

Traveling to the Heart of Asia: A History of Western Encounters with Mongolia

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Abstracts

Poles in Mongolia in the 20th century – some remarks on the less known travels

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Several Poles who visited Mongolia in the 20th century made their names known worldwide for various reasons. The eminent Altaist Professor Władysław Kotwicz, political figures such as Ferdynand Ossendowski, Kamil Giżycki or Michał Wołosowicz should be listed among them. However, the 20th century was a time of many opportunities and Poles, as many others, looked for their luck in business and other enterprises in Mongolia. They undertook journey to Mongolia when it gained its independence. Here such persons as Zdzisław Koziół-Poklewski with his family members and friends can be mentioned.

After the World War II when Mongolia was a satellite country of the Soviet Union and Poland joined the Eastern Bloc, Polish experts were sent to Mongolia in order to develop Mongolia's industry and infrastructure. A distinct group among them were geologists who served with their skills in Mongolia for several decades. Also Polish ethnographers and Mongolists visited Mongolia to enrich their knowledge about Mongolia and enhance their language skills.

The present paper will focus on such less known travels by Polish people in Mongolia in the 20th century with special interest paid on those trips which can be illustrated with photographs.

“Mongolia at last! I’m at the threshold of the great goal of my life”: Lumír Jisl and Ulaanbaatar in the summer of 1957

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Contribution deals with an original historical source, private diary of Lumír Jisl as well as his very first photographs of Ulaanbaatar. Often it is said that the first impression is the most important, and indeed the proverbial love at first sight is not merely the figment of a lover’s imagination ... hence the subject of the pages to follow will be nothing less than the first impressions of a Czechoslovak explorer in Ulaanbaatar: how Lumír Jisl captured the atmosphere of those days beginning on Monday, 5 August 1957, when he first set foot on Mongolian soil. Yet before we launch ourselves into the reading of his diary, it is necessary to make a few explanatory notes. Jisl’s first photographs now date back nearly sixty years, and are in a sense historic document. They depict a city, its inhabitants and temples, in a state that can no longer be seen, and often is viewed with nostalgia: where we now find crowds of the latest cars and skyscrapers thrusting upwards, along with all other achievements of the 21st century, where we now find masses of local residents and international tourists, in Jisl’s day were empty or half-empty spaces and streets, with sparse local population and indeed no tourists at all. The city was living through its final days in its ancient form, one that only a few of the older citizens can recall. And so Lumír Jisl unwittingly became the one to document the disappearance of an old world, a witness to a Mongolia that we shall never again see.

THE WOULD-BE MONGOLIST: an account of Lt G C Binstead's travels in Mongolia in the context of British diplomatic and other encounters with Mongolia: 1900-1921

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Prior to the early part of the twentieth century, the sparse number of British travellers in Mongolia were mostly gentlemen adventurers with or without a diplomatic background. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century as the two great powers, Britain and Russia, jockeyed for power in East Asia, Mongolia's relationship with the latter led to growing anxiety amongst British officials in India and China about what agreements were being made between the two. The fear was they might impact on the tricky negotiations they were having over the issue of Tibet (following the British invasion in 1903 leading to the Simla Convention in 1914), a country historically closely linked with Mongolia, and threaten the potential trading opportunities created by the withdrawal of Chinese traders, following the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911

The talk will centre on Lt G C Binstead, a British Army Officer on Extra Regimental leave to study first Russian and then Chinese, who became fascinated with Mongolia visiting in 1912 and again, on a much longer trip up the Kerlen valley, in 1913. Extensive research has been done in the Royal Geographical Society, the British National Archives, British Army records and other sources (on the internet), which reveals how Binstead's reports and articles were used by the British Foreign Office to guide its response to events in Mongolia; and probably led to British diplomats attached to the British Legation at Peking visiting Mongolia in 1919, 1920 and 1921.

Among the “Open-hearted People of Chingis Khan”. The Hungarian Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna on the Mongols in Urga 1873

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Being not published for more than a century, only a few scholarly remarks in articles mention the invaluable materials of the Hungarian linguist, Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna (1844–1913). He recorded folklore and ethnographic texts in the sounding languages, i.e. in Kalmyk and Khalkha vernacular (1871–1873). His materials not only fixed that-time spoken tongue, but also perpetuated ethnographic and folklore-data of 19th century Mongols.

In the present talk the following points will be discussed: the intention of Bálint's travelling, his scholarly methodology and his personal impressions about the “Heart of Asia”. As source material, Bálint's unpublished manuscript of Khalkha language, folklore and ethnography, his letters, accounts and his diary will be displayed.

My Buddhist masters and other Mongolian monks on the photographs by L. Jisl

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Lumir Jisl, the Czechoslovak archaeologist, paid three research visits to Mongolia in the years 1957-1963. At that time he took many interesting and rare photographs on various topics. The photographs were presented on two exhibitions titled: “108 Forms of Mongolia” in 2014 and “Ulan Bator 1957-1963” in 2015, organized by the Czech scholars. There was also one monograph book published.

My interest was especially taken by photographs of the Gandategchenlin monastery’s monks displayed in the exhibitions and published in the book together with precise captions regarding dates and places. However, people’s names were lacking. I attempted to clarify names and life accounts of these monks. Among photographs taken by L. Jisl during his stay at the Gandentechenlin monastery there were pictures of my Buddhist masters and other monks whom I knew, such as O. Dagvajantsav, T. Damdinsuren, Kh. Baldorj, G. Osor, Uran Danzin, and others. In my paper I will present their names and short biographies. It is important to collect and spread all available information about them before it is too late.

In the Country of Lamas and Shamans of Adolf Zeman: The ethnographic reflection of the Southern Siberia through the eyes of Czechoslovak legionaries during The Russian Civil War

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Although Czechoslovak legionaries were not the first compatriots who came to Siberia, their evidences about the cultural variety of the region, that were the main reason of their undertaking of “Siberian trip” (1918-1920), were more spacious and informative than we had before from other Czech or Slovak travelers and visitors of this areas. On the basis of these evidences a lot of materials were published in 1920s-1930s. The most interesting work about the Baikal region and about the local habitants Buryats was the book of legionary Adolf Zeman. This book can help us to understand how Czechoslovaks reflected cultural experience that was in a great measure “exotic” for them and how they managed to cope with terrain reconnaissance in the frames of their mission in comparison with other contemporary researchers.

The Inner Mongol city of Hohhot/Guihua according to Western travellers’ accounts

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Most of the Western travellers to southern/Inner Mongolia in the 19th and early 20th century, from Fathers Huc and Gabet in 1844 to Henning Haslund-Christensen in 1936 visited Hohhot (Kökeqota), then known as Guihuacheng. Hohhot, the Blue City, was composed of an Old City populated by Han Chinese and Mongols, of a New city – a Qing dynasty garrison named Suiyuan – and of a commercial district that developed in-between. Travelers’ accounts and photographs give us precious information on this cosmopolitan city, its many temples and monasteries, and its caravanserais and workshops, which have been for their greatest parts destroyed in the course of the 20th century, especially during the Cultural Revolution (for the religious buildings) and in the 2000s (for the houses, shops and caravanserais).

Russian lady headed to Mongolia: Love, repression, expectance (first half of the 20th century)

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In the beginning of the 20th century many Russians started to settle permanently in Mongolia and in everyday life they started to make friends among Mongolians. Mongolians, on the other hand, have gotten interested in Russian culture, thus they started to lean towards/get closer to the Western education through the Russian one: in 1924 many young men and ladies were sent by the new Mongolian government to study in Sankt-Petersburg (Leningrad in those days), Germany and France. They were first young Mongolians who have got the education in Western countries. Besides the study they made friends among the young people of the country they studied in and a lot of mixed marriages appeared. Among them was Ulziibadrakh, a smart young man originally from Inner Mongolia, who moved from Beijing to Mongolia and then to Russia, where he studied in Sankt-Petersburg. He had had a very interesting and peculiar life. He fell in love with a Russian Jewish lady, wanted to marry her and took her with him when he returned to Mongolia in 1929.

The young couple invented many new things according to their knowledge and expertise gained in the country of new culture and had lived three years in Mongolia which started to implement the new way of development then. They took a lot of photographs with Mongolians in their everyday life, temples and monasteries of those days. Unfortunately, suddenly the repressions started based on the communist ideology and as a result the husband was arrested and the wife sent to her homeland. Russian lady managed to take whole collection of photographs with her. I have found all of them in 2012 and therefore my contribution focuses on the tragic destiny of the young couple.

Traces of the (Czecho)slovak composer and conductor in formation of European-style classical music in Mongolia

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About the same time as Lumír Jisl made his very successful expeditions to Mongolia the Czechoslovak specialists of the other scientific, industrial and cultural fields visited Mongolia in order to co-operate in research and building up the “new culture”.

Mongolians were very eager to introduce the European-style classical music in Mongolia ever since the 1921 revolution when mostly Russian musicians, as for example Boris Smirnov, participated in the formation of modern theatre and orchestras and many gifted Mongolians were sent to Russian musical institutions for study. Later, after the diplomatic relationship was established with the Eastern European countries, there was both-sided active exchange of composers, performers, conductors, as well as of the whole orchestras and ensembles.

Tibor Andrašovan (1917–2001), one of the outstanding personages of the Slovak music, spent three months in Mongolia where he worked closely with one of the outstanding personages of the Mongolian music – S. Gonchigsumlaa (1915–1991), and made a contribution to the establishment of the Mongolian Philharmonic Orchestra.

“*The most wonderful summer of my life*”: Walter Bosshard’s journeys in Inner Mongolia

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From 1934 to 1936 the Swiss photo journalist Walter Bosshard (1892-1975) undertook five journeys in Inner Mongolia. Walter Bosshard who reported mostly for the renowned *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (New Zurich newspaper) had gained world-wide renown for his photo reports about Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian independence movement. During his prolonged residence in Peking (1933-1939) he made acquaintance with the so-called “Mongolia Swedes”, the swedes who had taken residence in Inner Mongolia as members of the *Christian Missionary Alliance* since the late 19th century, and seized the opportunity to travel to Inner Mongolia. During his stays he was witness to the political turmoil in the region caught between Japanese occupation and Chinese claims. In 1938 he published a book about his travels under the title *Kühles Grassland Mongolei* (“Fresh grasslands of Mongolia”). This work which contained 131 black-and-white photographs about life in Mongolia gained wide popularity among Swiss and German readers. It was reprinted in 1949/1950 and was also translated into French and Swedish in 1954. Furthermore, Walter Bosshard and his companion of his second journey (1934), Pablo Bangerter, bought diverse ethnographical objects, among them a completely furnished Mongolian ger and the complete library of the Buddhist monastery of Čayan küriy-e süme in the Chahar region, and brought them back to Switzerland. They are today preserved at the Bern Historical Museum. Bosshard’s photographic legacy, including the rich photographic material from his Mongolian journeys, is nowadays preserved in the Archiv für Zeitgeschichte (“Archive for Contemporary History”) and the *Schweizerische Stiftung für die Photographie* (“Swiss Foundation of Photography”), both at Zurich.

In my contribution I will provide a first description about Bosshard’s Mongolian journeys and analyse his travel account with regard to its politics of representation.

Various People, Various Purposes, Various Impressions, but Common Experiences:
‘Western’ ‘Travelers’ to ‘Buryat(-Mongol)ia’ From the Late 17th to the Early 20th
Century

Stefan Krist, independent researcher, Vienna, Austria

First this paper discusses who can be considered to have been both a *westerner* and a *traveler* in this part of the “Heart of Asia” belonging to Russia since the mid 17th century. Second it analyzes the reports these envoys, explorers, exiles, adventurers, scientists, and others have left behind. It shows that personal backgrounds and goals have influenced their perceptions of this part of the world and its inhabitants, but that they nonetheless have made similar experiences and their reports contain valuable ethnographic information.

Etiological tales and motifs in publications and archives of Russian travelers to Siberia and Mongolia

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Etiological texts were widely spread in Mongolia, Buryatia and other territories, populated by Mongolian peoples. Unfortunately, they were placed to the periphery of studies in Mongolian folklore up to mid-20th century. The presentation will prove that a great amount of etiological texts and motifs can be discovered in articles on ethnography, rare publications of folk texts, diaries and reports, prepared during 19th and the first half of 20th century by Russian-speaking travelers to Mongolia and Siberia.

On After-Death Ritual Texts Mentioned by Travellers (A. M. Pozdneev and Bálint Gábor of Szentkatolna)

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In addition to the data found in early historical sources, even early travellers to Mongolia, for example Plano Carpini, Willelmus Rubruk and Marco Polo mentioned the death related costumes of the Mongols. However, they relate to the early traditions and mostly describe some details of the morning traditions, the burials themselves, and several acts like cleansing rituals by fire and water after the funerals, or taboos related to death and dying. These costumes, mirroring mainly the soul believes of the Mongols are well documented. Later the co-existence of Folk religion and Buddhism was mirrored in the burial costumes. Most travellers of the 18-20th centuries the descriptions or diaries I had a chance to read only mention the most 'strange' costumes of open air disposal of the bodies, and such cemeteries near the monasteries, even the few available photographs concentrate on this.

However, describing or even mentioning titles of different kinds of Buddhist death rituals, which are in fact abundant in number, occurred only later first by researchers having proper background knowledge for this.

Among the early descriptions, Pallas accounted the burial customs of the Mongols, giving the translations of two texts, one of them being the Altan saw burial manual (which in itself includes names of other rituals recommended for the dead or their bereaved).

In the presentation I analyse text titles mentioned much later by A. M. Pozdneev and Bálint Gábor of Szentkatolna, both from the 19th century. A. M. Pozdneev in one of his books accounted the Mongolian burial customs, and in his other book described several after-death rites. Here the titles of 16 related texts/rituals are mentioned – unfortunately some still remain unidentified.

Hungarian researchers, starting as early as in the 19th century with the linguist Szentkatolnai Bálint Gábor have conducted research with lamas and collected data on after-death rites. In the presentation I also look at the related part of the already published Kalmyk material of Bálint Gábor of Szentkatolna (the Khalkha material was not available to me).

The presentation aims at identifying the titles mentioned by the above travelers, mostly those described by Pozdneev, comment on their role among the after-death rituals according to the special aims of the texts and related rituals, place them into the time frame of after-death rituals (before death, immediately after death, disposal of the body, after the funeral/disposal, remembering the deceased), and into the twofold aims of the death rituals of the Tibetan tradition (helping the deceased to find the best possible rebirth, protecting the bereaved from potential danger caused by the death event).

Stanisław Godziński - an ordinary or extraordinary Ambassador of Poland to Mongolia (1991-1995)?

Jan Rogala, University of Warsaw, Poland

Stanisław Godziński is well known as a Mongolist but less known as the first Ambassador of democratic Poland to Mongolia. During his five years stay on duty in Mongolia from 1991 until 1995 he not only served with his skills and knowledge to develop mutual relations between Poland and Mongolia but he was involved in many matters concerning life of ordinary Mongolians, such as supporting the activity of the newly established Catholic church in Mongolia. As one among the Ambassadors, who knew Mongolia, its people and language, Prof. Godziński was regarded as a “friend of Mongolia”. He traveled through the Mongolian steppes, met Mongolian shepherds and visited many bewitching places of the Land of Blue Sky. He took numerous photographs of people and events he witnessed during his duty in Mongolia. Many of them still remain untouched in his archives and are known only to a few close family members and friends.

“Golden Goddesses Lasciviously Copulate on Altars” – Perception of Mongolia in Czechoslovak Travel Writing from the 1950s

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After the communists *coup d'état* in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 the new government established diplomatic relations with the Mongolian People's Republic in 1950. The shared ideology and close relations within the socialist camp quickly resulted in a wide-scale political, economic and cultural cooperation. These ties included official visits of a number of prominent Czech and Slovak writers and journalists in Mongolia during the 1950s. These pro-regime authors either went especially to Mongolia (Dominik Tatarka) or, which was usually the case, made a stopover in Ulaanbaatar during their journey to (or from) the People's Republic of China (e.g., Ladislav Mňáčko, Adolf Hoffmeister, Marie Pujmanová). The contribution will analyse the image of Mongolia, its people, culture and religion, in the published travelogues as well as in unpublished travel diaries preserved in archives.

Dolonnuur Assembly (1691): diary notes by J.-F. Gerbillon and the official Qing historiography

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In 1691, Jesuit missionary J.-F. Gerbillon accompanied Kangxi Emperor to the Dolonnuur Assembly, where the Khalkha nobility officially submitted to the Qing dynasty. Gerbillon's diaries represent a unique insight of a well-informed and impartial observer of this crucial event in the Mongolian–Manchu relations. The present contribution aims at comparing Gerbillon's testimony with two sources from the Manchu Qing side: Mongolian versions of *Qing shilu* and *Qinzheng pingding shuomo fanglüe*.

Hungarian Travelers in Inner Asia and in the area of the Mongols: Aims and Heritage

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The aim of the present paper is to introduce a handful of Hungarians who travelled to the Heart of Asia, especially to the area of the Mongols; to specify their aims and the types of their accounts. Friar Julianus, a Dominican visited Magna Hungaria in the 1230's (near the Volga) and returned to Hungary to inform the Pope and the Hungarian King about the forthcoming invasion of the Mongols.

A group of Hungarians travelled to the East in the 19th century: some of them were searching for the origin of Hungarians (e.g. Alexander Csoma de Kőrös), whilst others had geographical interest. The majority of them were members of the Hungarian Geographical Society founded in 1872. Apart from the most famous travelers in Inner Asia such as Sir Aurel Stein (1862-1943), following the linguistic interest of Joseph Budenz (1836-1892) Gábor Bálint de Szentkatolna (1844-1913) spent five months in Urga in 1873 to collect Khalkha materials after studying Kalmyk in Kazan, whilst Louis Lóczy (1849-1920), a member of the expedition of Béla Széchenyi (1837-1918) studied the area of the Gobi and other parts of Inner Asia from 1877-1880.

A group of Hungarians arrived at Mongolia when returning from the Siberian labor camps after World War I: Joseph Geleta, Andor Radnóti-Róth (1893-1964), Pál Báder, and Jenő Sallai (or Szalay) cooperated in building of the new Ulaanbaatar in the 1920's. At the same time military experts assisted to organise the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Army, such as Pánczél and János Mészáros.

Mentioning the new generation of scholars, Louis Ligeti (1902-1987) travelled to Inner Mongolia from 1928-1930, and to Afganistan in 1936-1937. The first expedition of András Róna-Tas (1931-), György Kara (1935-) and Katalin Kőhalmi (1926-2012) to Mongolia in 1957 is considered as the base of present-day fieldworks of Hungarians.

The lecture will analyze the types of sources travelers' bequeathed.

Medieval European mission among the Mongols – strategies, obstacles and goals

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The paper explores the methods of medieval European Christian missions during the 13th and 14th centuries in the Mongolian empire. Reports of such missionaries as John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck, John of Montecorvino and others are used as sources for this analysis. The main aim of the paper is to show development of missionary strategies as a process of more or less successful adaptation of particular missionary in new cultural and religious environment. Main obstacles such as the language barrier are also discussed. During this process not only the missionary strategies changed, but also their original goals were redefined. Representation of these goals, original and new ones, within the context of missionary reports and their desired effect on European audience is also discussed.