

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

## Csoma Archive of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Hungary)

*Ref N° 2008-53*

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### PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

#### *1 SUMMARY*

##### **The Csoma Archive of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences**

Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (c. 1784-1842) a Hungarian scholar was the first to interpret to Europe the cultural heritage of the Tibetan people. He compiled the first Tibetan-English Dictionary of scientific value together with a Grammar of the Tibetan Language (1834). With his scholarly work he became the founder of Tibetan studies, a new discipline of Oriental studies.

The Csoma Archive of the LHAS is a comprehensive repository of manuscripts and printed documents related to Csoma in the following categories:

- I. the four ‘Alexander books’ which are summary outlines of various fields of Tibetan literature and scholarship, compiled by Csoma’s teachers, the lamas at Zangla, at his explicit request. Their value resides in their uniqueness, having been composed personally for Csoma and written only in one copy.
- II. 32 Tibetan block prints and manuscripts copied or purchased by Csoma.
- III. Csoma’s correspondence (nearly 250 letters, including 26 letters from him)
- IV. the Csoma-related collection of his first biographer, Theodore Duka (1825-1908)
- V. contemporary and modern documents related to Csoma’s life and work.

The archive does not only contain a great number of unique documents of exceptional scientific value (like the Alexander books or Csoma’s correspondence), but it is also unique in itself as the only comprehensive collection of Csoma-related documents.

Its significance is manifold:

- Csoma is considered as a national hero in Hungary, whose documentary heritage has great significance for the Hungarians. On the national level, he is highly esteemed as one of those Hungarian scholars who went to the East to find the cradle of the nation which was supposed to be somewhere in Central Asia.
- As the founder of a new discipline, Csoma is esteemed on the international level, especially because his scholarly achievement is still taken into account. His archive is significant for Buddhist and Tibetan studies alike.

#### *2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR*

##### *2.1 Name (person or organisation)*

The Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

##### *2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated.*

A part of these documents (items I-II) were donated in 1839 by Csoma to the secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal S. C. Malan, to whom he taught the Tibetan language at that time. As this was a private donation, nobody knew about these documents until Theodore Duka, the biographer of Csoma, visited Malan in London in 1883. Malan gave these books to Duka. Theodore Duka, a true Hungarian patriot, who fought in the Hungarian War of Independence in 1848-49 and who later

became surgeon-colonel of the Indian Army, donated the Csoma documents together with his collection of Csoma's correspondence and other related manuscripts and prints (items III-IV) in 1885 to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences of which he was a member. At the time of the creation of the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1951 these documents became part of the holdings of this unit. Item (V) is due to the library's systematic collecting activities to enrich the archive.

### 2.3 Contact person (s)

Dr. Kinga Dévényi, keeper of the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

### 2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences  
H-1051 Budapest,  
Arany János u. 1.  
HUNGARY

Postal Address: H-1245 Budapest, Pf. 1002  
Phone: 36-1-312-3298  
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## 3 ***IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE***

### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The Csoma Archive of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

*Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*  
*Oriental Collection*  
H-1051 Budapest,  
Arany János u. 1.  
Hungary

### 3.2 Description

The Csoma Archive of the LHAS is a comprehensive repository of manuscripts and printed documents related to Csoma in the following categories:

- i) the four 'Alexander books' which are summary outlines of various fields of Tibetan literature and scholarship, compiled by Csoma's teachers, the lamas at Zangla, at his explicit request. Their value resides in their uniqueness, having been composed personally for Csoma.
- ii) 32 Tibetan block prints and manuscripts copied or purchased by Csoma.
- iii) Csoma's correspondence
- iv) the Csoma-related collection of his first biographer, Theodore Duka (1825-1908)
- v) contemporary and modern documents related to Csoma's life and work.

#### ***Cataloguing:***

The documents of the Csoma Archive are catalogued in the online catalogue of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (<http://www.mtak.hu>). The books are in the database of "Books-monographs-series", whereas the manuscripts are catalogued within the "Manuscripts of the Oriental Collection" database. The two databases can be searched together or separately alike.

#### ***Guide:***

A detailed description of the Csoma Archive can be found at a special web-site dedicated to Alexander Csoma and the Tibetan Collection of the LHAS (<http://csoma.mtak.hu>).

Bibliographic and registration details:

Csoma 2, 6, 11, 14, 18, 20, 27, 50, 54, 57, 58, 60, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 72  
MS Tib. 3, 4 (a-d), 6 (a-b), 8  
Misc. 6-9

**Provenance:**

A part of these documents (items i-ii) were donated in 1839 by Csoma to the secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal S. C. Malan, to whom he taught the Tibetan language at that time. As this was a private donation, nobody knew about these documents until Theodore Duka, the biographer of Csoma, visited Malan in London in 1883. Malan gave these books to Duka. Theodore Duka, a true Hungarian patriot, who fought in the Hungarian War of Independence in 1848-49 and who later became surgeon-colonel of the Indian Army, donated the Csoma documents together with his collection of Csoma's correspondence and other related manuscripts and prints (items iii-iv) in 1885 to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences of which he was a member. At the time of the creation of the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1951 these documents became part of the holdings of this unit. Item (v) is due to the library's systematic collecting activities to enrich the archive.

Assessment of physical state and condition:

The documents are in fair condition. The letters are kept separately in acid free boxes, on metal shelves in a storage room. The books belonging to the Csoma Archive are kept in the same storage room.

The Alexander Books are kept separately, together with the Tibetan manuscripts and block prints.

At their present state the documents do not require conservation.

**Visual documentation:**

For the visual documentation of the heritage, see our website: <http://csoma.mtak.hu>, especially "The Csoma Collection".

**Bibliography:**

- Duka, Theodore: "Some Remarks on the Life and Labours of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, delivered on the occasion when his Tibetan Books and Mss. were exhibited before the Royal Asiatic Society on the 16th June, 1884", *JRAS* 1884, 486-494.
- Ligeti, Louis: "Ouvrages tibétains rédigés à l'usage de Csoma", *T'oung Pao* XXX (1933), 26-36.
- Terjék József, *Collection of Tibetan MSS and Xylographs of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös*, MTAK Budapest, 1976.

**Referees:**

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#### **4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**

##### 4.1 Is authenticity established?

The provenance of the heritage is well established and documented. As for items (I-IV), their provenance is documented in the archives of the Academy (RAL 363/1886) and the official bulletin of the Academy (*Akadémiai Értesítő* xviii (1884), p. 169; xx (1886), p. 160). Several documents bear the signature of Theodore Duka, the person who donated the documents to the Academy. Items belonging to (V) came into the possession of the LHAS as contemporary authors' gifts.

##### 4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?

The heritage is a prime source for the understanding of the basic concepts of Buddhism, summarized on the basis of the sutras revealed by Buddha and of the sacred writings on monastic discipline occurring at a very early phase of the history of Buddhism. They treat every aspect of Tibetan knowledge: cosmology, cosmography, medicine, grammar, philosophy, history, metrics, etc. In addition to this the documentary heritage provides an insight into the development of a special branch of Oriental studies, giving a full background to the life and works of the founder of Tibetan studies.

Since the heritage primarily contains items which are unique manuscripts, written in one copy (MSS written for Csoma de Kőrös) or private and official letters, they cannot be replaced. This heritage as the documentary heritage of the founder of Tibetan studies has created a great impact worldwide where interest in Tibetan studies and Buddhism is alive.

##### 4.3 Is one *or more* of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style satisfied?

###### (a) time

This heritage is the "first of its kind", and it may be added that it is also the "last of its kind", since it cannot be repeated. The first items of the heritage were made in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and as such they are also evocative of the state of learning at that period.

###### (b) place

The heritage provides crucial information about one of the most inaccessible places in the world, i.e. Tibet.

###### (c) people

The heritage provides information about the social and cultural context of Tibetan people, and especially Buddhist monks, living in a secluded society at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

###### (d) subject and theme

The subject of the heritage, though departing from an earlier phase of Buddhist teaching, reveals the state of the art at the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As for the achievement of Alexander

Csoma de Kőrös, as the founder of a new discipline, his intellectual accomplishment in the field of human sciences is preserved in the heritage.

(e) form and style

The Alexander books as the first exemplars of “easily understandable handbooks” in Tibetan made for foreigners is of outstanding linguistic value.

4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?

- Rarity

It is the content of the documentary heritage which makes it a unique surviving example of Tibetan Buddhism and culture and its interpretation, supplemented by the unique documentary heritage of a person who became the founder of a new discipline.

- Integrity

The documentary heritage is complete, it has neither been altered nor damaged.

- Threat

Its survival is secure. Vigilance is applied to maintain its security, since the building where it is housed is constantly under surveillance and is fitted with an alarm system. Only qualified librarians can handle the documentary heritage.

- Management plan

There is no separate management plan, but the library as a whole works according to a set of well-defined principles and guidelines. For our guidelines, see 6.1.

## 5 **LEGAL INFORMATION**

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

*Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*  
*Oriental Collection*  
H-1051 Budapest,  
Arany János u. 1.  
Hungary

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

The same as the owner.

5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership  
Public institution.

(b) Accessibility  
Public access for reproductions and digital images on demand.  
Information about the collection as well as a significant number of digitized pages are available on the internet.  
Scholars can access the original documents as well.

(c) Copyright status  
Only a small part (items v) are subject to copyright. All the copyright owners can be identified.

(d) Responsible administration  
Prof. Gábor NÁRAY-SZABÓ

Director General of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences  
He is appointed by the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and is individually responsible for the administration, management and safe-keeping of the Library.

(e) Other factors

As a public library, the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences is required by law to preserve national cultural heritage of which this collection is a part.

## **6 MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage? YES/NO**

In the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences there is no management plan for the individual units, as is e.g. the Csoma Archive. This is so, because the Library as a whole works according to a set of well-defined principles and guidelines which are also incorporated in the strategic plans of the Library.

Founded in 1826, the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences - as one of Hungary's foremost public collections - is dedicated to support scientific and scholarly research and safeguard its precious collection for generations to come; it serves the public by providing its holdings in an ever widening circle of patrons preserving its traditional values and at the same time relying upon a modern platform of information technology.

Each year the budget of the Library of the HAS is determined by the General Assembly of the Academy. This budget, however, is quite tight, so it is not possible to set aside a preservation budget. Instead, the Library regularly applies for preservation grants at the National Cultural Fund and other state and private establishments.

The Library does not employ conservators, but we regularly work with a select team of conservators of great expertise in the conservation of Oriental and Western MSS and prints.

The Library is regulated by the Hungarian law for the preservation of national cultural heritage, and the documents are stored according to the specifications set out by these regulations.

The disaster preparedness would necessitate making a complete digital copy of the whole collection to be deposited in a safe, in order that at least a copy remains in case of a disaster.

## **7 CONSULTATION**

### **7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee**

Since the Library of the HAS is the owner and custodian of the Csoma Archives, there was no need for consultation with (a) and (b).

We have also consulted the secretary general of the Hungarian UNESCO Committee, Mr. Péter Gresiczki

## **PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

### **8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK**

#### **8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage (see 5.5)**

Although this documentary heritage is in fair condition at present, since no permanent preservation budget is set aside at the Library of the HAS, in case of unsuccessful application for preservation grants, the preservation budget might prove to be insufficient.

### **9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION**

9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage (see 3.3)

The documentary heritage is fully catalogued in the online catalogue of the library, while some parts are also catalogued in printed inventories. Their retrieval is straightforward, since they are correctly labelled.

Storage environments:

The letters are kept separately in acid free boxes, on metal shelves in a storage room. The books belonging to the Csoma Archive are kept in the same storage room.

The Alexander Books are kept separately, together with the Tibetan manuscripts and block prints. The Manuscripts are covered with acid free polyester/paper.

The temperature – owing to the thick walls of the Library – is constant during the summer and it is not overheated in the winter. Humidity is controlled. There is a smoke detector and the rooms are frequently checked for insects.

Security:

The whole building is under permanent surveillance. It is fitted with an alarm system which is directly connected to the police.

The documents are housed in the central building of the Academy, so they are not transported.

While every care is taken to conserve the originals, the Alexander Books are available on microfilm as well.

**PART C - LODGEMENT**

This nomination is lodged by:

(Please print name)...Dr. Kinga Dévényi

(Signature)..... (Date) 6 March 2008