

Some additional remarks on the history of Hungarian Buddhism and the influence of Buddhism in Hungary at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries: Explorers, collectors, and first accounts on Japanese Buddhism and the Buddhist connection to Japonisme in Hungary

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Summary

As the second of a series, this paper aims to add some additional comments on the author's first paper written about the history of Buddhism and its influences in Hungary up to the 1920s by focusing on the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and on the reception of Japanese Buddhism. It gives an account about the achievements of Hungarian scholars and geographers who have been influential to Buddhist studies after Csoma Kőrösi. It introduces the first set of travelers to Japan and the Hungarian artists from the fin du siècle who have been influenced by Buddhism and the wave of Japonisme. It also introduces briefly the collectors of Oriental art and the decisions that led to the founding of an independent Museum of Oriental Arts in Hungary.

Keywords: Buddhism in Hungary, Sir Aurel Stein, Hungarian explorers, writers, travelers to Japan, Péter Vay, Ferenc Hopp, Ferenc Hopp Museum of Eastern Asiatic Arts, Japonisme

Introduction

As the second paper of a multiple-part series, this paper aims to add some additional comments on the author's first paper written about the history of Buddhism and its influences in Hungary until the 1920s¹. This time, by focusing on the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the author intends to add some comments on the development of Buddhism and its influences in Hungary by giving more detailed information on scholars, geographers, travelers to Japan, and collectors of Asian art who had been influential during this period. It also brings some additional sources to the attention of its reader about this period, and cites some academic references not used for the writing of the first paper. It is vital to indicate here that during the past two years some new and crucial academic achievements on Japonisme and Hungarian-Japanese relations have been published, and these are considerably enriching our possibilities to examine this period².

¹ Attila Király, "History of Hungarian Buddhism and the Influences of Buddhism in Hungary until the 1920`s," *Electronic Journal of Central European Studies in Japan*, no. 3 (October 2017) at <https://www.josai.ac.jp/jices/ejces/index.html>.

² Katalin Gellér and Mirjam Dénes, *Japonizmus a magyar művészetben = Japonisme in Hungarian Art* (Budapest: Kovács Gábor Művészeti Alapítvány, 2016); Gergely Tóth, *Japán–magyar kapcsolattörténet 1869–1913 (History of the Japanese-Hungarian Relations 1869–1913)* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2018); Györgyi Fajcsák and Béla Kelényi, eds., *Sanghay-Shanghai: Parallel Diversities between East and West* (Budapest: Museum of Fine Art - Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts, 2017).

In his previous paper, the author tried to summarize the main characteristics of the period until the end of the second world war³. Without repeating everything previously mentioned, it might be important to add two critical elements. The first is the introduction of modern technologies, such as photography, as helping tools for explorers, writers, orientalists, book editors, and museum curators – people and experts who dealt with Far Eastern religions. Photography at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century cannot compete with the relative simplicity of photography from the 1930s and 1940s up to today. The photographic equipment at that time was still heavy, and its set up and transportation was considerably tricky and problematic. Although working outside a photographic studio was still a challenge, photography meant a significant improvement for experts and amateurs alike to make visual records. Another essential element is the broadening of travel opportunities and basically the first stage of modern tourism, with visitors traveling from Hungary to Asia by ships. It is necessary to mention here the opening of the Suez Canal, which significantly advanced the traveling opportunities for European travelers. Not surprisingly, the improved travel conditions unquestionably strengthened the positions of European colonizers in Asia. On the other hand, the emergence of the Asian centers of world trade, such as Yokohama or Shanghai, was also conducive to domestic development of curio-shops and art gallery networks. These shops and their networks soon became essential for many European art collectors (such as Ferenc Hopp), to manage their acquisitions in Asia, and thus facilitated the shipping of Buddhist artwork to Europe.

³ Király, “History of Hungarian Buddhism and the Influences of Buddhism in Hungary until the 1920`s,” 3–8.

Explorers

In the first part of the paper, we will discuss those explorers whose achievements had a momentous impact on the research of Buddhist studies. It is important to refer first to the world-renowned orientalist, archeologist and explorer Aurél Stein (Sir Aurel Stein, 1862-1943)⁴, who was researching with British support in India, Kashmir, and Central

⁴ A significant part of Sir Aurel Stein's collection was donated to the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It is important to mention here some of the books of Stein were translated to Hungarian, in which Stein was referring to Buddhism. Stein Aurél. *Homokba temetett városok.* (*Sand-buried ruins of Khotan*) Átdolgozta Halász Gyula. (Budapest: Lampel R. Könyvkereskedése R.T. könyvkiadóvállalata, 1908). Stein Aurél, *Indiából Kínába. Harmadik utam Belső-Ázsiába 1913-1916.* (*From India to China. My Third Expedition to Inner Asia.*) Angolból fordította Halász Gyula. (Translated from English by Gyula Halász) (Budapest: Atheneum Rt., 1923); Stein Aurél, *Romvárosok Ázsia sivatagjaiban (Ruins of Desert Cathay).* (Budapest: K.M. Természettudományi Társulat, 1913); Stein Aurél, *Ősi ösvényeken Ázsiában.* (*On the Ancient Paths of Asia*) (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1934). Here is a recently published book on Stein and on the Buddhist Caves of Dunhuang: Kelecsényi Ágnes. *A Selyemút rejtett kincsei. Stein Aurél és az Ezer Buddha barlangtemplomok.* (*The Hidden Treasures of the Silk Road. Aurél Stein and the Thousand Buddhas' Cave Temples*) (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára, 2007). Fortunately, the original Hungarian translations of Stein's books were re-released by Szabolcs Felföldi and the publisher company Palatinus book. For example: Stein Aurél. *Homokba temetett városok: régészeti és földrajzi utazás Indiából Kelet-Turkesztánba 1900-1901-ben.* (*Sand-buried towns: archeological and geographical expedition from India to East Turkestan in 1901-1902*) Stein Aurél életműve.

Asia. It was geographer Lajos Lóczy (1849-1920) who had informed Stein about the Buddhist caves of Dunhuang. Stein's visit and discovery of the caves had a tremendous impact on the research of Buddhism around the world.

Lóczy, the head of the Geological Society and President of the Geographical Society of Hungary, had visited the caves with Béla Széchenyi and other scholars. It was in 1879 when the Hungarian expedition of Béla Széchenyi reached Dunhuang, and this Hungarian expedition was the first to visit Dunhuang, and it was Lóczy who later brought Stein's attention to Dunhuang's Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Lóczy described to Stein the fresco paintings and the stucco sculptures, and his vivid account induced Stein to visit the caves. Lóczy edited the scientific results of the expedition in three volumes that were published in 1897: "*Gróf Széchenyi Béla keletázsiai utazásának (1877-1880) tudományos eredményei*"⁵. The three volumes contained the contributions of other Hungarian and foreign scholars.

Gustav Kreitner, the Austrian member of Count Béla Széchenyi's expedition, also mentioned the caves in his book, "Reisen des Grafen Bela Széchenyi in Indien, Japan, China, Tibet und Birma in den Jahren 1877-1880". This book was published earlier than

Sorozatszerkesztő: Felföldi Szabolcs. (Budapest: Palatinus, 2007). Felföldi's interesting book about the current Stein-studies and about the efforts made to the re-release of Stein's books is here: Szabolcs Felföldi, *Stein Aurél - Egy rendhagyó életrajz (Aurel Stein – An Unusual Biography)* (Budapest: Palatinus, 2015).

⁵ Lajos Lóczy, *Gróf Széchenyi Béla kelet-ázsiai útjának tudományos eredménye 1877 – 1880 (Scientific Results of the East-Asian Expedition of Count Béla Széchenyi)* (gr. Széchenyi Bélával, I – III., Bp., 1890 – 97).

Lóczy's, with the Hungarian translation having already been published in 1882, and entitled “*Gróf Széchenyi Béla keleti utazása India, Japan, China, Tibet és Birma országokban*”⁶. In addition to the caves, Széchenyi and Kreitner also visited other sacred East Asian and Buddhist sites⁷.

Stein's visit to the area led to the sensational discovery of the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, which brought immense sources to the scholars researching medieval Central Asian and Chinese Buddhism. Stein, in his book “*The Ruins of Desert Cathay*”, acknowledged Lóczy's contribution⁸. Stein also sent flowers to the grave of Lóczy, which

⁶ Gusztáv Kreitner, *Gróf Széchenyi Béla keleti utazása India, Japan, China, Tibet És Birma Országokban (The Eastern Travel of Count Béla Széchenyi in the Countries of India, Japan, China, Tibet and Burma)* (Budapest: Révai testvérek, 1882). In the Hungarian version, the description of the caves with the illustrations of the author can be found on the pages 687-692.

⁷ For example, Kreitner describes their voyage to Kioto, the sacred Fuji, the Buddhist Jizo statues and later encounters with lamas in Tibet. About their visit to Fuji see also: Tóth, *Japán–magyar kapcsolattörténet 1869–1913*, 46.

⁸ Stein's visit was followed by the French sinologist and explorer Paul Péliot, and then the thorough scientific exploration of the sites began. Recently it was the Hungarian-born Lilla Russell-Smith who made reference to the still relatively unknown contribution of Lóczy in the West in her paper “Hungarian Explorers in Dunhuang” (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 2000, vol. 10, no. 3: 341-362).

are preserved and can be still seen in their withered state under a sheet of glass on Lóczy's grave⁹.

In 2007, the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences organized an exhibition to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the Dunhuang library cave¹⁰. During the same period, at the turn of the century, the writings of foreign travelers helped to bring the public closer to Buddhism in general, and the different Buddhist sites in East Asia¹¹. Other Hungarian travelers to East continued to write about the local religions and the different forms of Buddhism.

⁹ Lóczy's grave is in a cemetery near Lake Balaton, at Balatonarács (Balatonfüred). For more about this, see: Szabolcs Felföldi, *Stein Aurél - Egy rendhagyó életrajz (Aurel Stein - An Unusual Biography)* (Budapest: Palatinus, 2015).

¹⁰ The website of this exhibition can be found here: "Hidden Treasures of the Silk Road. Aurel Stein and the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas," accessed November 2, 2018, <http://dunhuang.mtak.hu/index-en.html>. <http://dunhuang.mtak.hu/index-en.html>

¹¹ The famous writings of Sven Hedin are also noteworthy. For example: Sven Hedin, *Ázsia sivatagjain keresztül (Through the deserts of Asia)* Magyar Földrajzi Társaság Könyvtára 1., (Budapest: Lampel Rt., 1902); Sven Hedin, *Tízezer kilométernyi utatlan utazás. (Then thousand kilometers' trip on untravelled roads)* Magyar Földrajzi Társaság Könyvtára 7–8., (Budapest: Lampel Rt., 1906); Sven Hedin, *Három év Tibetben 1899–1902 (Three years in Tibet 1899-1902)*. Magyar Földrajzi Társaság Könyvtára, (Budapest: Lampel Rt., 1908); Sven Hedin, *Transzhimalája: felfedezések és kalandok Tibetben. (Trans-Himalaya: Discoveries and Adventures in Tibet)*, (Budapest: Lampel Rt., 1910).

Explorers and writers on Japanese Buddhism

With a focus on Japan, we should mention some of the most important travelers, writers, and journalists who made references to Japanese Buddhism.

Umemura mentions 11 major books about Japan written by Hungarians up to 1920. These writers, Gusztáv Kreitner (who travelled with Béla Széchenyi), Sándor Bródy (the famous writer, who actually never visited Japan), Ernő Szeghy (Christian theologian), Péter Vay (see below), Benedek Barátosi Balogh (explorer, ethnographic writer), Ferenc Gáspár, Vilmos Pröhle (see below), Dezső Bozóky, and Varga Antal Csige are all making references to Japanese Buddhism¹². Csige even gives an explanation of Japanese Buddhism in a separate chapter¹³.

A worthy addition to mention here is Lajos Sámi. Although he never visited Japan, Lajos Sámi regularly wrote about Japanese culture and society for the *Vasárnapi újság* (Sunday magazine) at the end of the 1860s. In April 1868, he wrote an article about the

¹² Yuko Umemura, “Japán Magyar Szemmel - A Magyarországon Megjelent Korai Japanológiai Könyvek Tükrében,” in *Ukijo-e = Ukiyoe : Az elillanó világ képei : Válogatás Gróf Vay Péter Japán Fametszet Gyűjtéséből*, Bibliotheca Hungarica Artis Asiaticae (Budapest: Hopp Ferenc Kelet-ázsiai Művészeti Múzeum, 2010), 14–49.

¹³ See the chapter “The influence of Buddhism in Japan” in: Varga Antal Csige, *Japán és a japánok* (Budapest: Franklin, 1914).

sacred Fujiyama¹⁴, and in May 1869, about a large, prominent Buddhist temple in Yedo (Tokyo)¹⁵.

As usual in this period, these travel writings contained romanticizing and idyllic descriptions about Japan, but we can also find discriminative elements in them. Tóth mentions in his book written on early Japanese-Hungarian relations, a diplomat, Béla Rakovszky (1860-1916), who traveled in Japan in 1901. Rakovszky also visited Buddhist sites on his own¹⁶. Another traveler, Attila Szemere visited Japan in 1882-1883, and the Museum of Applied Arts bought his Japanese collection. This was one of the first significant Japanese collections purchased by a Hungarian Museum, and it was followed by the acquisition of the collections of other collectors.

Vilmos Pröhle's book, the *Napkeletről* (From the East) was written based on the conviction of the author about Turanism, an ideological framework which was seeking to „understand” better the Eastern kinship of Hungarians and to explore the Hungarian's relation to Asian people. Turanism was a wide-range, ideological framework. Being influential during the inter-war period, it stirred a lot of academic and cultural interests towards Oriental cultures and the progressed a foreign policy interest toward Asian and Eastern countries (Turkey, Japan, Mongolia), but it also strengthened the pseudo-mythical interpretations about the Eastern roots of Hungarians¹⁷. Pröhle's book

¹⁴ Japáni zarándokok. (Japanese pilgrims). *Vasárnapi újság* vol 15. (1868) április 12.

¹⁵ A yedói Buddha templom (The Buddhist temple of Yedo). *Vasárnapi újság* vol. 18. (1869) május 2. p241.

¹⁶ Tóth, *Japán–magyar kapcsolattörténet 1869–1913*, 84.

¹⁷ The Hungarian Turanic Association was established in 1910. About Turanism, see a recent book, Balázs Ablonczy, *Keletre, Magyar! A Magyar Turanizmus Története* (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2016);

was published originally in 1904, and its revised version was published in 1913. While Pröhle writes in his book with exceptional interest and in a friendly way about Japan and Turkey, he made references on Japanese Buddhism only superficially.

Some travelers were not only traveling or working in Japan, but also functioned as collectors of East Asian art items, contributing to the public collections of Hungary. János Xantus joined the first Austro-Hungarian expedition in 1869 to the Far East. He was commissioned by the government to collect historical, ethnographic and bibliographical items for the Hungarian public collections.

Count and titular bishop Péter Vay was born in Dabas, not far from the capital. He finished his studies in Rome, and then traveled the world several times. He was commissioned by the government to purchase Japanese artwork for the Museum of Fine Arts¹⁸. During his Japanese trip in 1906, Vay visited Japanese Buddhist sites. For example, he gave an account about his visit to the Daibutsu in Kobe, and Tennoji in Osaka¹⁹. He visited Koya-san and the Itsukushima shrine near Hiroshima, as well as the temple complex of Horyuji, where he explained about its buildings and statues. He also

Balázs Ablonczy, “‘Lándzsahegy’, Néprokonság, Small Talk - Turanizmus És Keleti Gondolat a Két Világháború Közötti Magyar Külpolitikai Gondolkodásban,” (“Spearhead”, Ethnic Kinship, Small Talk - Turanism and the Eastern Thought in the Hungarian Foreign-Policy Thinking During the Interwar Period) in *Magyar Külpolitikai Gondolkodás a 20. Században*, (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006)

¹⁸ Geller and Dénes, 22. Geller and Dénes, *Japonizmus a magyar művészetben = Japonisme in Hungarian Art*, 22.

¹⁹ Gróf Vay Péter, *A keleti féltekén (On the Eastern Hemisphere)*. (Budapest: Franklin-társulat, 1918) pp. 221-232. In this book he also wrote extensively on Buddhism in Burma and Cambodia.

visited the temples of Todaiji, Yakushiji, and Saidaiji in Nara. The collection of Japanese woodblock prints that Péter Vay collected in Japan also included artwork with Buddhist and Shinto elements²⁰. The exhibition of this collection took place in Budapest in 1908 and was followed by another exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts in 1910²¹. He produced several books about Japan and East Asia and wrote the first book in Hungarian on Japanese art²². Vay's ukiyo-e collection was exhibited again in 2009²³. Vay also traveled extensively in Korea, and his writings about Korea also contained references to Korean Buddhism and accounts of his travels to Buddhist sites in Korea. These writings were published recently in English²⁴.

It is important to mention at this point the Kuhn & Komor Company. The Hungarian Kuhn and Komor families were art dealers who established curio-shops separately in Japan and China. One of the Komor company shops was named Daibutsu. Soon they

²⁰ Yuko Umemura, Annamária Gáspár, and Éva Cseh, *Ukijo-e = Ukiyoe : Az elillanó világ képei : Válogatás Gróf Vay Péter japán fametszet gyűjtéséből*

²¹ Gellér and Dénes, *Japonizmus a magyar művészetben = Japonisme in Hungarian Art*, 20.

²² Péter Vay, *Kelet császárai és császárságai (Emperors and Empires of the East)* (Ázsiai útja Szibérián át Kínába, Koreába és Japánba). (Budapest, 1906); *Nippon esztétikája. A japán festészeti iskolák, azok mesterei és műemlékei (The esthetics of Nippon. Japanese painting schools, their masters and masterpieces)* (Budapest, 1907). *Kelet művészete és műízlése (Art and Taste of the East)* (Budapest, 1908).

²³ Umemura, Gáspár, and Cseh, *Ukijo-e = Ukiyoe : Az elillanó világ képei : Válogatás Gróf Vay Péter japán fametszet gyűjtéséből*.

²⁴ Péter Vay, *Korea of Bygone Days*, ed. Ágnes Birtalan (Budapest: Terebess Publications, 2001).

began their cooperation (Kuhn & Komor Company), and they managed curio-shops in the seaports of China and Japan (Shanghai, Yokohama, Kobe). They were in contact with Hungarian public collections, and Ferenc Hopp was also one of their customers²⁵. Ferenc Hopp, the head of Calderoni, a successful photography and school equipment firm in Hungary, was also a passionate traveler and collector of Asian art. He visited Asia and Japan several times, and his collection and his Villa in Budapest became the basis for the founding of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Eastern Asiatic Arts in Budapest.

Unsurprisingly, the original Hopp collection also contained art items associated with Japanese Buddhism²⁶.

²⁵ Mónika Bincsik, “The Trade in Japanese Art during the Meiji Period with Special Reference to Lacquer, as Mirrored in the Collections at the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Eastern Asiatic Arts, Budapest.” (*Ars decorativa*, 2002, vol. 21: 103-143); Tóth, *Japán–magyar kapcsolattörténet 1869–1913*, 62–64.

²⁶ Mónika Bincsik, “The Trade in Japanese Art during the Meiji Period with Special Reference to Lacquer, as Mirrored in the Collections at the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Eastern Asiatic Arts, Budapest.”; Mónika Bincsik, “Ferenc Hopp’s Japanese Curio Collection,” in *The Man of Buitenzorg Villa: Ferenc Hopp, Globe-Trotter and Art Collector (1833-1919)* (Budapest: Ferenc Hopp Museum of Eastern Asiatic Arts, 2008), 99–115. Györgyi Fajcsák, “Chinese Curio Trade and Ferenc Hopp’s Chinese Collection,” in *The Man of Buitenzorg Villa: Ferenc Hopp, Globe-Trotter and Art Collector*, 117–35. Mária Ferenczy, “The Life of Ferenc Hopp,” in *The Man of Buitenzorg Villa: Ferenc Hopp, Globe-Trotter and Art Collector (1833-1919)*, 29–41; Eszter Gábor, “The Knorr, Later Hopp Villa at 103 Andrassy Street,” in *The Man of Buitenzorg Villa: Ferenc Hopp, Globe-Trotter and Art Collector (1833-1919)*, 81–90.

Japonisme

Besides József Hollóssy and his circle of activity, the first writings and attempts to interpret Buddhism and Theosophy, which claimed as their core element the unique interpretation of Buddhism²⁷, was Japonisme²⁸. Japonisme brought many direct and indirect elements from Buddhism into the activities of Hungarian artists. According to Katalin Gellért, the most renowned scholar in Hungarian Japonisme, Japonisme was a complex phenomenon in Hungary. Themes and motifs were borrowed from the Japanese culture, and although the interpretation of many of the doctrines of Buddhism were erroneous or remained obscure (for example the meaning of Nirvana²⁹), many artists became familiar at least with some elements of this world religion. “Following orientalist and academic works that presented Japan as something exotic, Japonisme, the complex influence of Japanese art that could be felt in a variety of ways and on many levels, also appeared in Hungarian art, as indeed in the art of other Central European countries.” (Gellér and Dénes 2016, 9)³⁰ “Japonisme was something that helped to supersede the tradition, and establish stylized presentation modes, along with a new understanding of space and colours.” (Gellér and Dénes 2016, 84)³¹ Japonisme, however, was not only a

²⁷ See in Király, “History of Hungarian Buddhism and the Influences of Buddhism in Hungary until the 1920’s”

²⁸ In Hungarian: japonizmus, japanizmus or japánizmus.

²⁹ Nirvana in Buddhism is time to time depicted with full or partial female nudity, thus exoticism goes together with eroticism or other times with a performed rejection of eroticism.

³⁰ Gellér and Dénes, *Japonizmus a magyar művészetben = Japonisme in Hungarian Art*, 9.

³¹ Gellér and Dénes, *Japonizmus a magyar művészetben = Japonisme in Hungarian Art*, 84.

technical question. Many of the most acknowledged artists were influenced by Buddhism and by the Japonisme at the same time, such as the painter Mednyánszky who learned about Buddhism through Theosophy, as well as István Csók and Tibor Boromisza³². In many cases, traditionalism and the wish to learn about the Eastern roots of Magyars, and to connect it to Eastern religions, Theosophy and Buddhism had an influence on a wider range of Hungarian artists.

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³² Other contemporary major artists who were influenced by Japonisme were József Rippl-Rónai, Pál Szinyei Merse, István Zádor, Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka etc.

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