

Bělka, Luboš

Historical context

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1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 The Buryat sangha within Tsarist and Soviet Russia

The position of Tibetan Buddhism, previously referred to as *Lamaism*, in Russia, later the Soviet Union, changed in accordance with state policy regarding this religion. The relationship between state authority and minority churches, in this case the Buryat sangha (Buddhist community of monks and lay believers), oscillated from a policy of tolerance to one of elimination of Buddhism in Russia.¹ The attitude of the Buddhist sangha also transformed in response to changes originating in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In the three-hundred-year history of the interaction between Buddhism and the state, several key turning points may be identified, in which religious policies of the Russian or Soviet government changed radically. The latter half of the 1930s can clearly be described as the most critical period. Official religious life ceased to exist for almost a decade as a result of harsh Stalinist reprisals. The first restoration of Buddhism in Buryatia began after 1946 and lasted until the *perestroika*, in the mid-1980s. The history of Buryat Buddhism is the history of a search (at least in part successful) for a mutual relationship between the Russian Orthodox state and the Buddhist sangha which was, in its early stages, connected to international structures.

1 A remarkable and probably the oldest publication describing the relationship between the Orthodox state and Buryat sangha in the 19th century from the viewpoint of the Tsarist administration is: Vladimir Vashkevich, *Lamaity v Vostochnoi Sibiri* [Lamaists in the Eastern Siberia, in Russian], Saint Petersburg: Tipografia Ministerstva Vnutrennykh Del 1885. See also Rustam Sabirov, “Buddhism in the Russian Republic of Buryatia: History and Contemporary Developments”, in Bruce M. Knauft – Richard Taupier (eds.), *Mongolians after Socialism: Politics, Economy, Religion*, Ulanbatar: Mongolian Academy of Sciences, National University of Mongolia – Open Society Forum Mongolia 2012, pp. 235–248; Natalia Lvovna Zhukovskaia, “Buddizm i shamanizm kak faktory formirovaniï buryatskogo mentaliteta” [Buddhism and Shamanism as Forming Factors of Buryat Mentality, in Russian], in: Natalia Lvovna Zhukovskaia (ed.), *O buddizme i buddistakh. Stati raznykh let 1969–2011*, Moskva: Orientalia 2013, pp. 136–141; Tsymzhit P. Vanchikova – Galina D. Chimitdorzhin, *Istoria buddizma v Buryatii: 1945–2000 gg.* [History of Buddhism in Buryatia: 1945–2000, in Russian], Ulan-Ude: Izdatelstvo BNTs SO RAN 2006.

1.2 Internal development of the sangha at the turn of the 19th century

The social reforms of 1905 directly affected religious matters: the Tsar's Toleration Patent granted Russian citizens the right to leave the Orthodox Church freely and without legal or other consequences. In addition, it ensured the right of parents to raise their children in the spirit of their chosen religion and guaranteed non-orthodox churches, denominations and other ecclesiastic structures, such as Old Believers, the right to create and build temples, own property and even to establish elementary schools.²

Another example of expanding tsarist tolerance towards Buddhism came in the form of the approval, by Tsar Nicolas II, for the construction of a Buddhist temple in Saint Petersburg in 1907.³ Thus, another non-Christian sacral building was built in the center of the Russian Orthodoxy (following the Muslim mosque).

The Buryat Buddhist clergy, lay intelligentsia and to a lesser extent common believers, all became involved in these events. Even before the outbreak of World War I, the process of forming differing opinions was apparent among the Buryat Buddhists. This process continued well into the 1920s and was especially apparent in the political development in the Soviet Union. The monastic community and the few members of Buryat national intelligentsia fell into two competing groups. This schism derived from their fundamentally different views on the developments in the sangha (community of Buddhist monks and lay people): the reformers (Rus. *obnovlentsi*) and the conservatives (traditionalists). Apart from these two groups, there was a third, not very numerous, group of nirvanists,⁴ which rejected the schism and pointed out that Buddhists must devote their energy to the primary aim of Buddhism, the spiritual goal of all aspiration – the achievement of the state of nirvana by all sentient beings.

Kseniia M. Gerasimova in her monograph on the reform movement of Buryat Buddhist clergy mentions a link between rich Buryats (referred to by her as *kulak* in Russian or *noyon* in Buryat) and the conservative wing. The oth-

2 Cf. Harrold Berman, "Religious Rights in Russia at a Time of Tumultuous Transition: A Historical Theory", in: Johan David Vyver, van der – John Witte Jr. (eds.), *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective*, Hague: Kluwer 1996, p. 288.

3 Ernst Benz, "The Status of Buddhism in the Soviet Union and Its Relations to Buddhism in Southeast Asia", in: Ernst Benz (ed.), *Buddhism or Communism: Which Holds the Future of Asia?* London: Allen and Unwin 1966, p. 153; see also Aleksandr Andreev I., *Buddiiskaia sviatynia Petrograda* [The Buddhist Shrine in Saint Petersburg, in Russian], Ulan-Ude: EkoArt 1992.

4 Kseniia M. Gerasimova, "Sushchnost izmeneniia buddizma" [The Nature of the Buddhist Change, in Russian], in: R. E. Pubaev (ed.), *Kritika ideologii lamaizma i shamanstva: Materialy seminarov lektorov-ateistov*, Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoe knizhnoe izdatelstvo 1965, pp. 28–46.

er group, *obnovlentsi*, was more democratic and progressive according to the author, but even this group spawned from the rich Buryat bourgeoisie (sic!). She states that:

“Kulaks were politically organized in regional and gubernial congresses in the Verkhneudinsk, Chita, Gusinozersk and Tsugol Monasteries. In the Chita congress in April 1905, the Buryats definitely split into *obnovlentsi* and *starodumtsi*, proponents of bourgeois autonomy without the supervision of peasants... The other group, the *obnovlentsi*, was established later in Aginskoe, 1906. Its members were representatives of intelligentsia, coming from the circles of noyons and kulaks. They were not numerous, but were important as ideologists and theoreticians of the *obnovlentsi*.”⁵

1.2.1 Conservatives

The first to form an oppositional stance against the reformers were the traditionalists. The conservatives, represented by Lama E. Vambotsyrenov, the former Khori tribal chief (Bur. *taisha*), stood in strict and often armed opposition to Soviet power. Lamas-warriors did not just belong to the realm of popular myths and the imagination; these Buddhist fighters really existed, although their numbers were lower than Buryat legends have it. At the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, rebellions against the Bolshevik regime broke out in neighboring Mongolia⁶ and in Buryatia, where lamas participated both as ordinary warriors and as instigators of the unrest.

The Buddhist conservatives advocated the traditional Buryat conception of religion and rejected all changes and reforms. Their efforts were directed towards the maintenance of the pre-war status quo and the traditional lifestyle of the Buddhist community.

Tensions between these two movements in the Buryat Buddhism escalated at the beginning of the 1920s and the risk of open armed conflict between the feuding factions became imminent even within individual monasteries. The potential conflict was resolved by an unexpected agent: the intervention of Soviet power, the Communist Party, combat groups of atheists, the Komsomol, the secret police and finally the Red Army.

5 Kseniia M. Gerasimova, *Obnovlencheskoe dvizhenie buryatskogo lamaistskogo dukhovenstva, 1917–1930 gg.* [Buryat Lamaist Clergy Reform Movement, in Russian], Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoe knizhnoe izdatelstvo 1964, pp. 113–114.

6 See for instance: Larry W. Moses, *The Political Role of Mongolian Buddhism*, Bloomington, Indiana: Asian Studies Research Institute 1977; Bulcsu Siklos, “Mongolian Buddhism: A Defensive Account”, in: Shirin Akiner (ed.), *Mongolia Today*, London: Kegan Paul 1991, pp. 155–182.

1.2.2 Reformers

The reformers represented about a fifth of the Buddhist clergy and were led by the well-known Buryat Lama Agvan Dorzhiev,⁷ personal teacher and advisor to the 13th Tibetan Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso. A. Dorzhiev (see Fig. 1 and 2) held the prestigious title *tsanid khambo*; “Master of Buddhist Philosophy” and was an official representative of Tibet at the Tsar’s court in Saint Petersburg (then Petrograd). Later, he became the Tibetan ambassador to the Soviet government in Moscow. The reformers wanted to restore Buddhism to its original state by effecting radical changes to the ecclesiastical structure, which would remove the past imperfections and would simultaneously bring the teaching and practice of Buryat Buddhism, and thus Buryat learning, closer to the modern context. Lamas, scholars, writers, politicians and philosophers who participated in the movement understood these planned reforms in a broader sense rather than purely religious. The reform itself consisted of the following points:



Agvan Dorzhiev, not dated.
(Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

- (1) the introduction of Mongolian as a second ritual language besides Tibetan, because this language is closer and more comprehensible to Buryats;
- (2) the monks’ leaving monasteries and approaching common people, their work among peasants and nomads;
- (3) the abolishment of the institution of recognized rebirths, referred to rather inaccurately as “reincarnations”, (Bur. *khubilgan*);
- (4) the incorporation of western science into the traditional Buryat learning;
- (5) a closer connection of Buddhism with the Buryat national movement;
- (6) a return to an original form of Buddhism, which was not yet corrupted by later developments and internal disputes within the monastic community;
- (7) an understanding of Buddhism as an ethical system and lifestyle rather than a mere religion;
- (8) the conception of the Buddha as an ingenious man, teacher, philosopher and thinker while rejecting his apotheosis, which was typical of most Mahayana schools including the Tibetan form (Vajrayana).

The Buddhist reform movement, in particular its wing led by Agvan Dorzhiev (1857–1938), was not limited to the reform of internal issues of the ecclesiastical

⁷ His autobiography in Agvan Dorzhiev, *Zanimatelnye zametki. Opisanie putechesestvia vokrug sveta* [Important Notes. An Account of the Travel around the World, in Russian], Moskva: Vostochnaia literatura 2003; see also Jampa Samten – Nikolay V. Tsyrempilov, *From Tibet Confidentially: Secret correspondence of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to Agvan Dorzhiev, 1911–1925*, Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives 2011.



Fig. 2

Lama Rinpoche gives the *lung initiation* in Gegeta Monastery, Buryatia. From left to right: the superior of Chelutai (Sholot) Monastery, superior of Chesan Monastery and Pandito Khambo Lama Choinzondorzhi Iroltuev, Lama Rinpoche, Agvan Dorzhiev, superior of Gegeta Monastery, and *gelun-bagshi* of Ana Monastery, summer 1902. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

structure. It influenced laymen and the non-Buddhist population as well. The movement's followers expressed their views peacefully, non-violently and tolerantly, which was certainly not usual in Russia at the turn of the 19th century. In 1912 Bazar B. Baradiin prepared a project aimed at teaching Buddhism in Buryat secular schools, which were not connected to monasteries, and stressed the ethical aspects of Buddhist doctrine and its practical implementation. B. Baradiin advocated that, if Buddha's teachings were presented in a non-religious fashion at schools, it would help foster the moral aspects of the personality of children. Such ideas must be mediated in the form of friendly discussions and not by promoting tedious religious dogmas. Civilized and experienced Buddhist spiritual leaders, lamas, who were able to use popular and scientific literature about Buddhism in their classes, were needed for that purpose. This should have raised respect amongst students for the importance and role of the clergy in the life of the nation.⁸ Baradiin's school reform was influenced by his own

8 Kseniia M. Gerasimova, *Lamaizm i natsionalno-kolonialnaia politika tsarizma v Zabaikalie v XIX i nachale XX vekov* [Lamaism and National-Colonial Policy of Tsarism in Transbaikalia in the 19th and

experience from a year's study and research stay at the Labrang Monastery in Amdo.⁹ In the years 1906 and 1907 he was schooled in the workings of the traditional monastic educational institutions, which provided Buryat, Mongolian, Tibetan and other monks with a highly valued Buddhist education.

1.2.3 Nirvanists

Nirvanists were a specific, not very numerous group. As their name suggests, their attitude was focused on the achievement of nirvana, and therefore they rejected participating in other monastic movements. Little is known about this group, due to the small number of adherents and its negligible influence. The attention of participants in the political events in Buryatia focused on the main actors, and not on marginal movements during the 1920s and 1930s.

1.2.4 Balagat movement

The most dominant feature of the Balagat movement is its conclusion; the efforts of this reform wing resulted in a historically unique attempt at the establishment of the theocratic state in Buryatia in 1919. The founder of the movement, Lama Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov (1850–1922), who boasted the title *Dharmaraja*, king of dharma, which he bestowed on himself, was a *sui generis* heretic (if such a term could be used for the Buddhist tradition and practice). He refused the traditional Buryat monastic way of life, which dominated in Mongolia and Buryatia. His goals were ambitious: he wanted to reform Buddhism in Buryatia by disrupting monastic structures and through spreading the reformed teachings to the west of Russia. He was convinced that traditional monastic Buddhism was not viable and that only an adapted form, based primarily on the direct leadership of a teacher over his student, might be acceptable for other nations living in Russia. Naturally, this agenda interfered with the core of the Gelugpa hierarchy and it is therefore not surprising that it encountered strong opposition from the majority

the beginning of the 20th century, in Russian], Ulan-Ude: Buryat-mongolskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut kultury 1957, p. 137.

9 See Bazar B. Baradiin, *Zhizn v tangut'skom monastyre Lavran: Dnevnik buddiiskogo palomnika 1906–1907 gg.* [The Life in the Tangut Monastery Labrang: An Buddhist Pilgrim's Diary, in Russian], Ulan-Ude – Ulanbatar: Institut mongolovedenia, buddologii i tibetologii SO RAN 1999; see also Anya Bernstein, “Pilgrims, Fieldworkers, and Secret Agents: Buryat Buddhologists and the History of an Eurasian Imaginary“, *Inner Asia* 11/1, 2009, s. 23–45; Anya Bernstein, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press 2013, pp. 50–54.

of the clergy and common believers. Later, it even led to a religious schism in Buryat Buddhism. Tsydenov's anti-institutional agenda was not absolute and universal; it was directed against the existing structures, not against all Buddhist institutes. This is evidenced by his conception of a completely new institution; the theocratic state.

Tsydenov's rules of the life of the sangha, theoretically formulated in the first decade of the 20th century and put into practice in his own life, met with wide, largely critical responses in the other parts of Buryatia. However, his ambitions went beyond religious reform. Tsydenov envisioned the creation of the above mentioned theocratic state. If his attempts had been successful, it would have meant a substantial change in the political situation of south-east Siberia.¹⁰

The Buddhist sangha was to play a significantly greater role than in the past, where, according to Tsydenov, it only obeyed instructions from Saint Petersburg, Irkutsk and Verkhneudinsk. The Soviet authors N. A. Pupyshev, B. N. Vampilov, V. P. Grishchenko in their later, not yet published, work on Buryat Buddhism, state the details about the theocratic state led by Lubsan S. Tsydenov:

“In April 1919 Lama Dharma Randzyin-gygen (a variant of Tsydenov's name and title) declared himself a 'Living God'. Together with his assistants he elaborated the basic legislature and constitution of the theocratic state. The state should have been headed by the president [in the Russian original *erchin-said*] and a vice-president or assistant [in the Russian original *did-said*]. Ministers [in the Russian original *amba-noet*] should have been appointed to lead the following sectors: (1) interior; (2) foreign affairs; (3) justice; (4) the court; (5) trade and industry; (6) finance; (7) agriculture, and (8) national education. Each minister was to have his assistant or deputy... Lubsan S. Tsydenov authorized the *Constitution of Buryat Theocratic State*, prepared by his friends and colleagues, on 4 April 1919. The Constitution mentions that all the believing Lamaists are subjects of the king of three worlds, Dharmaraja [Tib. *chogyal /chos rgyal/*, literally king of dharma, of Buddha's teaching; Bur. *choidzhal*]. Lubsan S. Tsydenov was perceived as a spiritual and secular leader, designated by the Buddha himself [sic!]. Pursuant to the Constitution, the government ministers of the theocratic state were elected from amongst local lamas.”¹¹

10 See e.g. Aleksandr Andreev, “Dreams of a Pan-Mongolian state: Samdan Tsydenov, Baron Ungern, Agvan Dorzhiev, Nicholas Roerich”, 2009, http://www.budcon.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=169&Itemid=117&lang=en (21 July 2013); see also Nikolay V. Tsyrepilov, “Konstitutsionalnaya teokratia Lubsan-Samdan Tsydenova: popytka sozdanija buddiiskogo gosudarstva v Zabaikalie (1918–1922)”, [The Constitutional Theocracy of Lubsan-Samdan Tsydenov: an Attempt to establish a Buddhist state in Transbaikalia, 1918–1922, in Russian], *Gosudarstvo, religia, tserkov v Rossii i za rubezhom* 33/4, 2015, pp. 318–346.

11 N. A. Pupyshev – Vampilov B. N. – Grishchenko V. P., *Buddizm i lamaizm: Kratkaia istoria, proiskhozhdenie, razvitie i rasprostranenie v Indii, Tibete, Mongolii i Buryat-Mongolii* [Buddhism and

The authors *inter alia* mention that the theocratic state was an attempt to seize power with the support of foreign soldiers and Ataman Semënov.¹² For this purpose they formed "... several armed troops to whom L. S. Tsydenov gave prophecies [in the Russian original *aboral*]. Believers had to bring him gifts [in the Russian original *mandal*] such as food and money so that he may deliver the prophecy."¹³

The key political event in the establishment of the short-lived theocratic state is dealt with by E. Kh. Daribazon on the basis of newly released archive materials in Buryatia. He points out that the Buryat citizens were traditionally exempt from service in the Russian army and they duly appreciated this privilege (it did not apply to Buryat steppe Cossack troops, which were regulated by special decrees and rules and guarded the border with Mongolia and China). Thus, it was not surprising that Ataman Semënov met with strong opposition and outrage when in 1919 he ordered the mobilization of Buryat men born between 1895 and 1898 in Transbaikalia. Buryats approached their clergymen, mainly Lubsan S. Tsydenov, and asked for protection from forced recruitment. According to E. Kh. Daribazon, these circumstances played a decisive role in the declaration of the Buryat theocratic state.¹⁴

Lubsan S. Tsydenov was imprisoned by Soviet authorities on 20 January 1922 and died in a Novonikolaevsk jail in Novosibirsk on 15 May of the same year. After the final defeat of the remnants of the Tsydenov reform movement in 1922–1923, the advancement of the reform agenda in Buryatia was limited to the clergy and lay people, faithful to Agvan Dorzhiev.

Lamaizm: A Short History, Origin, Development and Spreading in India, Tibet, Mongolia and Buryat-Mongolia, in Russian], Moskva: Institut iazyka, literatury i istorii B-M ASSR 1941, unpublished manuscript, pp. 582–584 (*Arkhiv Muzeia istorii religii*, Sankt-Petersburg, f. 31, op. 1, no. 183).

12 His name was later crossed out by a pen, probably by B. N. Vampilov, who gave the manuscript to the Archive of the Museum of Religious History in 1981.

13 N. A. Pupyshev – Vampilov B. N. – Grishchenko V. P., *Buddizm i lamaizm...*, p. 584.

14 E. Kh. Daribazon, "K voprosu o teokraticheskom dvizhenii v 1918–1926 gg. v Khorinskom vedomstve" [To the Question of the Theocracy Movement in Khori Vedomstvo in 1918–1926, in Russian], in: Shirab B. Chimitdorzhiev (ed.), *Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii "Tsybikovskie chtenia – 7"*, Ulan-Ude: Izdatelstvo BNC 1998, pp. 100–101.

1.3 Buryat sangha during the Soviet period:

1.3.1 Search for relationship: 1917–1924

Although the first decrees of the Soviet government proclaimed to solve the fundamental problems of life in ethnic minorities in Russia, they were actually never met. The noble declarations of Bolshevik representatives were in fact worthless and, for instance freedom of religion, was never put to practice. Freedom of religion should have been ensured by the separation of church and state, which was guaranteed by the decree of 23 January 1918. The original version of this decree did not expressly mention Buddhism; an amendment was adopted seven months later, which concerned the “Buddhist and Lamaist faith”. The Soviet regime collapsed in Transbaikalia at that time, and therefore the amendment on separation of church and state could not be implemented until the mid-1920s, after Soviet power had become firmly established.

1.3.2 First wave of reprisals: 1925–1928

During the first wave of the destruction of Buddhism, monasteries were referred to by Soviet propaganda as hotbeds of counterrevolution and hostile attitudes towards the ruling power. These accusations included spreading anti-Soviet ideology and armed terror. The actions of Buryat Communist Party organizations were based on a document entitled *Lamaism in Buryatia*, which was prepared under the supervision of Mikhail N. Erbanov,¹⁵ chairman of the Sovnarkom Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, B-M ASSR (Rus. *Sovetskii Narodnyi Komitet, Soviet National Committee*) in May 1925.¹⁶

15 Although Mikhail N. Erbanov was referred to as a “friend of lamas” by ardent Bolsheviks at the end of the 1920s, he was a rather aggressive atheist and not a protector of Buddhist clergymen. This is demonstrated by a story included in the biography of Nicolaus Poppe, a leading representative of Lenin-grad oriental studies at that time. When visiting Ulan-Ude on the occasion of a scientific conference in 1936, Poppe was invited to have dinner with this “Buryat Choibalsan”, the nickname given to him by Buryats. He cautiously reminded Erbanov that state and party representatives should pay better care to Buryat national customs and traditions, which in his view meant maintenance of at least one Buddhist monastery or temple as a historical, ethnographic and arts museum. Erbanov answered: “I disagree. I am sure that you also wish to keep a few lamas in the monastery to protect them. However, I can assure you that they are so well protected in labor camps that you do not have to worry about them.” See Nicolaus Poppe, *Reminiscences*, Washington: Center for East Asian Studies 1983, p. 106. Erbanov was arrested in Moscow in 1937 and executed shortly afterwards. More about him e.g. in G. D. Basaev – S. Ya. Erbanova, *M. N. Erbanov*, Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoe knizhnoe izdatelstvo 1989.

16 B. N. Batorov, “Osushchestvlenie v Buryatii Leninskogo dekreta Ob otdelenii cerkvi ot gosudarstva i shkoly ot cerkvi” [The Implementation of the Lenin Decree about the Church and State Separation, in Russian], in: *Stroitelstvo sotsializma i utverzhdenie nauchno-materialisticheskogo, ateisticheskogo mirovozzrenia*, Moskva: Mysl 1981, p. 16–17.

Viktoria V. Nomogoeva mentions a later date for the nationalization of monasteries:

“The Communist Party of Buryatia decided to nationalize all religious institutions in the summer of 1926. Most monasteries, churches and other sacral buildings were closed down in the years 1930 and 1931; all ceremonies were forbidden. Repression of clergy followed.”¹⁷

By the end of November 1925, special permanent boards for religious matters were established at the aimag committees of the Communist Party. These committees' main task was to put into practice the provisions of the decree on the separation of church and state. As part of the nationalization policies, monastery property, both movable and immovable, was handed over to local religious communities of clergymen and lay people, whereby, as intended, lay people became involved in the process. Another aim of the expropriators of monastic property was to separate clergy and laymen, which was to be achieved through the mentioned change in ownership of the movable property and real estate. The last step was to confiscate the property of local religious communities and factually hand it over to the state.¹⁸ The Soviets used the property of the monasteries and temples to influence the views of village people and lay Buddhists and to deepen the existing schism among the clergy. They distributed the monastery property for the benefit of the reformers, which created animosity between the reformers and conservatives. A strictly confidential instruction was issued for all members of regional executive committees (Rus. *raispolkom*, *raionnyi ispolnitelnyi komitet*), which said:

“To the representatives of all regional executive committees: (1) the Buddhist Lamaist church is currently divided into two hostile camps – old Lamaists and new Lamaists; (2) the new Lamaist stream, which rejected the institution of khubilgans (reincarnations) and imposed an obligation to work on lamas, is certainly a progressive movement in our conditions and undoubtedly advantageous in terms of our society and ourselves; (3) because the new Lamaist stream is beneficial to us in the current situation, it will be necessary to provide it all possible support in specific local conditions of organizing local religious *obshchinas* and transfer of ritual assets. The most risky moment in terms of potential hindering the transfer of monastery property to new

17 Viktoria V. Nomogoeva, “Iz istorii borby s religiei v Buryatii v 1920–1930-e gg” [About the Fight against Religion in Buryatia in 1920s-1930s, in Russian], in: L. V. Kuras (ed.), *Tezisy i doklady mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-teoreticheskoi konferentsii “Banzarovskie chtenia-2”, posviashchennoi 175-letiu osnivanja Dorzhi Banzarova*, Ulan-Ude: Izdatelstvo BNC 1997, p. 79.

18 Batorov B. N., “Osushchestvlenie v Buryatii...”, p. 19.

Lamaists is the existence of old Lamaist groups of believers in certain monasteries. In order to prevent the transfer of this property to conservatives, monasteries must be handed over to new Lamaist groups everywhere, where they applied for them. Although the conservatives may outnumber the obnovlentsi, it must not be a reason for releasing the property to conservative groups.”¹⁹

An important role in the anti-religious campaign was played, besides party organizations, the secret police and the Red Army, by the *Buryat-Mongolian Union of Militant Atheists* (Rus. *Buryat-mongol'skii soiuz voinstvoiuushchich bezbozhnikov*) founded in 1925. By year 1928, the Union cells operated in every aimag and almost every village. The journal *Science and Religion* (Bur. *Erdem ba shazhan*), the principal media tool in the campaign against religion, in particular Buddhism in Buryatia, was published from 1928 onwards.²⁰

The decimation of Buddhist structures took on many forms and severely affected human rights. Buddhist clergy, except novices (Bur. *khuvarak*), were stripped of both their active and passive suffrage in 1926. The restrictions progressed and those clergymen who remained in monasteries were denied the right to use the agricultural land (which they had been forbidden to own) and at the same time were subjected to high taxes since 1927. According to official data, in 1930 there were still seventy-three religious schools with more than four thousand khuvaraks in Buryatia. The Soviet government introduced compulsory school attendance in Buryatia in the same year, which resulted in outflow of boys from monastery schools. Khuvaraks from eight to fifteen years of age were obliged to attend Soviet schools, and therefore had to leave monastery educational institutions. In 1934 the authorities recorded that elementary schools were attended by 97.5 percent of all Buryat children.²¹

1.3.3 Second wave of reprisals: 1929–1938

A radical turn in the history of Buryat Buddhism began at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, when the Bolshevik regime started the first wave of violent repression of monasteries and monastic community regardless whether the monastery or monks belonged to the reformers, traditionalists or

19 A. V. Daminov, “Agvan Dorzhiev v obnovlencheskom dvizhenii buryatskogo buddiiskogo dukhovenstva” [Agvan Dorzhiev in the Buryat Buddhist Clergy Reformers Movement, in Russian], in: L. E. Iangutov (ed.), *Buryatskii buddizm: Istorii i ideologiia*, Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNC 1997, p. 87; the translation maintains the official style of emerging Soviet bureaucrats.

20 Viktoria V. Nomogoeva, “Iz istorii borby...”, p. 80.

21 B. N. Batorov, “Osushchestvlenie v Buryatii...”, pp. 20–24.



Teacher of Buda Lama Tsygmunov, Tibetan Lama Thangring; photograph dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. (Archive of A. I. Breslavets)

nirvanists. The “final solution of the Lamaist issue” was preceded by a decision of the Communist Party. As early as 1923, the XXII congress of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), adopted the resolution on Anti-Religious Agitation and Propaganda (Rus. *O postanovke antireligioznoi agitatsii i propagandy*), which declared that religion of all kinds, Buddhism being no exception, had no place in a communist society. The Soviet reprisals were extraordinarily cruel, similarly to Mongolia several years later. Monks were forced to emigrate or to leave for a secular life and a large number were executed or sent to Stalinist concentration camps (gulags),²² which only a few survived.

The violent suppression of religious life in Buryatia was executed in three waves of reprisals. The first was at its worst in the year 1930, the second peaked in 1935 and the third and final took place in the years 1937 and 1938. V. V. Nomogoeva comments on the last wave of reprisals: “1864 lamas had been imprisoned; 968 of them were sentenced as of 1 January 1938.”²³ Whereas a part of the convicted prisoners returned to life in the following period of relative “warming up” at the end of 1938, they did not include lamas, i.e. higher Buddhist clergymen.²⁴

The life story of the Buryat lama can serve as an apt example of the situation of that period.

The life of Buryat Lama Buda Budaevich Tsygmunov²⁵ and his Saint Petersburg (then Leningrad) disciple Aleksandr I. Breslavets

Buda Budaevich Tsygmunov (Bur. *Buda Lama*, see Fig. 5) was, according to official documents, born on 1 September 1905. According to the Mongolian calendar he was born on the first autumn day, but because Russian officials did not know the Mongolian calendar, they entered what they thought was the “first autumn day”, 1 September 1905. Tsygmunov was born in the village of Borzia, in the Chita Oblast. In 1911, as a six-year old boy, as was customary in Buryatia, he entered the Tsugol Monastery in the Chita Oblast and started his Buddhist studies under the direct leadership of his first Mongolian or Buryat teacher (see Fig. 4), who professed Buddhism of the Gelugpa tradition. The future

22 The term GULAG is an abbreviation of the Russian name of the Main Administration of USSR Camps (Rus. *Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei SSSR*); however, the word *gulag* became generally known as the name of the prison camp of the Stalinist period.

23 Viktoria V. Nomogoeva, “Iz istorii borby...”, p. 81.

24 B. V. Bazarov, “Obshchestvennye techenia lamaizma” [Social Aspects of Lamaism, in Russian], in: S. B. Chimitdorzhiev – D. D. Nimaev – G. A. Dyrkheeva G. A. (eds.), *Tsybikovskie chtenia: Problemy istorii i kultury mongolskikh narodov. Tezisy dokladov i soobshchenii*, Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoe knizhnoe izdatelstvo 1993, p. 69.

25 Based primarily on personal testimony of late Aleksandr I. Breslavets, recorded in Saint Petersburg in summer 1996.

Buda Lama Tsygmunov mostly studied in the mentioned Tsugol Monastery, but similarly to other khubaraks and their teachers he often visited the Aginskoe Monastery. These two main monasteries of the Chita Oblast did not compete with each other and both the teachers and pupils could freely travel between them. The monasteries are about sixty kilometers apart. Lama Thangring (see Fig. 3), a Tibetan coming from Amdo, follower of the Tibetan Kagyu tradition, arrived in Tsugol Monastery in 1913 and immediately became the second teacher of khubarak Buda Tsygmunov. Lama Thangring came to Buryatia from China, which he had fled in order to pursue his religious practices in peace and quiet.

Lama Thangring escaped the Soviet anti-religious reprisals together with his five disciples, including Buda Lama Tsygmunov, by fleeing to Mongolia in 1931, and later to Manchuria, which was home to the Buryat diaspora and three Buryat Buddhist monasteries. In August 1945 the Soviet secret police NKVD arrested Buda Lama Tsygmunov and Lama Thangring, and sent them to Siberia, where they were imprisoned in a labor camp for ten years. They both returned from the gulag after ten years. Aleksandr I. Breslavets describes the local Buryat version of the events:

“My spiritual grandfather [meant Lama Thangring, who was the direct teacher of Buda Lama Tsygmunov, who in turn was the direct teacher of Breslavets; author’s note] lived in the south of the Chita Oblast for some time. He died in 1979 and was reborn in Manchuria. After Buda Lama Tsygmunov made sure that his teacher was really reborn there, he died and was reborn there, too. I even have a photograph of his new rebirth from north-east China; he lives in Manchuria on the border with Mongolia, inhabited by a large Buryat diaspora.”

The monks who had been arrested in Manchuria in 1945 were released after ten-year imprisonment in winter 1955. Aleksandr I. Breslavets describes the situation:

“They were released, into the freezing cold, without money or food. They were let out as they were, without any property and with only the clothes they wore. Here is your paper, the release certificate, and you can go. They were given money for the journey home and their documents. That was all. Everyone had a place to return to, but Buda Lama Tsygmunov. Where should he go? He could not be sent to Manchuria, where he had been imprisoned in 1945. When Buda Lama Tsygmunov left the gulag, he went to Novosibirsk in the beginning of 1956, to a neighborhood, where *zeks* [in Russian argot: prisoners] met, waiting for the spring and thus a chance to get home. They lived in slums, shelters made of cardboard boxes and anything that was at hand. The place was inhabited by criminals, robbers, political prisoners: the gulag moved to town.



Fig. 4

Teacher of Buda Lama Tsygmunov: Buryat or Mongolian Lama, name not known; photograph dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. (Archive of A. I. Breslavets)

By a lucky coincidence, Buda Lama Tsygmunov met Klavdiia Andreevna here, who offered him to live with her, out of compassion. She herself had been imprisoned; she used to be a kulak, whose property was expropriated. They were older people, in their fifties. After some time of living together, they decided to marry. Under Soviet law they registered their marriage, but had no children. A Russian-Ukrainian woman and a Buryat man. As wife and husband, their dealings with authorities were easier. Buda Lama Tsygmunov suggested to his wife that they should return to the Aginsky Buryat Autonomous District, which he knew well. She, on the other hand, had nowhere to return to. All her relatives in Ukraine had been arrested, murdered or taken to gulags where they died; there was no place to return to and no reason to do so. At the end of the 1950s they moved to the Aginsky Buryat Autonomous District. Klavdiia Andreevna found a job there, working at a railway station, as did Buda Lama Tsygmunov. They lived in a village, near the Mogoitui station, about thirty kilometers from the town of Aginskoe. Their street was named after revolutionary Red Army commander Vasily Ivanovich Chapaev. They earned some money, life was cheaper then, and bought a small house.”

A. I. Breslavets speaks of his experience with Buryats in the 1980s:

“Before each trip to Buryatia, the Leningrad Institute of Experimental Medicine, where I worked, equipped me with a document requesting local people to help the scientific worker A. I. Breslavets, because he collects information about popular medicine and medicinal herbs.

The Buryats asked me: ‘Why does Sasha Breslavets go to visit Buda Lama?’ Therefore we invented a story that I was a relative of aunt Klavdiia. She was Ukrainian and I have in my passport that I am a Ukrainian, too. Thus, the Buryats put up with me, because everyone who is a relative of a lama, is untouchable. Sometimes, when my assistance, I mean physical assistance was needed, I accompanied him and was present when *Bardo thodol* [the text of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*] was read. They were speaking for a long time, reading special texts. I thus received my initiation and learned a lot.”

What did the unofficial, in fact secret work of Buda Lama Tsygmunov in Soviet times look like?

“Buda Lama Tsygmunov on principle did not accept money for his acts, he only agreed to gifts, like meat, bread, milk etc. He was a steppe lama, a monk who does not live in a monastery. This was his social function at the time when I met him and earlier [i.e. since the beginning of the 1960s until year 1980, author’s note]. He did not live in a monastery, but in a village among common people. He fulfilled his Buddhist role, which he knew well, to the extent of the given circumstances of the

Soviet regime. His main task was to conduct funerals. According to the Mongolian tradition, he was the *choidzhi lama*. I do not know about the rest of Buryatia, but in the Aginsky District there were several secret burial grounds, which were still used in the 1970s. All the nine burial grounds were used in accordance with the Buddhist tantric tradition. Ritual structures were built from young tree trunks in remote places, where dead bodies were placed for birds and animals to eat them. But first the bodies had to be cut into pieces and this was performed by the lama, this was his function. Buda Lama Tsygmunov fulfilled this task all those years I visited him. Sometimes I spent the whole summer and stayed with him. A truck used to come for him, he was spoken to in Buryat and then he was driven away. He took me with him several times as an assistant, however, never to a funeral in secret grounds; he always took me to the dying, where *Bardo thodol* was read. Buryats are strong patriots, and did not understand why Buda Lama Tsygmunov had a European assistant. That was the reason why we made up the story I mentioned before.”

Aleksandr I. Breslavets further says about Buda Lama:

“Neither Buda Lama nor his teacher had children. They were real monks. When I was last in Aginskoe, a delegation prepared for the trip to Manchuria, to visit the rebirth of Buda Lama. I have some notes from Darma-Dodi [an important Buryat Buddhist monk, affiliated at this time to Ivolginskiy Monastery near Ulan-Ude, author’s note] at my home; they are in Tibetan, they are Tibetan tunes. Darma-Dodi used to sing them to me and each time a different tune: one from Tibet, another one from China, then from Amdo. He always sang them in the way they are sung in those areas. Was he Tibetan, Buryat or Mongolian? The facial features typical of certain nationalities tend to disappear in the old age. I do not know whether there were Tibetans living in Buryatia, I mean old men. What I know for certain is that some of the old men went to Tibet and studied there. The remaining four disciples of Buda Lama, Buryats, live in Buryatia nowadays; that is all I can say. His spiritual father, my spiritual grandfather, also had five disciples, it is a tradition. I cannot and do not want to say more about this.”

A. I. Breslavets answers the question “Which tradition is taught by Buda Lama Tsygmunov? What was it that he transferred to his five disciples?”

“Sanskrit was taught in the Aginskoe Monastery until 1929. When I first visited my teacher, I knew a little Sanskrit and English. Buda Lama did not know much of Sanskrit. When I arrived, inspired by Milarepa, I fell to the ground and I gave him everything I had – about five hundred rubles, which was good money at that time. He gave it back to me later, so that I had money for the journey back. He taught me

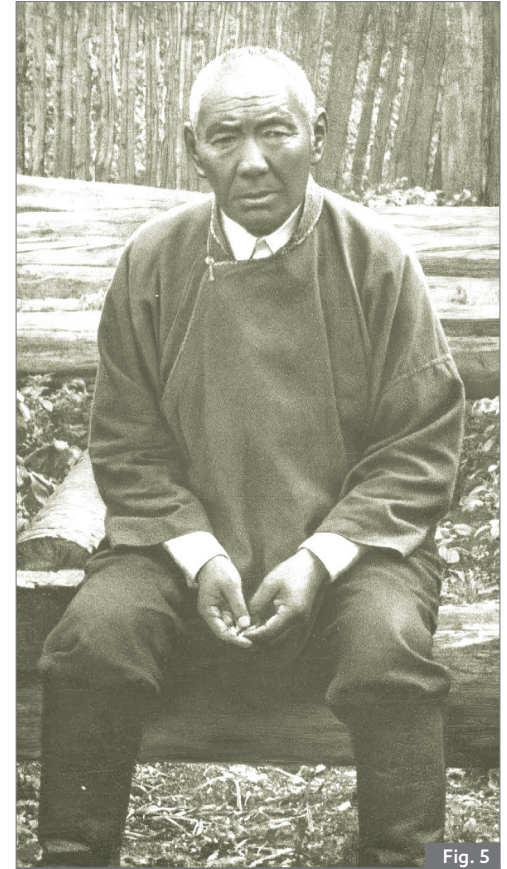


Fig. 5

Buda Lama Tsygmunov in 1976, the village of Mogoitui in the Aginsky Buryat Autonomous District. (Photograph by Aleksandr I. Breslavets)



Fig. 6

The ritual of transmission of initiation (Bur. *lun*), Kushok Bakula Rinpoche on the left, Aleksandr I. Breslavets with the white *khadak* (ceremonial scarf) to the right of him; Saint Petersburg (Lenin-grad) on 15 June 1988. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

the mahamudra [great seal or great symbol] system. He was the *zhodchin lama*. I was given these texts by him: *Prajnaparamita Hrdaya Sutra*, in the first place, and then *Vajracchedika Sutra* [*The Diamond Sutra*]. Of course, the *Mahamudra* text was the most important one; that was our main practice, our principal focus. When I started to meditate, he gave me this text, which is based on the Gelugpa tradition. I still have it at home. He also gave me the initiation of *Yamantaka Tantra* and *Vajrabhairava Tantra*. He did not give me any other initiation; he said that was enough for the beginning. Before his departure, in 1980, he gave me a kind of a recommending letter for another lama, who lived in Kiakhta. I traveled to see him after the death of Buda Lama. The lama tried me for two weeks and then gave me the initiation for *Chakrasamvara Tantra*. It is not exactly initiation, but transmission of the tradition, *lun*. He sent me to a third lama, who gave me initiation for *Guhyasamaja Tantra*. All these lamas were old men and they have died. I received another initiation later, after the death of Buda Lama.”

A ritual was performed in Saint Petersburg (then Leningrad, see Fig. 6 and 7) on 15 June 1988, conducted by Kushok Bakula Rinpoche.²⁶ About twenty believers gathered for the occasion of his first visit. A. I. Breslavets:

“I handed him the *khadak* [ceremonial scarf] and asked for *Demchog*, *Sandui* (*Guhyasamaja*) and *Zhigzhed* initiation. On my request he gave *lun* for these three tantras to everyone at the same time. Then I asked him for special transmission of the Manjushri line, namely of *Manjushri-nama samgiti*. He read it aloud in the ceremonial way, so that everyone heard that he was transmitting *lun*. We have written to each other twice a year since.”

The last moments of Buda Lama Tsygmunov’s life, described by A. I. Breslavets:

“Buda Lama died on 23 November 1980; however, this date is not exact – it is only formal. In fact, the precise date of his departure from life is not known. It happened like this: He said goodbye to his family and to me and he asked that no one disturb him for three days. He stayed in his little wooden house, which was located in the monastery grounds, all by himself. After three days we entered the unheated room and saw him lying in the lion pose. He was dead. His relative, the senior doctor in the Aginskoe hospital, Mr. Gonchikov, filled out the death certificate, entered the date 23 November, which, by the way, is Tsonghapa’s birthday, and gave the body to the lamas without performing an autopsy, to handle it in the traditional way. Before entering the monastery, Buda Lama divorced aunt Klavdiia and willed her all the real estate. The money that he saved from his patients’ gifts was bequeathed to the Ivolginskiy and Aginskoe Monasteries. It summed up to three thousand rubles, good money at that time. The Lamas laid his body into a coffin and buried him in the ground in the Buryat cemetery. There are two cemeteries in the town of Aginskoe: the Russian and the Buryat one. Buda Lama was not buried ‘in the air’ in the secret burial grounds: this tradition ended together with his departure. Only he knew who was to be buried in the ground, who in the air and why. It was a big funeral; a special ceremony [Bur. *khural*] was served, and a lot of people came. After the grave was covered with earth, no tombstone was erected. He was simply buried in the ground without any tombstone.”

Let us quote one more story, illustrating the Buryat practice of *mahamudra*. A. I. Breslavets says:

²⁶ More about the 19th Kushok Bakula Rinpoche (21 May 1917 – 4 November 2003) e.g. Maya Joshi (ed.), *My Life, My Times. The Autobiography of Kushok Bakula (a condensed version)*, New Delhi: World Buddhist Culture Trust – Indraprastha 2006; Margarita Kozhevnikova, *Povest ob uchitele. Bakula Rinpoche v Rossii* [The Story about the Teacher. Bakula Rinpoche in Russia, in Russian], Nartang 2003; see also Tsering Shakspo – Henry N. Vynner, *Kushok Bakula Rinpoche: Saint and Statesman*, New Delhi: Indraprastha Press 2006.



Fig. 7

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, an official photograph. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

“Yesterday, we spoke about cream. It was a kind of a mahamudra game of the teacher. The conversation took place in the morning: I asked him for permission to bring my wife. He glanced into the corner, and there was a bucket with milk which was brought to him by the local Buryats as a gift, an expression of thanks and gratitude. ‘Go and churn butter,’ he said. I took the bucket and a plunger and I began to churn the cream. The milk was thick and you have to work long, until buttermilk remains. I brought the butter and a bucketful of buttermilk to the teacher and I put everything into the corner. He asks: ‘What were we talking about? You want to bring your wife? Come on, let’s think it over.’ He eats the freshly churned butter, which resembles tea butter and asks: ‘Why did you churn so little butter today?’ ‘I did everything I could,’ I answered. He replied: ‘Go and continue churning!’ After an hour’s work I came to him and said: ‘This is all that’s been left.’ He looks at me, smiling: ‘You want to bring your wife?’ ‘You see, here was the meta-symbolism. The plunger was a metaphor for the phallus and the bucket was a metaphor for the vagina. And at that moment, when I said it, something remained (...) at that moment I suddenly grasped everything; I had the entire picture of my relations with my wife before my eyes and I saw it: ‘Why should I bring her here?’ And it was right. When I returned home, to the city, from my teacher in the autumn, her interests were elsewhere. She left. You see what kind of mahamudra it was. In the first days of my encounter with the teacher I asked him to tell me about his life and he answered concisely: ‘I did not attach any importance to dharma in the first twenty years; I prepared for the study in the next twenty years and in the past twenty years I have regretted I started so late.’”

Aleksandr I. Breslavets learned about the situation in Buryatia during the 1920s to 1940s from his teacher Buda Lama:

“When the destruction of monasteries started, his teacher, my spiritual grandfather, told him to leave through the Mongolian border, because he knew how it would end. It was still possible in 1931. From Mongolia, they went to Manchuria: there lived a Buryat diaspora since the 1920s. Buda Lama fled Buryatia in 1931; there were Buddhist monasteries in Manchuria, and thus lamas and their disciples could continue in what they had started until the year 1945. Buda Lama obtained complete education and very good practice here, especially during the war. He had prayer beads, but I didn’t keep those. I kept others, which I can show you, but not his beads. I left them in the place where he was buried. I had no right to use them. Buda Lama died in 1980. His string of prayer beads did not contain a vajra [Tib. *dorje /rdo rje/*], but a knife. It contained a hundred beads; fifty male and fifty female ones. They were made of cranial bones of the dead buried by Buda Lama. Their energy was so strong that I could not keep them. Therefore I laid them into the earth in the place where he is buried. Maybe I will find them and use them in one of my future rebirths.”

1.3.4 Absence of an official sangha: 1939–1945

Soviet atheist policy, which was aimed at the destruction of religious life, proved devastating in Buryatia. There was not a single functioning Buddhist monastery in the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (B-M ASSR) and the Aginsky Buryat Autonomous District, Chita Oblast, by the outbreak of World War II. Buildings were demolished and some monasteries, such as Ana Monastery, were destroyed by artillery or taken down. In addition, monks and novices were expelled from their monasteries. The reprisals were not restricted to Buddhist clergy, and deeply affected lay Buryats as well. In 1941 there was no one to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the alleged Toleration Patent; religious life in Buryatia was practically non-existent. The elimination of the Buddhist community seemed total.

The Soviet Academy of Sciences in Leningrad organized a rescue expedition to the destroyed monasteries and temples that should have saved and brought back the remnants of libraries, works of art and ritual objects, costumes and other artefacts which are important for the study of religion. The participants of the expedition sadly had to acknowledge that there was virtually nothing left to save; everything had been either destroyed or stolen.²⁷ After two hundred years of existence, Buryat Buddhism lay in ruins.

1.3.5 First restoration of Buddhism: 1946–1985

Following almost a decade of non-existence of the sangha in Buryatia, in 1945, the lamas asked the Soviet ruler Josif V. Stalin if they could renew their activities. In fact, they pleaded for mercy with the authority that oppressed them most, but there was no other way. As far as we know, their letter has never been published. There were two aspects to the letter to Stalin. Firstly, the lamas were able to make such a request only after it was previously made by the Orthodox Church and secondly, they knew that any anti-Soviet activity was out of the question in the new post-war conditions. As far as we know they did not engage in any. The fight against the Soviet establishment, on part of Buddhists led by the conservatives and headed by *taisha* Vambotsyrenov (according to other sources he was a nirvanist), ended in the latter half of the 1930s and was not renewed. However, that does not mean that Buryat Buddhists were completely loyal.

27 Inessa I. Lomakina, “Sokrovishcha buryatskikh datsanov” [Buryat Buddhist Monasteries Treasures, in Russian], *Pravda Buryatii* (18 October 1991), pp. 4–5; Inessa I. Lomakina, *Arkhivnye listy ostayutsya sviditelyami* [The Archive Papers Remains a Witnesses, in Russian], 1994, unpublished manuscript, 23 pp.



Fig. 8

The chariot of the future Buddha Maitreya, the summer festival of the future Buddha Maitreya (Bur. *Maidar khural*), Ivlginskiy Monastery, Buryatia, picture taken on 11 July 1967. (Archive of Donatas L. I. Butkus)

In this context it is interesting that Vladimir Montlevich tries to show that it was Bidia Dandarovich Dandaron to whom we owe the first restoration of Buddhism, thanks to his letter to Stalin. In fact, Dandaron had nothing in common with the sangha, he was not a professional member (a lama or a monk) and nothing is known about any engagement on his part in the activities at the Saint Petersburg (then Leningrad) Buddhist monastery. In fact, he could not participate in the first postwar restoration, because he was imprisoned in 1947 (until 1955). When he returned to Buryatia after Stalin's death, the sangha lived its own, incredibly restricted life. It was also engaged in new, Soviet activities, such as active participation in the international Buddhist peace movement, whereby Soviet communists tried to influence the politics of Asian countries.

What is important however is that until the period of the so-called *glasnost*, the Buryat official sangha, or for that matter anyone else in Soviet society, could not freely criticize the reprisals of the 1930s. Despite, or maybe because of that, in October 1974 (19 October 1974, exactly a week before the death of Dandaron) a mandala, which captured the reprisals or at least contained references to them, was created. The fact that Dandaron is dressed in striped prisoner's clothes (see



Bidia D. Dandaron, Lodroe Yampilovich Yampilov, Kristina Lange, Boris V. Semichov at the entrance to Ivolginskii Monastery, Buryatia, picture taken on 11 July 1967. (Archive of Donatas L. I. Butkus)

Fig. 43) is a paradox in itself: prisoners did not wear such clothes in Russia; this is a western symbol, which is comprehensible all over the world. That is probably the reason why Aleksandr Zheleznov depicted Dandaron in clothes which he most probably had never worn. That is not the only curiosity: Dandaron is also depicted in a tantric robe in the mandala; however it is not his ritual robe, but an object from a museum collection (see Fig. 44). Back to our story: We may ask whether Zheleznov hoped the mandala would get out of the Soviet Union and hence the “western” prison clothes. It may be the case; we must not forget that

Dandaron's Cause was the object of attention of the Keston Institute, Amnesty International and was covered by *Radio Liberty*, *Radio Free Europe*, *the Voice of America* and others. Thanks to people like Aleksandr Piatigorsky and Elena Semeka the West was informed of the existence of persecuted European Buddhists, led by the Buryat teacher.²⁸

1.3.6 Second restoration of Buddhism: 1986 – present

The changed social and political situation in the USSR in the latter half of the 1980s, following perestroika, did not significantly affect Buryat ecclesiastical structures. In particular, its highest ranks remained relatively unaffected and not even the radical events at the turn the 1980s and the 1990s led to changes in the Buryat Buddhist Central Spiritual Administration. Buryat society began to awake with a certain delay in comparison to other Soviet regions. The highest Buddhist officials had retained the status quo, allowing only for minor changes.

The process of the second restoration of Buryat Buddhism took form at the beginning of the 1990s. Activities of the existing monasteries expanded, the number of novices increased and plans for the opening of new temples and monasteries were made. Nowadays, Buryat monks live and work in almost forty monasteries, temples and shrines. Their numbers are estimated to be between 600 and 800 and their average age is relatively low. A large group of lay Buddhists thrives in the present Buryatia. Lay Buddhists have their own organizations and they visit monasteries, temples and shrines, they participate in the celebration of significant religious festivals in monasteries or in traditional sacred places – near the *obos* and stupas.

The number of Buddhist monasteries, temples and shrines may grow in Buryatia in the future, alongside the restoration of religious life in the country. However, we may also expect that the pace of building and restoration of the destroyed monasteries and temples will not be as fast as it was at the beginning of the 1990s. This is primarily due to a lack of funds but also derives from certain

28 See for instance Aleksandr M. Piatigorsky, “The Departure of Dandaron”, *Kontinent* (London) 2, 1978, pp. 169–180; Elena Semeka, *Delo Dandarona* [Dandaron's cause, in Russian], Firenze: Edizioni Aurora 1974; Elena Semeka, “Delo Dandarona” [Dandaron's cause, in Russian], *Soel (Kul'tura)* 1/1, 1991, p. 6. See also Natalia L. Zhukovskaia, “The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia: Problems and Prospects”, in: Balzer Marjorie Mandelstam (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Russia: A Reader*, New York: M. E. Sharpe 2010, pp. 203–204; see also Michael Pye, “Political Correctness in the Study of Religions: Is the Cold War Really Over”, in: Iva Doležalová – Luther H. Martin – Dalibor Papoušek (eds.), *The Academic Study of Religion during the Cold War: East and West*, New York – Bern: Peter Lang 2001, p. 322; Michael Pye, *Strategies in the Study of Religions*, Berlin – Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2013, p. 231–234; see also Andrey M. Strelkov, *Vadzra-guru Bidia Dandaron* [Vajra-guru Bidia Dandaron, in Russian], Ulan-Ude: Udumbara 2013.



Common photograph of delegates, guests and visitors to the Tenth Congress of Soviet Buddhists; 8-11 October 1990. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

exhaustion amongst the people. Moreover, it must be recognized that the Buddhist “boom”, typical of the turn of the 1980s and 1990s is past its prime. Nevertheless, the Buddhist way of life again permeates all levels of Buryat society and life. The attempts to return to a tradition which was violently interrupted in the 1920s and 1930s have been incredibly successful.

1. Historical context



Buryat Buddhist lay women in front of a double stupa in Ivolginskiy Monastery, picture taken on 11 July 1967. (Photograph by Kristina Lange, archive of Donatas L. I. Butkus)



Buryat monks during the summer festival of the future Buddha Maitreya (Bur., *Maidar khural*), Ivolginskiy Monastery, Buryatiapicture taken on 11 July 1967. (Photograph by Kristina Lange, archive of Donatas L. I. Butkus)

1.4 Bidia D. Dandaron: life and work

Bidia Dandarovich Dandaron was a unique and exceptional figure in the history of Siberian, in this case Buryat, Buddhism of the 20th century. He introduced a completely new element into the local religious tradition: a non-monastic and non-public, even clandestine practice, concealed from state authorities. He did so in the historical context of the atheist state, which initially suppressed religion violently and then, after World War II, more or less put up with religion and tolerated it. In any case, the state always tried to govern religious life and to control it openly or in secret. The life story of B. D. Dandaron, his influence and role in the maintenance, transmission and development of Buddhist teachings in Buryatia seems an apt example for the study of the continuity and discontinuity of religion, in particular Tibetan Buddhism, in Buryatia.

Dandaron's career comprised two aspects of life, which contained both the ambivalence of Buryat Buddhism in the Soviet period and the ambivalence of Dandaron's activity at that time. As mentioned above, his life, work and role in Soviet Buryatia are not univocal, at least from the viewpoint of historical evaluation. We can speak of two sides of Dandaron's life, which may serve as a basis for discussing his significance in Buryat religious as well as social life. Dandaron was both a Buddhist and a Buddhologist; and it is no overstatement to say that the importance of both these roles was extraordinary. We intentionally leave aside Dandaron's academic work in the field of Buddhology, which has been the subject of a number of literary works.²⁹ We would like to concentrate on the other aspect of his life and work in order to accentuate the religious aspect of his persona; Dandaron the Buddhist. Firstly however, we must point out that there is a lot of information about Dandaron's religious side, but most of the sources are one-sided.

For the assessment of B. D. Dandaron as a religious official, active in Buryatia during a very critical period in the development of Buddhism, it is important to realize that, from the beginning, he was involved in "marginal" movements, which did not play a decisive role in the formation of the Buryat sangha.

²⁹ See e.g. Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*, London: Aquarian 1994; Vladimir M. Montlevich, "Buddizm na severe Rossii" [Buddhism on the North of Russia, in Russian], *Nauka i religii* 31/2, 1990, pp. 8–9; Vladimir M. Montlevich, "Tantra na zapad! O dukhovnom podvige Bidii Dandarona" [Tantra to the West! About Bidia Dandaron's Spiritual Development, in Russian], *Nauka i religii* 32/2, 1991, pp. 31–33; Vladimir M. Montlevich, "Dandaron Bidia Dandarovich", in: *Buddizm. Slovar*, Moskva 1992, p. 107; Viktor N. Pupyshev, "80 let B. D. Dandaronu, uchenomu-buddologu" [Eighty Years of B. D. Dandaron, a scholar-Buddhologist, in Russian], in: *Znamenatelnye i pamiatnye daty po Buryatii na 1994 god*, Ulan-Ude: Burnatsbiblioteka 1993, pp. 66–70; Viktor N. Pupyshev, "Nama Guro Radna Daryaya", *Svyashchenny Baikal* 1/1, 1993, pp. 30–31; Veronika Zikmundová – Daniel Berounský, "Bidija Dandaron", *R. Revue* 28, 1995, pp. 321–325; John Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia: The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's Emisary to the Tsar*, Shaftesbury – Dorset: Element 1993.

So, who was B. D. Dandaron? There are several brief biographies and one autobiography; probably the most extensive source, including rich photographic documentation is contained in Dandaron's selected works, published by Vladimir M. Montlevich in 2006.³⁰

Dandaron's life and work may be divided into nine periods, which were to a different extent defined by turning points:

- 1.4.1. Childhood (1914–1928)
- 1.4.2. Adolescence (1929–1931)
- 1.4.3. Study in Leningrad (1931–1937)
- 1.4.4. First imprisonment (1937–1943)
- 1.4.5. Freedom intermezzo (1943–1947)
- 1.4.6. Second imprisonment (1947–1955)
- 1.4.7. Freedom (1955–1965)
- 1.4.8. Teaching (1966–1972)
- 1.4.9. Third imprisonment (1972–1974)

Important turning points in B. D. Dandaron's life:

14 or 13 December 1914 – birth of B. D. Dandaron

July 1921 – Ceremony of bestowing the powers and title of Dharmaraja upon B. D. Dandaron.

1929 – High school student in Kiakhta

1930 – Student of Leningrad Civil Aviation Institute

1931 – Married to Elizaveta Andreevna Shulunova

1936 – Birth of the first son Leonid Bidievich Dandaron

1936 – Dandaron met Agvan Dorzhiev in the Buddhist temple in Leningrad

1937 – First imprisonment

1943 – Released from the gulag

3 March 1943 – Married to Zundyma Tsydypova

1947 – Imprisoned again

1955 – Released from Ulan-Ude prison

³⁰ They were written during police investigation and therefore markedly affected thereby; first published in 1994, see Vladimir Baraev, "Delo Dandarona" [Dandaron's cause, in Russian], *Buddiiskii mir* 1, 1994, pp. 76–83; see also Vladimir Baraev, "Aura i karma uchitelya" [The Teacher's Aura and Karma, in Russian], *Buddiiskii mir* 1, 1994, pp. 84–91.

- 1956** – Full judicial rehabilitation
- 1957** – Became a junior academic worker in Buryat All-Scientific Institute
(Rus. *Buryatskii kompleksnyi nauchnyi institut*)
- 1965** – First European disciples, origination of “Dandaron’s group”
- 1972** – Sentenced under Section 227, the only section of the Penal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialistic Republic concerning religion, and other sections to five years of imprisonment in labor camp
- 26 October 1974** – B. D. Dandaron died in Vydrino Labor Camp near Lake Baikal

1.4.1 Childhood (1914–1928)

Bidia Dandarovich Dandaron was born on 14 December 1914³¹ Khorinsk, Kizhinga aimag. His father was Agvan Silnam Tuzol Dorzhi Shob (Badmaev) and by the time he had this son he had been a well-known religious poet, tantra practitioner and philosopher. Agvan Badmaev obtained his education in Kizhinga Monastery in Buryatia. An important coincidence that affected the lives of both father and son was Badmaev’s apprenticeship under teacher Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov, an equally well-known tantric master, yogi and religious official. This particular teacher carried the title of Dharmaraja and would later play a decisive role in the young Dandaron’s life. Dandaron’s given name was Zida-Bazar (from Sanskrit *cittavajra* or “Diamond of Mind” or “Diamond of Heart”). B. D. Dandaron says about his early life:

“I was born in Buryat-Mongolian ASSR in the Kizhinga aimag, the village [Bur. *ulus*] of Shalot in the family of a peasant and herdsman, more precisely a monk and disciple of Lama Tsydenov, in 1914. My father’s name was Dorzhi Badmaevich Badmaev. I cannot remember when my mother Balzhima Abidueva married the peasant and herdsman Dandar Bazarov. They had two sons and a daughter. These three children got the name of their father, Dandaron. After the death of her first husband Dandar Bazarov, my mother went to her parents, where she unofficially lived with a monk, Lama Dorzhi Badmaev. She had two children with Badmaev, me and daughter Dashid. Because this relationship was not official, sister and I got the name of mother’s first

³¹ According to other sources it was 13 December 1914, cf. Vladimir M. Montlevich, “Dharmaradza Bidia Dandaron”, *Garuda* 1/1, 1992, p. 4. The view that he was born on 15 December 1916 is isolated; see Dmitrii O. Garmaev, *Filosofskie osnovy neobudizma Bidii D. Dandarona* [Philosophical Outline of the Dandaron’s Neobuddhism, in Russian], Moskva: Rossiiskaia akademiia gosudarstvennoi sluzhby 2005, dissertation manuscript, p. 14.

husband, Dandar Bazarov. My father Dorzhi Badmaev did not participate in our upbringing, he and his teacher Lama Tsydenov lived in a forest. They were in the state of homelessness.”³²

Lama Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov soon recognized the new rebirth of the Gyayag /Tib. *rgya yag*/ Lama in Dandaron and gave him a new name: Rigdzin, which means *Vidyadhara*, in Sanskrit literally “holder of wisdom”. The name remained preserved in Dandaron’s Buryat secular name Bidia.³³ B. D. Dandaron is one of the few Buryat “reincarnations” or “better rebirths” – *khubilgans* (Tib. *tulku /sprul sku/*). The institution of *khubilgans* was not wide-spread in Buryatia, unlike in Mongolia and Tibet it did not appeared until the mid-19th century. The first Buryat *khubilgan* was Sumaev and the second Danzan Norboev. Both of them were rebirths of the original Tibetan Kanjurwa Gegen.³⁴

All the testimonies about Bidia Dandaron’s status as a “recognized rebirth”, *khubilgan*, have, until recently, come from one source; his disciple, the Saint Petersburg Buddhist art historian and Buddhist, Vladimir M. Montlevich. Due to the fact that Montlevich had long been writing about Dandaron in a praising, mythical and poetic way, his texts have to be taken with a grain of salt. He did not support them with any literary sources or references to the bibliography. This shortcoming can be explained by the historical context. In the period at the outset of Stalinism and in particular during the culminating reprisals at the end of the 1930s, it was extremely dangerous to keep any written documents that could be interpreted as anti-Soviet. Documents about Dandaron as a Dharma-*raja* and the 14th Gyayag Lama could easily be classified as such. However, new testimonies from Buryatia and Tibetan Amdo have appeared recently, which shed more light on the matter. These testimonies were first published by the Russian scholar-Buddhologist and Buddhist Andrey M. Strelkov:

“Samdan Lama [Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov] recognized Bidia as the new rebirth of Dzha-yag Rinpoche (*Dhza-yag San gegen*) [i.e. the line of Gyayag Lama rebirths]. The former *khuvarak* [Bur., novice] of Kodun Monastery Ayusha Lama (1904–2001) told in 1997 that even before the boy was born, Lubsan Samdan [Tsydenov]

32 Vladimir Baraev, “Delo Dandarona...”, pp. 77–79.

33 Vladimir M. Montlevich, “Dharmaraja Bidia Dandaron...”, pp. 4–5.

34 See e.g. Luboš Bělka, “Burjatské ‘převtělení’ (chubilgáni)” [Buryat reincarnations (*khubilgans*), in Czech], *Hieron* 4–5, 2000, pp. 3–11; see also Luboš Bělka, “Burjatský buddhismus a Rusko: Instituce bandido *chambolamy* a *chubilgánů*” [Buryat Buddhism and Russia: An Institution of Bandita *Khambo Lama* and *khubilgans*, in Czech], in: Martin Slobodník – Attila Kovács (eds.), *Politická moc versus náboženská autorita v Ázii, Bratislava: Chronos 2006*, pp. 251–267; see also Caroline Humphrey – Hurelbaatar Ujeed, *A Monastery in Time: The Making of Mongolian Buddhism*, Boston: The University of Chicago Press 2013, p. 228.

had known that his spiritual teacher, reincarnation from Kumbum 13th Gyayag Lama Kalzang Tsultrim Tenpay Nyima,³⁵ was reborn in the boy and pointed it out after Bidia was born.”³⁶

The same or a similar story is told by Vladimir M. Montlevich, when he describes the circumstances of the 13th Gyayag Lama’s rebirth in Buryatia.

Bidia D. Dandaron, as a recognized reincarnation in the line of the Gyayag Lamas, appears in a special “Buryat” branch. Two points are remarkable in this context. Firstly, we encounter a relatively scarce phenomenon of a “division of the line of recognized reincarnations” which occurred after the Buryats rejected the relocation of Bidia D. Dandaron to the Tibetan capital monastery of Kumbum. Consequently, the Tibetans found “their own” reincarnation of the recently deceased 13th Gyayag Lama. Secondly, no attempts to ensure the continuity of this branch of Gyayag Lamas occurred in Buryatia. The reason for this may lie in the specific circumstances in the Soviet Union in the latter half of the 1970s. Firstly, for political reasons it was not possible to search for a reincarnation of Dandaron, who died in prison. And secondly, the tradition of khubilgans was officially abolished by the sangha itself in the middle of the 1920s.³⁷

Line of Gyayag Lamas:³⁸

- Vimalakirti (*dri ma med par grags pa*), India, Vaishali;
- Jalandhara,³⁹ siddha, India (also called Badradzin /’bar ba ‘dzin/);
- Gyani Tsenchen /*rgya yi mtshan can*/ (also called Tanagpa /*rta nag pa*/), Tibet, Nyingmapa order;
- Langrithangpa Dorje Sengge /*glang ri thang pa rdo rje seng ge*/, 1054–1123, Tibet;
- Je Lodroe Gyaltzen /*rje blo gros rgyal mtshan*/, Tibet;

35 Galina R. Galdanova speaks *expressis verbis* about the man named *Galsan Tsultim*, i.e. Gyaltsan Tsultrim /*rgyal mtshan tshul khrims*/ as about *zhayaksan gegen* (see her *Lamaizm v Buryatii. Struktura i sotsialnaya rol kultovoi sistemy* [Lamaism in Buryatia. The Structure and Social Role of the Cult System, in Russian], Novosibirsk: Nauka 1983, p. 125).

36 Andrey M. Strelkov – Evgeny A. Torchinov – Marina. V. Mongush – S. V. Riabov, *Buddizm: Kanony, Istoria, Iskusstvo* [Buddhism, Canons, History, Art, in Russian], Moskva: Dizain – Informatsia – Kartografia 2006, p. 434.

37 For more details see Luboš Bělka, *Tibetský buddhismus v Burjatsku* [Tibetan Buddhism in Buryatia, In Czech], Brno: Masarykova univerzita 2001, pp. 264–265.

38 This summary is based on the list prepared by Andrey M. Strelkov and published in: Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati: Chernaya tetrad; Materialy k biografii; Istoria Kukunora; Suma Kenpo* [Bidia D. Dandaron – Selected Works: The Black Notebook; Materials to the Biography, Kukunor History, in Russian], Saint Petersburg: Evrazia 2006, pp. 253–254.

39 About mahasiddha named Jalandhara (*dza la ndha ra; dza lan da ra; ‘dra ba ‘dzin pa*) see e.g. Andrey A. Terentyev, *Opredelitel buddiiskikh izobrazhenii/ Buddhist Iconography Identification Guide*, Saint Petersburg: Nartang 2004, p. 240, Fol. 17.

- Je Ponzang Legshe Nyima /*rje dpon bzang legs bshad nyi ma*/, Tibet, Gelugpa order;
- Lozang Jigme Chogle Namgyal /*blo bzang 'jigs med phyogs las rnam gyal*/, Tibet;
- Dragpa Gyaltzen /*grags pa rgyal mtshan*/, Tibet;
- Lozang Dargye /*blo bzang dar rgyas*/, Tibet;
- Ngawang Lodroe /*ngag dbang blo gros*/, Tibet;
- Lozang Khyenrab Tenpay Nyima /*blo bzang mkhyen rab bstan pa'i nyi ma*/, Tibet;
- 13th Gyayag Lama Kalzang Tsultrim Tenpay Nyima /*bskal bzang tshul khriims bstan pa'i nyi ma*/, died in 1913, khenpo of Jampaling Temple in Kumbum Monastery, Tibet;
- 14th (Buryat) Gyayag Lama Bidiadara Dandaron /*bidya dha ra*/, Dandaron Bidia Dandarovich, 1914–1974, USSR, Buryatia;
- 14th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama Lozang Tenpay Gyatsen /*blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*/, 1916–1990; Jampaling Temple in Kumbum Monastery, Tibet;
- 15th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama Lozang Palden Choje Wangchug /*blo bzang dpal ldan chos rje dban phyug*/; was born in 1992 and his traditional seat is Jampaling Temple in Kumbum Monastery.

We may also ask whether the choice of B. D. Dandaron as the reincarnation was random or not. Everything seems to indicate that it was no coincidence but rather the result of a deliberate agenda, on the part of Tsydenov, which aimed to ensure support for, and the continuity of, his reform attempt. If it had not been the young Dandaron, another boy would have been selected to play the role of the future leader of Tsydenov's wing of the Buryat Buddhist reform movement and he would have been prepared for his mission instead of B. D. Dandaron.

Both Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov and Dorzhi Badmaev saw their reforms as a long-term project that could last for decades because of its revolutionary and fundamental nature. Therefore they sought a boy who would, after a thorough Buddhist, but not monastic education, assume a leading role in the reform movement. Both monks thought the ideal person for this mission would be a son of one of them. According to V. M. Montlevich, the founder of Balagat movement was the Tibetan monk, Khambo Lama of a monastery in north-east Tibet, in Kumbum, who held the title of Gyayag Lama (in Russian often transcribed as *zhayagsy gegen*; V. M. Montlevich does not mention his name⁴⁰). The man must have been the 13th Gyayag Lama Kalzang Tsultrim Tenpay Nyima, khenpo, the superior of the Jampaling Temple in the Kumbum Monastery, who was at the

40 Vladimir M. Montlevich, "Dharmaraja Bidia Dandaron...", p. 5.

birth of the Balagat movement with his Buryat disciple Dharmaraja Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov and the father of B. D. Dandaron, Lama Dorzhi Badmaev. Certain aspects of the movement corresponded to the Tibetan “ecumenical” movement *rime* (Tib. *ris med*).

According to V. M. Montlevich, the founders of the Balagat movement, from its very conception, paid special attention to the Tibetan tradition of Nyingmapa and the teachings of Dzogchen. Their ideas were based on the work of the Tibetan Longchen Rabjampa (tib. *Klong chen rab 'byams pa*, 1308–1363). In addition, Dandaron’s father Dorzhi Badmaev translated the fundamental work of Longchen Rabjampa from the book *Zambo Yangut*, called the *Karnatantra*, *support for great Teaching, called the Mirror of deep mediation* (in Rus. *Karnatantra, opora velikogo Ucheniia, nazyvayemaya Zertsalo mekhanizma glubokogo sozertsania*).

Dandaron started work on the translation into Buryat when he was released from the gulags and continued after 1956. The Balagat movement required that monks refrain from the comfortable and lavish lifestyles in Buryat monasteries and leave to become genuinely homeless. The name of the movement is based on the Buryat term *baalaha*, which means “a person who left under the law”, in the vernacular it also means “to force”, referring to the forced departure from the official ecclesiastical structure.

The educated monks who formed the Balagat movement, Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov and Dorzhi Badmaev, lived in the easternmost monastery of the Kizhinga valley, Chesan. The first one was the superior of the Chesan Monastery; Lama Samdan (Bur. *Samdanei Lama*). The other was Erdeni Lama (Bur. *Erdeni Lamkhe*). The central figure in the reformation of the Balagat movement, after the death of the 13th Gyayag Lama, was Lama Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov. He belonged to the sangha of the Kizhinga Monastery. Together with his friends he formed the idea of “balaha” and left the monastery for the taiga at the foot of the Kudun Ridge near Kizhinga. He openly professed the tradition of yogis who practiced spiritual exercises from the times of the Indian mahasiddhas. This line of yoga was practiced in India and the Buddhist mahasiddhas flourished mostly between 8th and 11th centuries. It is said that the 13th Gyayag Lama Kalzang Tsultrim Tenpay Nyima had an especially warm attitude toward the Buryats, which was clear from his willingness to grant an audience to the Russian research expedition led by Piotr K. Kozlov in his home monastery of Kumbum in 1908.⁴¹ Decisive in this process was a letter of recommendation from the Buryat reformer and head of the *obnovlentsi* movement, Agvan Dorzhiev. The 13th Gyayag Lama had a strange experience during his last visit to Buryatia in 1910. Upon

41 See Piotr K. Kozlov, *Mrtvé město Chara-choto (Mongolsko a Amdo). Expedice Ruské zeměpisné společnosti 1907–1909* [Dead City of Khara-khoto Mongolia and Amdo. An Expedition of the Russian Geographical Society, in Czech], Praha: Pokrok 1929, p. 238.

arrival the Buryat believers asked him to grant them the *lun* initiation, or *wang Yamantaka*; the highest initiation of *Vajrabhairava Tantra*. Gyayag Lama agreed and said it would happen in Kizhinga. However, he had one request: he wished that the Russian disciples be present as well. The Buryat believers unharnessed the horses from the telega (horse-drawn carriage) and pulled the carriage, with the Lama still in it, in a wide circle, for three times. After that they gave him a khadak and pleaded for him to be reborn in Buryatia. The 13th Gyayag Lama promised that he would.⁴²

After the departure of the Tibetans, led by the 13th Gyayag Lama, from the Kizhinga valley, Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov and Dorzhi Badmaev left the Kizhinga Monastery and together with their disciples settled on the Sorkhoi plateau (also called Bur. *Lamyn Sorkhoi*), about twenty kilometers from Kizhinga. Lama Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov meditated on the deity of Vajrabhairava at that time, which had a significant formative influence upon Dandaron and his group. The achievement of higher levels was based on the close connection of the teacher with his disciple. Tantra was practiced on the level of *mahamudra*.

According to Viktor Nikolaevich Pupyshev⁴³ it was the most important reform in Buddhism since Tsonghapa's times. In the view of the reform monks, the monastic form of Buddhism was too corrupted and hitherto attempts to change it seemed insufficient. The situation called for immediate reforms. This idea would later, with the destruction of the monasteries, prove to have held tremendous foresight. The characteristics of the Balagat movement are probably somewhat overestimated, at least in terms of its real impact and significance. Nevertheless, they speak of the way in which the Buryats and in particular Dandaron's group – Viktor N. Pupyshev (see Fig. 20) was one of its earliest members – perceived the movement. Its beginnings may be geographically traced to the Kizhinga valley and the reform or the restoration of Buryat Buddhism itself was prepared as early as the 1890s. It is not clear from the documents and literature to what degree the Balagat movement intended to open up to the West. We may, however, assume that it was not one of their goals; the movement was interconnected with the development of Buryat nationalism, which – at least its Buddhist wing – was not much interested in a western orientation. One notable exception in the obnovlentsi movement was Agvan Dorzhiev, who expressly favored openness toward the West. B. D. Dandaron later took over the phenomenon of openness to the West and he went far beyond the ideas of his teachers Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov and Dorzhi Badmaev.

42 Vladimir M. Montlevich, "Dharmaraja Bidia Dandaron...", p. 5.

43 Viktor N. Pupyshev, "Zhizn, posvyashchennaya dukhovnomu sovershestvovaniu" [The Life Devoted to the Spiritual Development, in Russian], *Svyashchenny Baikal*, 1995, spetsnomer, pp. 9–12.

Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov, following the example of well-known Tibetan Buddhist yogis Tilopa and Naropa, proposed a change in monastic life, which would ultimately lead to its secularization. According to members of Dandaron's group, Tsydenov himself spent twenty-three years meditating outside the monastery walls. Such a life, beyond monastery walls, required special practices, which were not traditional in Buryatia. Therefore Lubsan Tsydenov sent his disciple Dorzhi Badmaev to China to study and obtain his initiation there. Badmaev initiated his teacher upon return, and thus they both became simultaneously each other's student and teacher.

As legend has it, although supported by V. M. Montlevich (this story is not found anywhere in literature except for in Viktor N. Pupyshev's work), Lama Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov held the title of Dharmaraja, the king of three worlds according to Buddhist doctrine: (1) the world of suffering, *samsara*, our visible world; (2) the world of forms, of deities and other intangible beings and of *asuras* (titans); and (3) the world without forms, the world of higher deities.⁴⁴

Besides recognizing B. D. Dandaron as the 14th rebirth of the Tibetan Gyayag Lama, Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov performed one more important formal act. He passed over his title of Dharmaraja to his successor, Bidia D. Dandaron. The ceremony is described by Vladimir M. Montlevich, who later became one of Dandaron's leading disciples:

"In July 1921 at a small temple [Bur. *dugan*]) at Sholuta, attended by crowds of people, the ceremony of handover of powers of [the title] Dharmaraja took place. Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov passed over the title to the seven-year old B. D. Dandaron. Dandaron was later raised in a family of deeply believing Buryats. He learned Tibetan, Mongolian and basics of Buddhism from lamas. His first teacher was Tsyden Unzad. He started to attend the school in Kizhinga in 1926. One of his teachers was the Buryat writer Khotsa Namsaraev, who later became well-known."⁴⁵

1.4.2 Adolescence (1929–1931)

After the year 1929, Bidia D. Dandaron continued his secular education in Kiakhta. There he met his future wife Elizaveta Andreevna Shulunova and he soon married her. Local believers knew all too well he was a reincarnation, a khubilgan (they named him *Bidiadara*). As the political and religious situation was getting worse and Dandaron quite paradoxically had to hide in Leningrad. B. D. Dandaron says about that life period:

⁴⁴ Viktor N. Pupyshev, "Zhizn, posvyashchennaya dukhovnomu...", p. 9.

⁴⁵ Vladimir M. Montlevich, "Dharmaraja Bidia Dandaron...", p. 5.

“I was married twice. First in 1931, when I was a student of the Leningrad Civil Aviation Institute [in Russian: *Leningradskii institut inzhenerov grazhanskogo vozduschnogo flota*]. My first wife was Buryat; her name was Elizaveta Andreevna Shulunova. She studied at the Leningrad Medical Institute. After my imprisonment, Shulunova continued in her studies. At that time she took care of our son Leonid Bidievich Dandaron, who was born in 1936. When I was in labor camp, Shulunova’s relatives wrote me that she had died on the way from Leningrad to Ulan-Ude and that my son stayed with my sister Syrma Khomisova in the Irkutsk Oblast.”⁴⁶

1.4.3 Study in Leningrad (1931–1937)

The young B. D. Dandaron was forced to leave Buryatia out of concern for his safety at the beginning of the 1930s. The Soviet authorities were probably aware of his status as khubilgan and the growing pressure from Soviet power, danger of imprisonment and the desire to obtain a European education drove him to Leningrad.

“It was typical of the approach of local Buryat authorities to Dandaron to hate him for he was the representative of the Buddhist spiritual tradition; the religion that they denounced and persecuted.”⁴⁷

Not much is known about the Leningrad period of Dandaron’s life. An important event was his encounter with Agvan Dorzhiev, who received him at the Leningrad Buryat Buddhist temple and monastery and recommended him to study eastern languages at LGU (Leningrad State University). Dandaron did not become Dorzhiev’s disciple and it is not known whether he attempted to be one. It is highly probable that the potential friendship was impeded by Dorzhiev’s antipathy towards his former competitor in the reform movement in Buryat Buddhism, the teacher of the young Dandaron, Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov.

1.4.4 First imprisonment (1937–1943)

Even in Leningrad Dandaron could not escape persecution and in 1937 he was arrested, charged with being a “pan-Mongolian and Japanese spy” and sentenced to death by firing squad. The sentence was later changed to twenty five years of hard labor due to the convict’s young age. Bidia D. Dandaron says about himself and that period:

⁴⁶ Vladimir Baraev, “Delo Dandarona”, *Buddiiskii mir* 1, 1994, pp. 79.

⁴⁷ Vladimir M. Montlevich, “Dharmaraja Bidia Dandaron...”, p. 5.

“I was released from Slobodinskoi camps in 1943 and I left for the ulus of Shalot, Kizhinga aimag in the B-M ASSR. I applied for the permission to travel to the Irkutsk Oblast to see my son Leonid. I got the permit and then we lived together in the village of Kizhinga in the Kizhinga aimag. On 3 March 1943 I got married for the second time. My second wife Zundyma Tsydyypova comes from the family of the herdsman Tsydyp Tsyrempilov. Now her father is a member of the cooperative and lives in Kirov’s Cooperative in the Kizhinga aimag of the B-M ASSR. Zundyma Tsydyypova was trained as a midwife. When we met for the first time, she worked in Kizhinga.

I left for Leningrad in 1943 and my family stayed in Kirov’s Cooperative, where my wife’s parents live. After I found a job in the Parabelsky District of the Tomsk Oblast and got an apartment, I decided to invite my family. According to the agreement, Shagdarov and I worked as artists. I did most of the work, while Shagdarov had more free time. I asked him to bring my family in the spring 1947 and we have lived together since. My older brother Gudorzhi Dandaron had worked as the chief of regional criminal service administration in the B-M ASSR, and lived in the capital of the republic, Ulan-Ude until 1937. In 1937 Gudorzhi was arrested under section 58–10 Penal Code of the RSFSR and sentenced to ten-year imprisonment. I do not know what has happened to him. The other brother Artosedi Dandarovich Dandaron went mentally ill in 1929 and was transported to the asylum in Tomsk, where he died in 1931.”

Dandaron continues in describing his life story:

“My older sister Syrma Khomisova married Zakhar Khomisovich Khomisov in 1925. My sister’s husband worked in the Irkutsk Oblast in the Ekhirit-Bulagat aimag in the village of Baiandai in the local cooperative unit. I know that he moved from the Irkutsk Oblast to Kizhinga, the Kizhinga aimag in the B-M ASSR, where he worked as the union representative in 1945. Zakhar Khomisov died in 1947. Syrma Khomisova nowadays works with children in Stalin’s Cooperative in the Kizhinga aimag. My other sister Dashid Dandaronova married a man who lived in Shalot and worked in the consumer union, whose name was Sanzhimityp Munkin. At present, he is the chairman of Voroshilov’s Cooperative in the Kizhinga aimag of the B-M ASSR. My mother Balzhima Abidueva lives with him. My older brother’s son Dzhabai Dandaron works in Moscow in the physics and engineering laboratory of the electro-mechanical institute as a junior researcher, and lives in 61–44 Osipenka street. I know that he wanted to leave and have permanent residence in Ulan-Ude. I am in no direct contact with him. I do not have any other relatives.”⁴⁸

This is what B. D. Dandaron says about his life. We must mention that this autobiography was written in the 1950s for the needs of the KGB, hence certain formulations.

⁴⁸ Vladimir Baraev, “Delo Dandarona...”, p. 79.

1. Historical context



The first of Dandaron's disciples, Butidma Sanzhimitypovna Munkina, with Bidia D. Dandaron, Buryatia, end of 1960s. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)



Bidia D. Dandaron, around 1955. (Archive of Donatas L. I. Butkus)

Dandaron was imprisoned in 1937 together with other Leningrad Oriental studies scholars and representatives of the Buryat Buddhist diaspora. After he was sentenced, he was transported to a gulag in Siberia. He spent a year and a half in a jail in Voinova street, where he borrowed the book by Oswald Spengler *Decline of the West*. The book clearly influenced his later work about the karma of nations and civilizations. In the Siberian gulag he wrote a book on aesthetics on 174 pages of a notebook. Let us quote a sentence from this work: “It is good for a Buddhist to be born in Russia,” adding: “For a Buddhist, not for Buddhists.”

1.4.5 Freedom intermezzo (1943–1947)

In the latter half of 1941, while imprisoned in the gulag, B. D. Dandaron made a request to be sent to the front lines. The request was not granted, but in combination with his illness it may have contributed to his early release in 1943. He was no exception: part of the surviving Buryat lamas was released from labor camps and returned home towards the end of the war. Buryat Buddhists used the relatively favorable situation after the Great Patriotic War to ask the highest Soviet power, Josif V. Stalin, for permission to build a new monastery (Ivolginskiy) and to reopen the Aginskoe Monastery, which had been closed down. According to Vladimir M. Montlevich “The letter was written by Dandaron and Darma-Dodi Lama, who had just returned from the gulag. Out of fifteen thousand Buryat lamas only two hundred returned after the war.”⁴⁹ Viktor N. Pupyshv is rather skeptical about Dandaron’s authorship of the letter: “According to some testimonies, which are impossible to verify now, at the end of the year 1946 Dandaron sent a letter to Stalin, asking him to reopen a monastery (Bur. *datsan*) in Buryatia.”⁵⁰

1.4.6 Second imprisonment (1947–1955)

However, life in Buryatia was not easy for Dandaron: he was arrested again in 1947 and sentenced to imprisonment in Ulan-Ude, where he spent eight years. He was released and fully exculpated in 1956. Very little is known about that period of Dandaron’s life. The first of Dandaron’s disciples were his co-prisoners in the gulags – Buryats, Russians, Hungarians, Germans, Poles and others. B. D.

49 Vladimir M. Montlevich, “Dharmaraja Bidia Dandaron...”, p. 6.

50 Viktor Pupyshv, “Zhizn, posvyashchennaya dukhovnomu sovershestvovaniu” [The Life Devoted to the Spiritual Development, in Russian], *Svyashchenny Baikal*, 1995, spetsnomer, p.10.

Dandaron spent almost a third of his life in Stalin's and Brezhnev's labor camps. His first works were written there; however, it is not clear which were written during his first and which during the second imprisonment.

The first three larger works written in the gulags were published unofficially, they were the so called *samizdat*. The first book, entitled *On the Relationship between Matter and Spirit* (Rus. *O vzaimootnoshenii materii i dukha*) captures the history of spiritual movements and philosophy of the West. The second work, which deals with the history of thought, is the *Aesthetics* (Rus. *Estetika*), and gives a brief history of western schools of aesthetics and an analysis of their development in the West. Neither of these works has so far been published. The last book, *Neobuddhism* (Rus. *Neobuddizm*), was smuggled out of the gulag by a Polish man named Kokoszka. The book was published in Thailand under a pseudonym.⁵¹

1.4.7 Freedom (1955–1965)

When Bidia Dandaron lived in Kizhinga, he was a family man. He had several children and one of them, his son Leonid (Gunganimbu) Bidievich Dandaron, became a successful professor of mathematics and physics and the Rector of a university.

B. D. Dandaron became a scientific assistant in the Buryat branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and began to work as a researcher and translator. At the same time, he was a non-public, clandestine Buddhist teacher (who of course did not have the state approval).

1.4.8 Teaching (1966–1972)

Dandaron had his first disciples before he was arrested and he taught in gulags. His followers were people from different nations. In 1965 came an event that, according to Viktor Nikolaevich Pupyshev, had been long awaited by Dandaron – he got the first disciple from the West, that is from the western part of the Soviet Union. Later, in the court proceedings of 1972, more than sixty of his disciples were named, both men and women, of “Dandaron’s group”, the illegal Buryat lay

⁵¹ Because the information about Kokoszka comes from Viktor N. Pupyshev and is written in Russian, the correct Polish form of the name may only be guessed. The story about publishing the book in Thailand has not been verified either. About Dandaron and philosophy, see Pavel Varnavsky, “‘National’ Religion in the Context of Globalization: Traditional Buddhism in Contemporary Buryatia”, in: Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz – Seline Reinhardt – Tatiana Skrynnikova (eds.), *Religion and Ethnicity in Mongolian Societies: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2014, p. 111–123.



Fig. 15

Bidia D. Dandaron with his second wife, Sofia Ivanovna Sampilova, Ulan-Ude, 1970. (Photograph by Vladimir M. Montlevich)



Fig. 16

Bidia D. Dandaron on his way to work, Ulan-Ude, 1972. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

sangha. His first “western” disciple was Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov. Dandaron was arrested, investigated and subsequently convicted of founding and heading a clandestine religious association, which violated the laws of the Soviet Union.

The mock trial against B. D. Dandaron was described in a book written by the Soviet Orientalist and direct disciple of Dandaron’s, Elena Semeka, who managed to emigrate to the USA after the trial.⁵² Not only the teacher but also his disciples were persecuted. However, they were not imprisoned, but examined in psychiatric clinics (so-called *psikhushky*), which in some respects were equal to or worse than the gulags. Patients were interned there without trial, upon the discretion of a psychiatrist. Both Viktor N. Pupyshev and Vladimir M. Montlevich had their experiences with Soviet psychiatrists. In addition, the well-known Buryat Buddhistologist Kseniia M. Gerasimova was to testify against B. D. Dandaron. She did write an expert opinion, however, she did not appear in court. The academic Andrey Dmitriyevich Sakharov supported Dandaron at Radio Liberty.⁵³



Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov.
(Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

1.4.9 Third imprisonment (1972–1974)

Dandaron was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment in Vydrino, a labor camp near Lake Baikal. There are various testimonies about his last sentence. “One of his disciples, heavily pregnant, took a great risk by smuggling food, tobacco and tea into the camp in Vydrino, through an acquaintance of hers. He could meet relatives twice a year.”⁵⁴ Even the highest representative of the Buddhist “church” in the Soviet Union, the 19th Buryat Pandito Khambo Lama Zhambaldorzhi Gomboev tried to get Dandaron freed. He traveled to Moscow to meet with the highest authorities, but to no avail.

It is remarkable that the top Buryat ecclesiastical hierarchy was not united and certain lamas took a different stand towards the issue. Although the 19th Buryat Pandito Khambo Lama Zhambaldorzhi Gomboev protested against Dandaron’s sentence, his deputy, S. Dylykov, clearly sided with Dandaron’s critics and judges. This becomes apparent from a letter, dated 12 October 1973, written to the honorary chairman of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, A. Sankhvasi. In this letter he replies to the latter’s inquiry into the persecution of B. D. Dandaron. In his reply, S. Dylykov fully identifies with the sentence.⁵⁵

52 See Elena Semeka, *Delo Dandarona* [Dandaron’s cause, in Russian], Firenze: Edizioni Aurora 1974.

53 Viktor N. Pupyshev, “Zhizn, posvyashchennaya dukhovnomu...”, p. 10.

54 Viktor N. Pupyshev, “Zhizn, posvyashchennaya dukhovnomu...”, p. 11.

55 The World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) was established in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1950 and it soon began to cooperate with the Central Spiritual Administration of Buddhists in the USSR. Buryat Buddhists were represented in this organization also by S. Dylykov for some time.

The full text of the letter (source: archives of Keston Institute, Oxford, file USSR/Budd-6):

A. Sankhavasi
 Honorary Secretary General of
 the World Fellowship of Buddhists
 Bangkok, Thailand
 In Moscow, 12 October 1973

Dear friend in Dharma,

I would like to inform you regarding “the persecution of Buddhist minorities in the USSR and imprisonment of a practicing Buddhist” as follows:

Reports of the alleged “persecution of Buddhist minorities in the USSR”, which appeared in the foreign press, do not actually reflect the situation of religious people in this country. The Buddhist citizens of the USSR enjoy full freedom of belief and in no case are subject to any repression.

The only person who appeared before a court for a criminal offence is a former lama⁵⁶, Bidia Dandaron, a man who has been employed as a junior researcher in the department of manuscripts of the Institute for Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Ulan-Ude in recent years. However, he was not so much interested in research work as in drinking and organizing the group of his “disciples”, in which there were no Buryats and no Buddhists. Naturally, they did not have any contact with Buddhists in this country.

Dandaron needed his “disciples” to get him money so that he may continue in his idle and lavish lifestyle. He demanded money, valuables and vodka, in order to organize frequent drinking orgies.

Dandaron willfully mistreated the articles of Buddhist faith. He threatened those who wanted him back to order and proper life that he would kill or harm them. Thus it happened that Dandaron and his “disciple” cruelly beat one of his fellow countrymen named Dambadorzhiev for criticizing him for his immoral conduct.

Dandaron’s adoptive son Dandar Dashiev, who is enrolled in Tibetan studies at Leningrad State University, repeatedly rebuked his stepfather for the chronic alcoholism. Several times, he had to protect his mother against gross violence committed upon her by his stepfather. Therefore Dandaron decided to punish his adoptive son for disobedience and attacked him in the streets of Ulan-Ude. If it were not for passersby, he would have become victim of hooliganism.

⁵⁶ B. D. Dandaron had never been a Buddhist monk, a fact, of which S. Dylikov was very well aware. The reason why he writes about him as a lama is not clear; maybe it should have been another evidence of Dandaron’s disputable moral profile.



Fig. 18

Bidia D. Dandaron on his way to work, accompanied by his youngest disciple Maia Kark, housing estate in central Ulan-Ude, 1972. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

1. Historical context



Viktor Nikolaevich Pupyshev on the left, Lama Agramba Gatavon on the right, Ulan-Ude, end of the 1960s. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

The people's court in Ulan-Ude reviewed Dandaron's case in a public procedure, established that the provisions of the Penal Code of the USSR were breached and issued the judgment of suspension of civil rights and three years in prison. Dandaron's "disciples" participated in the proceedings only as witnesses. The judgment was met with approval of Buryat public.

Some foreign newspapers and propaganda tools depict Dandaron the criminal as a martyr and present his crimes as alleged persecution of Buddhists in the USSR. The truth is that Buddhists as well as followers of other religions are allowed to freely engage in their religious rituals in our country.

Buddhists in the USSR celebrated *vesak* this year, and festivals in honor of the future Buddha Maitreya will be held in Buryat Buddhist temples in July. All the religious ceremonies were conducted by Pandito Khambo Lama Zhambaldorzhi Gomboev, Chairman of the Central Spiritual Administration of Buddhists in the USSR.

We, Buddhists of the Soviet Union are in no doubt that the court punished Dandaron for his criminal acts, not for his religious belief.

With kind regards,

Yours in Dharma,

Professor S. Dylykov

Vice-President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists⁵⁷

Dandaron's sangha was not the only unofficial Buddhist community in Buryatia after World War II. As Andrey A. Terentyev mentions:

"Several hundreds of former monks, who had been released from labor camps by that time, continued in illegal activity in all Buddhist regions. They performed religious rituals and practiced Tibetan medicine for fellow villagers and visitors. Although the KGB closely watched their actions, it did not assert further reprisals against them and limited itself to *discussions*, *warnings* and *admonitions*. Some of these monks had other disciples from different parts of the Soviet Union, which were not traditionally Buddhist. ... Further Buryat Buddhist groups gathered around Lama Z. Tsydenov and Z. Erdyneev from Ivolginskiy Monastery. The second mentioned group largely consisted of Estonian Buddhists led by Vello Värt. They erected two stupas dedicated to Buddha Shakyamuni, Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) and Mahakala."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The letter has been published in Czech, see Bělka Luboš, *Tibetský buddhismus v Burjatsku* [Tibetan Buddhism in Buryatia, In Czech], Brno: Masarykova univerzita 2001, pp. 98–100.

⁵⁸ See Andrey A. Terentyev, "Poslevoennaja reanimacija", [Postwar reanimation, in Russian], Saint Petersburg 1998, <http://cl18.cland.ru/buddhismofrussia/c1-6.htm> (23 March 2000).

Dandaron wrote a number of letters to his disciples from the Vydrino gulag, in which he continued in the synthesis of Buddhist teaching and contemporary image of the world of science. Here, he also wrote *The Black Notebook* (Rus. *Chernaya tetrad*), a book on the karma of nations of the Soviet Union and other nations of the world from the viewpoint of *Vajrabhairava Tantra*.⁵⁹ Even before his last imprisonment, B. D. Dandaron spoke of his departure:

“Dakinis [sky dancers] are beckoning,’ he used to say. His disciples begged him not to leave. However, as legend has it, in June 1972 in the apartment of his disciple O. F. Volkova, his bygone teacher Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov approached him and Dandaron said: ‘*Ochevidno, pridetsya v turmu sadisy*’ [Apparently, it is necessary to sit in jail]. In October 1974, the teacher suddenly left for samadhi. Before that, he asked his fellow prisoners not to disturb him, which they respected.”⁶⁰

B. D. Dandaron was the first Buddhist teacher to accept many lay European disciples, who came to Buryatia, and thereby enabled the continuity of the transmission of dharma (Buddha’s teaching) under contemporary circumstances and to new people. He was not isolated and did not work on his own as it may seem; he cooperated with important Buryat Buddhist monks from Ivolginskiy and later also from Aginskoe Monastery. Consequently, he had the approval and support of a certain part of the clergy, namely Lama Darma-Dodi, Lama Agramba Gatavon (see Fig. 19), the superior of the Ivolginskiy Monastery Tsyben Tsybenov, a Lama from Tuva Gendun Tsyren, Lama Dashiev and the 19th Buryat Pandito Khambo Lama Gomboev,⁶¹ which was an important prerequisite with regard to the institutional nature of the dharma transmission in Tibetan Buddhism.

Thus, B. D. Dandaron came with something different, something new. He had not enjoyed a formal monastic education, and yet possessed exceptional knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and doctrine. He was well acquainted with Oriental and western languages (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Mongolian, German, English, and Russian). He was not a monk, he had never studied in a monastery, but during his childhood years, he was recognized as one of the Buryat khubilgans, reincarnations, by Lama Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov. As popular Buryat legend has it, he even received the Buddhist title of Dharmaraja from Lama Tsydenov as



Viktor Nikolaevich Pupyshev, Ivolginskiy Monastery, end of the 1960s. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

59 This book was written in secret and it could only be published after the fall of the Soviet regime, see Bidia D. Dandaron, *Chernaya tetrad. O chetyrekh blagorodnykh istinakh Buddy* [Black Notebook. About the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, in Russian], Saint Petersburg: Datsan Guzeichoinei 1995.

60 Vladimir M. Montlevich, “Dharmaraja Bidia Dandaron”, *Garuda* 1/1, 1992, p. 9.

61 For more details see Boris Dondokov, “K stoletiu Bandido-Khambo-Lamy Zhambal-Dorzhi Gomboeva” [To One Hundred Years of Buryat Pandito Khambo Lama Zhambaldorzhi Gomboev, in Russian], *Buddizm* 1/4, 1997, p. 6.

a child. Therefore B. D. Dandaron held a very high and unusual post in Buryat Buddhism, which lay beyond traditional ecclesiastical structures.

As a youth, Dandaron also studied at a Soviet high school, later the Leningrad University of Technology (aircraft design) and on the recommendation of A. Dorzhiev, he attended the lectures of the Leningrad Orientalist Andrey Ivanovich Vostrikov. Later he was a prisoner, who completed his Buddhist education and yoga practice thanks to his Buryat fellow prisoners – lamas, and he learned European languages and philosophy from his German friends in prison, who were mostly intellectuals and academics. His first works were written in the gulag. For some time after his release, he was a private scholar, and at the end of the 1950s he became a professional academic researcher in the Ulan-Ude branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

Then he became the founder and teacher of a group of European and Buryat disciples. At the beginning of the 1970s, he was again, for the last time, imprisoned. This time, he did not return from prison: he died in October 1974, only sixty years old.

B. D. Dandaron became a point of intersection between the Buryat Buddhism of the previous, pre-Soviet era (he spent his childhood and first encounter with Buddhist teaching in the tsarist times) with the present, which he well understood (he was a Soviet citizen, European scholar and we may say – a modern man). He is also an intersection of the traditional Buryat education (he was “almost” a monk) and contemporary Russian academic Buddhology (he was a professional researcher and academic). However, he did not identify with either role. His true mission was to teach. He was an excellent teacher regardless of whether his disciple was a leading Soviet Orientalist or a common Buryat truck driver. He passed on the dharma to each of his disciples according to his or her intellectual abilities and degree of commitment.



Oktiabrina Fedorovna Volkova, Moscow, undated.
(Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

1.5 Dandaron's sangha

Dandaron's sangha is a unique phenomenon in the convergence of the West and the East behind the iron curtain in the period of Khrushchev's "melting" at the beginning of the 1960s and Leonid Brezhnev's "Neostalinism" at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

The wave of interest in the "wisdom of the East" in Asia spread throughout the Euro-American world at the beginning of the 1960s, and this trend also appeared in the former Soviet Union. The romantic quest for eastern mystical truths, the desire for mysteries inspired by the books of Hermann Hesse and by American beatniks and hippies appeared in a transformed form in the former USSR as well. Young people, particularly from larger cities, such as Moscow and Leningrad, tried to leave for India and south-east Asian countries. However, illegal emigration through the tightly sealed borders was very risky and many a "seeker of eastern wisdom" suffered the consequences in prison. Fortunately, many people realized that they did not have to risk this loss of freedom; they could look around their own country and travel for instance to Lake Baikal. As a result, the first lay European and Buryat Buddhist community was formed. Dandaron's first disciples were those romantic seekers of the eastern wisdom. Another type of Dandaron's disciples included young Soviet academics and researchers in the field of Oriental studies.

The Europeans interested in the Buddha's teaching arrived in Buryatia, which had been severely affected by the reprisals of the 1930s, from the middle of the 1960s. They were not tourists, but people who often abandoned their homes, jobs and families in Russia or the Baltics, and left for a new country, new knowledge and a new religion. They primarily went to see Dandaron, not the learned Buryat lamas who dwelt in the Ivolginskiy or Aginskoe Monasteries, or were active outside monasteries, following the example of "steppe lamas". Dandaron did not object to this influx of disciples; it had been planned that his first disciple would be a European, Natalia Kovrigina (married Klimanskene).⁶² Although this first attempt to gain a disciple was not successful, it strengthened Dandaron's belief that it would be better to teach more people, even those originating from Europe. The old Buryat lamas from the Ivolginskiy and Aginskoe Monasteries and outside, such as Buda Lama Tsygmunov and others, were not able to fulfil the role of teachers to European students interested in the Buddha's teaching as well as B. D. Dandaron for several reasons.

Besides language and cultural barriers, one of the main reasons why Buryat monks had so few disciples was that they only knew the traditional monastic



Linnart E. Mäll, Estonian disciple of Bidia D. Dandaron, end of the 1960s.
(Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

⁶² Natalia Klimanskene, "Bidia Dandaron. Kakim ya ego pomnyiu" [Bidia Dandaron. In My Memoirs, in Russian], in: Dandaron Bidia D., *99 pisem o buddizme i lyubvi (1956–1959)*, Saint Petersburg: Datsan Guzeichoinei 1995, pp. 24–28.



Dandaron's group; from the left sitting: Vasili Petrovich Repka, Viktor Shikovich Aranov, Bidia D. Dandaron, Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov, from the left standing: (?), Yuri Konstantinovich Lavrov, Oleg Vladimirovich Albedil, Margarita Fedorovna Albedil, (?), Dandar Dashiev. Ulan-Ude, 1971. (Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)

educational system based on a firm relationship between the teacher and his pupil. They had been raised in such a system, it formed part of their tradition and it was not possible to suddenly change it.⁶³ They expected their disciples to be *khuvaraks*, novices, which was impossible at that time due to the administrative regulation of religious life in Soviet Buryatia. It was not possible for a citizen of the European part of the Soviet Union to become a Buddhist monk: such a person could not obtain state approval.

Given the Soviet parameters B. D. Dandaron traveled quite a lot, although only within the Soviet territory (he did not own a *zagranpassport*, a passport). He knew the European part of the Soviet Union, he stayed in the Baltics, Moscow and Saint Petersburg (then called Leningrad). He met with colleagues – Orientalists, including the outstanding Tibetanist Yuri Roerich. His disciples included leading Orientalists like Aleksandr M. Piatigorsky, and the future excellent researchers and academics Oktiabrina F. Volkova (see Fig. 21), Linnart E. Mäll (see Fig. 22) and Donatas Butkus (see Fig. 26). B. D. Dandaron had sufficient knowledge of

⁶³ Buryat lamas did have several disciples, especially after B. D. Dandaron was imprisoned in 1972 and could not continue in teaching his disciples. Such disciples included for instance Andrey A. Terentyev and Aleksandr I. Breslavets.



Fig. 24

Dandaron's group in winter 1971; from the left: Vasili Petrovich Repka, Mark Petrov, Viktor Shikovich Aranov, Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov, Nadezhda Sanzhimitypovna Munkina, Leonid Makhov, Bidia D. Dandaron, Viktor Nikolaevich Pupyshev, Donatas Liudvikas Juzovich Butkus, Oleg Vladimirovich Albedil. (Archive of Donatas L. I. Butkus)

western science; he studied it and sympathized with it. None of these traits were to be found in contemporary, learned Buryat lamas. Although they shared similar life stories, they objectively could not play the role held by Dandaron.

B. D. Dandaron was a victim of Buryat anti-Buddhist reprisals in a particularly pronounced way. He was their subject in both the Stalinist period of the 1930s, and the neo-Stalinist period of the 1970s. Dandaron's destiny was unique in this respect; none of the lamas had had such a harsh life as he did. Buryat lamas were subject to reprisals as a religious and social group. Soviet power differentiated its attitude to them on the basis of monastic hierarchy and wealth, and divided them into three groups.

The first group included rich lamas and representatives of the highest hierarchy. These people were either executed without a trial or they were sentenced to death, which in a few cases changed into decades in the gulag.

The second group included older lamas and those of the mid-level hierarchy. These were usually sentenced to long-term imprisonment in the gulags, not to death. Only a few of them avoided arrest and embarked on a lay life.

The third, most numerous group included young lamas and novices. Their future was the most favorable of all the three groups. Usually, they did not

stand trial, but they had to leave the monasteries, start a civil life and become standard Soviet citizens who were involved in building socialism. Many of them got married, had children, found new civil professions, and thus fully embraced their new status dictated by the Soviet establishment.

These different treatments of the lamas did not apply to B. D. Dandaron because he was neither a monk nor a lama. His sentence was not immediately connected to the Buryat Buddhist sangha.

The genesis of the new form of Buddhism in the midst of the traditional Buryat sangha dates back to the middle of the 20th century. The first attempts to restore Buddhism in Buryatia appeared after World War II, and consisted of an attempt to salvage what was left of religious life after a decade of anti-religious reprisals. All the monasteries were closed down, many monks were executed and the rest had been forced to disrobe their monastic attire in the 1930s. The middle of the 1960s, the period of the first criticism of Stalin's cult, saw the rise of a small, but important Buddhist community in the capital city of Buryatia. This unofficial, or more precisely, secret micro-sangha, led by Bidia D. Dandaron, Buddhist and Buddhologist, existed until the year 1972, when Dandaron was imprisoned. He was sentenced to five years in a labor camp, where he died in the age of sixty in 1974. One of his first disciples was Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov (1940–1996), a biologist by education as well as a painter of thangkas. After his teacher died, he painted the mandala of Vajrabhairava and thirteen deities. The rendition was innovative, out of line with the established traditions and standards. The subsequent text intends to show the origins of a new religious community, how it perceived the world around it and how it incorporated its vision into the mandala. It is surprising how much can be learned about Dandaron from the depiction; what cannot be seen is the rising cult of B. D. Dandaron, which, during his life was, and still is, accepted with a certain hesitation by the official Buryat sangha.

It follows from a KGB document published by Vladimir Baraev in 1994:

“In 1966 the group consisted of (1) Piotr Erdyneevich Dambadarzhaev, teacher of mathematics in an evening school, born in 1933, not a party member, university education; (2) Butidma Sanzhimitypovna Munkina, high school teacher of Russian language and literature, born in 1928, not a party member, university education, wife of a school principal; (3) Dugarzhap Gyrgueevich Baiartuev; born in 1926, high school principal, member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU); (4) Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov, born in 1940, Russian nationality, not a party member, since 1966 living in Kizhinga; (5) Dashi-Dorzhi, driver, age ca 40 years, working in the bakery of Kizhinga Sovkhoz. Other members of Dandaron's group such as Butidma Sanzhimitypovna Munkina, Dugarzhap Gyrgueevich Baiartuev, Piotr Erdyneevich



Galina Alekseevna Montlevich,
Dandaron's disciple, Buryatia, 1971.
(Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets)



Dandaron's group in 1992; from the left Donatas Liudvikas Iuzovich Butkus, Galina Alekseevna Montlevich, Vladimir Mikhailovich Montlevich, Antanas Danelius, Vasili Petrovich Repka. (Archive of Donatas L. I. Butkus)

Dambadarzhaev and Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov had to account for their conduct to their colleagues in the Kizhinga High School, who called a special meeting for that purpose. The regional executive committee of the CPSU assessed the issue of the Kizhinga High School principal, member of the CPSU Dugarzhap Baiartuev. Bidia Dandaron had a preventive interview with the director of Buryat Scientific Center comrade Lubsanov, vice-director comrade Sanzhiev and secretary of the local Party organization comrade Pubaev. Dandaron admitted his mistakes and promised to disassemble the *suburgan* that he had erected.”⁶⁴

In reality, Dandaron's sangha was much more numerous; hopefully its complete list is the one created by Vladimir Montlevich⁶⁵ (the year of entry to the micro-sangha, dates of birth and death; not all the information is up-to-date):

64 Vladimir Baraev, “Delo Dandarona”, *Buddiiskii mir* 1, 1994, p. 80.

65 Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati: Chernaya tetrad; Materialy k biografii; Istoria Kukunora; Suma Kenpo* [Bidia D. Dandaron – Selected Works: The Black Notebook; Materials to the Biography, Kukur History, in Russian], Saint Petersburg: Evrazia 2006, pp. 386–387. About Linnart Eduardovich Mäll and B. D. Dandaron see Märt Läänemets, “Mäll Linnart: Creator and Translator”, in: Tarmo Kulmar – Märt Läänemets (eds.), *Humanistic base texts and the Mahayana Sutras*, Volume 3 of *Studia Orientalia Tartuensia*, Tartu: University of Tartu 2008, pp. 11–20; Märt Läänemets, “In memoriam Linnart Mäl”, *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* 11/1, 2010, pp. 151–156.

1. Butidma Sanzhimitypovna Munkina (1944; 1923–2005, see Fig. 13)
2. Natalia Yurevna Klimanskene (1956; 1930-)
3. Piotr Erdyneevich Dambadarzhaev (1965; 1932–2006)
4. Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov (1965; 1940–1996)
5. Galina Dmitrievna Meriasova (1966; 1943-)
6. Yuri Alekseevich Alekseev (1967; 1941–1983)
7. Viktor Nikolaevich Pupyshev (1968; 1944–1998)
8. Vladimir Mikhailovich Montlevich (1969; 1940-)
9. Nadezhda Sanzhimitypovna Munkina (1969; 1938-)
10. Vasili Petrovich Repka (1969; 1940–1992)
11. Farida Malikova Zheleznova (1969; 1944-)
12. Aleksandr Moiseevich Piatigorsky (1969; 1929–2009)
13. Anchen Ayusheevich Dashitsyrenov (1969; 1918–1992)
14. Dolgorma Badmaeva
15. Donatas Liudvikas Butkus (1970; 1939-)
16. Oktiabrina Fedorovna Volkova (1970; 1926–1982)
17. Mark Petrov (1970; 1928-)
18. Oleg Vladimirovich Albedil (1970; 1946-)
19. Yuri Konstantinovich Lavrov (1970; 1946–2002)
20. Oleg Vladimirovich Albedil (1970; 1946-)
21. Viktor Shikovich Aranov (1970; 1948-)
22. Yanina Petrovna (1970; 1931-)
23. Leonid Makhov (1970; 1944-)
24. Linnart Eduardovich Mäll (1970; 1939–2010)
25. Yuri Mikhailovich Donets (1970; 1943-)
26. Dasarma Dugarzhapovna Bayartueva (1971; 1948-)
27. Galina Alekseevna Montlevich (1971; 1943-, see Fig. 25)
28. Andrey Mikhailovich Donets (1971; 1948-)
29. Batodalai Dugarov (1971; 1949–2007)
30. Aleksandr Ivanovich Viaznikovtsev (1971; 1948-)
31. Maia Kark (1971; 1952-)
32. Maret Kark (1971; 1954-)
33. Dema Sanzhimitypovna Munkina (1971; 1950-)
34. Antanas Danelius (1972; 1942–2002)
35. Tsyvan Anchenovich Dashitsyrenov (1972; 1948-)