

***Alexander Csoma de Kőrös* by Peter J. Marczell Vol.1. *Csoma Kőrösi's Planet*. 302 pp.; Vol. 2. *British-Indian Source Documents*. 593 pp. Kolkata: Asiatic Society Monograph Series. No. XLV. 2007.**

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The Hungarian linguist Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (Kőrösi Csoma Sándor, 1784-1842) is well known to Himalayan scholars for his pioneering *Essay Towards a Dictionary, Tibetan and English* and his *Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, both of which were published in Calcutta in 1834. This two-volume study is the culmination of years of study by the Hungarian expatriate scholar Peter Marczell in archives scattered across Europe and India. Its purpose is to make Csoma's life better known and, by reproducing an extensive set of source documents, to provide a secure foundation for further research.

Marczell first became interested in Buddhism — and ultimately in Csoma de Kőrös — in the course of a visit to Sri Lanka in the late 1980s. In the years that followed, he set out from his base in Geneva to make research visits to Göttingen, where Csoma had studied; to Zangskar where he began work on his Tibetan dictionary; to Calcutta where he had served as Librarian of the Asiatic Society of Bengal; and to archives in London, Oxford, Vienna and Budapest which contain material related to Csoma and his contemporaries. Sadly, Marczell passed away in late 2007: this study is an important part of his legacy.

The first volume, entitled *Csoma Kőrösi's Planet* begins with a short overview of Csoma's life and achievements, and then presents 12 papers on different aspects of his life and career, together with an appendix on three Tibetan manuscripts which had belonged to Csoma and are now at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Five of these papers had been presented at conferences organised by the International Association of Ladakh Studies (IALS), and are now partly re-written; five had previously been published in Hungarian, and appear in English for the first time; one had previously been published in India; and one is totally new. Because they come from a variety of different sources, the chapters in the first volume represent a somewhat disparate anthology rather than a connected narrative. However, the anthology contains many gems.

The first two chapters discuss Csoma's relationship with William Moorcroft (1770-1825), the East India Company servant and explorer. Csoma's encounter with Moorcroft in Ladakh in 1822 set the course of the rest of his life. Having travelled across Asia by foot from his native

Hungary, Csoma had sought to continue from Ladakh across the Karakoram to Chinese Turkestan in the hope of fulfilling his original mission of finding information on the origins of the Hungarian race. However, he was prevented from travelling beyond Leh and, when he met Moorcroft, was pondering his next move. Impressed by Csoma's scholarly aptitude, Moorcroft encouraged him to take up the study of Tibetan with a view to preparing a Tibetan dictionary. Marczell reviews Moorcroft's correspondence describing these events, including a pioneering memorandum on the Tibetan language and script which Moorcroft wrote in 1823 — probably with Csoma's assistance — but which was not reported to the Asiatic Society until 1825. Marczell suggests that H.H. Wilson, the secretary of the Asiatic Society, deliberately neglected Moorcroft's findings.

Marczell's third chapter is on "Csoma Kőrösi's Zanskari Guides in Tibetan Learning": it discusses Csoma's three teachers - Sangye Phuntsog, Kunga Choleg Dorje and Tsultrim Gyatso — and the texts that they prepared to assist his studies. Marczell supplements archival sources with oral information gathered on a visit to Zanskar.

Subsequent chapters discuss: Csoma's relationship with Dr James Gerard, the military doctor based at the East India Company's Sabathu cantonment; his involvement in debates between the contemporary scholars Brian Hodgson and George Turnour; his early training in Göttingen and its possible influence on his work as Asiatic Society Librarian; his choice of a pseudonym (Moorcroft had first introduced him by letter to his colleagues in Calcutta as "Mr Alexander Csoma or Sekundur Begh"). The last three chapters discuss aspects of Csoma historiography or, as Marczell would put it: "hagiography". He pays due tribute to Dr Theodore Duka, whose pioneering *Life and Works of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös* was published in London as early as 1885. However, he is critical of what he regards as historical misinterpretations by more recent devotees of "Csoma's cult".

In the second, much longer volume Csoma and the key protagonists in his story speak for themselves. Marczell explains that early in his own research he became aware of the need to cross-check the original sources. His objective here is to facilitate the work of future researchers by presenting transcripts of both major and minor texts.

The volume is divided into three sections: the "Handwritten sources" are mainly from archives in India and the India Office collection in the British Library. The "Printed Sources" are culled from contemporary publications such as the Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Finally, the "Lists of Sources" arrange the main archival references by date and source. In reproducing the documents, Marczell is following the tradition of Duka (1885) who himself quotes lengthy extracts from

Csoma's own correspondence, as well as from the British officials Dr James Gerard and Dr Archibald Campbell. Marczell's volume is of course much more comprehensive, and notes the textual variations between the originals and the earlier published versions. As Marczell explains in the introduction, he has not included texts related to Csoma's childhood, or the correspondence in Latin between Csoma and his Hungarian supporters. He also notes that further manuscript sources may yet be found, but the overwhelming bulk of the available sources for Csoma's adult life are to be found in this volume.

Csoma's personal qualities — as well as his fears — shine through the correspondence. His relationships with the British authorities were at times uncertain. In 1825 he arrived from Zanskar at the British garrison of Sabathu with a letter of recommendation from Moorcroft. However, he was at first detained — apparently on the suspicion that he might be a spy — while the commanding officer sought instructions from Calcutta. This episode remained a lasting source of offence. At the same time, he was determined to complete his dictionary and thus to fulfil what he regarded as a binding promise to Moorcroft. While working on the dictionary in Zanskar and Kanam, he subsisted on a small subsidy initially from Moorcroft and then from the British authorities in Calcutta, but regularly failed to spend — and even refused — much of the money that he was offered. However, he rightly saw his pioneering linguistic work as the key to a literature of which European scholars were scarcely aware, and this was a source of enthusiasm and justifiable pride. All this and much more is discussed in detail in the correspondence that we can now read.

The two volumes have been published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and this is historically appropriate in the light of Csoma's personal association with the Society. However, Marczell — and Csoma — could have been better served by the editors responsible for the final layout and presentation of the book. For example, the line-spacing is wider than necessary. One letter from a British official (H. Newton) is printed twice without explanation, and some of the section headings have been misspelt. The greatest omission is the limited number of cross references. Most of the papers in the first volume have previously been published elsewhere but — with the exception of Chapter 3 — the original places of publication are rarely given in the papers themselves. However, in several cases the endnotes of one paper refer to one of the others, citing the original place of publication, but not the fact that it has been republished in the same volume. Similarly, the papers in the first volume cite important source documents, without mentioning that these same documents have been reproduced in full in the second volume. There is an obvious need for thorough indexing, but the index that we are offered is very far from being comprehensive.

Overall, the task of finding one's way round the two books is a little like working out the structure of a confusing but very rich archive. In the course of exploring it, one encounters many unexpected obstacles but these are more than balanced by pleasing discoveries. Perhaps best of all, after reading through the correspondence, one is left with an engaging sense of personal acquaintance with Csoma de Kőrös himself.

Marczell was often scathing of other writers who — out of an excess of admiration, personal ambition or ignorance — distorted Csoma's memory with implausible legends. His own writing is well sourced and carefully argued. At the same time, while he always claimed a critical detachment, it is obvious that he felt a special affinity with a subject who — like himself — had been a wandering expatriate Hungarian, and had been sustained by high ideals. We must be thankful to him for communicating his findings to the rest of us with such enthusiasm and care.