lama also accompanied him on his return to Calcutta where Ross began working on the Csoma manuscripts with Dr Vidyabhusana. In a letter to Aurel Stein in January 1910, he described his ongoing Tibetan project the following way: "I have a lama from Lhasa who sits in my study all day and does copying and correcting – and when I have time (which is

[11]Ross remembers the lama the following way: "Lobzang was the most lovable of men, charming and full of character. Besides Tibetan, he knew just enough Hindustani to make his lessons intelligible, and his translations absurd. His year was divided into two periods. The period he enjoyed most were the months when he was an opium-eater. When reduced again to poverty, he would deliver himself up to the missionaries at Darjeeling, making full profession of the Christian faith, or, as he put it, 'Jesus ko biswas karta' ('I believe in Jesus'). It was at those times of comparative sobriety and virtue that he turned again to teaching" (*Both ends of the candle*, p. 115).

[12]Ross also visited the grave of Csoma and resolved to have a new English tablet cut on a piece of marble, since the old one contained some errors. The new tablet was later ordered by the Society (*Ibid*., p. 113).

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Fig. 2. Denison Ross and Lama Lobzang studying Tibetan. This was one of the photos made and publicised by Löffler, which also appeared in Ross's autobiography.

all too seldom) reads with me Buddhist sutras".[13] The vocabulary eventually came out in 1912.[14]

In the meantime, Ross also collected and published in a single volume Csoma's papers that had appeared in the Asiatic Society's journal while the Hungarian scholar worked there. As part of his editorial work, Ross undertook to learn as much as he could about Csoma's life and his connection with the Society, a subject he admittedly knew very little about. Although Theodore Duka's biography of Csoma had been published in London in 1885,[15] he was practically unknown outside his homeland and Ross indeed deserves the credit for rediscovering him and making his name known to the world. It is also apparent that due to his prominent position and academic status he was able to direct more attention to Csoma with a couple of lectures than Duka's meticulous study, even though the latter served as the main source of information for Ross.

Ross delivered his paper on Csoma on 5 January 1910 before the Asiatic Society. The event was noted in the local media, with *The Statesman* and *The Empress* running stories on Csoma and his connection with the Asiatic Society of Bengal.[16] Apparently, the lecture was regarded as a noteworthy cultural event in Calcutta, even if it did not make headlines. More remarkably within a month all of Hungary knew about this "important scientific event" and the major newspapers ran stories detailing the content of the talk, Csoma's contribution to

[13]Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (LHAS), Stein-Ross, No. 136.

[14]Sándor Kőrösi Csoma, Anil Gupta, Edward Denison Ross, Satis Chandra Vidyabhusana, Durga Charan Chatterjee, *Sanskrit, Tibetan-English Vocabulary* (Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1910–14).

[15]Theodore Duka, *Life and Works of Alexander Csoma de Körös* (London, Trübner and Co., 1885).

[16]"Csoma de Koros: A famous Tibetan scholar and his work", *The Statesman*, 9 January 1910; "Dr. Denison Ross's lecture on Csoma de Körös, the famous Tibetan scholar", *The Empress*, January 1910, No. 1, pp. 13–15.

scholarship, and his elevated place in the history of academic research. The *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest Daily) published an eye-witness description of Ross's talk and the accompanying commemoration,[17] and a couple of other articles in the following days.[18] The influential pictorial *Vasárnapi Újság* (Sunday Paper) ran the cover story with the title "Sándor Kőrösi Csoma's remembrance in India", publishing photographs of Ross and a number of places associated with Csoma.[19] The January 1910 issue of the *Akadémiai Értesítő* (Bulletin of the Academy) published an excerpt from Ross's talk under the title "Sándor Kőrösi Csoma and Tibetan Buddhism".[20]

As a result of this sudden media attention, Ross began receiving a multitude of letters from proud Hungarians who thanked him for bringing Csoma's achievements to the world's attention. These letters are today held among the papers of Sir E. D. Ross at the Archives of SOAS, in a separate folder that bears the title "Csoma Körösi Sandor: Congratulatory Letters". They are written in French, German, English or Hungarian by private individuals and learned societies, and boast of patriotic feelings and grand ideas. Although Ross's admiration for Csoma stemmed purely from scholarly interests, the letters demonstrate that in Hungary the significance of the lecture went far beyond academic research; it was conceived as an act of sympathy towards the entire nation. Ross's admirers wrote of nation, humankind, patriotism, pride and other high sentiments, that is to say all the elements of pre-war European nationalism. For example, Gyula Lekly, Vice President of the Kazincy literary society in Kassa (today's Košice, Slovakia), saluted Ross in English "with the whole warmth" of his "Hungarian heart" with the following array of complex exaltations:

> ... Only the great English Nation has appreciated the value of the individuality of the self-sacrificing Hungarian scientific explorer and made it to be acknowledged also by the world of science. We are indebted with a precious gratitude for it to the learned men of the great English Nation, and to such an exquisite scholar of her as You are my Dear Sir, who estimated the gentle exertions of Alexander K. Csoma properly, which exertions desire to valid [*sic*] the great idea of universal human progression, and endeavour to realize it, as a commonwealth of mankind. Receiving Dear Sir my patriotic greetings and salutation with good-will and be convinced, that as well as I do, so attends every true member of my nation the gentle manifestation of the English nation made in favour to us Hungarians, – with grateful enthusiasm.
>
> With patriotic greetings and salutation[21]

Another English language letter in a large flowery frame with a red-white-green ribbon of the Hungarian national colours came from a large group of over eighty "Hungarian ladies" headed by Countess Batthányi.[22] The letter abounds in sincere gratitude and in a peculiarly excessive use of commas:

[17] *Budapesti Hírlap*, 2 February 1910 (No. 27), p. 8.
[18] *Ibid.*, 4 February 1910 (No. 29), p. 12; 13 February 1910 (No. 37), pp. 34–35.
[19] *Vasárnapi Újság*, 13 February 1910 (Vol. 57, No. 7), pp. 137–140.
[20] *Akadémiai Értesítő*, No. 241, January 1910, pp. 438–451.
[21] The Papers of Sir E. Denison Ross, 2, SOAS Archives.
[22] The Countess was the widow of Count Lajos Batthyány (1807–1849) who had been the Prime Minister of Hungary for a short period following the 1848 anti-Hapsburg uprising and who was executed in 1849.

Dear Sir

In the name of the undersigned Hungarian ladies, accept our hearty thanks, for the most kind manner, in which you have written, and spoken, of our countryman, Mr Csoma de Körös. It has warmed all our hearts, to know, that his life's work was not in vain, but that other countries are also willing, to acknowledge, that he did a great work. Mr. Tóth sent from Calcutta the newspaper, with the notice in it. They gave us all a great pleasure, and we are not only thankful to the sender, but also most grateful to find, that the knowledge of Mr Csoma de Körös's great work has spread, far beyond his native land, and is understood, and appreciated, by those, who are in a position, to give their opinion on such things. –

Again offering you our most hearty thanks, - we remain

Yours most sincerely and gratefully

This is followed by a long list of signatures, including the names of many prominent personalities such as Mrs Ottó Herman (1856–1916), wife of the great natural scientist and ethnographer, or the highly successful actress Mari Jászai (1850–1926), whom the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* called "one of the greatest Hungarian tragediennes". The ladies signing the letter were either prominent public figures themselves (writers, composers, painters, etc.) or the widows, wives and daughters of such men. Accordingly, most of their surnames appear as street names in today's Budapest.

A grateful letter in French was received from ten ladies from the town of Somorja (today's Šamorín, Slovakia), who sent him "les félicitations les plus sincères de plusieures bonnes compatriotes hongroises". In another letter, "a Hungarian girl" wrote in a child's clumsy handwriting that she had been "proud and happy" to learn about Ross's lecture. One letter was from the Principal of Bethlen College, Csoma's old high school at Nagyenyed, who expressed his gratitude for Ross's working on the publication of their former student's life work and making it available for general scholarship. But the most prestigious of these communications was a notice, with Hungarian and French versions side by side, from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, informing Ross that he had been unanimously elected a Foreign Corresponding Member.

Ross himself was quite surprised at rising to celebrity status so rapidly in Csoma's native country. In April of the same year, in a letter to Stein he wrote that he had been "greatly touched by the number of letters" that he received from all parts of Hungary, in many cases from the leading figures of provincial towns.[23] In amusement, he described the influx of congratulatory letters to his friend Albert von Le Coq (1860–1930), the celebrated German explorer of Central Asia, who replied, "The behaviour of Hungarians is charming and I sincerely congratulate you to the many proofs you have got of having touched a nation's heart!".[24] Despite the oddity of the incident, Ross was obviously pleased by the public impact of his talk, and he kept the letters of his Magyar admirers for the rest of his life - this is how they ended up in the SOAS Archives.

[23]LHAS, Stein-Ross, No. 202 (Calcutta, April 21 1910).

[24]Letter dated Berlin, 17 June 1910 (*Both ends of the candle*, p. 107). Le Coq continues this letter with the following comment on Hungarian nationalism: "Generous they are, and ever were and patriotic to a degree! 'Teddy' has been saying nice things about them, but I fear their pride of race does not require much encouragement–when I was amongst them, I rather thought they were too well pleased with themselves".

The campaign

One cannot but marvel at the swiftness of the news of Ross's lecture reaching Europe and how it triggered such an interest in contemporary Hungarian society. A closer look at the background of this enthusiastic reception reveals that much of the publicity was generated by two Hungarian young men who happened to be in Calcutta at the time of the lecture. These two gentlemen were Emanuel Maurice Löffler (fl. 1909–1911), a temporary traveller in India, and the painter Eugene Tóth (1882–1923), a Calcutta resident. The two of them embarked upon an intensive media publicity campaign and sent a multitude of articles and letters to publishers, schools, learned societies and public figures. In a letter to Stein, Ross refers to the fact that Tóth was introduced to him by Stein:

> (Calcutta, January 13, 1910)
> Your compatriot Thót (*sic*) brought a charming letter to me from you. I will certainly do all I can to assist him in his researches. There is also another Hungarian now in Calcutta, Herr Löffler who is likewise a great enthusiast; and he has taken an enormous interest in the tribute I recently paid to the great Csoma in a lecture I delivered before the A.S.B. on January 5th.[25]

These lines suggest that initially Tóth came to Calcutta with a letter of recommendation from Stein. In another letter almost a month later, Ross reveals that Löffler visited him before the lecture and that he was most pleased to make the acquaintance of the young man.[26] The subject of the two Hungarians and the resulting fame in their distant country also appears in his autobiography:

> Coming up after the lecture, these two thanked me for the tribute paid to their countryman. I saw Mr. Loffler many times afterwards: he took photographs of me with Lama Lobzang . . . and wrote articles for the papers. He went to Darjeeling by and by, to superintend the renovation of Csoma's grave. To Hungary he sent far too glowing accounts of the service I had rendered to Csoma's memory, and my astonishment may be imagined when one day I received from Budapest an illuminated parchment, an expression of thanks from the ladies of that city signed by over one hundred persons. That year I was elected a Foreign Corresponding Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.[27]

Apparently, Ross enjoyed meeting Löffler and had a positive impression of him. They met frequently both in Calcutta and Darjeeling, Löffler essentially fulfilling the role of a foreign correspondent, with a keenness to document everything that happened with regards to Csoma's memory and to transmit it back home. Naturally, the English scholar was curious about the identity of the young man who appeared on the scene just in time for his lecture. Yet nobody seemed to be able to provide any information about him. Arminius Vámbéry (1832–1913), the legendary Hungarian traveller and Turkologist, replied to the enquiries saying, "As to your question about Mr. Loffler, I do not know him personally – he introduced himself to me in a letter from India, nor do I know the object of his travelling".[28] But the fact that Ross was enquiring about this in academic circles shows that he was under

[25] LHAS, Stein-Ross, No. 136 (Calcutta, January 13 1910).
[26] LHAS, Stein-Ross, No. 198 (Calcutta, February10 1910).
[27] *Both ends of the candle*, p. 114.
[28] *Ibid*.

the impression that back in his homeland Löffler must have been a person of some social or academic import. This was, however, evidently not the case.

The other young Hungarian gentleman, Eugene Tóth (i.e. Tóth Jenő), was a minor painter who, pursuing an interest in the Orient, arrived in British India in 1907. Initially he remained in Bombay, painting historical compositions on various themes from Indian history for British clients.[29] After two years he moved to Calcutta where he became involved with the project of honouring the memory of Csoma. He eventually left India and returned to Hungary in 1912. By this time, besides being a painter, he had also transformed himself into an amateur linguist and ethnographer. In the following years he published several pseudo-scientific articles dealing with the origins of the Magyars and claiming that there was a connection between their language and those of India. Although he was an active advocate of his theories, he never succeeded in having those acknowledged by mainstream academic circles who considered him, not wholly unjustifiably, a dilettante. He died in Budapest 1923, at the age of only 40, working as a high school teacher.

Tóth's involvement with Csoma must have began in the autumn of 1909 when Löffler appeared on the scene. In October Tóth wrote a letter to a friend in his native town of Rimaszombat (today's Rimovská Sobota, Slovakia), in which he praised Csoma at length and elaborated on the idea of paying homage at his grave.[30] He asked for a handful of native soil and a wreath to be deposited at the grave in Darjeeling. In late November he and Löffler visited Csoma's grave in Darjeeling and laid a wreath on it with the inscription "Your body may rest here but your soul is forever back in your homeland". The daily paper *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest News) ran the story with the title "Hungarian wreath laid at the grave of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös".[31] Apparently, two of them had sent a long letter to the editor in which they described how, overcome by patriotic feelings, they visited the grave of the great scholar.

Löffler became a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in November 1909, a connection he was to use and abuse in his correspondence with Hungarian institutions and individuals.[32] He took a particularly active role in the Csoma campaign, personally contacting key public figures in Hungary with the news. For example, the papers of Kálmán Mikszáth (1847–1910), the famous novelist and editor, contain a letter from Löffler which had arrived from Calcutta along with an album of photographs of Csoma's grave in Darjeeling.[33] This letter is dated 12 January 1910, showing that within only a week from Ross's lecture Löffler found the time to visit Darjeeling, take a series of pictures there, develop these and post them to Hungary (see: Figure 3).

[29] István Pogány, "Magyar kutató Kőrösi Csoma Sándor nyomában: Dr. Tóth Jenő emlékezete" (A Hungarian researcher of Alexander Csoma de Kőrösi: In memory of Dr. Eugene Tóth), *Turán*, Vol. XXV., No. III., October 1942, pp. 110–115.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 113. Letter dated October 12 1909.

[31] *Budapest Hírlap,* 9 January 1910 (No. 7), p. 9.

[32] "List of Ordinary Members" of the Society, *Journal & Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, January 1910. Tóth joined the Society over a year later, on 1 December 1910.

[33] Mikszáth Kálmán, *Mikszáth Kálmán összes művei* (Budapest, Akadémia Kiadó, 1956), Vol. 9, p. 80.

Fig. 3. Csoma's grave in Darjeeling around 1909 (Courtesy of LHAS).

The swindle

That the young man's dealings were not entirely selfless and at times were intermixed with outright fraud is demonstrated by a couple of letters allegedly written by Ross - in Hungarian. One of these appeared in the Transylvanian paper *Székely Nép* (Szekler People).[34] According to the newspaper, the eminent English scholar wrote the letter himself in Hungarian because, being a linguist, Csoma's example inspired him to learn the language of the Magyars. Beside the fact that we know that Ross in reality never learned Hungarian, much less attempted to actually write in it, the content of the letters ascribed to him is highly improbable to have been written by a foreigner: "I owe to Csoma the idea of learning Hungarian, the study of which gives me great delight... He was Hungarian in his life, and Hungarian in his death; and the glory of his work that has now become public also belongs to the Hungarian nation, of which he was a loyal son until his death." Such loaded words make one suspect that they were actually either written by the patriotically disposed Löffler, or were at least translated by him from an English original in a rather free manner, with plenty of additions and embellishments.[35]

[34] *Székely Nép*, 22 December 1910, p. 1. Ross's other letter ostensibly written in Hungarian was sent to Csoma's alma mater, the Bethlen College, and it was published in the school's annual bulletin (*A Nagyenyedi református Bethlen-Kollégium értesítője az 1909–1910-ik iskolai évről*, Nagyenyed, 1910, pp. 99–100).

[35] The myth that Ross learned Hungarian as a token of his admiration for Csoma prevails in Hungarian publications to this very day. One researcher, for example, with admiration for Ross's enthusiasm refers to one of the letter's "touching foreignness and ornate eruditeness" (Ferenc Szilágyi, "A zarándok", *Nyelvünk és kultúránk* 54 [1984], p. 11). In reality, however, this was Löffler's literary style, as he generally used an ornate and overly polite tone in his letters, with strings of complicated clauses at times resulting in grammatical mishaps.

But the most daring "project" that we can attribute to him was swindling the Hungarian Academy of Sciences out of the funds raised for the erection of a marble plate on Csoma's grave in Darjeeling. The details of this intriguing story emerge gradually, as one reads through the letters and memoranda related to Csoma's marble plate.[36] Apparently, Löffler had sent a series of letters to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, all suitably written on the letterhead of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The first correspondence must have been despatched in the autumn of 1909 and, upon receiving a response, the young man raised the idea of erecting a marble plate with a Hungarian inscription on one side of the octagonal tombstone because, as he explained, people in Darjeeling had been wondering why the public in Csoma's homeland displayed no interest in their compatriot's grave.[37] He proposed to hold a ceremony in April of the following year, on the anniversary of Csoma's death, a plan he claimed to have already coordinated with the Asiatic Society of Bengal. About a week later, he posted to the Academy an album containing the photos of the grave in Darjeeling, raising the issue that he would like to make copies of these photos available "at cost" to schools, clubs and individuals. In addition, he mentioned Ross's upcoming lecture, which was to be held the following week.[38] In his next communication, Löffler described the lecture "held in the Society's grand hall, filled with the cream of Calcutta's social and academic elite" and also attached a copy of Ross's paper.[39]

In order to cultivate his relationship with the Academy, Löffler wrote more letters but, after not hearing back regarding his proposal,[40] he claimed that since the marble plate had already been announced in Calcutta, in order to avoid making himself and the Academy look ridiculous in front of the world, he and Tóth would pay for the inscription out of their own pockets.[41] Parallel with this, he also tried to mediate an acquisition of several manuscripts purportedly found near Khotan, revealing his willingness to become involved in financial deals on behalf of other parties.[42] Eventually, the Academy entrusted Löffler with working out the details of erecting an inscription and wired him a sum of 60 pounds to pay for the marble plate.[43] After this, no more correspondence from Löffler is to be found, but at the end of the same month Tóth, the other young man involved in the Csoma campaign, wrote

[36]Most of the related correspondence is kept at the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MLHAS), with a few related items at the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchenyi Library (MCNSzL).

[37]Letter dated December 22 1909 (MLHAS, RAL 22/1910).

[38]Letter dated December 30 1909 (MLHAS, RAL 47/1910).

[39]Letter dated January 29 1910 (MLHAS, RAL 62/1910).

[40]See, for example, letter dated March 21 1910 (MLHAS, 254/1910), in which he informed the Academy that the Asiatic Society decided to decorate its Grand Hall with an oil painting of Csoma. He was also growing impatient for a reply regarding his marble plate project. Of course, he did not know at that time that the Academy had already decided at its 31 January meeting to sponsor the marble plate and have it installed with the help of the Asiatic Society; perhaps a letter had been lost or delayed. (*Akadémiai Értesítő* Budapest: MTA, 1910, p. 110.)

[41]Letter dated February 29 1910 (MCNSzL, Levelestár, Löffler, E.M. ismeretlenhez, 1910).

[42]Letter dated May 5 1910 (MCNSzL, Levelestár, Löffler, E.M. ismeretlenhez, 1910). This letter describes that a Russian officer had recently arrived from Chinese Central Asia and brought with him five manuscripts in an unknown language from the vicinity of Khotan, similar to the documents discovered earlier by Stein. Allegedly, the Russian officer was willing to sell them at 350 rupees a piece but Löffler claimed that it might be possible to buy them for 275. If the Academy was interested in purchasing them, he was willing "to keep their owner in check, lest these rare copies were bought by a foreign society".

[43]Two letters from 21 June (MLHAS, RAL 359/1910) and 15 July (MCNSzL, Levelestár, Löffler, E.M. Ballagi Aladárhoz, 1910) discuss the ordering of the plate and preparations for the installation ceremony. Finally, a telegram received from Calcutta on November 19 (MLHAS, RAL 501/1910) said, "Wire sixty pounds sharp Laffler".

an angry and disillusioned letter to the Academy in which he openly accused Löffler of being a con artist whose only purpose was to swindle funds.[44] Tóth explained that after having waited in vain for the ceremony he alone had finally placed the sixteen wreaths sent from various parts of Hungary on Csoma's grave. He claimed that Löffler had disappeared with the money sent by the Academy. Apparently he had also borrowed 250 rupees from a certain Eugen Ludvigh and signed the receipt as a representative of the Academy. In addition, he tried to get the Asiatic Society to pay the costs of the marble plate for which he had already received funds from the Academy. Finally, Tóth noted that he had anticipated such a turn of events, and had written about his apprehensions regarding Löffler to Dr Aurel Stein a year earlier.

The Academy's reaction was a letter to the Austro-Hungarian Consul in Calcutta in which they described how they had been approached by the unknown Löffler with the patriotic idea of erecting a marble plate on Csoma's grave and how they sent him the 60 pounds.[45] They confessed that, in retrospect, they understood that they had been tricked by an "unworthy" person who had abused their "naive unfamiliarity" with local conditions. They also expressed their concern that "Mr. Löffler perhaps embezzled the money he had been entrusted with". In addition, they asked the Consul for information regarding the identity of Löffler and Tóth, the status of the Csoma monument, and whether it had been paid using the 60 pounds sent to Löffler. At this point the Löffler affair reached diplomatic channels and the next piece of correspondence was a stern letter from the Minister of Religion and Education addressed to the Secretary of the Academy, in which the minister refers to a report from the Calcutta Consulate, according to which Löffler, "allegedly as a representative of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences", had attempted to borrow a sum of 1,000 rupees from the Asiatic Society of Bengal.[46] In the conclusion to his letter, the Minister suggested, with palpable irritation, that in the future the Academy should handle this affair on its own. To this the Academy replied that they had given credence to Löffler only because he had approached them in the name of the Asiatic Society and had claimed to be recommended by Dr Denison Ross, the Society's Secretary.[47]

Eventually, the Academy was obliged to turn directly to the Asiatic Society in a letter in which they summarised the course of events and asked for help in resolving the matter:

> . . . A Hungarian man by the name of E. M. Löffler, of whom we knew nothing more than that he was a member of the esteemed Society, approached us with the proposal that he wanted to erect a Hungarian inscription on Körösi Csoma's grave in Darjeeling. Our Academy gladly accepted this patriotic offer and sent 60 pounds to the said person's address to cover the expenses. The Austro-Hungarian Consul General was kind enough to let us know that although the inscription has been completed, Mr. Löffler ran off with the money.

[44]Letter dated November 29 1910 (MLHAS, RAL 561/1910).
[45]Letter dated December 22 1910 (MLHAS, RAL 584/1910).
[46]Letter dated February 14 1911 (MLHAS, RAL 100/1911).
[47]Letter draft dated February 25 1911 (MLHAS, RAL 100/1911).

> With collegial respect, we would like to ask the esteemed Society to pay for the inscription and, together with our Consul General, have it installed at the grave in Darjeeling. We shall remit the invoices of the expenses immediately upon receipt . . . [48]

No doubt, it was an embarrassing experience for the Academy to have to write this letter to the Asiatic Society and admit to having been swindled. In addition, a favour had to be asked in order to pay the outstanding costs of the inscription. We can see Ross's response to this communication in a private letter that he wrote to Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921), the famous Islamist and at the time Head of the First Department of the Academy:

> I don't know what Mr. Löffler has been doing of late – but I am told that since your Academy was good enough to elect me an honorary member, Mr. Löffler has been boasting that he has power to nominate scholars (and non-scholars!) to this distinction, and thereby lowering the prestige of the Academy. From all that I hear, I think the Academy ought to be very careful in their dealings with him.[49]

This correspondence reveals that the shadowy traits of Löffler's activities had eventually also been recognised in Calcutta. Apparently he had taken credit for nominating Ross to the Academy, that is, he had been using the names of both the Academy and Ross to advance his own schemes.[50] Nevertheless, after this he disappeared completely from the scene both in India and in Europe.[51] We do not know what happened to him later on; perhaps his next project did not go as smoothly, or he chose to keep a low profile, or simply disappeared in the turmoil of the upcoming world war.

This is as far as the story can be traced on the basis of archival correspondence. However a marble plate with a Hungarian inscription sponsored by the Academy was eventually placed on Csoma's grave, where it can be seen to this day.[52]

Postscript

Csoma has been a key figure in Hungarian culture, and is one of the few historical persons of whom the whole nation is proud, as his life, as Hungarians perceive it, exemplified the spirit of the Magyars. Although there have been few people qualified to judge his academic accomplishments, the public at large has never doubted that these were anything other than outstanding, and that through him, Hungary contributed to the culture of humankind

[48]Letter draft dated March 12 1911 (MLHAS, RAL 137/1911). This letter in the archives of the Academy is a draft, written in Hungarian. An English translation, obviously in somewhat different wording from my own rendition here, must have been made from this and sent to the Asiatic Society where it presumably remains to this day.

[49]Letter dated April 11 1911 (LHAS, Goldziher-Ross).

[50]The person proposing Ross's nomination in fact was Goldziher, and Ross had specifically thanked him for this in a letter written almost a year earlier (letter dated June 1, 1910; LHAS, Goldziher-Ross).

[51]This is not to say that further archival research, perhaps including the diplomatic archives of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, would not reveal additional information about Löffler and the funds he misappropriated. However, such an enquiry would lead beyond the scope of this incident and, considering the young man's significance, can hardly be justified.

[52]It is also worth pointing out that the Academy was only one of the institutions with which Löffler kept in close contact during these months. To be sure, this is the most extensive correspondence but, for example, a couple of his letters are at the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, as well as a set of seventy photographs of Indian artefacts he had given to the Museum in exchange for photos of Hungarian folk art.

in its entirety. His exceptional position in the national pantheon remains true even today and he is regarded as a patriotic example for all Hungarians even though his hometown no longer belongs to the country. Interestingly the rise of Csoma's cult, at the end of the nineteenth century coincided with Hungary's search for national identity. The 1849 defeat of the patriotic anti-Hapsburg revolution and the following period of political repression intensified the desire for an identity independent from both Austro-German and Slavic influences. In this environment, Csoma gradually came to embody the image of a tragic hero who sacrificed himself for a patriotic idea, despite the fact that the contemporary political situation and his untimely death prevented him from fulfilling his objectives, and that his true contribution to academic research was in Tibetan studies.

Denison Ross's lecture on Csoma, which began as an ordinary academic paper, resonated closely with the patriotic sentiments in contemporary Hungarian society. The letters addressed to Ross by his Magyar admirers speak of lofty ideas and are dominated by keywords such as nation, humankind, science, patriotism, pride and gratitude. This was, of course, to a large extent the result of the publicity campaign stirred up by the two Hungarians Tóth and Löffler, who were in Calcutta at the time. The young men acted as intermediaries for the public back home, no doubt thrilled to have become part of an important cause and being able to correspond with societies and institutions which otherwise would have been beyond their reach.

Ironically, in the long run Löffler's involvement in the Csoma celebration, despite his dishonest actions and the Hungarian Academy's embarrassment, cannot be judged as entirely negative. It was his idea to erect the marble plate on Csoma's grave with a Hungarian inscription, which is still there today. Although he may have been self-motivated, he nevertheless acted as a correspondent for the public back home, promoting the idea of honouring Csoma's memory. The news of Ross's positive assessment of Csoma's scholarship and his efforts in making this known to the world escalated into a media sensation in Hungary. Ross became known and revered throughout the country and the grateful public flooded him with a host of congratulatory letters. In sum, all parties won in this story, although the Academy paid with embarrassment and the sum of one hundred and twenty pounds (sixty pounds paid twice), which in the long run could be deemed a price worth paying.

Ross meanwhile was elected a Foreign Corresponding Member, a distinction of which he was proud for the rest of his life. He did not have a chance to visit Hungary until 1928 when he gave a lecture on Csoma at the Academy.[53] This was his second visit to the country, as he had been there once as a young man in 1893. In 1934 he gave another talk to the Academy as part of the commemoration dedicated to the 150th anniversary of Csoma's birth.

Imre Galambos
The British Library

[53]The English original of his 1928 talk was published two years later in the *Kőrösi Csoma-Archívum*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (1930), pp. 333–345.