



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 24, 2021

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

Revisiting a Hypothesis: Tracing Early Buddhist Heritage in Central-Eastern Europe

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Abstract. The following paper is a revisitation of a hypothesized cultural connection between the Szekler gates, predominantly from Transylvania (in the Carpathian Basin), and the Sacred gate tradition found across Asia. The structure of this paper is built upon three different approaches: firstly, the recent publications and historical records on this topic; secondly the ethnographical similarities in function and symbolism between the Szekler gates and the gateways found across Asia; and thirdly the observable similarities and analogies between the ornaments and symbols used on Szekler gates and other Asian gateway structures are examined. This article aims to investigate if the observable analogies and similarities are just the result of a strange coincidence, or if there is indeed a cultural connection between the Szekler gate and the similar constructions across Asia as hypothesised by several 19th and early 20th century researchers of the topic.

Keywords. Szekler gate, Torana, Sanchi, Buddhism, art, architecture, symbols, ornaments, Fergusson, Medgyaszay, Lechner

1. Introduction - The Szekler gates & the sacred Asian gate building tradition

The following paper represents a discussion of a hypothesized relationship between Szekler gates, predominantly found in Transylvania in the Carpathian Basin, and the gate building tradition found across Asia. Theories which mentioned similar aspects to the one presented in this research paper have been introduced by a number of Hungarian and British researchers and artists of the 19th and early 20th century. In Hungary, a few of the most notable proponents of the theory of a potential cultural connection between the Szekler gates and other similar structures of Asia were Jozsef Huszka (1854-1934) art teacher and ethnographer, Istvan Medgyaszay (1877-1959) architect, co-president of the Hungarian-Indian Society, Viktor Keope author and orientalist or Jeno Lechner (1878-1962) architect, nephew of the iconic Art Nouveau architect Odon Lechner. Istvan Medgyaszay (1877-1959) was an influential Hungarian architect who started to look at and research folk art and ornamentation, as relics, motifs and memories of an ancient past. His ornamental research is primarily based on Transylvanian folk art as he regarded it the most untouched memorabilia over the centuries. (Szabo, 2007). Whilst Medgyaszay was arguing the similarities between the architectural styles and ornaments of the Szekler gates and the “gate and terrace structures of north India” (Medgyaszay,1993), the others were speculating connections in an even larger geographic spectrum. Public lectures and presentations on this topic were held frequently, however, after the mid-twentieth century these research results and theories were quickly forgotten and the

current very valuable investigations on the Szekler gates are mainly focusing on the gothic, renaissance, baroque influences in a closer European context.

Scottish architect and archaeologist James Fergusson (1808- 1886) and Robert Sewell (1845–1925) a historian, who were both important figures of the 19th century rediscovery of ancient India, presented their observations regarding architectural ornamentation in several publications. Sewell in his work 'Early Buddhist symbolism' (1886), and James Fergusson in the 'Tree and serpent Worship (1868) and the 'Description of the Amravati Tope in Guntur' (1867) explained certain observable similarities between symbols found on the Sanchi and Amaravati stupas and others found in Eastern Europe and Western Asia. Sewell, referring to Fergusson, expressed the hope that this subject would be taken up as a subject for further research.

2. Methods

The hypothesis explored in this paper is supported by three fundamentally different approaches. Firstly, a consideration of the possible historical connection of people who eventually settled in the Carpathian basin with Asia, described by historians, based on recorded researchable data and published information. Secondly, the similarities between the Szekler gates and the Asian gate building traditions from the aspect of ethnography: the function of these gates, the philosophies behind them, the human and cultural connotations, emotions, thoughts and rituals connected to these structures. Thirdly, and most importantly, the similarities of the ornaments and symbols used on these gates will be observed in detail. These symbols and ornaments are like imprints and historical archives of the social and cultural belief systems of a given society at a specific period in time.

3. The theoretical basis of the possible similarities

3.1. Historical records on movement of peoples and cultures

Man, in his recent publication 'Barbarians at the Wall' (2019), provides a thorough review of the historic records that discusses the rather unknown people of the Xiongnu or Hunnu. He hypothetically proposes that tribes that eventually settled in the Carpathian Basin might have migrated from the Altai Mountain area around 100 AD, and that these tribes and people had even earlier connections with the Xiongnu people. The Xiongnu empire was located approximately where present day Mongolia is around 140BC. The first historical record, mentioning the possibility that the Huns are related to the Xiongnu, was written by Joseph de Guignes, a French Sinologist, in his book 'Histoire generale des Huns, des Turcs et des Mogols' (1756) (Man, 2019). One of his followers, Edward Gibbon, in his publication 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' (1776), confirmed the views introduced by de Guignes. Almost a hundred year later, the priest and eminent scholar, Dr Sir Ervad Jivanji Jamshedji Modi (1854-1933), in 'The Early History of Huns and their inroads in India and Persia' is referring to and agrees with de Guignes' earlier theory. Modi also describes the possible connection between the Hunnic people and Xiongnu, and further to this, he explains that the Huns, under different names, had relations with the nations of all the four great kingdoms in the first few centuries before and after Christ (China, India, Persia and Rome). Bakker (2016) writes that by the middle of the fourth century AD Hunnic People were settling in the eastern part of the Sasanian kingdom and started to dominate Bactria, the Kabul area, and Gandhara from the middle of the 4th century onwards. North of the Hindu Kush, the Kidarite Huns established a powerful

kingdom in Bactria and Sogdiana. South of the Hindu Kush, during the first decades of the fifth century, the Alchon Huns started to gradually replace the Kidarite rulers in the Kabul area, Gandhara and the Punjab. In the seventies and eighties of the fifth century, the Hephthalites, or 'White Huns', grew into a strong military force replacing the Kidarites in Bactria. Huns stretched across the continent from Mongolia in the east, reaching India in the south and France to the west. (Weatherford, 2016)

The religious beliefs of the Hun tribes is not fully understood yet. Sima Qian, Chinese chronicler from ca. 209 BC states that the Huns worshipped "Heaven and Earth and the gods and spirits". Roman and Chinese sources mention that the Huns practiced scapulimancy, divining the future and also consulted shamans (Weatherford, 2016). Man, in his book 'Attila the Hun' (2005) claims that there can be no doubt that the Huns were animist, and later in the 'Barbarians at the Wall' (2019) Man explains that 'Tengri' was the overarching deity of the Central Asian form of Animism. Thompson (1946) refers to sources claiming that in the middle of the fifth century Christian missionaries managed to convert many of the Huns and further to this they translated some books (its not confirmed if they are referring to the Bible or not) into the Hun language. Other researchers of the topic (Wink, 1990; Dani, 1996) claim that the Hunnic tribes were predominantly Buddhist, with some religious presence of Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. However, Bakker (2016) quoting Eltschinger, mentions that a great religio-political challenge for the Buddhism of India could have been the emerging "par excellence" Saivism (Shiva worship) that is believed to have arrived along with the Huns around AD 500. All these very diverse descriptions of the Hun religious practices might result from the fact that the western Huns had been very far from Mongolia for several generations and during this time they had absorbed religious and cultural traditions from the different people they had conquered or encountered. (Weatherford, 2016)

The intellectual and theological currents around the Silk Road was crowded with deities, priests and spirits belonging to different cults, religions and beliefs (Frankopan, 2015). Buddhism was the concept that gained rapid success and acceptance across Asia, especially after it had been embraced by emperor Ashoka. Ashoka promoted the spread of Buddhism across ancient Asia and sent monks to teach Buddhism into neighbouring countries. The spread of Buddhism was also helped by the silk route, the great channel of exchanging thoughts, cultural, religious, and philosophical ideas as well as trade between the east and the west (Mackerras, 2003). The Buddhist texts, monks and paraphernalia that were spread along the Silk Road triggered a so called 'social conversion' or integration in these countries, a process by which pre-modern people adapted foreign cultural traditions (Sen, 2003).

There are several complex, sometimes contradicting or even mythical theories on how the people of the Carpathian Basin and their gate structures might have arrived to their current location in the middle of Europe, and it is also very uncertain which cultures and people they interacted with. However, it would be quite difficult to imagine that these tribes would have been completely unaware or untouched by Buddhism in any way.

3.2. Associated functions, traditions & the history of the gateways

The second approach, in this next section of this text, investigates functions, traditions and symbolism associated with Szekler gates and the Asian gate building tradition. The overarching link behind these gates is that all these countries, where these gateways can be found, had some sort of relationship, interaction with Buddhism. Buddhism was a philosophy that reached most of the countries of Asia. Emperor Ashoka's royal support enabled Buddhism

to enter China via the silk Route from Central Asia, Afghanistan and the north-western frontiers of India. From China, Buddhism spread to Korea and Japan and to Southeast Asia via the sea routes (Spice Route). From the Himalayas, it reached Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, Siberia and Manchuria. Artists from these diverse cultural backgrounds created new styles enriching the palette of Buddhist arts, from the Greco-Buddhist world of Gandhara to Japan in the East and Indonesia in the South. (Shashibala, 2003; Albanese, 2007).

One of the earliest surviving Buddhist structures is the toraṇa gate of the Bharhut Buddhist stupa (Satna district of Madhya Pradesh) from the 2nd century BC. Its architectural design was based on timber and bamboo gateway prototypes. Slightly later, in the 1st century BC, more elaborate gateways were built in front of the Sanchi stupa (Madhya Pradesh). Although there are no other complete surviving toranas from ancient India, numerous representations indicate the widespread use of these gates. Brown (1959) sees the origin of torana in the simple village or town gates (grama-dvara) of the Vedic age, however the word torana has many different meanings including arched gate and garland (flower) decoration. Certain lexicons from 11th century AD call the garland decoration itself a torana. The torana had a purely decorative function from the very beginning and it is closely related to festivals and religious ceremonies. Early Sanskrit writings also mention toranas, however it is difficult to imagine the architectural and artistic appearance of the gate from these documents alone. The Indian toranas had undergone a number of extremely large changes over the centuries. (Dhar, 2010).

The Bharhut and Sanchi toraṇas' form was carried with Buddhism to the Far East, where the torii of Japan and the piu-lu, (pailoos or paifang) of China can also be related back to the toranas of India, the land of origin (Hardy, 1996). Buddhism was first introduced into Japan by way of Korean and Chinese immigrants in the sixth century AD (Green, 2018). According to certain sources, the Japanese torii can be associated with the Indian torana gateway arch, while other sources mention closer connections with the traditional gates in Manchuria and elsewhere in China (Brittanica.com). Wang (2018) in his paper, based on detailed research of numerous and well-preserved Ming dynasty paifangs, concluded that these gateways show a very large versatility in terms of their functionality, the values of the current ruling class and the architectural design of the age. As Buddhism synergized with Confucianism as well in China, the moral values (such as chastity, loyalty, filial piety, benevolence or charity) emerged as very important aspects of society. Hence often before entering a town adorned with these gates, visitors had to walk across these gates as a symbol of accepting and respecting the values of the town. (Chen & Wei, 2014; Jiang, 2014)

The Korean gateway, called the hongsalmun, designates the boundary point from which people should focus their spirit and show respect and behave appropriately. Whilst the other Korean gateway type, the iljumun, is the gate that indicates Buddhist territory and is set up at the boundary between spiritual and earthly life (Kugowon, 2002). In a similar way the Japanese torii gateway signifies the boundary between the sacred space of a shrine or sacred location (such as a mountain or rock) and the ordinary world. The Sao Ching Cha gate structure in Bangkok, Thailand, is an exception. In terms of shape and architectural design the Sao Ching Cha (Giant Swing) is very similar to other gateway buildings of this tradition, however the religious function is different. In this truly Buddhist country, this structure was originally constructed in 1784 and was used to celebrate an old Indian Brahmin ceremony therefore the architectural look of this gateway structure still points to the direction of cultural origin.

Whilst the Buddhist torana was suggested to be an important influence in the morphological development of the paifang, torii, hongsalmun and Sao Ching Cha, the Hindu gopura's effects can be found in the architecture of the candi bentar and the temple gates of the

Khmer and Cham (today middle and South Vietnam) gate buildings (Clark, 2007; Kastawan, 2009; Phuong, 2009). The gopura gate represents the most outer structure of the sacred area around a temple (Hari Rao, 1967). The Cambodian Angkor Thom Gates (Clark, 2007) or the classical ‘candi bentar’ gateways of Java (Suprapti, 2017) and Bali are also very clear indications of entering a sacred area, most often belonging to a temple of the often-intertwined Hindu-Buddhist heritage of these places. Reichle (2007) argues that esoteric Buddhism and Hinduism is so conjoined sometimes that it can be very difficult to differentiate not only in Indonesia but India as well. Hence certain scholars suggest that the 13-14th century Indonesia should not be categorised as Hindu or Buddhist but simply Tantric. (Appendix 1)

The meaning of the word ‘gopura’ has several different explanations to it. One of these interpretations according to Harshananda (2008) is ‘which protects the town or city’. Another possible meaning of gopura or gopuram could be the joining of two words, gawa and puram, which according to Sthapati (2012) means that ‘all energy and living beings that exist come inside this gateway’.

From the above descriptions, it can be seen that these gate structures have a very strong symbolic role. Actually, they have almost only symbolic importance and hardly any, or possibly no, practical functionality at all. Entering these gateways means entry into a sacred, protected, spiritually elevated space. Hence, in the author’s view it is significantly different from other monumental gateway structures in the history of architecture; such as the arches of triumph (Arc de Triomphe). The arches of triumph started by the Romans, usually celebrated or honoured important persons or significant events, hence clearly not serving spiritual purposes, but very worldly and earthly duties. In the author’s view, it is this symbolic role that is one of the connections between the Szekler gates and the Asian spiritual gateways.

Balazs Orban (1829-1890), the acknowledged author and ethnographic collector, writes in detail about the Szekler gate in his book ‘Description of the Szekler Land from the point of view of history, archaeology, geography, and folklore’ (1868-1873). He states that these gates bear witness to the great perfection of woodcarving and the great fondness for ‘oriental’ embellishment. These gates are more of an adornment than a necessity there, because the traditional hospitality of the Szekler does not allow them to close the gate. Another important point from Balazs Orban is that where these decorative gates lead is called ‘lives’, and all inner plots and possessions inside of these gates are called ‘life’ or ‘integrity’. This terminology resonates to certain aspect with the meaning of the gopura explained by Sthapati (2012) mentioned earlier. Above the opening, each and every Szekler gate has a blessing, such as: “*If you have a good heart and name, you can come through this gate, however if you are deceitful you can walk up and down in front of it*” (there is no admission for the malevolent or untruthful) or “*Peace to the person who enters, blessing to the one who leaves through this gate*”.

From the above it can be seen that the Szekler gate has the same symbolic meaning – to denote the boundary between a spiritually elevated area and normal land, as the other gateway structures of Asia.

Figure 1. Examples of the two most basic designs of the Szekler gates. The small gate for only pedestrian access and the large gate which is for coaches as well.



1(a) - Small version of the Szekler gate. In this example it is shown with the characteristic 'Hetfalusi csango' roof structure.

1(b) - Painted Szekler gate from Marefalva, Transylvania

1(c) - Carved Szekler gate from Kezdivasarhely, Transylvania

3.2.1. Analogies in the arrangement patterns and associated meanings

The similarities in function and the surrounding traditions result in corresponding architectural arrangements of the gates as well. In Figure 2. examples are shown for the very distinctive architectural use of sequential gate arrangement patterns from different geographical locations and times. Another interesting parallel is that Szekler gates can often be found in front of cemeteries as well. Actually, one of the Hungarian researchers even hypothesised at one point that the Szekler gates originated from the temple cemetery gates (Szinte, 1909). Examples for this are the torii gates of Oku-no-in Cemetery, Koya-san, the paifang of the Mukden Shenyang Gate Imperial Tombs Liaoning, hongsalmun of the Joseon Dynasty royal tombs, the candi bentar of the Tomb Complex of Sunan Bayat Ki Ageng Pandanaran or the ancient Buddhist toranas that were also originally built in front of Stupas containing ashes of Buddha. Almost as if these gates not only serve as symbolic crossings between the sacred and mundane worlds but also between the realms of the living and the dead.

Figure 2. Sequential gate arrangements.



- 2(a) Sequence of torii gates, Fushimi Inari shrine, Kyoto, Japan
 2(b) Sequence of Szekler gates of the Kakasd Community Centre, Hungary. Architect: Imre Makovecz.
 2(c) Sequence of Szekler gates in Szeged, Hungary.
 2(d) Tangyue Memorial Archways. Seven ancient archways in Shexian, the “Town of Arches”, China.
 2(e) Sequence of Szekler gates, Szejkefurdo, Szekelyudvarhely, Transylvania.

In Figure 2(a), the hundreds of red torii gates donated by believers were erected to form a pilgrimage path to the top of the Inari Mountain in Kyoto, Japan. Visitors walking through the sequence of these hundreds of vermilion toriis, are showing their respect to Inari, the spirit of the mountain (Isomae, 2015). In Figure 2(e) the sequence of 14 Szekler gates is outlining an uphill pilgrimage path to the grave of the most honoured and memorable son of the land, Balazs Orban. Figure 2(d) shows the Tangyue Memorial Archways, China symbolizing virtues and merits that the visitor arriving to the village of Tangye should respect. (Jiang, 2014; Chen, 2014). Figure 2(b) shows a contemporary building designed by Imre Makovecz, one of the most prominent proponents of organic architecture in Hungary. In the community centre building of Kakasd, Hungary. Figure 2(c) is showing an uphill pilgrimage path again marked by Szekler gates in Szeged, Hungary.

3.3. Symbols and motifs of the gateways

In the following section of the paper, a list of illustrated analogies between the ornaments and symbols found in both Szekler gate and the Buddhist gate buildings will be

introduced as an attempt to underpin the assumed or hypothesized connection between the two.

The key question to ask is whether such similarities can be simply the result of mere coincidence without some kind of cultural connection or contact?

Two relevant quotes could be important to mention here from two key figures of this topic. Medgyaszay's memory table in Komarom says the following: "For us Hungarians, our modern art can only be developed from the treasure trove of Asian cultures".

The sarcophagus of Tibetologist Sandor Korosi Csoma (1784 – 1842) in Szeged, Hungary has the following quote engraved onto it: "Search and explore, because not a single nation in the whole world will find as much treasure to enrich their culture as Hungarian society finds in the storehouse of the ancient Indian culture...". (Hetenyi).

3.3.1. Szekler gate plinth ornaments & symbols of Sanchi

Stupas were royal monuments. The Sanchi Great Stupa is one of the oldest stone structures in India. It was originally commissioned by Ashoka in the third century BC. Later circa in the first century BC, four elaborately carved toranas and a balustrade structure were added to it. Bharhut is of a similar time period to Sanchi. Bharhut was known for its exquisitely carved railings built circa in the second century BC. The crowning of the Sanchi toranas, is the complex symbol of the never-ending knot (Shrivatsa) in a Triratna on top of the Dharmachakra, shown in figure 3(c). Figure 3(b) shows the Bharhut torana reconstruction, as depicted by Cunningham (1879) in 'The stūpa of Bharhut'. Sewell in his publication "Early Buddhist symbolism (1886)" writes in great detail about this triratna symbol and the way it potentially travelled from the East to the West from ancient times. An example of this emblem is shown below in Figure 3(a) on an ancient coin from Cyprus. Next to the coin there are different examples of the evolving shapes of the triratna. (Note: Sewell and Ferguson are referring to this symbol as Trisula or Trisul).

A very similar symbol with analogies of the evolving shape of the triratna appears as a common ornament at the plinth of Szekler gates (Figure 4).

Figure 3(a). Ancient coin from Cyprus with five examples of the evolving triratna shape next to it. (Sewell, 1886)

Figure 3(b). The triratna symbol of Bharhut. (Cunningham, 1879)

Figure 3(c). The triratna symbol of Sanchi. (Fergusson, 1876)

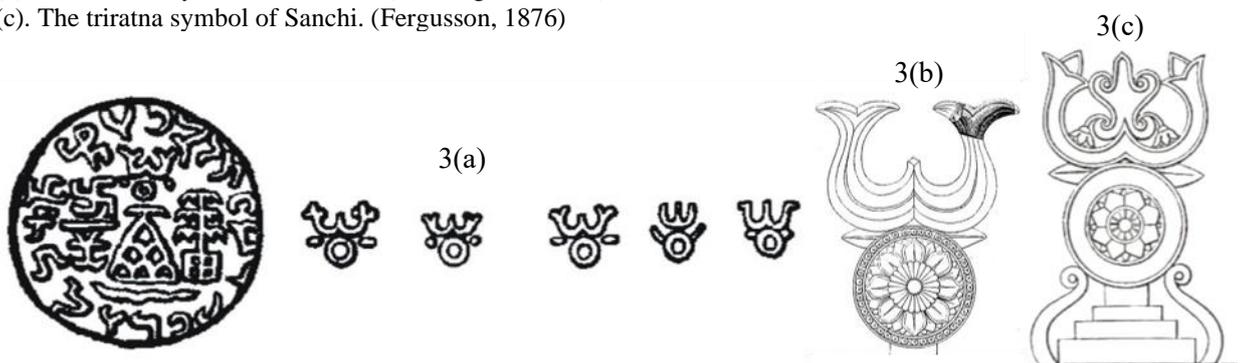
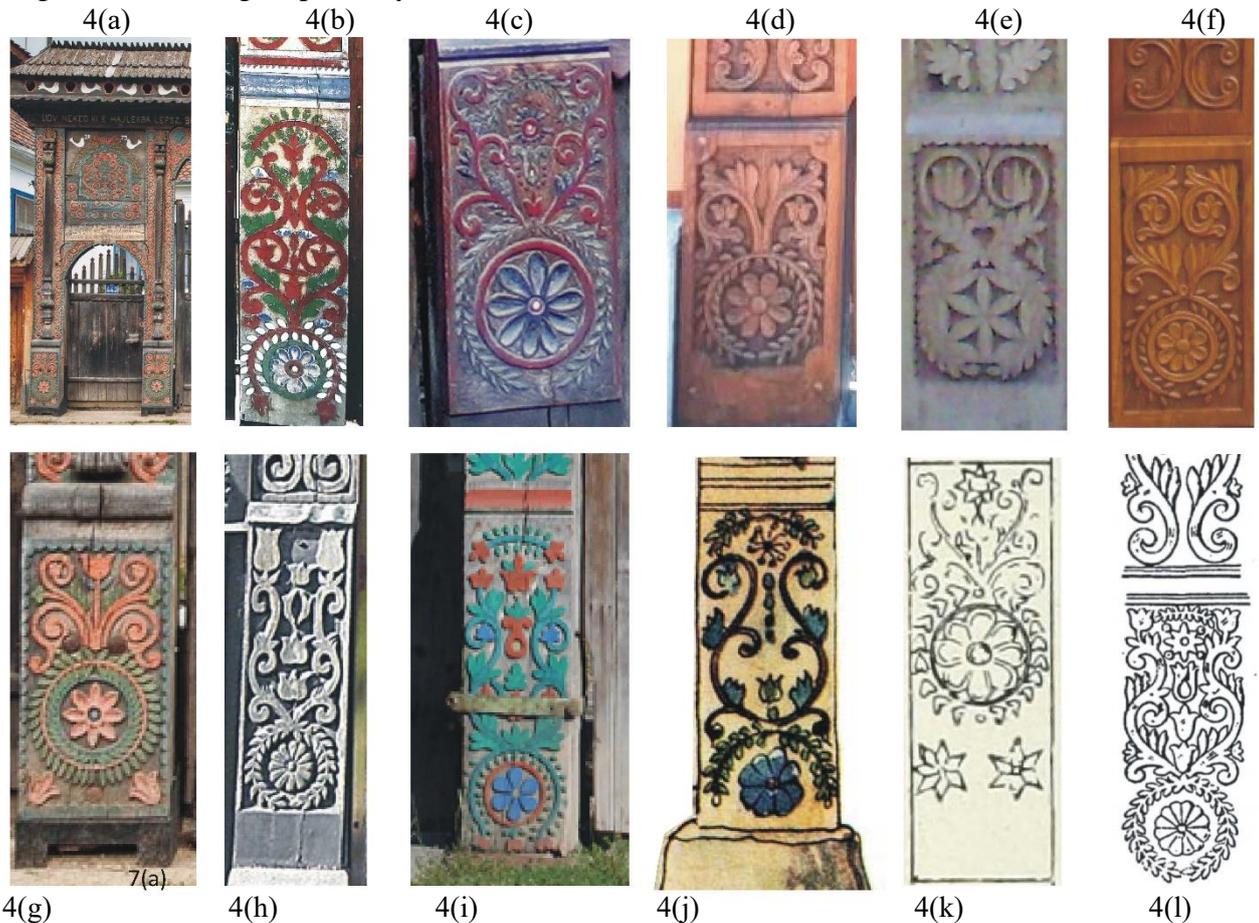


Figure 4. Szekler gate plinth symbols



4(a) – 4(i) Pictures of carved and painted Szekler gate plinths. The common symbol on the plinths shows observable similarity with the compound sign of the never-ending knot (Srivatsa) in a Triratna on top of the Dharmachakra.

4(j) Image source Arcanum. OSZK MEK

4(k) Szekler gate. Székely-Udvarhely. CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 HU). OSZK MEK

4(l) Szekler gate plinths from Kapolnas - Olahfalu by Huszka (1895).

The leaf-like decoration encircling the eight-petal flower, can be found on Buddhist reliquaries from Gandhara as well (Figure 5).



5(a) and 5(b) Reliquaries from Gandhara first to third century AD. (Samuel Eilenberg Collection, metmuseum.org)

5(c) Szekler gate plinths drawing by Huszka from Kapolnas- Olahfalu, Trasyvania (1895).

3.3.2. Hungarian Tulip, Triratna and Trisula as ancient symbols

The tulip motif is one of the most ancient symbols of Hungary, however the exact origin of the shape has many questions around it. Huszka (1930) notes that this very ancient flower form is tulip-like but the petals of the flower do not overlap like the leaves of a tulip but extend with three quite separate petals. Therefore, Huszka prefers to call this motif a lily. Luko (1942) writes that ethnographers have been much concerned about the origin of the most ancient Hungarian floral folk-art motif, the tulip. Hoppal (2020) in several of his publications noted that the Hungarian tulip or lily is not an ordinary, lifelike depiction of a flower, but the display of some sort of symbols. Interestingly, in a similar way, Gupta (1980) in 'The Roots of Indian Art' states, that finding the origin of the ancient form of the Triratna and Trisula motifs has been a distinct problem for art historians.

In Figure 6. below, the author compares the visible similarities of these evolving forms, which again might be a pure coincidence. Looking at the below formations of these ancient symbols, the question arises if it is possible that these observable similarities appeared without any cultural connection or any common foreshadowing of a specific design or object. These images below are variations of Triratna, Trisula and the Hungarian tulip motif designs from different ages, using different materials, used at different functions, events.

Figure 6. The first column shows the evolving forms of Triratna, the second column is the Trisula and the third column is the Hungarian tulip.



The similarities are a bit more visible in the second and third column images. The representations are not identical, but it is reasonable to say that the general look and the way they changed and evolved is alike.

First column: Buddhist Triratna

- Fergusson & Burgess (1880), The Cave Temples of India
- Foucher (1914). The beginnings of Buddhist Art
- Detail of entrance pillar symbol of Sanchi stupa No.2. (Fergusson, 1886)
- Drawing of the triratna sign of the Sanchi stupa torana

Second column: Hindu Trisula

- Four pictures of commonly available Hindu religious and Indian jewelry item details. Such as tridents, candle holders, bangles.

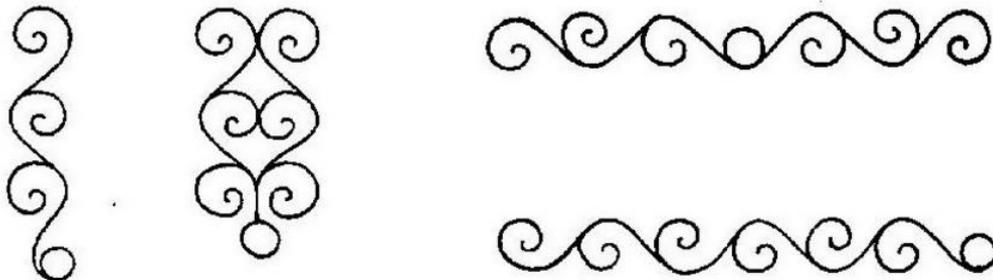
Third column: Hungarian Tulip

- Hungarian Tulip, Huszka (1930)
- Redrawn image of Gatepost carving, Korosfo, Kalotaszeg (original image - Kutvolgyi, 1981)
- Hungarian Hand embroidery, Gergely (2017)
- Hungarian Szekler Tulip jewelry motif

3.3.3. Hindu-Buddhist recalcitrant spiral

Bosch (1960) his book ‘The Golden Germ: An Introduction to Indian Symbolism’ describes the very common Hindu-Buddhist ornament, the ‘recalcitrant’ spiral as a very common motif in Sanchi, Bharhut and Borobudur. It is the rootstock of the wavering lotus plant which produces nodes at regular intervals. From each node of the lotus plant a spiral shape leaf-stalk grows, that undulate alternately to the right and the left. At the end of each leaf-stalk, there is a leaf which bends in the opposite direction to the stalk. If the stalk curls clockwise, the leaf undulates the opposite way.

Figure 7. Various types of undulating, wavering tendrill scrolls (Bosch 1960).



Dr. JLA Brandes (c.1890-1905), who was the chairman of the Netherlands Indies Commission for Archaeological Research in Java and Madura named it ‘the recalcitrant spiral’. Various stylised adaptations of the natural lotus plant scrolls were introduced to ornate temples of countries with Hindu-Buddhist cultural heritage. Bosh calls this Hindu-Buddhist influence in art the “golden germ” because of the way it spread and influenced other artistic styles with long lasting effect. (Lee-Niinioja, 2018). Figure 8. shows the ‘recalcitrant’ tendrill decoration on Indian and Indonesian gates, buildings and a very similar almost identical ornament on Szekler gates.



8(a) Szekler gate and belt ornament drawing by Huszka (1930).
 8(b), 12(c), 12(d) Three pictures of Szekler gate ornaments.
 8(e) Ornament of modern wooden mandir, India.
 12(f) Undulating, wavering tendril scroll from Indian stone temple frieze decoration.
 12(g) Indonesian scroll detail
 12(h) Redrawn scroll motif detail of Javanese door screen (original image - Schoppert, 1997).

3.3.4. The toranamala arch & its symbols

The toranamala is the flower embellished arch connecting the gates' vertical pillars. The shape and details of the toranamala arch is one of the most compelling components in the gates' architectural effect.

Figure 9. Shows examples of this toranamala arch and comparable details of Szekler gates.



9(a) -9(d) Szekler gate arch details

9(e) Torana of the Sun Temple, Modhera, India

9(f) Szekler gate picture

9(g) Toranamala detail (Forbes, 1856, Râs Mâlâ)

9(h) Szekler gate picture

9(i) Two Buddhist symbols (Fergusson and Burgess, 1880).

9(j) Solar disc or rotating rose flower pattern motif of Szekler gates.

9(k), 9(l) Dharmachakra (Fergusson and Burgess, 1880).

9(m) Gate idol, Museum of Ethnography Szentendre, (Note the steps below the Szekler gate idol and the Chakra disc).

9(n) Gate idol, (Kos)

3.3.5. Makara serpents & dragons

Fergusson in 'Tree and serpent Worship' (1868) pointed out the widespread dragon or serpent representations in both the Eastern and the Western world, and he specifically mentioned Eastern Europe. The dragon images of the Szekler gates might or might not be related to the early Buddhist serpents, but the iconography is similar. The dragons on the Szekler gates have snake like long coiled up tail and scaly skin placed above or on both sides of a door or a gate. This creature is called Makara in the Hindu-Buddhist cultures of South and South-east Asia, and is usually depicted on gates to provide protection or ward off evil. The seven-headed naga, described by Fergusson, is a very common Hungarian folktale element. In Hungary it is referred to as seven-headed dragon and not seven-headed naga serpent.

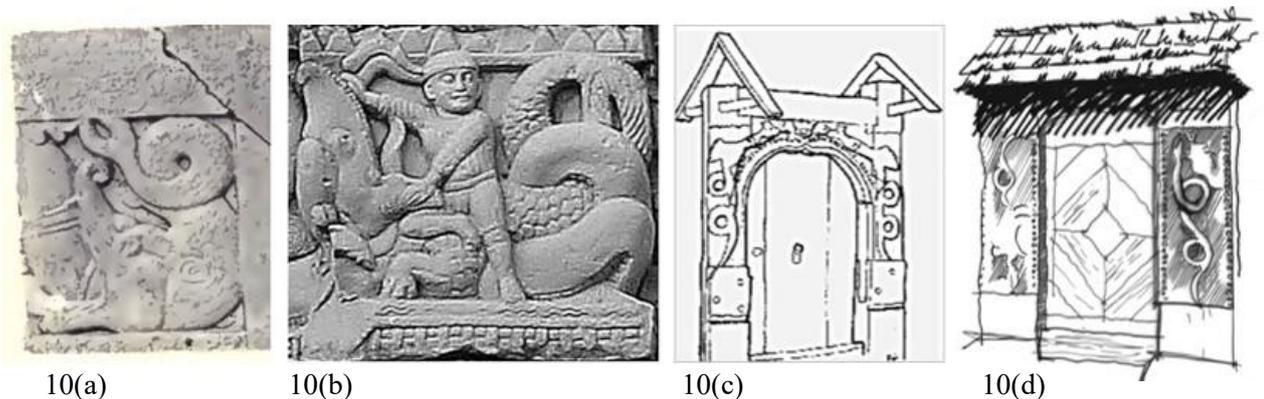


Figure 10(a) Fragment detail, Amaravathi Stupa. (Fergusson, 1868)

Figure 10(b) Torana gate detail, Sanchi stupa No.3. India.

Figure 10(c) Gate with serpents from 1731, Magyarlapad, Transylvania, (Kos, 1989)

Figure 10(d) Redrawn gate image with serpents, from Transylvania (original image – Romulus Vuia, 1928)

3.3.6. Female gate idol figures

In figures 11(a) and 11(d) the symbol of Lajja Gauri, the fertility goddess can be seen. In the author's view, a very similar depiction can be found in certain Szekler gate carvings, examples of which are shown in figures 11(b), 11(c), 11(e), 12(b) and 12(d).

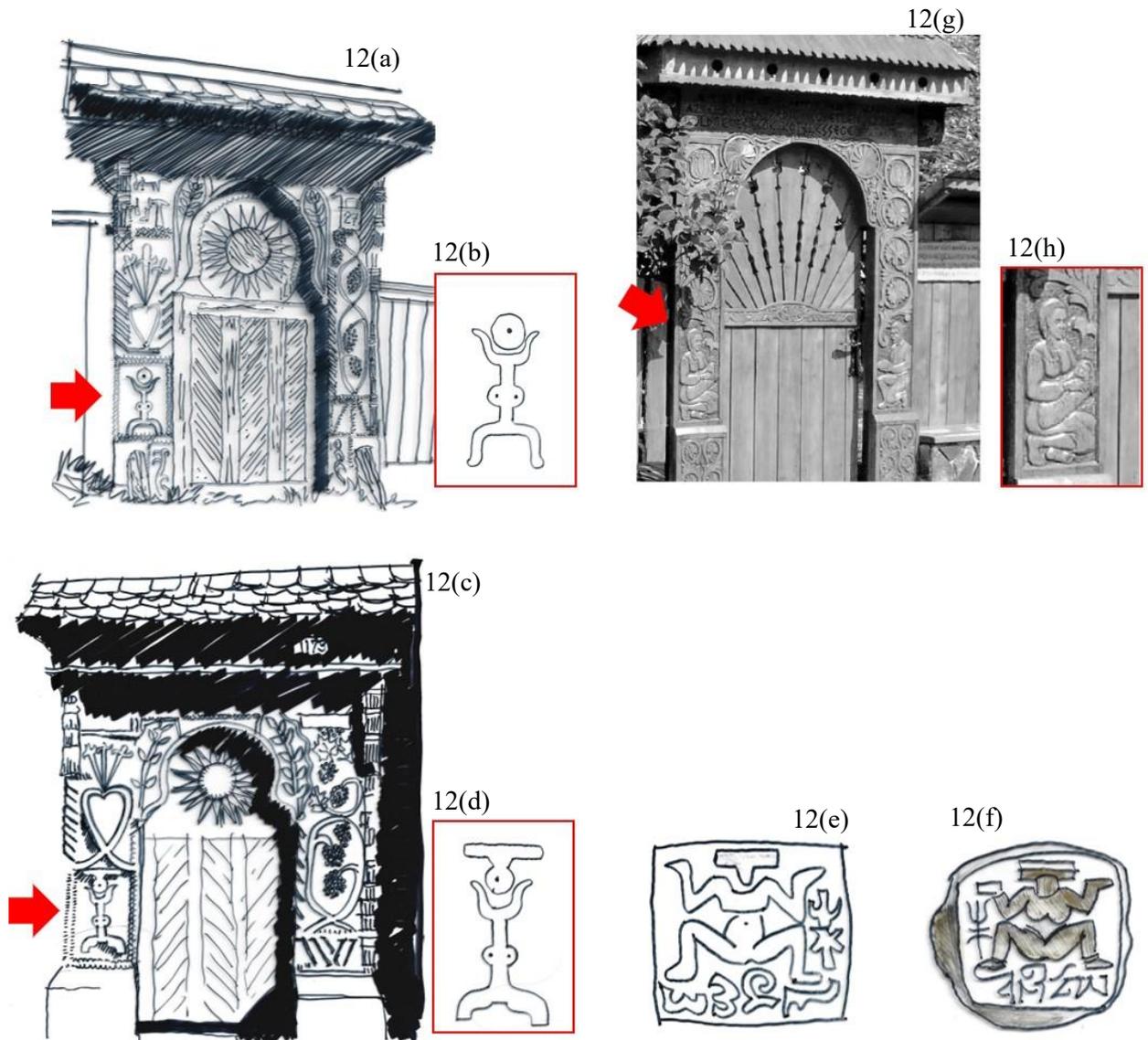
Regarding figures 11(a) and 11(b) it is important to note that, (i) not only is the position and posture of the figures similar in the Szekler gate carving and the Lajja Gauri depiction, but (ii) both figures sit on the important Hindu-Buddhist symbol, the lotus flower (or similar round flowers with petals), (iii) both female figures hold flowers in both hands, and (iv) the bald head of the Szekler gate figure is reminiscent of Lajja Gauri who is often depicted with a lotus flower or bud instead of a head. Gandhi (2019) argues that in the absence of documented ritual, rites or clarity on the origin of her image, it's very difficult to understand the meaning and the symbolism of Lajja Gauri. Even though Lajja Gauri is more closely connected to Hinduism, there are examples of Buddhist associations as well (Brown, 1990).

Figure 15. Lajja Gauri and Transylvanian gate idols



- 11(a) Lajja Gauri, 5th century AD, State Museum Bhopal, India.
 11(b) Redrawn detail of wooden figural gate post carving of Szekler gate, Inaktelke, Transylvania from 1888 (Furu, 2012). The hatched area indicates where the image is damaged.
 11(c) Drawing of the same or similar Szekler gate (Csete, 1990, Museum of Ethnography).
 11(d) Lajja Gauri, Gulbenkian Museum
 11(e) Wooden carving detail of Szekler gate with female gate idol figure. 1778, Martonfalva. Szekler National Museum.
 11(f) Drawing of the same gate post by Huszka. The illustration is listed under the title of 'Female Gate Idol Figures' by Luko. (1945). Note the position of the arms and the lotus-like flower ornament on top of the figure's head.

Figure 12. Transylvanian gate idols representations



12(a) Szekler gate carved by Jakab Kajcsa in 1925. Nyaradkoszvényes, Transylvania. Redrawn gate image. Original Image - László, A. (2010) Nyárádközvényes kapufaragói I. Kajcsa Jakab, Oroksegunk IV.1.

12(b) Redrawn detail of the same Szekler gate. In the author's view this might be an abstract female figure which corresponds with the female figure's posture on the Inaktelke gate from 1888 (Figure 11b), it is also found on the left-hand side of the gate. However other researchers of the subject propose different suggestions regarding the potential meaning of this image.

12(c) Szekler gate carved by Jakab Kajcsa in 1925. Nyaradkoszvényes, Transylvania. Note, the abstract female figure found on the left-hand side of the gate. Redrawn gate image. Original Image - Jakab & Kinda, (2015)

12(d) Detail of the same Szekler gate. Again, in the author's view this might be an abstract female figure which corresponds with the female figure's posture on the Inaktelke gate from 1888. (Figure 11b). Note the unusual rectangular head shape.

12(e) Silver seal with Lajja Gauri representation, Kashmir Smat, second century BC. Note the shape of the head. Redrawn image. Original Image - Le Martin (2012).

12(f) Impression of bronze seal with Lajja Gauri representation, Kashmir Smat, second century BC. Note the shape of the head. Redrawn image. Original Image - Le Martin (2012).

12(g) Relatively new Szekler gate.

12(h) Detail of the same Szekler gate. This image due to its symbolism (a female figure is holding a baby) and the exact location on the gate post (just above the plinth on the left side) clearly fits in to the series of the previous images associated with female energies, fertility traditions and family blessing.

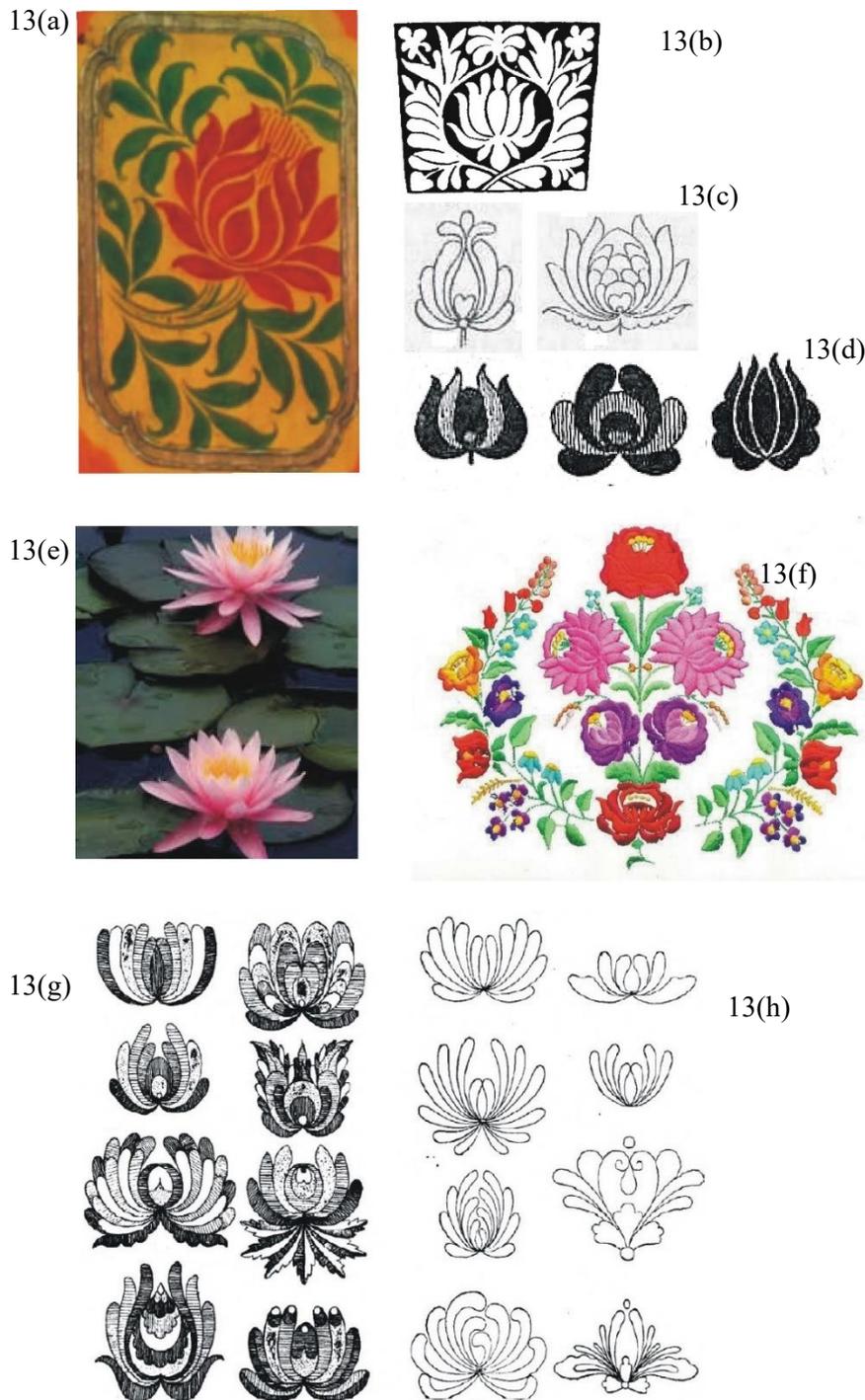
In the author's view, the similarities between Lajja Gauri and the Szekler gate idol images, in terms of the figures' sitting position, the surrounding symbolism and the fact that the Szekler gate idol figures are found on gates and fences are definitely an interesting topic, which potentially could be further researched. Nonetheless, it is also important to mention that there is another similar figure that could be compared to these lady figures on the Szekler gate carvings, and that is 'Sheela na gig'. There are numerous conflicting theories regarding the origins and functions of the Sheela na gig. Sheela-like ornaments are found in Ireland, the British Isles, western France and northern Spain. However, the classic Sheela body posture, as described by Dexter, is very different from the Lajja Gauri or Szekler gate figures. Also, Sheela na gig, whilst showing a very powerful image, is often depicted emanating menace and thought to avert the evil eye and bring good luck. Sheela na gig is often the topic of discussion in the subject of 'grotesque in architectural representations' (Shanahan). These meanings and connotations however are very far removed from the Lajja Gauri and the more fertility and family blessing-oriented figures of the Szekler gate.

3.3.7. Floral ornaments

Further to Bosch's (1960) observations with regards to the very common Hindu-Buddhist scroll or tendril motifs of the wavering lotus plant sprouts, this plant's flower is also a very important Buddhist symbol and is often confused with water lilies. As a general Buddhist symbol, the lotus flower depicts purity of the spirit and spiritual existence and superiority over the impure secular world. As the flower grows out of the unclean, turbid water, the roots cling to the mud, the stem finally filters through the polluted water into the clear and wonderful flower. It is the path of spiritual existence unfolding from material existence (Takeyama-Losch).

The greatest difference between water lilies (*Nymphaea* species) and the sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) is that water lily leaves and flowers both float on the water's surface, while lotus leaves and flowers rise above the theoretically spiritually unclean water's surface. The sacred lotus belongs to a small family of Nelumbonaceae containing only one genus with two species. The sacred lotus is widely used especially in Southeast Asia (Lin et al, 2019), whilst the water lily is a subspecies of the Nile water lily and its only natural occurrence in Europe is the Pece stream fed by thermal springs near Oradea, Transylvania (Veler, 2008). In summary, the sacred lotus and the water lily are rather uncommon plants in the Carpathian Basin's cultural region. However, contrary to this, these flower representations can be found very often in fabric embroideries just like the tulip, rose or other common and indigenous flower species of the Carpathian basin.

Figure 13. Floral ornaments from the Carpathian basin and from Asia



- 13(a) Tibetan lotus flower decoration
- 13(b) Similar Hungarian flower pattern by Luko (1945)
- 13(c) Similar Hungarian flower patterns by Huszka (1898)
- 13(d) Similar Hungarian “matyo” embroidery patterns by Gergely (1917).
- 13(e) Lotus flowers picture
- 13(f) Kalocsa embroidery pattern with strong resemblance to the lotus flower in picture 13(e).
- 13(g) Hungarian folk flower embroidery by Huszka (1930).
- 13(h) Japanese enamel dish ornaments by Huszka (1930).

3.4. Revival of Eastern ornamentation in Hungarian Art Nouveau

In the Hungarian Art Nouveau (Szecesszio) style there was also an attempt to find and connect to the authentic and characteristic Hungarian style. This searching period was illustrated by the revival of the oriental influences in Hungarian ornamentation. The book ‘Turn-of-the-Century Hungarian Architecture’ by Gerle, Kovács, Makovecz (1990) contains a very thorough analysis of the various architectural currents of this age, and interestingly it is discussing the ancient architecture of the Far East as well, among other eastern influences, that shaped the Hungarian artistic and architectural style of the time. Hence the influence of the torana or the gate architecture design can also be found (among several other eastern oriental influences) in the architecture of Hungarian Art Nouveau. An example is the balcony designs, gate arches and pergolas of Medgyaszay’s theatre buildings that preserved the shape, carvings and sawn patterns of the Szekler gates and thus the torana gateways. Wavy pediments and arches with resemblance to the toranamala can be found in many buildings design by Odon Lechner as well. (Figure 14)



- 14(a) Geological Institute, Budapest, Hungary, Architect: Odon Lechner.
- 14(b) Internal picture of the Geological Institute.
- 14(c) Hungarian State Treasury, formerly the Royal Postal Savings Bank. Architect: Lechner.
- 14(d) Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, Architect: Lechner.
- 14(e) Pictures of six different toranamala formations as a comparison.

4. Conclusion

The objective of this research paper is to investigate if the observable analogies and similarities between the Szekler gates and certain elements and aspects of the Asian gate building tradition are just the result of a strange coincidence, or if there is indeed a cultural connection between the two. This suggestion was already pointed out by researchers of the topic based on ornamental and architectural similarities. This paper concludes that, for the Szekler gate tradition to show these numerous similarities and analogies, it is very likely to have a historical, cultural connection between the Szekler gates and Asia. This conclusion is based on the following. Firstly, the tribes that eventually settled in the Carpathian Basin most probably would have been in contact with several religious and cultural traditions including Buddhism. Secondly, the meaning given to the Szekler gates is more spiritual as opposed to triumphant - unlike other European gate structures. This is aligned to the spiritual meaning and use of the Asian gate tradition. This tradition stretches from India, China, Southeast Asia to Japan. Thirdly and most importantly, is the fact that there is a whole array of ornaments and motifs found on the Szekler gates, which show interesting similarities with Eastern, Buddhist symbols. In the author's opinion, the Szekler gates are a powerful example of how the ornaments and motifs that cultures use can provide a long and lasting connection to the past. In the author's view, this very complex topic that was initiated by the 19th and early 20th century scholars with an architectural style and perception-based approach should definitely be considered for a more detailed inquiry complemented by different research study methods and analysis.

Article I. Appendix 1



Early map of Asia by J. C. Hoemann, Nuremberg c. 1730 with the different types of sacred Asian gates indicated on the antique print. (Image source mapsland.com, image colour altered, gate pictures added)

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