

NOTE II

A SHORT HISTORY OF BUDDHISM IN HUNGARY

The Hungarians are of oriental origin. In the Hungarian popular customs, traditions, folk tales and art the inwardness of the East even nowadays is still living. According to our every day experience the ideals of Buddhism are not alien to the Hungarian people.

Before the conquest of this land by the Hungarians, in the people's migration period, there lived here for a time nomadic peoples of Asiatic origin, the most important of whom were the Huns. There are archeological finds representing swastica motifs from that period. The old Hungarians' ancient religion was Shamanism; it is therefore to be supposed that the ancient Hungarians were acquainted with Buddhism and perhaps some of them held it as their religion. The religious tolerance of Buddhism made it possible for them to confess Shamanism and Buddhism simultaneously, as other formerly Shamanist peoples did, e.g. the Tibetans and Mongols. Unfortunately the relics from which we could have got a definite answer to this question have been annihilated in consequence of the intolerance of Christian fanaticism.

We can find some traces about knowledge of Buddhism in the fifteenth century. It is by Professor Dr. Zoltan Takats de Felvincz that our attention was called to the book of Dr. T. Kardos, entitled "The Age of the Humanism in Hungary". There is written that Galeotti, the famous humanist poet, philosopher and astrologer /1427-1497/ escaping from the Italian inquisition, took refuge at King Matthias' /of Hungary/ court, and there he played a considerable role. Galeotti wrote of Buddha as an "Indian Sage" and thought it was the "Buddha" from whom the capital of Hungary/: Budapest/ had got its name. We know that the Hungarian King Matthias debated often with his scientists therefore it can be taken for certain that Buddhism was an subject of their debates.

After long centuries, in Alexander Csoma de Koros's heart the memory of the long forgotten past resurrected again. After a long wandering in the mountains of West-Tibet the Buddha-Dharma was awoken in him again. Csoma de Koros noted down numerous words from the Sanskrit, Pali and Bengali languages, which display a similarity to some Hungarian family— and place-names. Dr. Th. Duka, the bibliographer of A. Csoma de Koros, offers an interesting conjecture on the origin of the name of Hungary's capital. In his opinion, on some of the mountains of Buda—Budapest was built being on both banks of the river Danube, Buda

on the west bank and Pest on the east bank /on a plain lowland/ —there may have stood a Stupa /mchod-rten/, or a Buddha-stature or perhaps a lama-monastery /dgon-pa/, and the place got its name from that. Below that on the other bank a habitation was built, as it used to take place in the vicinity of every lama-settlement. That habitation is now a part of the capital and it is called Pest. The “past” or “pest” is a Persian word meaning low. It expresses the topographical relation between Buda and Pest. “Lower-of-Buda, Lower-of-Gompa” = Buda-Pest.

In consequence of Alexander Csoma de Koross’ pioneering work there arose in the last century a keen interest in Buddhism in Hungary. This is evidenced by the literature. There were many people who after having studied the Teachings of the Buddha confessed Buddhist faith, and there have been formed small Buddhist communities of a private nature.

Theosophists by their publications and lectures helped to keep the interest in Buddhism alive.

A small group of seekers for the Noble Path in the thirties of the twentieth century endeavoured to establish Sangha in Hungary for the first time. Mr. G. Kovacs—now the librarian of the Francis Hopp Museum of East Asiatic Arts in Budapest—was one of those who used every effort in those days to establish a Buddhist community in Hungary.

From about January of 1932 there used to meet at irregular intervals some people, chiefly artists and pedagogues, at first to get acquainted with one another. Later thus opened and closed their meetings with a short and simple ceremony, holding some lectures in between. Thus in the year 1933 they used to meet in the second week of every month; 20-30 people attended. The number of inquirers was increasing. In 1934 still there were held some meetings, but want of a proper place and other difficulties arose, and by 1935, in the menacing approach of the second world war the movement ceased.

Soon after the first attempt to establish a Sangha in Hungary terminated, in 1937-1938 there came letters of a Buddhist Abbot of Hungarian origin, from China /Tientsin/, in which he declared to his friends of his returning home in order to found a Buddhist Sangha in Hungary. This man of extraordinary interest was Chao-kung, formerly called Trebits Lincoln. He was born in 1879 in Hungary /Paks/. From these letters it is clear that he intended to return to Hungary with ten Chinese disciples and work for the promotion of the Holy Dharma. But the then Hungarian government did not give him permission to do so.

These two efforts in the thirties aiming at establishing a Buddhist organisation in Hungary failed.

The third effort was assigned by the Karma to be successful then, when in 1931 the author of these lines visited Italy as a journalist on the main road leading to Bari was brought into contact with a Buddhist priest of German origin, called Padma. By this lama were uttered the words which were destined to bring the Buddha-Dharma into bloom in the native country of Alexander Csoma de Koros, the Hungarian Bodhisattva.

The establishment of the Western Branch of the Arya-Maitreya-Mandala, based on the traditions of the Tibetan bKa'-rgyud-pa -Vajrayana-School-, was announced in India /Sanchi-Bhopal/ on 2 of November 1952 by the Lama Anagarika Govinda. To his Vajrayana-Order joined the Hungarian Buddhist Mission working since 1951, continued its activity within the scope of this order, having its centre in Budapest. Hungarian Buddhist Mission has been declared as "East European Centre" in order to aid in their development the Buddhist organizations in the neighbouring countries. In the year 1956 in the scope of the 2500th Buddhist Anniversary Jayanti was established by the Arya-Maitreya-Mandala an International Institute of Buddhology which bearing the name of the Hungarian Bodhisattva Alexander Csoma de Koros. The agenda of the Institute incovers the whole circle of the Buddhist sciences of religion.

The Hungarian Buddhist Mission, as the East-European Centre of the Arya-Maitreya-Mandala and the Alexander Csoma de Koros International Institute for Buddhology functions in the principles of religious freedom laid down in the Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic.

The aim of the Mission and Institute conveying of the Buddha's noble teachings to those who want to walk on the Path shown by the Enlightened One; revealing the East's cultural values, its true spirit, dispelling of the delusions and ignorance, making the people better and nobler in the spirit of the human dignity, the all-embrancing love and compassion, peace and mutual understanding, in the interest of the prosperity and salvation of all beings.

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Leader of the Mission,
Director of the Institute.