

KALMYK AND KHALKHA *ETHNOGRAPHICA* IN GÁBOR BÁLINT OF SZENTKATOLNA'S MANUSCRIPTS (1871–1873)

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The Hungarian (Székely) Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna (1844–1913) was one of the first researchers of Kalmyk and Khalkha vernacular language, folklore and ethnography. His valuable records are written in a very accurate transcription and include the specimens of Kalmyk and Khalkha spoken languages, folklore material and ethnographic narratives, and a comparative grammar of western and eastern Mongolian languages. Bálint's manuscripts had not been released until recent years when Ágnes Birtalan published his *Comparative Grammar* in 2009 and the Kalmyk corpus with a comprehensive analysis in 2011.

The present article aims to give an introduction to Bálint's ethnographic materials recorded among the Kalmyks (1871–1872) and Khalkhas (1873). Despite the similar economic and cultural milieu the two ethnic groups lived in, there is considerable difference between the Kalmyk and Khalkha text corpora. Besides presenting and systematising Bálint's ethnographic material, I shall try to clarify the reason why this significant divergence emerges between the two text corpora. Specimens of a particular phase of the wedding ceremony are represented as examples from both text corpora.

Key words: Mongol dialects, Kalmyk, ethnography of the 19th-century Mongols, Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna, fieldwork.

During the past few years I have been dealing with Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna's (1844–1913) unpublished manuscript heritage¹ concerning his records of the Mongolian vernacular and published his Kalmyk material (Birtalan 2011) and his com-

¹ *Nyugati mongol (Kálmik) szövegek* [Western Mongolian (Kalmyk) texts]. (184 pages), No.: M. Nyelvtud. 4/109; *Bálint Gábor: Keleti mongol (khalkha) szövegek* [Bálint, Gábor: Eastern Mongolian (Khalkha) texts]. (88 pages), No.: Ms. 1379/2; *A Romanized Grammar of the East- and West-Mongolian Languages. With Popular Chrestomat[h]ies of Both Dialects.* (222 pages), No. 1: 81, No. 2: Ms. 1379/1. All these manuscripts are kept in the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

parative grammar of western and eastern Mongolian spoken languages (Birtalan 2009). The Khalkha manuscript is under elaboration and is expected to be issued in the nearest future. Besides, I have published detailed analyses of some of Bálint's unique materials, among others the so-called *Black Book of the Holy Chingis Khan* (Birtalan 2012b) and records connected to problems of the religious identity of the Mongols in the 19th century (Birtalan 2012a).

In my previous studies I have collected and reissued information about Bálint's life and his research concerning the Mongols on the basis of studies by Lajos Gyula Nagy, György Kara, Lajos György, Jenő Zágoni (for references and detailed bibliography cf. Birtalan 2009 and 2011), here I shall not go into the details of these matters.² In the present article I am going to introduce only the *Ethnographica* in Bálint's Kalmyk and Khalkha records. The choice of the topic of my presentation was dedicated to the event of "Mongolian Studies towards the 21st Century. Hungaro–Korean–Mongolian Joint Conference. 3–4 July 2013. Budapest" (organised by the Department of Inner Asian Studies of Eötvös Loránd University and the Department of Mongolian Studies of Hankuk University for Foreign Studies).³ Many of the Mongolian and Korean participants of the conference have been interested in the historical ethnography of Mongolian ethnic groups or have carried out field research among Mongols investigating their material culture.⁴ In order to make the international public of the conference and the readers of *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* acquainted with Bálint's achievements, I offer a detailed survey of Bálint's records dealing with ethnographic subjects in a classical sense. Simultaneously, I seek answers to the questions *why* exactly these issues of human life attracted Bálint's interest and *what conditions* determined the subjects he recorded.

A Brief Introduction to the Circumstances of Bálint's Field Research

Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna's research journey to Turkic and Mongolian speaking peoples of Russia and further to Mongolia began in the summer of 1871 and he arrived back to Hungary in the winter of 1874 (in detail see Birtalan 2009, pp. xii–xv). During this research trip his main endeavour was to study and record Turkic and Mongolian vernacular languages, explicitly: "... to study language branches to be

² Those who are interested in such matters as Bálint's life, career, his conflicts with the Hungarian academic circles and particularly with some prominent scholars on the Hungarian *Urheimat* and language contacts, or his controversial, ambiguous ideas about the kin of Hungarians (both of the people and the language) are kindly requested to consult the above-mentioned publications and their references. Cf. also the Internet article by Attila Rákos: Szentkatolnától Mongóliáig és vissza [From Szentkatolna to Mongolia and back again] at <http://www.nyest.hu/hirek/szentkatolnatol-mongoliaig-es-vissza>.

³ Detailed introduction into the events of the conference and further materials, cf. <http://innerasia.hu/event/mongolian-studies-conference-2013/>.

⁴ The studies of the team of the Department of Inner Asian Studies concerning the Mongols' nomadic culture are supported by a project of the Hungarian Scientific Fund (OTKA); No. 100613 (project-leader: Ágnes Birtalan).

traced as they exist in the folk's speech and record the possibly rich material from this very folk tongue ..."⁵ as he explained his efforts (Bálint 1871, p. 245; Birtalan 2009, p. xii). To achieve his goals and satisfy the expectations of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and especially his main patron's, János Fogarasi's (1801–1878), he started to learn the spoken language in the field as quickly as possible.⁶ Within a few months he was wholly aware of the grammar and vocabulary of any language. As I already mentioned in my previous studies discussing Bálint's methodology, his main basis of learning and researching among the Kalmyks was a school and foster home in Astrakhan, i. e. an educational institution, similarly to the working milieu in Kazan among the Christianised Tatars.⁷ He continuously communicated with school boys and teachers, but occasionally also with various people who arrived in Astrakhan, and at the market called Kalmyk Bazaar and spoke various dialects of Kalmyk.

“It was also easy to meet the Kalmyk folk, as many of the parents and relatives of the youngsters learning here arrived at the foster home to visit [them] on one hand, and on the other hand I also had the opportunity to meet Kalmyks who came to purchase [goods] or for work in Astrakhan frequently. Furthermore, I went several times to a Kalmyk Bazaar located one mile from Astrakhan on the right side of Volga, which the Kalmyks use to purchase their cattle and livestock under the supervision of the Government, and where the Kalmyk temple and priests are.”⁸

Bálint promptly learnt the spoken language and recorded texts in order to demonstrate the characteristics of the vernacular variety of Kalmyk. He left Astrakhan for St. Petersburg in May 1872. After more than half a year in St. Petersburg and a long hesitation about the continuation of his research trip to the Mongols in Inner Asia, he finally set out on a journey in February 1873. The method proven among the Tatars and Kalmyks was changed in Urga. Bálint did not explain why he did not (could not?) visit a school and work among the school-boys. During his almost four months' stay in Urga he lived in the Russian consulate and did not visit either the famous

⁵ “... tanulmányozni a kijelölt nyelvégeket úgy, a mint azok a nép ajkán élnek és lehető bő nyelvyagot gyűjteni szorosán a népnelyvből ...” (Bálint 1875, p. 4). Here and further I follow Bálint's spelling without adjusting his sentences to today's orthography.

⁶ Here it must be mentioned that Bálint started to learn Kalmyk parallel with the language of the Christianised Tatars already during his stay (June–September 1871) in Kazan (Bálint 1871, pp. 244–245).

⁷ For the revised edition of Bálint's Kazan Tatar materials see Berta (1988). Bálint is popular among the Tatars, even a Wikipedia article is devoted to him and his research on the Tatar language: http://tt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Габор_Балинт.

⁸ “Magával a khálymik néppel való érintkezésem is elég könnyű volt, minthogy részint a tanuló ifjak szülői és rokonai közül említett növeldébe látogatásra többen eljártak, részint Asztrakhán városában minden pillanatban találkozhatam a vásárlás vagy munkára jött khálymikokkal, azután meg eljártam az Asztrakhántól egy mérföldnyire, a Volga folyó jobb partján eső khálymik bazarra, a hol a khálymikok barmaikat és jószágaikat szokták a kormánytól rendelt ellenőrizet mellett eladni, s a hol a khálymik templom és papság is van” (Bálint 1875, p. 13).

sites, or the herdsmen's yurts in the countryside. It is obvious from his notes how influential on his work the then Russian consul, Šišmarjov⁹ was. His and his wife's hospitality supported Bálint's endeavour and was probably decisive why Bálint did not use any opportunity to travel throughout Mongolia or even in the vicinity of Urga. Bálint's recollection of the consulate and consul Šišmarjov gives additional valuable information on the contemporary Russian–Mongolian relations and the activity of the consul.

“Outside the town a mounted Cossack came to meet me and escorted me to the precincts of the Russian consulate. In the yard of the compound fenced round with planks, the secretary of the consulate I. V. Paderin¹⁰ welcomed me in English and led me to the room assigned to me. I gave Bold [Bálint: Bolot]¹¹ a little purse with silver 10 kopek pieces worth one and a half rubles. He thanked it with the “Be happy!” greeting and started back for Khüree [Bálint: Khüren],¹² which they call Urga in Mongolian, with a joyful face. I got out my pulp wash basin and washed myself for the first time in a week, then put on my grey suit bought from Budapest,¹³ for I took no black suit with me as it is hated by the Mongols. When I had a hearty meal from the snack sent to me by the secretary, I went upstairs to the consul who welcomed me warmly and told me he had been instructed by the Asian Department [Russ. *Aziatskij Departament*]¹⁴ to give me board and lodging while I was there because I could get no accommodation or food in Urga.¹⁵ Soon the consul's wife Maria Nikolaevna, a blond woman of thirty, appeared and her husband introduced me to her. The most respectful address among Russians, both men and women, is to say the person's Christian name and the name of the father with the suffix meaning N's son or daughter. Maria Nikolaevna (pron. [in Hung.] Nyikolayevna) is thus Maria, the daughter of Nicholas. The consul Jakob Parfenteevich Shishmarev [correctly: Jakov Parfjonovič Šišmarjov] as the surname indicates is of Mongolian origin, speaks Mongolian and is a practical man. His secretary studied Manchu–Mongolian and Chinese as well as law at St. Petersburg University. The consul's wife is the daughter of a rich doctor in Irkutsk who finished

⁹ In her detailed account, Edinarhova pointed out the use of the consul's father's name (Russ. *otčestvo*) in various forms in the sources, among others as Bálint used it: Parfent'evič (Edinarhova 2001, p. 37).

¹⁰ Paderin “služil ispravljajuščim dela sekretarja i dragomana konsul'stva v Urge”; he became famous as one of the first explorers of Karakorum. Cf. Us, Larisa Borisovna: *Zarubežnye ekspedicii sibirskih otdelov IRGO*. <http://history.nsc.ru/kapital/project/us/3-2.html>.

¹¹ A horseman hired by Bálint in order to escort him from the boundary of Mongolia to Urga (Bálint 2005a and 2005b passim).

¹² The capital city had a number of names, this refers to Mong. *Küriyen, Yeke Küriyen* ‘Monastery, Great Monastery’ etc. For the history and names of the city, cf. Teleki (2011).

¹³ This name-variant of the Hungarian capital city became officially accepted in 1872.

¹⁴ A department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire, founded in 1819.

¹⁵ In Khalkha Mongolian *Örgö*, cf. Teleki (2011).

secondary school, learnt French and English but for lack of practice forgot both. She called me Mister Bálint in the English way; her husband addressed me as Gabriel Andreevich. While we were conversing, the consul's wife brought a samovar to the table and after drinking a few cups of fine tea, we parted. I made my bed with the bedding I had bought from Kazan and slept till morning" (Bálint 2005b, p. 52).

Bálint's informant, the 45-year-old Lama Yondonjamc was recommended to him by J. P. Šišmarjov.¹⁶ Most of their meetings took place probably in the building of the consulate where Bálint lived. In his comprehensive report on his journey Bálint evaluated his Lama informant as follows:

"Upon arrival in Urga, I contracted a widely travelled and wandered lower-ranking hence married Lama (that is, priest) aged 45 to teach me, because among the *xar xün* [Bálint *khara khun*] (black people), i. e. the common people, only office administrators could undertake tuition, but their official engagements would not have let them devote me the time I needed.

My Lama tutor called Yondonjamc [Bálint Jandén Dsamcza, cf. Khal. Yondonjamc] had little to do. Well-known for his fluency in speaking, he could not write in Mongolian but only in Tibetan, for the Mongolian clergy find it beyond them to write, or even speak, in the language of their native folk. Money, however, loosened his tongue, and I was glad that he had not been concerned with anything else but the sacred Tibetan language and writs, for in this way he did not know the language of the Mongolian religious books which is rather well known through Kowalewski's dictionary and could teach me the vernacular.

Moving next to the Russian consulate, this lama could visit me twice a day upon my request" (Bálint 1875, p. 14).

In his *Grammar* Bálint added the following on his Lama:

"During 155 days I did nothing else than writing down phonetically all things my lama or other persons, whom he called to me, were able to dictate to me. ... I must remark that my lama was no literator [sic! perhaps 'educated, erudite'] but cleaverer [sic! recte: cleverer] and more experienced than many of the learned ones"

(Birtalan 2009, p. 5; in Bálint's manuscript, p. iv).

From the above short evaluations it is clear why the Khalkha material differs considerably from the Kalmyk. Even if the Lama was a "black", wandering monk, and was concerned with worldly matters as well, he explained the rites of passage (wedding and funeral) from his Buddhist viewpoint, but was acquainted with the characteristics of the nomadic way of life as well.

¹⁶ On the current works about Šišmarjov's achievements as the most influential person of Russian politics in Mongolia, cf. Birtalan (2012a).

The Kalmyk and Khalkha Records: Language and Content

The Kalmyk and Khalkha materials and the *Grammar* compiled on the basis of both records reflect the vernacular varieties of the languages.¹⁷ When I worked on the elaboration of the Kalmyk texts with T. Bordžanova and B. Gorjaeva (in Budapest in 2011), we tried to identify the dialectal features of the records. According to Bordžanova the majority of the Kalmyk texts reflect the peculiarities of the Torgūd dialect of the Kalmyk.¹⁸ Introducing Bálint's unedited texts Kara has already mentioned that the records from Urga seem to belong to a Western Khalkha variety of the Mongolian (Khalkha) proper (Kara 1962, p. 163). Here arises the question whether Bálint's main informant came from a western part of Mongolia where the spoken tongue has some characteristics of Western Mongolian Oirad, or Bálint's acquaintance with Kalmyk (a Western-Mongolian variety) influenced his transcription system. This fact does not detract from the value of Bálint's achievements, but after a careful study the linguistic properties of the Khalkha (Western-Khalkha?) texts could probably be ascertained more accurately.

Concerning the content of the records, the quality and quantity of particular parts (cf. below) are unbalanced, but most of them are indisputably unique and worth studying. Both text corpora reveal Bálint's systematic conception to demonstrate the language and its cultural context most diversely. The vernacular language "speaks" in a lifelike manner through some basic dialogues and with the most authentic terms and expressions of folklore genres and ethnographic narratives.

Supposedly, Bálint had a lot more records and materials than the ones included in his manuscripts kept in the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which are only systematic selections from his material already arranged according to a "classical" way of introducing a language and its speakers' folk tradition. Concerning both text corpora, his materials consist of the following:

- i) Dialogues – Bálint compiled them with the purpose of demonstrating the basic conversational types, i.e. the basis for a future conversation booklet.
- ii) Folklore texts – Bálint paid special attention to record almost all the main genres of the Mongolian folklore.¹⁹

¹⁷ The Kalmyk transcription encloses some elements of Written Oirad, as Bálint, being acquainted with the Kalmyk and Oirad "clear script", used also the written variants of the texts dictated to him (Birtalan 2009, pp. xviii–xix).

¹⁸ On the various dialects of Kalmyk with rich reference material, see Bläsing (2003).

¹⁹ It is striking, however, that he did not record longer epics, such as the famous *Jangar* (Kalm. *Jangyr*) epics among the Kalmyks or any other text from the rich heritage of other Mongolian ethnic groups in Urga. Bálint only noted down a *Geser* epic variant (in written form the text was published by Isaac Jakob Schmidt in 1836); cf. "I read the whole fable of Geser Khān with my lama and transcribed it in the spoken language" (Birtalan 2009, p. 5; Preface to the *Grammar*, p. iv); unfortunately this manuscript has been lost.

iii) Ethnographic records – texts concerning the folk life – both material and spiritual cultures – are thoroughly represented in Bálint's material (in detail cf. below).

Bálint himself summed up the circumstances of his recording ethnographic material (hereafter *Ethnographica*) among the Kalmyks as follows:

“The last passage of my collection comprises the articles demonstrating the main features of the Kalmyk life, written by Muchka Baldir, the best student of the upper level at secondary school and my teacher, the surgeon for me for [some] presents and the teaching help I offered the Kalmyk pupils at secondary school in learning Latin, Greek and French languages”²⁰ (Bálint 1875, p. 12).

Later in the introduction to his *Grammar* he mentioned again his intention of recording ethnographic material as follows:

“I directed my chief attention to matters concerning the customs and traditions of the Mongols; therefore I wrote down the customs and ceremonies about birth, marriage and death, which are given in part II of the present grammar”

(Birtalan 2009, p. 5; in Bálint's manuscript p. iv).

In fact he included into the Chrestomathy part of the Grammar only a minor part of his Kalmyk material concerning the ethnographic subjects, but almost everything from the Khalkha records (for the detailed contents see below).

The brief Kalmyk ethnographic surveys hold significant information on various aspects of the social and cultural environment and provide appropriate supplementary material to other well-known reports on the Kalmyks noted down by earlier travellers and researchers (such as P. S. Pallas, B. Bergman, P. Nebol'sin, I. A. Žiteckij, K. I. Kostenkov, Ja. P. Dubrov, Ū. Dušan etc.) and later ethnographic and folklore publications based on systematic field work (K. Erenžänä, U. E. Erdniev, T. G. Bordžanova, Je. E. Habunova).²¹ As Bálint's Khalkha manuscript is currently under elaboration, I have not collected all the possible reference and parallel materials, but the thoroughgoing monograph on Khalkha ethnography at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries edited by Badamxatan will be one of the main works in reconstructing the cultural background of Bálint's records (Badamxatan 1987).

²⁰ “Gyűjteményem záradékát képezik a khálymik életet főbb vonásaiban ismertető cikkek, melyeket a félégymnasiumi tanulók legkitünőbbje Mucska Baldir és tanítóm a sebész irtak számomra ajándék, de azon segítség fejében is, melyet én a gymnasiumi khálymik tanulóknak a latin, görög és francia nyelv tanulásánál nyújték” (Bálint 1875, p. 12). On Baldirin Műčka cf. *Introduction* in Birtalan (2011, p. 14).

²¹ All these references are given and the accounts are analysed in Birtalan (2011, pp. 137–167).

According to the traditional presentation of the material and spiritual spheres of cultures²² the following typology can be established on the basis of the contents of Bálint's records.

i) Nomadic way of life, i.e. working processes that include: nomadising, the way of pasturing the livestock, milking and preparing milk products, shearing the sheep and hunting with birds (Birtalan 2011, pp. 160–162). All these aspects of the daily life of a nomadic community were recorded among the Kalmyks and are missing from the Khalkha material. All these narrations are concise masterpieces on the way of life containing valuable terminology of the 19th-century Kalmyk vernacular. E.g. the chapter on *Hunting with Birds* is one of the rare descriptions of this unique custom maintained only by the Kalmyks and unfortunately lost in Mongolia towards the 20th century (only surviving among the Kazaks in Bayan-Ölgī province). Bálint's account is an invaluable material that seems to be the only early record on hunting with birds in the Kalmyk language.

ii) Customs of various life phases (*rites of passage*) of the Mongols. Both manuscripts contain records on wedding and funeral. Bálint accurately noted them down again with lots of important terms (Birtalan 2011, pp. 139–148). An account of the customs connected to childbirth as one of the *rites of passage*, is preserved only in the Chrestomathy part of the *Grammar* and is not included in the Khalkha manuscript. The Kalmyks narrated to Bálint also about other aspects of their life, namely the festive competitions (the well-known *Nādam* among all the Mongolian ethnic groups: wrestling, horse racing, archery),²³ stealing horses from the neighbouring Turkic population – as a “custom” practised by Kalmyks even in the 19th century. In all probability this is an emic distinction made by Bálint's informants who ranged this activity as a kind of competition in bravery (in detail, cf. Birtalan 2011, pp. 148–149). A very remarkable description of a legal process, the Kalm. *šaxa* ‘the way of taking an oath in the case of stealing’ is well documented in written sources and travelogues,²⁴ but as far as I know, Bálint's narrative is the only orally transmitted variant of the custom in the native Kalmyk language.

The Typology of Narratives on Kalmyk and Khalkha Ethnography

Bálint's text-corpora, as a unique ethnographic source for the 19th-century Mongols, contain the following aspects of life:

²² On the paradigms of material culture of nomads, cf. Johansen (1992, 2007).

²³ For a recent fieldwork based study on the *Nādam*, see Birtalan (2006).

²⁴ The way of this unique judgement on horse-rustlers is carried out as a *juramentum revelatorium*. Heuschert reviewed the written Mongolian and Kalmyk sources and many travelogues that mention this custom (Heuschert 1996, pp. 49–83), but Bálint's material is again the only narrative in a native tongue reflecting the elaborate terminology of the process.

Ethnographica Kalmykica

Nomadic Way of Life

- The nomadising of the Kalmyks (Bálint *Xal'imigīn nūdūl*, Kalm. *Xal'mgīn nūdūl*) *Manuscript* pp. 147–148 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 153–154).
- About how the Kalmyks Pasture their Livestock (Bálint *Xal'imiyūd yayaǰi malān xāriūldek tuskin'i*, Kalm. *Xal'myūd yāǰ malān xārūldg tusk n'*) *Manuscript* pp. 149–153 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 154–156).
- About the Milk of the Domestic Animals of the Kalmyk(s) (Manuscript *Xal'imigīn malīn üsünā tuski*) *Manuscript* pp. 154–161 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 156–158).
- About how the Kalmyks Shear the Sheep (Bálint *Man'i xal'imiyūd yayaǰi xöiyān xäiçiledek (kirjadik) tuski*, Kalm. *Manā xal'myūd yāǰ xögān xāçldg (kirydg) tusk*) *Manuscript* pp. 162–164 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 158–159).
- About how the Kalmyks Hunt with Birds (Bálint *Xal'imiyūd yayaǰi šobūyār angyuçildigīn tuski*, Kalm. *Xal'myūd yāǰ šowūyār angyuçldg tusk*) *Manuscript* pp. 165–169 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 160–162).

Rites of passage

- Wedding of the Kalmyks (Oirats) (Bálint *Xal'imigīn (öirādīn) ger abalyan*, Kalm. *Xal'mgīn (ördīn) ger awlyñ*) *Manuscript* pp. 140–146 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 139–144).
- Death among the Kalmyks (Bálint *Xal'imigīn ükül*, Kalm. *Xal'mgīn ükl*) *Manuscript* pp. 181–184 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 144–148).

Games and Competitions

- Horse racing, Wrestling and Stealing (Bálint *Uruldan, nöldan xulxa*, Kalm. [*Mördīn*] *urldān, nöldān, xulxā*) *Manuscript* pp. 170–171 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 148–149).

Customs

- About the Oath Taking among the Kalmyks (Bálint *Xal'imigīn šaxa abdigīn tuski*, Kalm. *Xal'mgīn šaxā awdgīn tusk*) *Manuscript* pp. 178–180 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 149–152).

Ethnographica Mongolica

Rites of passage

- The wedding customs of the Mongols (Bálint *Mongol ulusēn ekener abçi gerlekēn yoso*, Khal. *Mongol ulsīn exner awçi gerlexīn yos*) *Manuscript* Khal. pp. 52–58.

- The burial customs of the Mongols (Bálint *Mongol ulusēn ūküsen künē yasaīg bārixaxo yoso*, Khal. *Mongol ulsīn ūxsen xūnī yasīg barixxos*) *Manuscript Khal.* pp. 59–62.

The following parts are included in the Chrestomathy of Bálint's *Grammar*, for teaching purposes and as illustrative sample texts for someone who wishes to learn how "to speak to the open-hearted people of Tschingis khan" – as Bálint explained his intention of compiling the *Grammar* and the Chrestomathy (Birtalan 2009, p. 13; *Manuscript* p. xiii). The Chrestomathy of the *Grammar* includes the following texts with Bálint's English translation.

[<i>Mongolian customs</i>]	158
1. Moŋghol ulōsīn yoso (Mongol ulsīn yos) – The custom of the Mongolian people [birth]	158
2. Moŋghol ulōsīn ek'ener abtschi gerelk'eīn yoso (Mongol ulsīn exner awč gerlexīn yos) – The nuptial ceremony of the Mongolians	161
3. Ūk'ōsōn k'ūnī buyin (Ūxsen xūnī buyan) – Funeral ceremonies	171
<i>Khal'imāgīn malīn ūsūnāī tuski</i> (Xal'mgīn malīn ūsnā tusk) – <i>The milk of the domestic animals of the Khalmik(s)</i>	205
Gūnā ūsūn (Gūnā ūsn) – Mare's milk	210
Khōineī (khoīnāī) ūsūn (Xōnā ūsn) – Ewe-milk	212

Sample Texts from Kalmyk and Khalkha Ethnographica

One cannot overemphasise the significance of Bálint's records as the first information on the Mongolian customs written down in the native vernacular of 19th-century Kalmyk and (Western) Khalkha. These brief accounts describe the essential elements of Mongolian folk life and parallel with it contain the terminology embedded into the narrations, and this point brings Bálint's field research into prominence. Here, I chose two short fragments from both collections concerning the probably most important phase of human life, the wedding customs, to demonstrate the value of Bálint's material. Both the Kalmyk and Khalkha materials include quite long narrations about marriage, precisely presenting the phases and the long-lasting wedding process starting from the proposal, through the complex description of the wedding up to the integration of the new wife into her husband's family and even to the possibilities of divorce. As mentioned above, Bálint's sources of information were different: among the Kalmyks lay people less concerned with religiosity narrated about their life, while among the Khalkhas the main source of information was a monk and partly some other people he invited to be at Bálint's disposal. Even if Bálint emphasised that Yondojamc was a "black lama" with worldly views and intentions, his attitude was religious and regarded the world from a Buddhist viewpoint.

I have dealt in detail with the Kalmyk wedding process in the book devoted to Bálint's Kalmyk material and discussed it in the wider context of other contemporary sources (on the basis of Russian, German and other accounts and travelogues) and later native (emic) field reports and analyses. The Kalmyk records on wedding were not included in the Chrestomathy part of Bálint's *Grammar*. Concerning the Khalkha records, Bálint not only included them in the Chrestomathy of the *Grammar* and translated them into English, but attached some explanations to the Khalkha customs. He found surprising similarities with the customs of the Roman Empire on the basis of István Schönwisner's Latin text book.²⁵

Fragment from "The Wedding of the Kalmyks (Oirats)"
(Bálint *Xal'imigīn (öirādīn) ger abalyan*, Kalm. *Xal'mgīn (ördīn) ger awlyŋ*)²⁷

"[144] At night a sheep is slaughtered in the lad's father's yurt and offered to the fire.²⁸ The maid is called to come to the lad's father's yurt, where a white rug (Bálint *širdeg*, Kalm. *širdg*) is laid at the door.²⁹ [145] The maid is set down on the felt rug, a curtain is pulled in front of her and she is given a bowl with fat cut into small pieces (Bálint *bičixän bičixänär utuluksun āyata ökö*, Kalm. *bičkn, bičknär utlšn āgtā ök*). Thereafter the man who was supposed to touch her and her goods [for the first time] makes her bow (Bálint, Kalm. *ber mörgül-*)³⁰ as follows. That man takes the maid's head [and says]:

– [You] bow to the Buddha. – He makes the maid bow and she throws a piece of fat into the fire. Thereafter:

– Live well with your husband!³¹ – He makes the maid bow again and [she] throws a piece of fat into the fire. Thereafter:

– Respect your husband's³² parents, elder and younger brothers and relatives! – He makes her bow again. Thereafter, when the maid arrives at the lad's yurt, some wives send the little children and boys to say: "Her [i.e. wife's] hair will be prepared" (Bálint *üsü xagal-*, Kalm. *üs xayal-*).³³ The maid's hair is plaited into two [parts] and the decoration³⁴

²⁵ The proper use of Schönwisner's Latin textbook for secondary school testifies Bálint's competence in classical Latin language and culture.

²⁶ Kalm. = Reference to contemporary Kalmyk.

²⁷ *Manuscript* pp. 140–146 (Birtalan 2011, p. 141).

²⁸ Bálint *yal tai-*, Kalm. *yal tā-* 'fire offering'; this phase of the Kalmyk wedding is well-documented in the literature, e.g. cf. Batmaev (2008, pp. 224–226).

²⁹ Bálint *ūden xorondu*, Kalm. *ūdn xōrnd*; this place is significant as the location of sacred and other important actions.

³⁰ In detail cf. Pallas (1801, pp. 238–239), Habunova (2005, pp. 59–61).

³¹ Here lit. the son-in-law (Bálint *kürgü*) expression is used.

³² Bálint *köbün* lit. "lad".

³³ More details: *Berin üs xuwalym*, cf. Habunova (2005, p. 61).

³⁴ Bálint *šiberlek*, Kalm. *šiwrlg* "jewelled hair decoration", illustrations in Syčev (1973, without page numbering).

is put on it. Thereafter the pillows are joined³⁵ and they both go to bed together.”

Fragment from “The Wedding of the Khalkhas”

(Bálint *Mongol ulusēn ekener abči gerelkēn yoso* (Khalkha *Mongol ulsīn exner awči gerlexīn yos*) “The custom of wedding of the Mongols”)³⁶

“They make the girl enter, seat her at the left side of the fire near the door and give her mutton chop (rib) and mutton rump (Bálint³⁷ *xoninē öpčōtē ūca*, Khalkha *xoninī öwčūtei ūc*), brandy and *airak* (Bálint *ārek’i, äirek*, Khalkha *arix, airag*): then a man of the girl’s party harmonizing (Bálint *ebel*, Khalkha *iwēl*) with both the bridegroom and bride (girl) divides the girl’s hair (Bálint *usēg’ xagalji*, Khalkha *ūsīg xagalji*) and (so) makes her a wife. After this the hair dividing man makes the bride pay honors (Bálint *mörgül-*, Khalkha *mörgül-*) to the god, fire, (5) to the parents-in-law and elder brothers-in-law. While so doing he makes her kneel upon her spread outskirts (Bálint *xormoēgēne depsüülji*, Khalkha *xormoig n’ dewsüülji*). While the bride pays honors, the parents-in-law and elder brother[s]-in-law make invocations (but commonly) instead of them a good invocator performs this duty.”

Bálint’s note:

“(5) The hair dividing as well as the honor paying after the Oirat usage takes place not in the house of the bride’s parents, but in the new house of the bridegroom and it seems to me that my Mongolian Lama has related this part not in its due place. The honor paying or we might say adoration corresponding to the spousals consists in the following act: the bride kneeling before the fire in the bridegroom’s new house (tent) holds a small cup with pieces of mutton fat and while bowing says after the hair dividing man: ‘I adore the god!’ and throws a piece of fat into the fire; ‘Mayst thou live in peace with your husband!’ says the hair dividing man and the bride making a bow throws again a piece of fat into the fire: ‘Honor thy parents-in-law and brothers-in-law!’ and the bride bowing throws once more a piece of fat into the fire. Cf. the old Roman usage ... 7) *Laneis dein vittis ornabat Sponsa postes aedium, et adipe lupino vel suillo unguebat ad avertendam fascinationem, Compendium Antiquitatum Romanorum* Ab. St. Schoenwisner Budae 1821.”

³⁵ Bálint *dere nēlül-*, cf. Khal. *der nīlül-* lit. “to join the pillows” is a taboo-expression for sleeping together (used not only in the wedding terminology, but generally for woman–man relationship).

³⁶ *Khalkha-Manuscript* pp. 55–56; Birtalan (2011, p. 165), *Grammar-Manuscript* p. 146.

³⁷ I inserted the Khalkha terminology from the *Khalkha-Manuscript*, because its transcription is more elaborated than that of the *Grammar-Manuscript*.

Conclusion

Although Bálint travelled throughout Asia even after his first research journey to the Tatars and Mongols (1871–1874) as the participant in the expeditions of Count Béla Széchenyi (1837–1918) and Count Jenő Zichy (1837–1906),³⁸ on the basis of his working methodology (cf. above) and letters to Fogarasi (in detail Birtalan 2009) Bálint seemed not to be a “real” field researcher. As has been demonstrated above, he rather stayed in cities (in Kazan, Astrakhan and Urga) and worked with a limited group of informants (school boys, teachers, a lama and to some extent with people who arrived from the countryside) instead of going to the field and seeking for more herdsmen and peasants. This fact does not reduce his immense achievements in studying the vernacular and recording the first information about vernacular (folk) culture in the native tongue; however, it demonstrates why the contents of his records offer limited data in some respect. Examining his ethnographic material in the context of later field research issues, Bálint's data are correct, and if the informant seemed “to fail”, Bálint himself questioned his reliability (cf. Bálint's note to the wedding processes discussed above).

Concerning the subjects of the *Ethnographica*, Bálint tried to create meticulously the context of vernacular culture for the spoken language material. He came from Transylvania and was acquainted with the Hungarian and Székely folk culture, so he could correlate his field experience among nomadic people with his native milieu experienced from his childhood. However, his main informants' knowledge was limited for various reasons, the Kalmyks were mostly young (cf. their simple language usage), his lama informant tried to explain the phenomena of Mongolian Buddhism as he comprehended it from the periphery of the clergy (from the viewpoint of a half lay, half clerical person).

Nonetheless, Bálint was able to build the image of lay and religious Mongols with the help of his informants' material, and a lay Mongol's life and vernacular culture is remarkably reflected in the Kalmyk and Mongol *Ethnographica*.

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³⁸ Széchenyi's expedition: 1877–1878 and Zichy's first expedition: 1895.

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