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**Delgeriin choir, the Monastery of Zawa lam Damdin
in the Gobi**

The aim of the present article¹ is to give a detailed description of a special monastery of the Gobi area, the monastery of Zawa lam Damdin, a famous Mongolian philosopher lama of the 20th century, including its history, temples and monastic schools, famous lamas, and monastic life and ceremonial activity in it; as well as its current situation and revival, and thus to give a sample of the extensive field researches I conducted on the sites of old but destroyed monasteries of different size and type in Mongolia between 2005 and 2009. This included a survey executed in 2007 summer together with Krisztina Teleki on 150 old monastic sites and in 40 present-day Buddhist temples in Öwörkhangaï, Dundgow' and the south part of Töw province in the framework of the Documentation of Mongolian Monasteries project of Arts Council of Mongolia as one of the six research teams, the only foreign researchers involved². The documentation of monastic sites I had an opportunity to visit included recording GPS data, drawing drafts of the visible arrangement of monastery buildings, taking photos, and collecting all the available oral history regarding the sites from the very few still living informants: old lamas who had been lamas before the 1937 purges (mass executions and destroying of monasteries). This work of collecting oral history on the monastic life of old monasteries we started in 2006 when we interviewed 32 old lamas living in Ulaanbaatar, and continued in 2007 and 2009, recording repeated interviews with the still living ones and recording new ones with other old lamas in Ulaanbaatar and in the countryside as well (counting to about 80 lamas, of these 40 in the capital), putting an emphasis on the historical importance of old lamas' memories. For this article,

¹ The present article was written by the support of the János Bolyai Research Scholarship (Bolyai János Kutatási Ösztöndíj) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

² On details of these see Teleki, K., Building on ruins, memories and persistence: Revival and survival of Buddhism in the countryside. In: *Silk Road 7*, Seattle 2009, pp. 64-73.; Majer, Zs., Buddhism in Mongolia Today: Continuation or Disjuncture with the Past and the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition, In: *The Silk Road*, Volume 7, 2009 autumn, Seattle, pp. 51-63.; and Majer, Zs. — Teleki, K.: On the Current Condition of 190 Old and Present-Day Monastic Sites in the Mongolian Countryside. In: *Zentralasiatische Studien* 39 (2010), pp. 93- 140., Bonn and the homepage of the project www.mongoliantemples.net.

various written sources on the monastery were consulted and data from the recorded interviews were also included in the description.

The monastery described here, Delgeriin Choir, was chosen from the numerous monasteries studied as it was a special one, being important at the last decades before the monastery destructions. It worked only for 20 years: it was closed in 1937 similarly to other Mongolian monasteries, but was founded only in 1917-18. During this short time, however, it became one of the most important monasteries, due to the activities of Zawa Lam Damdin, its founder and head. It became the main monastery of the old Daichin beisiin khoshuu of Tüsheets khan aimag, that is, the land of Daichin *beis* (a Manchu title given for nobles by the emperor) in the administrative division belonging under Tüsheets khan.³ The site is today in Delgertsogt subprovince of Dundgow' ('middle Gobi') province.⁴ It was among the bigger ones of the once existing 1000 monasteries, being a real *khüree*⁵, big monastic city with its around 600-800 lamas, and being the central monastery in its *khoshuu* ('banner, battalion, administrative unit', smaller units in the old *aimag* divisions), though it did not belong to the biggest monastic cities, as these had around or above a thousand lamas (only perhaps 30 monasteries had about a thousand lamas and only a few had even more. The monastic capital Ikh khüree or Bogdiin khüree had ten thousand lamas). It was however important, due to being a place of Buddhist education with specialized monastic schools in various subjects of Buddhist studies. It was one of the privileged or highest category monasteries, belonging directly under the emperor (at the time, after the fall of the Manchu Qing dynasty, China's last dynasty, in the autonomous period between 1911-1921 being the 8th *bogd* or *jewtsündamba khutagt* or the Bogd khaan (T. rje-btsun dam-pa, 'the holy lord', the Buddhist religious holy leader or 'living Buddha' of Mongolia)), thus having the right of having 1000 monks and other privileges. On the history of its

³ The area of the *Khalkh* Mongols was divided into four big areas (*aimag*) of the four *khans*, which were divided into smaller units (*khoshuu*, 'banner, battalion'), the centre of which was the monastic city of a worldly noble (*khüree*). These *aimag* divisions and the *khoshuu* subdivisions within them had changed many times.

⁴ Today there are 18 big and some smaller provinces (*aimag*), and some cities with county level state. The area of Dundgow' province is divided into 15 sub-provinces, with the centre being Mandalgow' city. The *aimag* area belonged to different *khoshuus* of the old Tüsheets khan aimag (namely Daichin beisiin khoshuu, Tüsheets wangiin khoshuu, and possibly Achit güinii khoshuu) and Setsen khan aimag (Borjigin Setsen wangiin khoshuu).

⁵ Old Mongolian monastic sites can be divided into the following categories: monastic city (*khüree*) with about 800-2000 lamas, monastery (*khüid*) with about 50-500 lamas, temple (*süm* or *dugan*, T. 'du-khang) with some dozens of lamas and assembly (*khural* or *jas*) with only a few lamas with permanent or only temporary ceremonies.

foundation detailed data is available, and from this, readers can get a picture of the way Mongolian monasteries first founded as yurt temples were moving from place to place several times before settling down at their permanent or final site. Also, as interviews with two old lamas were recorded concerning the monastery, here first-hand data gained resulted in a detailed description. On top of this, it was revived after the democratic change at its old isolated site and in spite of this is working actively now, which also makes it interesting for readers such as being able to get details of the operation of present-day Mongolian temples of the countryside. Its current condition is also a good example of what destruction the purges of 1937-38 left. It is only a few percent of old monastic sites where there are still even partial remains, with at least a temple building standing, and a very few monasteries remained intact but even these only partly. In some cases these remained temple buildings were revived and are used as a temple, but in other cases they are neglected and in an extremely bad state of repair. There are again sites where no temple building remained, but only remnants of the other buildings, mostly lama dwellings and where the layout of the old complex is still easy to make out. Delgeriin Choir belongs to this last category of sites.

Zawa lam Damdin, Luwsandayan

Zawa lam Damdin (T. *rtsa-ba bla-ma rta-mgrin*) was born as Shagdariin Damdin (1867-1937), and known later also as Luwsandayan (T. *Blo-bzang rta-dbyangs*, in allusion to his magnificent learning like that of Ačvaghōāa, T. *rta-dbyangs*⁶), and as Luwsandamdin (T. *Blo-bzang rta-mgrin*). Zawa is an honorific title given to him, derived from Tibetan *rtsa-ba*, 'fundamental, basic, basis, source', or *rtsa-ba bla-ma*, 'the guru who knows all the originals'.

He was born from father Shagdar and mother Sodnompil on the 7th of February, 1867, as their fourth children in Gow' Üizen güni khoshuu of Tüsheets khan aimag (today's Delgertsogt subprovince in Dundgow' province), at a place called Tsagaan khad near Delgertsogt Mountain. As early as at the age of 4-5 he started to learn Tibetan from *ácarya sangs-rgyas* (Sanjee)⁷ and from his brother Jinba zurkhaich (astrologer Jinba)⁸, and started to memorize Tibetan texts, in which he proved to be extremely talented. At the age of 7 he joined Tsakhiurtiin khiid of his homeland (a monastery situated in the same *khoshuu* and today in the same subprovince)⁹. He studied philosophy from Borjgin

⁶ Lokesh Chandra, p.30.

⁷ Lokesh Chandra, p. 31.

⁸ *Buddiin shashin, soyoliin tailbar tol' 1-2*. [Dictionary of Buddhist Religion and Culture, volumes 1-2.], p. 313.

⁹ Dagwadorj, D., p. 187.



Zawa lam Damdin, painting by Pürewbat lama

Jamts, Minjüür *agramba* (T. sngags-rams-pa, doctor of tantric or Vajrayāna studies, name of a degree), and Dandar *agramba* from (Daichin) wangiin khüree or Khand chin wangiin khüree once situated near the present Bulgan *aimag* centre being in the old times Daichin wangiin khoshuu of Tüsheet khan aimag (1835-1916, belonged to Dashchoimbel datsan, T. bkra-shis chos-'phel grwa-tshang)¹⁰. At the age of 17 he went to Da khüree or Ikh khüree, the then monastic capital of Mongolia, to pursue further studies in philosophy in its Gūngaachoilin datsan (T. kun-dga' chos-gling grwa-tshang). There his teachers were for example Jigjid *gawj* (T. 'jigs-byed) and Agwaanrichin (T. ngag-dbang rin-chen)¹¹. He took *domiin damjaa* (T. sdom-pa'i dam-bca', 'to take a vow', a degree in philosophy) in 1891, and at the age of 39, in 1905 he gained the *gawj* degree (T. dka' bcu, meaning 'ten hardships', a philosophical exam). Then he went to Wu-t'ai-shan (T. ri-bo rtse-lnga, 'mountain with five peaks', monastic and pilgrimage site in China) and to Tibetan monasteries, where he became a student of the 13th Dalai Lama, Tüwdenjamts (T. thub-bstan rgya-mtsho, 1876-1933). He himself became a well-known master and philosopher, composer of numerous texts. His famous students were for example *agramba* Ishdagwa, *dooramba* Baldansambuu, and *gawj* Yondon¹². He was very famous of his deep knowledge in his time, and well-known not only among the Mongols, but in Tibet, too, where he became known as *Sogwu* (T. sog-po) Luwsandayan, that is, 'the Mongolian Luwsandayan'. Sh. Soninbayar gives examples¹³ of how different Tibetan lamas staying in Ikh khüree for a while brought his fame to Tibet upon returning to their homeland. When the 13th Dalai Lama visited Mongolia in 1905 (when he had to escape from Tibet from the invading British forces led by Younghusband), many Tibetan *lkhaaramb* lamas (T. lha-rams-pa, the highest philosophical degree that could only be gained in Lhasa, once a year during the Lunar New Year) accompanying him had religious disputes (*nom khayaltsakh*, T. rtsod-lan) with the main masters of the two philosophical monastic schools of Da khüree. Among them were knowledgeable Mongolian lamas of the time such as Borjgon Jamts (Jamts from Borjignii Janjin Züün Choir monastery, once situated in present Sümber sum of Gow'-Sümber aimag which was that time the area of Borjigin setsen wangiin khoshuu of Setsen khan aimag), Ööld Sowd (of Öölöd western-Mongolian origin), Ikher Samdan, Zawa Damdin, Angi Shagdar (1869-1935, belonged to Dashchoimbel datsan), and Darwa bandida Agwaanchoijordondow (Darwa pandita, 1870-1923, belonged to Gūngaachoilin

¹⁰ *Buddiin shashin, soyoliin tailbar tol' 1-2*. [Dictionary of Buddhist Religion and Culture, volumes 1-2.], p. 313. Dagwadorj, p. 188. also says that he studied from Borjgin Jamts and Dandar *agramba*.

¹¹ Dagwadorj, D., p. 187. Lokesh Chandra, p. 31. gives mkhas-dbang and 'jigs-byed.

¹² Dagwadorj, D., p. 188.

¹³ Soninbayar, Sh., p. 25.

datsan), and especially Zawa Damdin and Angi Shagdar gained fame in these debates. He was also a member of the Mongolian Scientific Academy, called that time *Sudar bichgiin khüreeleen* ('Committee of writings'), and was highly valued not only in Mongolia and not only by lamas but also by orientalist of his time.

He was one of the greatest representatives of Mongolian scholar-lamas, who wrote his books in Tibetan language and translated from Mongolian into Tibetan. His works were compiled in twelve volumes. Historical writings occupy the main place in his writings, and of these the most outstanding one is the Khor Choijün, 'History of (Buddhism in) Mongolia' (T. hor chos-'byung) or Altan Dewter, 'Golden Annals' written in Tibetan, being the last of the Mongolian chronicles or 'Histories of the Teaching' (choijün, T. chos-'byung). His other works were on different subjects such as philosophical and tantric texts and commentaries, astrological texts, ceremonial texts, among them *san* texts (T. *bsangs*) or incense offerings of many different mountains of his *khoshuu* area and other Mongolian sites, poems, eulogies, etc. His works have been acclaimed even in Tibet and some of his texts are used in Tibetan philosophical monastic schools in India¹⁴. From the point of view of researching the history of Mongolian monasteries, the 8 folios list of the most important 75 Mongolian monasteries included in his chronicle is of great importance¹⁵.

Apart from composing works, Zawa Damdin's activity was very wide¹⁶: He founded a monastic school (Choir) in Khötliin khiid or Khötöl monastery in the same area as his monastery belonged to, Daichin beisiin khoshu (today Ölziit sum of Dundgow' aimag)¹⁷; he initiated the *Tsam* religious dance (T. 'cham) about the lifestory of Milarepa, the famous yogi and poet of the Tibetan Karma Kagyü school (1040-1123), called *Myal bogdiin tsam* to be performed in Mökhiin jas (name of a monastery also in Daichin beisiin khoshuu, today Saintsagaan sum of Dundgow' aimag), and visited many Mongolian monasteries to give teaching and different initiations (*lün*, T. lung, 'scriptural/ oral transmission, spiritual teachings'; *wan / awshig*, T. dbang, S. abhiṣeka, 'empowerment, initiation'; and *jinan / jenan*, T. rjes gnang, 'authorization, empowerment, permission blessing')¹⁸. His activities were supported by for example the 8th *jewtsün-damba khutagt*; Angi Shagdar of Olon khüree (a monastery in the area of today's

¹⁴ *Buddiin shashin, soyoliin tailbar tol' 1-2*. [Dictionary of Buddhist Religion and Culture, volumes 1-2.], p. 314.

¹⁵ The monastery list of his chronicle is analyzed in detail by Teleki, K.

¹⁶ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 68.

¹⁷ Lokesh Chandra, p. 31. says the same, giving the philosophical manual of the monastery as well: In 1935, at a place called Kötül he established the College of the Blo-gsal-gling yig-cha.

¹⁸ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 68.

Saikhan dulaan sum of Dornogow' aimag, he belonged later to Dashchoimbel datsan); Yündendorj of Sain noyon khanii khüree (Uyanga sum of Öwörkhangaigai aimag, once Sain noyon khanii khoshuu of Sain noyn khanii aimag); Sanjjaw, who was also known as *Nomchiin lam* and was the *lowon* lama (T. slob-dpon, 'master') of Ulaan Sakhiusnii khiid (Khanbogd sum, Ömnögow' aimag) established by Noyon khutagt Danzanrawjaa (T. bstan-'dzin rab-rgyas, 1803-1856, the fifth reincarnation of a Sakya saint, abbot of Khamriin khiid in the present Dornogow' aimag, author of Tibetan-Mongolian bilingual poems, plays, founder of numerous monasteries in the Gobi, a monastic theatre, and a museum), which was situated about a half örtöö (relay station, there were situated 30 kilometres from each other) from Delgeriin Choir, Sandüijaw who was the abbot of Zoogiin khiid (a monastery situated in the area of the present Saintsagaan sum of Dundgow' aimag) and who revised the Khor Choijün; Luwsangonchig, who was the abbot of Khadan usnii khiid in Tüshee wangiin khoshuu (today Erdenedalai sum of Dundgow' aimag), and who edited the work Khor Choijün; Jamiyandonoi, who was the *shireet lam* (enthroned lama, a high rank) of Mökhiin jas and was the pupil of Zawa Damdin; Pagwajaw, who was the abbot of Lusiin khiid (monastery in the area of today's Khuld sum of Dundgow' aimag) and Mönkh-Ochir noyon, the local noble. After this active life Zawa Damdin died at the age of 70 in 1937 summer.

Here his monastery is dealt with, the central monastery in its *khoshuu*, which he settled at its final place, and made an important center of philosophical studies.

Delgeriin Choir, the monastery of Zawa lam Damdin

Delgeriin choir, known shortly also as Choir [though this means only 'monastic school' in general] is marked by Rinchen on his map of the Dundgow' monasteries as Delger Choiriin khiid as No. 735. According to Luwsandarjaa lama, head of the revived monastery and the current incarnation, the original Tibetan name of the monastery was Gandanchoidarlin (T. dga'-ldan chos-dar gling) or Gandanchojjillin (T. dga'-ldan chos-'dzin? gling) and later the 8th *bogd* gave the name Choiinodsallin (T. chos-'dbyings 'od-gsal gling) to it. This later was the widely known Tibetan name for it. The 'Encyclopaedia of Dundgow' Province' claims that its Tibetan name was Dashchoijillin (T. bkra-shis chos-'dzin? gling) or in Mongolian translation, 'Ölziit Nomiin Uchralt Töw'. The monastery was also known by the name Üizen güngiin khiid, as it was originally situated in the area of the *Üizen gün* of the Gobi, called Gow' Üizen günnii khoshuu. Zawa Damdin uses this name for his own monastery besides the Tibetan name Cho-



Taking an interview with S. Dagwa lama (The author is on the left. Photo by Bátor Majer)

inodsallin in the monastery list of his chronicle¹⁹, Later the *khoshuu* divisions and names changed, so again another name for the monastery was Daichin beisiin khoshuunii khüree, given after the area it became the central monastery of, the land of *Daichin beis* of Tüsheet khan aimag.

The monastery site is situated in Delgertsogt *sum* (subprovince) of Dundgow' *aimag* (province), at Delger or Delgerkhangai uul (Delgerkhangai Mountain), to the north-west of Baga gazriin chuluu, 25 kilometres to the west from Delgertsogt subprovince centre (N 46°08.637', E 106°09.142', elevation 1549m). Rinchen gives the place name Delger uul. The ruins cover an area of approximately 100 metres x 200 metres.

On the monastery this article deals with, two old lamas were found in Ulaanbaatar who could provide first-hand data in personal interviews recorded. It was exceptional, as usually we were happy even if one old lama was found to tell his memories on an old monastery, though we interviewed all old lamas we were able to reach in Ulaanbaatar and during our countryside travels. One of the informants was Sosoriin Dagwa *gawj* (he took this exam in 2007), lama with the *gergen*, 'old master' rank (T. dge-rgan) of Mamba datsan temple (T. sman-pa grwa-tshang, 'medical monastic school'), one of the about 40 present-day temples of the capital, who was interviewed repeatedly in 2006, 2007 and 2009 (he is 96 years old at the time of writing this article in 2012). He was born in 1916 and belonged to Delgeriin Choir from his age of 8 till 12 (meaning between 1924-1928), following here his brother (who took the *gawjiin damjaa* exam here in 1933) from Mökhiin khiid, a monastery in today's Saintsagaan *sum* of Dundgow' *aimag*, and then leaving for Bogdiin khüree, the monastic capital (now Ulaanbaatar) to study in one of its philosophical monastic schools, Dashchoimbel datsan. His brother (1910-1934) was a main student of Zawa Damdin, and the *shireet lam* (enthroned lama) in Mökhiin khiid being the 3rd incarnation of the *khutaqt* ('saint, majesty', a class of high Buddhist incarnate priests in Mongolia) or *khuwilgaan* ('reincarnating lama') there. The other informant, B. Süren *gawj* (he took this exam in 1991), lama of Gandantegchenlin or Gandan main monastery (T. dga'-ldan theg-chen gling), and *lowon* lama (T. slob-dpon, 'master') of Gandandarjaalin monastery of Ulaanbaatar (T. dga'-ldan dar-rgyas gling), one of the small temples opened on the way leading to Gandan monastery, was interviewed in 2006 and 2007 (unfortunately he had passed away by our next fieldwork in 2009 summer). A sketch of the arrangement of the temples of the monastery was also drawn based on his communication. He was born in 1911, and belonged to Delgeriin Choir from his age of 18 till his age of 27 (1929-1938). Before joining this monastery, he had been a lama in Tsakhiurtiin khiid or Dorjdamba datsan, a monastery situated in the same

¹⁹ Teleki, K., p. 778.



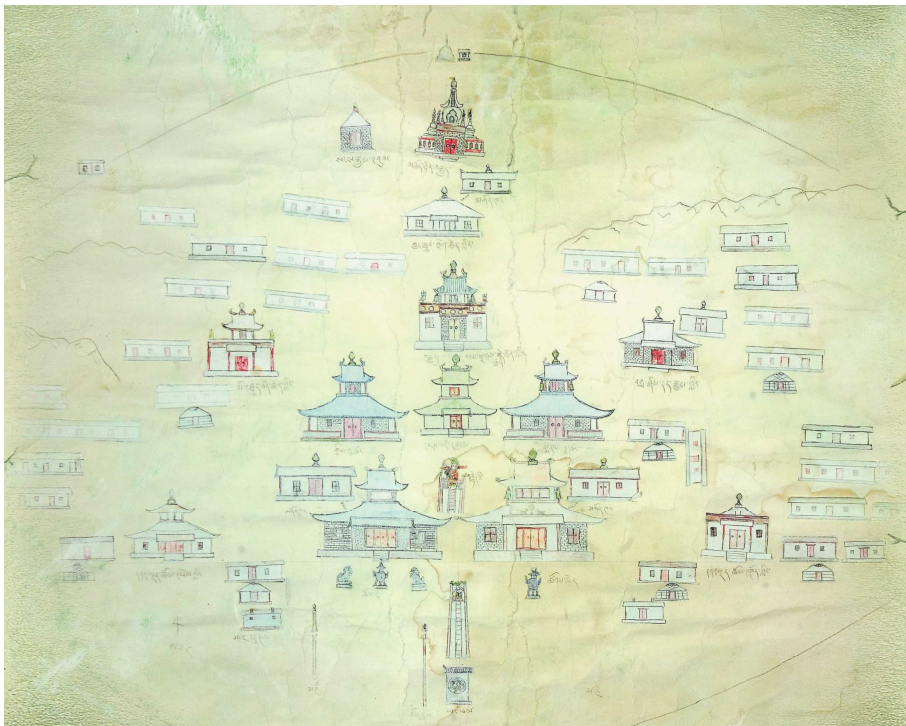
B. Süren lama

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Luwsandarjaa perenleinamjil, the present incarnation and head of the revived temple

khoshuu (and today in the same subprovince), from his age of 7. Tsakhiurtiin khiid was the monastery Zawa Damdin belonged to before becoming the head of Delgeriin Choir in 1917, so Süren lama stayed with him even in Tsakhiurt for a while, and later in Delgeriin Choir. During our fieldwork two more old lamas were found who spent 2-3 years in Delgeriin Choir, but they could not recall details but could only provide data on other monasteries they belonged to for a longer time. Additional information was gained from Luwsandarjaa Perenlei Namjil (T. blo-bzang dar-rgyas 'phrin-las rnam-rgyal), the young head of the revived monastery, now in his 30's, considered to be a rinpoche (mongol rinbüchi) as the current incarnation of Zawa Damdin. He was the main data provider on the activities of the revived temple, while information on the ceremonies of it was found also in the calendar of 2007 year published from the monastery. Useful material was also gained from the Museum of Dundgow' Province situated in Mandalgow'. A few published sources contain data on the monastery, but the site is not included in general books on Mongolian architecture or on historical sites, as it was not among the most well known ones nor was it important from the aspect of architecture.



Old drawing of the monastery with Tibetan inscriptions

The monastery is included in Rinchen's atlas, which shows 941 monasteries and temples that existed in the past in Mongolia, on separate maps for each aimag and the Ulaanbaatar area and indicates their names, location with place names, and show their rough place on a simple blank map of the given *aimag*. Of the monastery unfortunately no old photos are existing, but there is an old drawing available showing the arrangement of the temples at the site with their names given in Tibetan, which was extremely useful for comparing with the information gained from the data providers.

The monastery was founded in 1918, but this date may relate rather to the settling down of the monastery at Delger uul by Zawa Damdin. Kh. Shonkhor emphasizes in his article²⁰ that as the monastery of Delgeriin Choir was closed in 1937, and founded in 1917, it worked only for 20 years. According to Luwsandarjaa, the origin of the monastery goes back to the time of the 4th *bogd* or *jewtsündamba khutagt* (T. rje-btsun dam-pa, 'the holy lord', the Buddhist religious holy leader or 'living Buddha' of Mongolia), who said that a monastery should be founded on the Delger Mountain. Later, in 1918 it was founded by the local noble, Mönkh-Ochir *noyon* (noble) for the use of Zawa Lam Damdin. Other sources and the old lamas interviewed say the founder was Zawa Damdin himself. According to Kh. Shonkhor²¹ it was first commanded by the local noble (*khoshuu noyon*), *Üizen gūn* Tserendorj, in the area of whom Zawa Damdin was born, that Zawa Damdin, who was at that time a child, should once be the abbot of Choir, that time moving around from place to place (the legend says that what draw the attention of the *noyon* to Zawa Damdin was that at his birth-place yellow coloured flowers grew for three years). Zawa Damdin became a monk at Tsakhiurtiin khiid of the *khoshuu* first. The next local noble, Batsuur', however, did not care either about Choiriin khiid, or Zawa Damdin. In 1906 Mönkh-Ochir became the new local noble, who acknowledged Zawa Damdin as the abbot of Choir in 1917. So Zawa Damdin settled Choir khiid on the hillside of Delger Mountain. As for the ranked lamas, the *tsorj* lama (T. chos-rje, 'lord of religion') of the monastery became Zondol lama from Gūngaachoilin datsan, and the *shunlaiw* lama (T. gzhung lugs-pa/ gzhung las-pa) or the head of the monastic school became Sharaw *gawj* from Gūngaachoilin datsan. The *daa lam*, 'great lama' became the ex *daa lam* of Tsakhiurtiin khiid, named Khookh or Damdin *gawj*. There was also a lama from Ölgiin khiid (a monastery once situated in the area of today's Dornogow' *aimag*, Mandakh *sum*), called Nūnee Sharaw. When the monastery moved from Ikh jas (a main monastery situated once in today's Gurwansaikhan *sum* of Dundgow' *aimag*), this monk, Nūnee Sharaw did the meditational fasting *Düwkhan maaniin Baragzand nūnaa* (this

²⁰ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 69.

²¹ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 67.

ceremony is unidentified, but *nünnai / nügnai*, T. *smyung gnas*, S. *upavasatha*, is a fasting practice or retreat). These lamas are said to have a main role in founding Choir monastery. Before the monastery settled at Delger Mountain, it was moving and operating at different places, such as Tewshiin jas where it was originally founded, Maikhan khar, Khöshöön tal, and finally Ikh jas. From here it moved to Delger Mountain, or it is also said that it separated from Ikh jas monastery.

As for the number of lamas this monastery had, sources give contradictory data. As the monastery worked for only a short period, it is not possible that the sources relate to different periods, which could account for the differences. Zawa Damdin himself in his monastery list gives several hundred lamas. According to Luwsandarjaa, archival data proves that it had 600 lamas, but he says that he got to know from its old monks that it had in fact more, about 800 lamas. In our interviews Süren lama remembered about 300-500 lamas in the community, while Dagwa lama said about 500. Kh. Shonkhor mentions 320 lamas²².

As for the arrangement of the monastic site and its buildings, the temples were situated in the middle part, surrounded by the lama residential districts, as was the usual layout of Mongolian monasteries. In this arrangement called *khüree deg* (the word *khüree* having the meaning 'circle' here, and *deg* being a word derived from T. *sgrigs*, 'arrangement'), lama dwellings (yurts, small houses or cells, sometimes fenced-off) surrounded the central part consisting of temples mainly in an upside down U shape. From the about 20 temples of the monastery, names of fourteen are known from different sources and data providers: *Tsogchin* or *Tsogchin dugan* (T. *tshogs-chen* 'great assembly', *du-khang*, 'temple'), being the main assembly hall, *Jüid datsan* or tantric monastic school (T. *rgyud grwa-tshang*)²³, *Zurkhai datsan* or astrological monastic school (T. *rtsis-pa grwa-tshang*), *Manzshir* or *Jam'yaan* temple (temple of Mañjuśrī, T. 'jam-pa'i dbyangs), *Manaliin dugan* (T. *smān-bla'i* 'du-khang, the temple of S. Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha) or *Mamba datsan* (T. *smān-pa grwa-tshang*) being the medical monastic school, two *Choir datsans* or philosophic monastic schools (T. *chos-grwa grwa-tshang*) called *Güngaa(choilin)* or *Baruun datsan* (western monastic school) and *Dashchoimbel* or *Züün datsan* (eastern monastic school, the alternate names *Züün* and *Baruun datsan* were added by B. Süren lama), *Janchiwtegchenlin* temple (T. *byang-chub theg-chen gling*), *Myangan Burkhan* temple (T. *sangs-rgyas* 'bum, 'temple of the hundred thousand Buddhas'), *Lamrim* temple or monastic school (T. *lam-rim grwa-tshang*, named after the text 'Gradual path to enlightenment' composed by Tsongkhapa), *Düinkhor datsan*

²² Shonkhor, Kh., p. 68.

²³ Lokesh Chandra, p. 31. says that the Tantra College was built in 1922.

or the Kālacakra monastic school (T. dus-'khor grwa-tshang), *Maidar* temple (T. byams-pa, Maitreya), *Ganjuuriin süm* or the Kanjur temple (T. bka'-'gyur, collection of the Buddha's Teachings), *Danjuuriin süm* or the Tanjur temple (T. bstan-'gyur, 'the collection of the commentaries (of Buddha's words)'. Kh. Shonkhor also lists *Sakhiusnii gonkhon* or the chapel of the wrathful protectors (T. chos-skyong / bstan-bsrung-gi mgon-khang), but no other informants mentioned this. It is known, however, that some of the temples had separate parts or chapels for images of the protectors (*gonkhan/gonkhon*, T. mgon-khang) built on their northern side: the old drawing marks these at the *Choir*, *Tsogchin*, and *Janchüwtegchenlin* temples. As for the monastic schools of the complex, Zawa Damdin in his monastery list gives, apart from the philosophical monastic schools, only *Jüid*, *Mamba* and *Zurkhai datsans* of his own monastery. *Düinkhor datsan* and *Lamrim datsan* missing from his list may have been founded later than he finished his Golden Annals (the date of which is not clearly known). According to Süren lama, inside the *Düinkhor* monastic school a three-dimension maṇḍala palace of Kālacakra, called Loilon (T. blos bslangs, 'relief maṇḍala for meditation') or *Düinkhoriin loilon* (T. dus-'khor blos bslangs) was displayed. The temple names of only seven temples and their arrangement are shown on the old drawing of the monastery published in the 2007 calendar of the monastery, while Kh. Shonkhor lists fifteen temples including the five *aimag* temples²⁴. S. Dagwa lama and B. Süren lama were also asked for temple names and their arrangement, and the above list was compiled based on all these sources.²⁵ Dagwadorj mentions²⁶ that Zawa Damdin built his own *Lawran* (T. bla-brang, 'residence') at the north of Choir in 1928. It was usual in Mongolian monasteries of this size that the residence of the head of the monastery and of *khutaqts* ('saint, majesty, dignified', a class of high Buddhist incarnate

²⁴ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 68.

²⁵ On the old drawing names of 8 temples (*Tsogchin*, *Choir*, *Zurkhai datsan*, *Manzshir*, *Mamba datsan*, *Jüid datsan*, *Janchüwtegchenlin* and *Myangan burkhan* given in Tibetan as chos-grwa, tshogs-chen, rtsis grwa-tshang, 'jam-pa'i dbyangs, sman-pa grwa-tshang, brgyud sang-sngags theg-chen gling, and byang-chub theg-chen gling) and 4 *aimag* temples are shown. S. Dagwa lama mentioned that there were about 20 temple buildings but he could only name several of them (*Tsogchin*, *Choir*, *Zurkhai*, *Mamba*, *Jüid*, and *Maidar*). B. Süren *gawj* listed and named 9 temples (*Tsogchin*, *Baruun datsan* or *Güngaa*, *Dashchoimbel datsan*, *Jüid datsan*, *Mamba datsan* or *Manal*, *Düinkhor datsan*, *Lamrim datsan*, *Maidar* temple, and *Manzshir* or *Jam'yaan* temple). Kh. Shonkhor (p. 68.) lists the following temples: 2 philosophical monastic schools (*Choir*), *Tsogchin*, given as *Choir* with *Wanchin igchaa* and *Choir* with *Günchin igchaa* or *Tsogchin*, *Düinkhor*, *Zurkhai*, *Manzshir*, *Jüid*, *Mamba datsan*, *Ganjuuriin süm*, *Danjuuriin süm*, a separate chapel for the wrathful protectors (*Sakhiusnii gonkhon*), five *aimag* temples, 2 stūpas, a printing house (*Barkhan*), all in all about 20 temples and other buildings.

²⁶ Dagwadorj, D., p. 188.

lamas) or *khuwilgaans* (reincarnation, incarnated lama) was built near the complex separately. It could be a bigger yurt within a courtyard, a complex of several buildings and yurts, or even a small palace. A modern painting of the monastery kept in the Museum of Dundgovi Province (without data or name of painter) shows a complex of several yurts and buildings on the north of the monastery. As these kinds of modern drawings or paintings, made decades after the destructions were usually made based on information from surviving lamas asked in detail by the artist himself (in other details this one seems to have copied the old drawing used for this article, too), this is supposedly what was the *Lawran* of Zawa Damdin. As for the arrangement of the temples, the *Tsogchin* stood in the first line of the temples, on the south, on the east side, while *Choir* stood beside it, on the west side, as the picture shows. B. Süren however said that *Güngaa datsan* and *Dashchoimbel datsan* stood besides each other here, with *Dashchoimbel* being on the east and *Güngaa* on the west. He mentioned *Tsogchin* on the north of *Dashchoimbel datsan*. From this it is clear that the picture was drawn at the time only the first of the two *datsans* were standing. Kh. Shonkhor when listing the temple names²⁷ writes: *Choir* with *Wanchin igchaa* and *Choir* with *Günchin igchaa* or *Tsogchin* (see details of *igchaa*, philosophical handbooks, followed in the philosophical monastic schools below), as if the second *Choir* had been working in the same temple of *Tsogchin*. The drawing marks in the line on the north of *Choir* and *Tsogchin* the following temples from the west to the east: *Zurkhai datsan*, *Jam'yan* or *Manzshir* and *Manal datsan* (*Manba datsan*). Süren lama also remembered the last two of these standing behind the *Choir datsans* and *Tsogchin*. On the north of these stood *Jüü datsan*, as the drawing shows and also Süren lama described. On the very north stood *Janchüwtegchenlin* temple, according to the drawing, and *Myangan burkhan* temple on its north-west. Süren lama remembered the location of two more temples not marked on the drawing: *Düinkhor datsan* on the west of the two *Choir* temples and *Lamrim datsan* on the north-west (west of *Jam'yan* / *Manzshir* temple or west of *Jüü* temple). The exact location of the other temples within the complex is not known.

The monastery was specialised on philosophic studies but had many other monastic schools as well where lamas from the area could come and study for and also take different specialized exams. Even monks from Bogdiin khüree came to take their exams here. According to B. Süren lama, who himself belonged to *Güngaa datsan* from the two philosophical monastic schools, different exams called *damjaa* (T. dam-bca', 'disputation, assertion, promise, vow') were taken regularly in the monastery, such as *dom* and *gawj* in the philosophic monastic schools, *maaramba* (T. sman-rams-pa, academic rank in medical studies)

²⁷ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 68.

in the medical monastic school, *agramba* in the tantric monastic school, *zeer-embe* (T. rtsis-rims-pa, academic rank in astrology) in the astrological monastic school and *düirembe* (T. bsdus-rims-pa / dus-rims-pa?) in the Kālacakra monastic school. Luwsandarjaa lama and Kh. Shonkhor listed²⁸ the same exams possible to have taken in the monastery, and also the *gaaramba* (T. bka'-rams-pa, the highest examination in a philosophical college) and *düira* (T. bsdus-grwa, exam from introductory topics in logic or dialectics) exams. Kh. Shonkhor states that from the monks of the monastery, who lived here permanently, about 15-17 per cent or about 50-60 lamas had the exams of *gaaramba*, *gawj*, *agramba*, *düirembe*, *rawjamba* (T. rab-'byams-pa), *maaramba* or *zeerembe*. B. Süren lama himself took the *dom* exam in the monastery, but could not take the *gawj* exam afterwards because of the purges. He finally took this exam after the democratic change, in 1991 in Gandan, together with the present head abbot of Gandantegchenlin main monastery, D. Chojamts. The curriculum in each philosophical monastic school was based on one of the philosophical handbooks or manuals (*igchaa*, T. yig-cha) written by different eminent scholars of famous Tibetan monastic universities. Delgeriin Choir monastery was among the very few ones, in which two different philosophical manuals were followed in the curriculum. The three such manuals used in the about 60 Mongolian monasteries which had philosophical monastic schools were *Goman igchaa* also called *Günchin igchaa*, *Losalin igchaa* also called *Wanchin igchaa*, and *Serjee igchaa* or *Seriin igchaa*, and of these the most widely used was the Goman system. In only about six Mongolian monasteries were followed two kinds of systems²⁹. Here in Delgeriin Choir one philosophical monastic school was with *Wanchin igchaa* (T. pan-chen yig-cha) or *Losalin igchaa* (T. blo-gsal-gling yig-cha), the manual of the famous Tibetan scholar *Wanchin Sodnomdagwa* (T. pan-chen bsod-nams grags-pa, 1478-1554) used in *Loselling* monastic school (Losalin datsan, T. blo-gsal-gling grwa-tshang) in Drepung monastery in Tibet (T. 'bras-spungs); and the other one with *Günchin igchaa* (T. kun-mkhyen yig-cha) or *Goman igchaa* (T. sgo-mang yig-cha), the handbook by *Günchin jamiyaan shadaw* (T. kun-mkhyen 'Jam-dbyangs bzhad-pa, 1648-1721), which is the same as the system of Gomang monastic school (T. sgo-mang grwa-tshang) in Drepung.³⁰ Luwsandarjaa added, that in the end also the *Sera* manual (the system of Sera Jey, in mongolian *Ser Je* monastic school, T. *se-ra byes*, of Sera monastery of Tibet) was followed, but even Zawa Damdin himself in his monastery list

²⁸ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 68.

²⁹ Teleki, K., p. 784.

³⁰ Lokesh Chandra, p. 31. states that the College of Sgo-mang yig-cha was built in 1926.

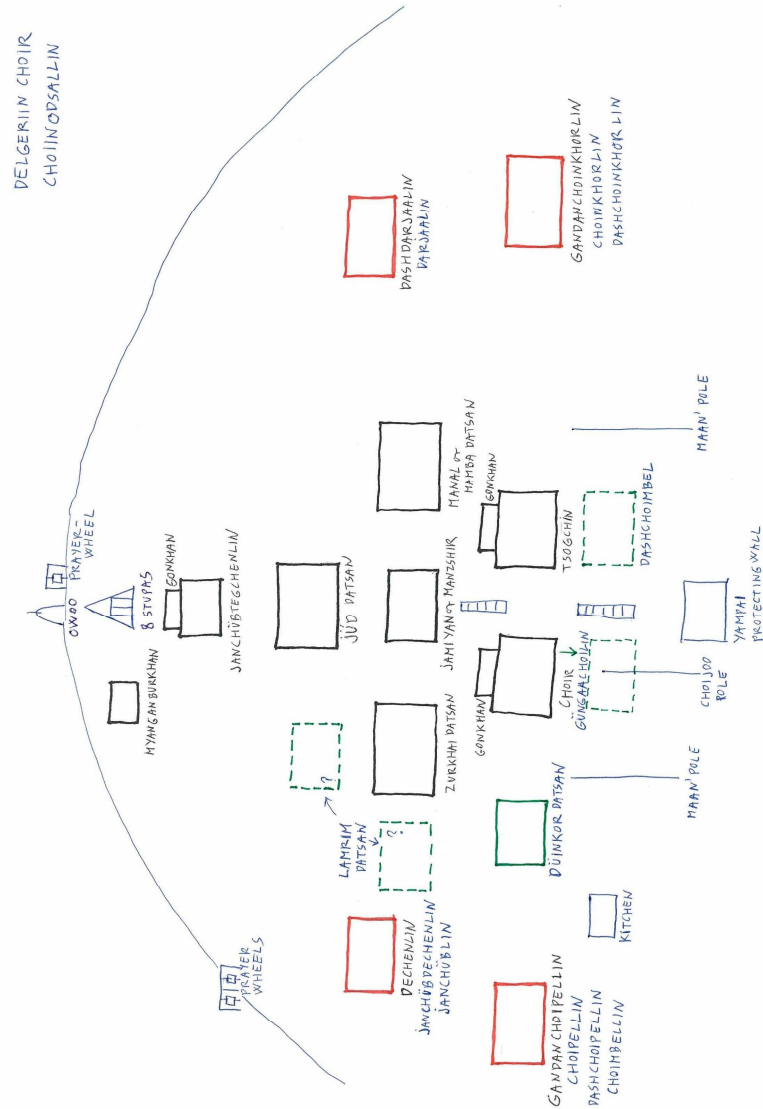
gives³¹ only the *Goman* and *Losalin* systems for his monastery, and this is what the old lamas interviewed said and the article of Shonkhor confirms.

According to S. Dagwa lama, the temple buildings were made of stone, and were one-storey buildings. According to B. Süren, however, the temple buildings were made of wood, except from the *Tsogchin* temple and *Güngaa datsan*, which two were made of brick and mud. The *Dashchoimbel datsan* was two-storeyed. The *aimag* temples were also made of wood.

The lama residential buildings were built in groups around the monastery, called *aimag* (residential sections or quarters for lamas) in Mongolian. All such *aimags* had their own temple buildings, as usual. Unfortunately, the names of the *aimags* of this monastery are controversial in the sources. Zawa Damdin himself in his monastery list states that the monastery had 5 *aimags*. On the old picture, however, there are only 4 *aimags* marked with their Tibetan names given, namely *Gandanchoipellin* (T. dga'-ldan chos-'phel gling) on the south-west, *Dechenlin* (T. mi-'byung³² bde-chen gling) on the north-west, *Dashdarjaalin* (T. bkra-shis dar-rgyas gling) on the north-east and *Gandanchoinkhorlin* (T. dga'-ldan chos-'khor gling) on the south-east. S. Dagwa lama remembered only 3 *aimags*, which seems incorrect, and could not recall their names only their arrangement: on the south-west (he himself lived here), on the north, and on the east, which does not help our analysis. According to B. Süren, there were 5 *aimags*, but he named only four of these, and instructed us to draw these at the following parts of the monastery when making a sketch based on information from him: *Choipellin/Choimbellin* or *Dashchoipellin* on the south-west [T. chos-'phel gling / bkra-shis chos-'phel gling, *Gandanchoipellin* of the drawing, similarly on the south-west] (once he used the name *Dashchoijillin*, T. bkra-shis chos-'dzin? gling for it, but perhaps only mistakenly); *Janchüwlin* or *Janchüwdechenlin* on the north-west [T. bde-chen gling / byang-chub bde-chen gling, *Dechenlin* of the drawing, similarly on the north-west]; *Darjaalin* on the north-east [T. dar-rgyas gling, *Dashdarjaalin* of the drawing, marked similarly on the north-east]; and *Choinkhorlin* or *Dashchoinkhorlin* on the south-east [T. chos-'khor gling / bkra-shis chos-'khor gling, *Gandanchoinkhorlin* of the drawing, similarly on the south-east]. The name of the fifth *aimag* temple is not clear from any sources. The date of the drawing is unknown; supposedly it was made earlier than the fifth *aimag* was founded. Another possibility is that the additional *aimag* temple was *Janchüwtegchenlin* (T. byang-chub theg-chen gling), marked on the north of the monastery, but as there are no lama dwellings shown around it (but this may also be due to the fact that the drawing is not too detailed), it is not likely. Considering the fact that such drawing or

³¹ Teleki, K., p.778.

³² Or mi-'gyur, this word is not possible to make out in the copy of the drawing I have.



Sketch of the arrangement of the monastery buildings based on the old drawing and information from B. Süren lama. [Temples marked on the old drawing are in black, aimag temples in red. Temples mentioned additionally by Süren lama are in green. The temple names written in black are given in the inscriptions of the drawing, while the name variants in blue were used by Süren lama.]

paintings remained of only about a handful of old Mongolian monasteries, we are still fortunate with it and also with the two interviews as on many other monasteries much less information is available. Kh. Shonkhor also mentions 5 *aimag* temples, namely *Erdene akhai*, *Güchin*, *Gol*, *Barguun* and *Zuut*³³. As this list is totally different from the other one, these might be other names used for the same *aimags*.

The monastery also had a printing house (*Barkhan*, T. *par-khang*), which was only usual in bigger monastic sites. B. Süren lama said that here many books were printed, such as *Ondogjan* (T. *mngon-rtogs rgyan*, 'Ornament of Realization' by Asaṅga), *Umanjüg* (T. *dbu-ma-la 'jug-pa*, 'Entering to the middle way' by Candrakīrti), *Doodüid* (T. *mdo sdud-pa*, a short version of Prajñāpāramitā), and the 18 volumes of the works of Zawa Damdin himself.

There stood several stūpas (*suwraga* in Mongolian) in the monastery. B. Süren mentioned 5 stūpas, while according to Luwsandarjaa 8 stūpas were standing on the north. The old drawing shows a stūpa composition here with a bigger central stūpa and a small chapel in front of it, surrounded by prayer wheels, with the inscription in Tibetan meaning 'eight stūpas' (T. *mchod-rten brgyad*). Here a new stūpa was erected, similar to the old one, with a small chapel in front of it. On its western side the drawing shows the small *Myangan burkhan*, 'thousand buddhas' temple (giving the name in Tibetan as *sangs-rgyas 'bum*, 'hundred thousand buddhas'). In front of the monastery a protecting wall stood (*yampai*, the old drawing marks it as *yang-phas*). This did not remain. There were 3 flagpoles in front of the monastery. Süren lama called these *awraga maan*' ('enormous mantra'), and the drawing has the Tibetan inscription *ma-ṅi* for the two ones on the two sides, and *chos-rgyal* (S. Yama) for the middle one. Today there are two such poles. On the top of the hill on the north there was an *owoo*, the drawing also shows it (today there is one, too), as well as a prayer wheel on its east side and several other prayer wheels on by the *goroo* route encircling the monastery (T. *skor*, 'circumambulation, circumambulate') on the north-east. There were two platforms for calling lamas to ceremonies (called *büreen shat*, 'trumpet platform' in Mongolian), one in the south to the north of the protecting wall, and the other in the middle of the temple buildings, in front of the *Manzshir* temple and at the back of the *Choir* and *Tsogchin* temples. The kitchen of the lamas is marked on the drawing in the south-west (as *mang-ja rung khang*, 'kitchen for making tea for the assembly').

According to B. Süren, the main protectors (*sakhius*, T. *chos-skyong / bstan-bsrung*) of the monastery were Lkham (or Baldan lkham, T. *dpal-ldan lha-mo*, S. Śrīdevī), Gombo (or Makhgal, T. *mgon-po*, S. Mahākāla), Chojoo (Chojil, T. *Chos-rgyal*, S. Yama), and Ochirwaan' (T. *phyag-na rdo-rje*, S. Vajrapāṇi), and

³³ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 68.

according to Luwsandarjaa the main deities in the monastery were Setew (T. bse khrab, 'hide plates/corselet', a guardian deity), Dorjshügden (or Shügden, T. rdo-rje shugs-ldan, 'powerful/strong', name of a wrathful protector deity, the worship of whom was forbidden by the 14th Dalai Lama) and Lkham. These six must have been the main tutelary deities (*gol yadam*, T. yi-dam) and main protector deities (*gol sakhius*, T. chos-skyong / bstan-bsrung) of the monastery. He claims that one of the teachers of Zawa Damdin, Minjüürdorj also worshipped Shügden deity and composed 2 volumes on his worship entitled Dorjshügden Bebüm (T. be'u bum, 'scriptures of Dorjshügden'). Luwsandarjaa also accounted that the protector deity Setew Gürtembe Chojon (T. bse khrab, 'hide plates/corselet', a guardian deity; T. sku rten-pa 'man possessed of deity, body support/representation', that is, oracle; and T. chos-skyong, Skr. dharma-pāla, 'protector of the Teaching') used to be invited and propitiated in the monastery. That means that the monastery had an oracle and 'interpreter' of the deity who understood and transmitted his pronouncements when in trans. About the ceremonial system of the monastery not much is known. According to B. Süren and S. Dagwa, in the monastery the *Tsam* ritual dance (T. 'cham) was not held, nor the *Ganjuur* circumambulation (*Ganjuur ergek*, T. bka'-gyur, 'circumambulation with the volumes of Kanjur'), the ceremonial event when the holy texts considered to be the words of Buddha himself are circulated around the monastery or its area or a whole *aimag*. However, the Maitreya circumambulation (*Maidar ergek*) was performed annually, in the last spring month, when the statue of the future Buddha was mounted on a vehicle with green horse head and circulated around the monastery with the aim of praying for the future Buddha's (*Maidar* or *Jamba*, T. byams-pa) coming. The annual 45 days oath-taking retreat *Khailen* was also held (T. khas-len, 'oath-taking'). According to Süren lama, a *Ganjuur* ceremony was held in the first summer month, when the *shunkhan ganjuur*, a copy of the text printed in vermillion ink was recited. In the monastery they used to hold regularly the ceremony reciting the collection of five dhāraṇīs or magic formulas called Sünchendena chogo (T. gzungs-chen sde-lnga, 'Five Great dhāraṇīs'). According to B. Süren, Tibetan masters did not reside in the monastery, but famous monks from other monasteries in Mongolia and also Tibetan masters used to come every year to give different initiations and empowerment here (*lün*, *wan* and *jenan*). According to him, about 15 kilometres from the monastery, Chinese merchants lived. Kh. Shonkhor lists the names of some of the most famous monks of the monastery³⁴: Jaal Sharaw *gawj* (also written as Jaal Shiiraw), Shar Chojjin Ayuush, who was an astrologer (*da zurkhaich*, 'head astrologer'), Naidan lama, and Gelegdorj.

³⁴ Shonkhor, Kh., p. 68.

According to him, Mönkh-Ochir *beis* was a chanting master (*unzad*, T. *dbu-mdzad*) in the astrological monastic school (*Zurkhai datsan*) of Choir monastery when he was acknowledged as the local the noble. According to B. Süren, a famous teacher of the monastery was Dorj Minjüür *lowon*; and there were also some *zoch* tantric masters practicing *zod* (T. *gcod*, ‘cutting the ego clinging’) near the monastery, like Tokhoi *zoch* or Dendew, and Choijid *zoch*. S. Dagwa also mentioned the *zoch* lamas, and said that the lineage (*jüid*, T. *rgyud*) called *khajid jüid* (T. *mkha’-spyod*, S. *ḍākinī* lineage) was followed by them.

Luwsandarjaa lama accounted that as Zawa Damdin was away to Bogdiin Khüree and was also ill, in the end; around 1937 Jaal Sharaw became the abbot of the monastery. When in 1937 on the 25th of the first summer month Zawa Damdin passed away in Bogdiin Khüree, his relics (*sharil*) were taken back to his monastery and placed here. According to Soninbayar, Sh., Jaal Sharaw managed to keep the *sümbüm* (T. *gsung’-bum*, ‘collected works, complete works’) of Zawa Damdin, and this was the copy which got to India where it was published financed by Gurudeva rinpoche³⁵.

The monastery was closed in 1937. The ‘Encyclopaedia of Dundgow’ Province’ claims that the ranked or influential lamas of the monastery were captured and taken away by people from the ‘internal security’ office (*Dotood kham-gaalalt*) who came on the 15th of the first spring month in 1937 when the lamas were holding the ceremony *Choim dirol jiwaa* (this ceremony or its Tibetan equivalent could not be identified); and the monastery was fully closed next year. Sharaw, Minjüür (or Dorj Minjüür *lowon*), Luwsannyam and Gombojaw were among the lamas arrested in 1937 (according to the material gained from the Museum of Dundgow Province, Mandalgow’). According to Luwsandarjaa, Jal Sharaw, by that time the abbot, survived the purges and lived near the monastery site till his death in the 1960’s. Old monks of this monastery managed to save and hide old objects of worship and old pictures and books. Among them were Arawzai, Yanjmaagiin Gimbel, Renchindorj, Sharawdorj, Chuluun, Tsermaagiin Pürewdash, Mishig, and Gonchigdorj lamas (according to the material gained from the Museum of Dundgow Province, Mandalgow’). Surviving lamas of the monastery³⁶ also held ceremonies in secret during the

³⁵ Soninbayar, Sh., p. 25.

³⁶ The material gained from the Museum of Dundgow Province, Mandalgow’ also lists names of lamas from this monastery who survived the purges but died later (Jam’yandonoi, Pagwajaw khuwilgaan, Dar’aaw sharaw, Tsedew Choi, Sesem Myataw, Semjid Dawaa, Sosor Dorjsüren, Jam’yan, Gonchinjaw, Dambii nyam, Tawkhai Waanchig, Nyamsüren Gonchigdorj, Ayuush Dash, and Jadamba Gombojaw), and names of lamas who were still alive at the time the material was compiled, the date of which is not known, but should be the end of the 1990’-beginning of the 2000’s (Süren gawj,



Remnants of lama dwellings of the south-west aimag

Lamas taking part in the first revived ceremonies in 1990 – picture from the Museum of Dundgow' Province Mandalgow'

communist era. Many of the old monks participated in the revival of the monastery, in the early 1990's, lead by Yanjin Gimbel, Tsesem Sanjmyataw, and Semjid Dawaa.

Dagwa dorj gewsh, Luwsan Ish, Dar'maa Lkham, Chojjamts, Magsar Shagdarjaw, Ölziit Damdin, Gawaa, Tserenpuntsag, and Ayuush Dash).

The yurt of Zava Damdin is on display in the Province Museum in Mandalgow', and a smaller yellow coloured yurt of him, which he used when he was traveling or when on pilgrimage, is kept in the yurt temple of the revived monastery.

The ruins of the old monastery are still visible, on which it was revived in 1990. Most of what remained of the old monastery is the buildings of the monks residential dwellings': small buildings (about 2 x 3 meters or 2 x 4 meters) made of brick and mud. Most such buildings remained in the south-west area, and also in the southern part in the middle and in south-east. Some of them almost remained intact, others are damaged but the walls remained, and again some only has partial remains or, on the north-west and north-east areas, only their foundations are visible. These buildings were situated in lines besides each other with lines of such buildings behind each other. Of the temples themselves, which were situated in the middle part, nothing remained: none of them have more remnants than elevations on the ground or stone foundations showing their sites. On the site materials of the old buildings, like stones, bricks and terracotta ornaments can be found scattered.

On the site of the old *Manzshir* temple a new *Manzshir* temple was erected and on the approximate site of the old main assembly hall (*Tsogchin*) stands now a huge yurt temple. Stūpas, a monument, and other buildings were also built at the site after the revival.

The revived monastery and its activities

Today the revived monastery has two temples, one of them being a huge yurt temple (presumably a third one is finished by now), a summer building, and several stūpas. It was revived in 1990 on the site and ruins of the old monastery, and is called by the same name, Delgeriin choir or shortly as Choir. It follows the *gelüg* tradition (gelukpa, T. dge-lugs-pa, the reformed sect), as the majority of Mongolian temples. The initiators of the reopening were old lamas, and they also revived in that year the Maitreya circumambulation. These old lamas made the first community, and young ones joined them. According to Luwsandarjaa, the present head, the leaders of them were Ya. Gembel (Yanjin Gimbel), Dawaa (Semjid Dawaa), and Sanjmyataw (Tsesem Sanjmyataw). A list containing the names of the 54 lamas, among them the above ones, who took part in the revival of the monastery, and participated in the first Maitreya circumambulation was gained from the Museum of Dundgow' Province in Mandalgow'.³⁷

³⁷ This lists the following names: Yanjin Gimbel, Dulam RENCHINDORJ, NODOL UCHRAL, TSEDWU CHOI, TSESEM SANJMYATAW, TSERMAA PÜREW DASH, BAA CHULUUN, BARAAT TSEREND-

The current incarnation, Luwsandarjaa, who became confirmed as the incarnation in 2000, came to the monastery in 2005, spring. Till then he was in Amarbayasgalant monastery in Selenge aimag, Baruun Büren sum, where he had the rank of *tsorj*. He had also spent 4 years studying in Switzerland in a Buddhist monastery. He came here bringing young novices from there. Currently there are about 15-20 monks, most of them from Amarbayasgalant.

According to him, the first two temples were built in 1991-1992, but these do not exist now, as were pulled down later. According to the 'Encyclopaedia of Dundgovi Province', many of the old lamas and local people gave donations, and restoration of old remnants and the building of a new temple started, which was opened in 1991. A monk called Choi (Tsedew Choi) gave the most donations, and another temple building was finished after his death, in 1997. As Luwsandarjaa accounted, one of these two temples stood on the north of the present *Manzshir* temple where in 2007 they were starting to build a newer temple building.

On the site of the old *Manzshir* temple a new temple was erected, named the 'Joyful Temple of Mañjuśrī', *Mazshiriig bayasgakh süm* (T. 'jam-dbyangs dgyes-pa'i lha-khang). There is a four line Tibetan poem inscribed on the board above the door, and there are two old incense burning pots placed in front of the temple. The big pictures of Shügden and a black-hat protector deity (presumably Setew) are painted on the door. Inside the temple the sculptures of the five kinds of Mañjuśrī are placed.

On the approximate site of the old main assembly hall (*Tsogchin*) stands now the yurt temple called *Badarguu tsagaan gerelt örgöö* ('palace radiating white light'). This is a huge felt yurt with 216 roof poles (*un*), and 20 wall-sections of the wooden frame (*khana*) a nice sample of Mongolian architecture: its measure reflects to the original dwelling of Awtai sain khan, the founder of Erdene

agwa, Pad Dagwadorj, Chimed Dangaasüren, Semjid Dawaa, Okhin Chimeddorj, Mör Sowd, Dorj Luwsandash, Saintsog Gombojaw, Shatar Dorjdamba, Sereeter Enkh, Gonchigchültem, Tsesem Gombojaw, Dolgor Zundui, Chimed Ikham, Khorol Baldandorj, Sosor Dorjsüren, Nasandelger tsegmid, Nasan luwsanjumba, Luwsantseden, Tsend Jamsranjaw, Yaichil natsag, Ölziit Sükh, Sugar Luwsan Ish, Genemaa Gonchigdagwa, Ajin Langan, Towuu, Maan' sengedagwa, Dünjmaa Tsend, Elbeg Nyam, Shatar Luwsandagwa, Dolgor Surmaaajaw, Dashdawaa Tsend, Sharaw Damdinjaw, Chimed Samdanperenlei, Khümbee Gündsamba, Dalai Tsedewsüren, Doljin Chültem, Dendew, Osor Tömörbaatar, Sonomdow Tsogsüren, Tsermaa Dagwa, Dashnyam Luwsanbaldan, Dashnyam Luwsankhorol, Dulam Mijiddorj, Dashnyam Dorj, Yanjin Rawjir, Jamba.



View of the monastery from the south

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The monastery form the north

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Manzhir temple and the Badarguu tsagaan gerelt örgöö

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The door of the Manzshir temple



Inside the yurt temple

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The sculpturers of the five kinds of Dorjshügden in the yurt temple



The small yellow yurt of Zawa Damdin inside the yurt temple

zuu monastery. For comparison, a usual Mongolian yurt (*ger*) has 5 wall-sections and 80 roof poles. In the yurt temple the sculptures of the five kinds of Dorjshügden are placed. The old small yellow coloured yurt of Zawa Damdin is on display here, too, which he used when he was travelling or on pilgrimage. Inside this there is a sculpture of Zawa Damdin which was made in 2005 and also a sculpture of Damdin Sandüw (T. *rta-mgrin gsang-sgrub*), a special 'secret' form of Hevajra. The temples are richly furnished due to the support of believers and mainly foreign help.

In 2006 the building of *Lawran* (T. *bla-brang*, 'residence'), a summer building was erected on the north-east of the *Manzshir* temple. On the north of *Manzshir* temple, at the site of the temple built in the 1990's but pulled down later, in 2007 a new, third temple building is started to be built, which was planned to be a *Sakhius* or Protector Temple. A Mongolian yurt which stands behind the *Badarguu Tsagaan Gerelt örgöö* is used for daily ceremonies in winter. A beautiful painted scroll or *thangka* (*thanga*, T. *thang-ka*) of Tsongkhapa (Zonkhow in Mongolian, T. *tsong-kha-pa*) and a *thangka* of Shügden protector are placed on its altar.

On the north of the monastery, on the hill, a new stūpa was erected with a small chapel in front of it (*baishintai suwraga*, 'stūpa with a chapel'). This stands where there used to stand the similarly designed 8 stūpas in the old times. On the top of the hill on the north there is also an *owoo*, and two other ones in the middle and on the south of the monastery. On its west two newly built stūpas stand, one of them was erected in 2004. On the west of the site a monument (*gerelt khöshöö*) was erected in 1997 on the 130th anniversary of Zawa Damdin's birth. There are two flagpoles in front of the monastery. The circumambulation road (*goroo*) of Maitreya circumambulation around the monastic site is paved with stones.

The sites of the old temple buildings are only shown by elevations of the ground. From the remained brick and mud lama dwellings several were restored mostly in the south-west and south-east and south and are used now for different purposes. For example, a well is in one of them.

In front of the *Manzshir* temple a beautiful garden was formed with newly planted trees. There is electricity gained from solar power and also a greenhouse. The environment and the surroundings of the monastic site is cared for and in this way a beautiful spot awaits the visitors and pilgrims even in the middle of nowhere in the deserted Gobi, a little 'oasis' in spite of the rocky soil. The monastic area has a calm atmosphere as new temples are growing out from the ancient ruins.

According to Luwsandarjaa, the main deities of the monastery are Dorjshügden, Setew, and Lkham as they were worshipped in the old temple, too.

Apart from the daily chanting, various monthly and annual ceremonies are held here. The *Tsogchin* daily chanting (T. tshogs-chen, ‘great assembly’) starts every day from 7 o’clock in the morning, and every evening they offer a *balin* food offering (or *dorom*, T. gtor-ma, S. bali) called *Dügjüü* (T. drug-bcu, ‘sixty’) to Damjan Chojoo (T. dam-can chos-rgyal, Dharmarājā, ‘King of religion’, one of the ten wrathful deities). As for the monthly ceremonies, on the 2nd of each lunar month the *Tsagaan Dar’ Ekhiin mandal shiwa* (T. sgrol-ma’i maṇḍala bzhi-ba, ‘the four mandalas of the White Tārā’, T. sgrol dkar, S. Sitatārā), on the 8th the *Otoch Manal* ceremony (T. sman-bla, S. Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha ritual), on the 10th *Tsogchid* (T. tshogs-mchod, , S. gaṇapūjā, ‘accumulation of offerings’), on the 15th the *Sanduin jüd* ceremony (T. gsang-’dus rgyud, S. Guhyasamāja tantra), on the 25th again *Tsogchid*, on the 29th *Sakhius* (ceremony of the wrathful protectors), and on the 30th the *Nogoon Dar’ ekhiin mandal shiwa* (T. sgrol-ma’i maṇḍala bzhi-ba, ‘the four mandalas of the Green Tārā’, T. sgrol ljang, S. Śyāmātārā) are held. From among the annual ceremonies and festivals, *Maidar ergek* is held on the 25th of the first summer month. Lamas from the Bragri lamiin khiid monastery of Dundgow’ *aimag*, Saikhan-owoo *sum* always come to participate. This day is the anniversary of the passing away of Zawa Damdin. On the 15th of the middle summer month they perform an incense offering (*san*) to the local spirits of the Earth (called *Zambuutiwiin niit lusiin san*). Before the Lunar New Year on the 26-29th of the last winter month the *Arwan Khangal* ceremonies (‘the ten fierce ones’, in Mongolian Buddhism the group of the ten wrathful deities protecting the Buddhist Teaching) are held for the wrathful deities with Yamandag (or Jigid, T. ‘jigs-byed, S. Yāmāntaka) as the central one, and including the special texts to Dorjshügden, Setew, and Khan marwa (this later deity name and its Tibetan form is unidentified). These ceremonies for the wrathful deities are usually called the ‘old ceremonies’ (*Khuuchin nomiin khural*), as are the last ceremonies of the Old Year. On the New Year’s Eve (*bitüün*), the *Tsedor lkham* (T. tshes-gtor lha-mo, ‘annual ritual cake offering’) ceremony is held, a special *Sakhius* ceremony in honour of *Baldan lkham*, similarly to all bigger Mongolian monasteries.

In the monastery students are trained in the most important readings, Mongolian, Tibetan languages and writing, Buddhist philosophy, and also in Lamrim (T. lam-rim, The Gradual Path, the main work of Tsongkhapa) and Guruyoga (T. bla-ma’i rnal-’byor, the practice of uniting one’s mind with the wisdom mind of the master), calligraphy and old Mongolian written script. All lamas have *gelen* or *getsel* vow, that is, are novices or fully ordained lamas (T. *dge-tshul*, S. śramaṇera, T. *dge-slong*, S. bhikṣu). The monastery has connections with Amarbayasgalant monastery in Selenge aimag, the home monastery of the head and present incarnation; Dashchoinkhorlin monastery in Bulgan aimag (rebuilt on the site of the old Daichin wangiin khüree near Bulgan aimag cen-

tre); and in Europe as well, with the monastery Rawdanchoilin in Switzerland (Rabten Choeling, T. rab-bstan chos-gling). The rinpoches Dagom (1953-2007, a Tibetan rinpoche) and Gurudeva (1908-2009, a highly esteemed lama of Inner-Mongolian origin who, escaping the purges of the Chinese, went to and learnt for decades in Tibet and Nepal and contributed greatly to the revival, restoration and reopening of temples in Mongolia) often visited the monastery. The volumes of the works of Zawa Damdin were reprinted in India on the initiation of Gurudeva Rinpoche. In 2007 during the Naadam festival the 140th anniversary of the birth of Zawa Damdin (1867-1937) was held in the province centre, Mandalgow`, a statue of him was inaugurated, and for that occasion the Cyrillic version of Khor Chojun (The History of Mongolian Buddhism written by Zawa Damdin) translated by the present incarnation and printed in China was introduced to the public and also ceremonies were held.

Though the monastery is situated out-of-the way in the Gobi desert, due to its talented and enthusiastic head, foreign help, and its active lama community, contrary to numerous Mongolian monasteries revived after the democratic change but abandoned by now, with their lamas scattered or became lay, it still works actively. The monastery attracts not only devotees, but, due to its nicely cared of area, the ruins and the spectacular new temples, also tourists in summer, who visit the beautiful Baga gazriin chuluu area nearby or head for Mandalgow`, the province centre. In Delgertsogt sum it is the only working monastery now, though in the subprovince centre, which is more reachable for the people of the area, a temple building was started (a one-storey residential building started to be turned into a temple, inside a fence, with a stūpa on the left) for their convenience, but in 2007 it seemed it was left unfinished. Delgeriin choir, however, today is one of the most active countryside monasteries of Mongolia.

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