

BUDDHIST STUDIES IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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Though Czechoslovakia is a small country placed right in the heart of Europe having no free access to the sea, her Asian studies enjoy an admirably long and brilliant tradition. This is largely true of Near East, Indian and East Asian Studies. The reason for this may be that this small country has ever been, since time immemorial, a source of rich traditions of culture, learning, democracy, humanism and social progress and the Czech intelligentsia have always shown a keen interest in learning about other countries' cultural legacy which had been then readily transferred and interpreted to the Czech people.¹

The age-long Indian erudition in philosophical and religious doctrines, however, could not escape attention of the Czech scholars both during the period before obtaining independence in 1918 and in course of the unheard of upsurge of Oriental studies in free Czechoslovakia after the World War II. The origin and development of Buddhist studies in this country though less stormy and confined almost exclusively to Buddhism of India, in lesser extent to its features in China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, Mongolia and elsewhere, then proceeds arm in arm with other developing Indian disciplines. But this could not happen until these disciplines abandoned their one-sided linguistic orientation which so dominantly brandironed almost all works of our Indologists in the past century.²

The Czech reader for the first time could avail of the opportunity of acquainting himself with Buddhist topics in the work of a religious and social reformer TOMAS of Stitny (1335-1409) who translated from Latin the erstwhile in Europe very popular story about *Barlaam and Josaphat*. The work is a classical presentation of a Buddhist legend in Christian attire which narrates about the Buddhist Prince Josaphat being converted to Christianity by the hermit Barlaam. It appeared in our country for the first time in 1392. In the following centuries the Czech reader but sporadically could acquaint himself with India, her customs and religion. Thus about 1400 the Czech translation of Marco Polo's *Million* was published, and about ten years later, about 1410, the translation of Mandeville's *Travels*, in 1528 appeared the Czech edition of *Panchatantra* prepared by MIKULAS of Hodiskov (died 1546) and others. The favourite romance about Barlaam and Josaphat has appeared several times during the 16th century; it was even rewritten as a play and frequently staged chiefly by Jesuit colleges in Bohemia and Moravia. The last critical edition of this work was published in Czechoslovakia in 1946.

The founder of the Czech Indian studies is to be considered KAREL PRIKRYL (Carolus Przikryl, 1718-1785), a member of the Jesuit Mission and Director of the Archbishop's Seminary at Goa, author of the first Latin written grammar of the Konkani dialect of the Marathi language (*Principia linguae brahmanicæ*).³ This work later played an exceptional role in forming the philosophical concepts of the founder of Slavonic studies J. Dobrovsky (1753-1829). The first original works on Sanskrit did not appear until the first half of the 19th century: in 1823, a study by A. JUNGSMANN (1775-1854), titled *O sanskritu* (On Sanskrit), and in 1831 a book by the Slovak author J.S. TAMASKO (1801-1881), called *De causis linguae sansritae* (On the origins of the Sanskrit language). The second half of the same century brought already the first translation from this language (fragments from *Mahābhārata*, *Rig-Veda*, *Hitopadesha* and others). In the same period a philosopher F. CUPR (1821-1882) wrote his three-volume opus on Indian philosophical systems and their relation to Christianity, *The teachings of ancient India* (Prague 1876-1878, in Czech) and the linguist C. SERCL (1843-1906) his book about the life in ancient India, *From the life of the ancient Indians* (Prague 1889, in Czech). The same author wrote also his well-known textbook of Sanskrit grammar published in Russian in 1873.

The most opulent scholarly production in Indology and Buddhist studies is closely related with the names of two prominent Indologists of Prague, Moriz Winternitz who was professor of Indian studies at the German University in Prague, and Vibcenc Lesny, professor of the same discipline at the Czech Charles University in Prague and later Head of the Oriental Institute. The two scholars belonged to the very few Indologists throughout the world capable of embracing the Indian problems in their full width and profundity.

MORIZ WINTERNITZ (1863-1937) is author of a monumental three-volume work, thus far unsurpassed as a whole, called *A history of Indian literature* (Calcutta 1927, 1933 and 1959; according to the original German edition, Leipzig 1905-1922). The second and the most comprehensive part of the work (673 pages in the English edition) is wholly devoted to the Buddhist and Jainist literature. The author wrote another two major works relating to Buddhism and presenting this doctrine in the light of its original texts. The first book is called *Der altere Buddhismus nach Texten des Tipitaka* (Tubingen 1929), the second *Der Mahayana-Buddhismus. nach Sanskrit-und Prakrittexten* (Tubingen 1930). M. Winternitz also became popular with editing the ancient Indian literary texts and compiling a comprehensive and very useful Index to the series *The Sacred Books of the East*. (A general index to the names and subject-matter of the Sacred Books of the East, Oxford 1910). He also took an active part in the development of Indian studies in India where he

acquired much esteem because of his great knowledge as well as the remarkably rich literary production.⁴

VINCENC LESNY (1882-1953), a well-known scholar in international Indian studies, besides his profound philological treatises devoted to Sanskrit, Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Indian Prakrits, Pali, Bengali and the Gypsy language, a great number of travel books, many translations (chiefly of the Bengali poet R. Tagore but also e.g. *Dhammapada* and other more), his extensive scientific-organizational and editorial activities (he was for many years Director of the Oriental Institute, founder of the Czechoslovak-Indian Association, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in Prague and Olomouc, initiator and long time Chief Editor of the popular-scientific monthly *Novy Orient* appearing now in 29th year etc.), indulged in research of Indian history and ancient, largely Buddhist, literature. He was the first of Czech Indologists who made Buddhism, its doctrine and history to his regular programme. The results of his studies were then incorporated into a book called *Buddhism. The Buddha and the Buddhism of the Pali canon* (in Czech) for the first time published in Kladno 1921 and twenty seven years later in a substantially supplemented and re-written edition (445 pages) titled *Buddhismus* (Prague 1948, in Czech). In this book of his V. Lesny analysed the original Buddhism of the Pali canon and pursued the development of this religion both in India and elsewhere.⁵

The problems of Buddhism were but marginally treated by another prominent Czech scholar in Indian studies, OTAKAR PERTOLD (1884-1965), professor of comparative religion at the Charles University and author of popular travel books. His main scholarly interest concentrated on the Indian Jainism and on religious questions of Ceylon as well. His are such great works as *The place and importance of Jainism in the comparative science of religions* (Bombay 1922), *Religions of the uncivilized nations* (volume one of a series *An outline of the history of the world's religions*, Prague 1925, in Czech) and others. Professor Pertold is also author of the first Czech textbook of Hindustani in two volumes (Prague 1930 and) 1939.⁶

The Chair of Indology at the Charles University vacated by the late Professor Lesny was succeeded by his erstwhile pupil OLDŘICH FRIS (1903-1955) who made himself notorious by his excellent translation of Old Indian and Middle Indian poetry. The Czech reader appreciated, besides other works, his translation of selected pieces from the Pali collection *Songs of the Elder Monks and Nuns* (*Theragatha and Therigatha*) published in the anthology of old Indian lyrics *Love and Selfdenial* (Prague 1948, in Czech).

Out of numerous pupils of Professor Lesny only IVO FISER (born 1929) is now active with the edition of a comprehensive Pali

Dictionary in Copenhagen, faithfully held to the study of Buddhism and its literature. One of his first works of this field is a study called "The problems of the setthi in Buddhist Jatakas" (Archiv orientální XXII 1954, pp. 238-266). One recent work of his deals with Old Indian erotics (*Indian erotics of the oldest period*, Prague 1966).

A very novel contribution to the study of Buddhism, its philosophical essence and concepts of the universe, of that which makes the ancient Eastern doctrine topical and close to the present day spiritual atmosphere in Europe, is the work of a Marxist philosopher ZBYNEK FISER (born 1930) simply called *Buddha* (Prague 1968, in Czech). The author argues that Buddhism had faced questions which only now the European thinking has approached in its own development and just in this issue he sees the very actual effectiveness of Buddha's teachings.

To elucidate the most glorious period in the history of Indian Buddhism was the object of a monograph by two young talented students of Indian studies, JAN FILIPSKY (born 1943) of the Oriental Institute, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, and JAROSLAV VACEK (born 1943) of the Faculty of Philosophy, Charles University who studied the life and time of Ashoka (*Ashoka*, Prague 1970, in Czech). They analysed pre-Ashokan India, depict Ashoka's life and attitude to Buddhism of which he was an ardent propagator and point out the historical and art monuments of the oldest period of Indian Buddhism. In this connection an exceptional attention is given to Ashoka's inscriptions on rocks and columns, the so-called minor and other inscriptions.

The records of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims of their travels to the holy places of India have always been regarded as the first class source information on India and especially about the position of Buddhism there. The first of these travels, Fa-shien's Travels bringing countless news about Buddhism in North-west, Central and East India in the break of the 4th and 5th century A.D., is available even in a broadly commented Czech translation (*A record of the Buddhist countries*, Prague 1972), prepared by a member of the Oriental Institute JOSEF KOIMAS (born 1933).

The journey of a Korean Buddhist monk Hye-ch'o (the first half of the 8th century) to India was described in an article by JOSEF SRAM (born 1933) titled "Hye-ch'o's pilgrimage to India" (*New Orient Bi-monthly* II/4, Prague 1961, pp. 120-123) accompanied by photographs of the Korean Buddhist art.

PAVEL POUCHA (born 1905), scholar of Indian studies of elder generation whose scientific development took course via Tibet and Inner Asia to the Mongols, furnished a valuable contribution to the the knowledge of Buddhism in its Tibetan form (Lamaism), or in that still persisting nowadays in Mongolia or China. They are the following works: an article "Das tibetische Totenbuch im Rahmen der eschatologis-

chen Literatur'' (*Archiv orientální* XX, 1952, pp. 136-162) and two travel books, *Thirteen thousand kilometres through Mongolia* (Prague 1957, in Czech; the same in German, Leipzig 1960) and especially *Into the depths of Asia* (Prague 1962, in Czech),⁷.

The Tibetan studies in the traditional channels are, as a rule, closely connected with the study of Buddhism or Lamaism. Here also two catalogue projects can be mentioned, by J. Kolmas *Tibetan manuscripts and blockprints in the library of the Oriental Institute Prague* (Prague 1969), and chiefly his *Prague collection of Tibetan prints from Derge* (2 volumes, Wiesbaden-Prague 1970), which supply information about the rich collections of Tibetan canonical and non-canonical literature in Prague.⁸ *A genealogy of the kings of Derge* (Prague 1968) by the same author is of importance also for the study of history of the Lamaist sect Sa-skya-pa in Eastern Tibet.

Finally, it should be stressed that Czechoslovak authors brought also their humble share to the knowledge of Buddhist art and iconography. Above all two works of late LUMIR JISL (1921-1969), *Tibetan art ancient Mongolia* (Prague 1961, in Czech). In this connection also two beautifully arranged artistic publications should be named, viz. by JAROSLAV BARINKA (born 1931), *The art of ancient Korea* (Prague 1962, published also in French and in German) dealing among others with Buddhist sculpture in Korea in the period of Koguryo and Silla, and by MILOSLAV KRASA (born 1920), *The temples of Angkor* (London 1963, published also in French, German and Russian); here belongs also the collective work by Prague scholars in Indian studies, published by DUSANZBAVITEL (born 1925) titled *The wisdom and art of ancient Indians* (Prague 1971, in Czech) where the problems of Buddhism are discussed in a separate chapter.

Apart from this brief recital of some works by Czechoslovak authors on Buddhism I am compelled—much to my regret - leave out a number of minor works, e.g. articles, entries in general and literary encyclopaedias or some other contributions, as well as all that of our popular and scientific production dealing with Buddhism but superficially or indirectly. The kind reader will surely realize my doing so solely under observance of the limited space given me in this journal. All interested persons can avail of more literature references in the attached Notes where they will find incomparably more than that which could be included in this brief survey.

NOTES

1. Generally to the history of Czechoslovak Oriental Studies, see D. ZBAVITEL, *Oriental Studies in Czechoslovakia* (Prague 1959, also in French, German and Russian), J. MAREK – T. POKORA, "Asian studies in Czechoslovakia" (*Journal of Asian Studies* XXII, 1963, pp. 357-366) and M. OPLT (ed.), *Asian and African studies in Czechoslovakia* (Moscow 1967), and other reference cited therein.
2. For Indian and partly Buddhist studies in Czechoslovakia, see p. POUCHA, "L'indianisme et les études concernant la Haute Asie et l'Asie Centrale" (*Archiv orientální* XIX, 1951, pp. 182-206, 10 plates), J. JAVURKOVA, "Indological studies in Czechoslovakia" (*United Asia* VII/3, 1955, pp. 164-169), V. PORIZKA, "A glance at Indian studies in Czechoslovakia" (*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* XXX/2, 1956, pp. 35-37), and above all a brilliant historical study by a well-known Czech Indologist M. KRASA, *Looking towards India*, Prague 1969 (Preface by Tara Chand), which pursues the mutual Indo-Czechoslovak contacts in all aspects and general historical perspective.
3. Cf. J. PEREIRA, "Principia linguae brahmanicae. A grammar of standard Konkani. Karel Prikryl. Edited with an introduction by Jose Pereira, Benares" (*Archiv Orientalni* XXXVI, 1968, pp. 625-684). Additionally also the study by M. KRASA, "First Czech scholar in India" (*ibid.*, pp. 609-624).
4. Cf. O. STEIN – W. GAMPERT, "Bibliographie Moriz Winternitz 1884-1933" (*Archiv orientální* VI, 1934, pp. 275-291) and "Bibliographie Moriz Winternitz II. 1933-1937 und Nachtrage" (*ibid.*, IX, 1937, pp. 225-228). See also W. GAMPERT, "Moriz Winternitz" (*Indian historical Quarterly* XIV/2, 1938, pp. IX-XXI).
5. Cf. P. POUCHA, "Vincenc Lesny : Bibliography 1909-1948" (*Archiv orientální* XVI, 1948, pp. 149-161).
6. Cf. V. PORIZKA, "The seventieth anniversary of the birth of Professor Otakar Pertold" (*Archiv orientální* XXII, 1954, pp. 161-175).
7. Cf. J. KOLMAS – J. SIMA, *A bibliography of Pavel Josef Pourcha's works* (as of 31st December, 1970), Prague: Department of East Asia, Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1970.
8. Cf. also *Bulletin of Tibetology* VIII/2, July 1971, pp. 13-19.