

## PRESENT-DAY BUDDHIST MONASTERIES AND SACRED SITES IN AND AROUND TSETSERLEG CITY

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In the 1990s, old monks revived the religious traditions of both Deed Khüree and Dood Khüree, which belong to the Gelukpa School, and many sites that were previously worshipped by the monks of Zayayn Khüree were once again worshipped by monks and local inhabitants. Before the repression, there were several sacred sites in the subordinated area of Zayayn Gegeen (Zayayn shav' nutag) (fig. 29), but this article only deals with the description of the sacred sites located in or near Tsetserleg City.<sup>1</sup>

### ACTIVE MONASTERIES

#### Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekhi Khiid, the Revived Monastery of Zayayn Deed Khüree

In 1990, following the democratic changes, Mongolians re-opened or built new temples on several ruined monastic sites, led by the elderly surviving ex-lamas, who put on their old monk robes, collected old *sūtras* and artefacts, and trained a new, young generation of monks. The reopening of Zayayn Khüree is a typical example of this revival. At first, the monks planned to renovate the old Main Assembly Hall (Tsogchin), and to put the Gegeen's palace that had been used as a provincial museum back into religious use. However, these plans did not come to fruition, and they eventually used the remaining building of the Sandui Khuvilgaany Dugan as a temple (fig. 92). Since then, it has been used as an active place of worship with daily chanting. The name of this revived monastery is Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekhi Khiid Monastery or Gandangejeelin, named after the Main Assembly Hall of the old Zayayn Khüree.

Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekhi Khiid started its activities in spring 1990, when several elderly ex-monks coming not only from Zayayn Khüree, but also from other monasteries that had existed in other parts of Arkhangai Province, gathered together for the reopening. O. Baatar from the Demchig Datsan of Zayayn Khüree became the abbot (*khamba*), monk Tserendorj of Zayayn Khüree became the *lovon*, monk Choidor from Luu Günii Khüree (Battsengel District, Arkhangai Province) became the *gevsh lam*, D. Sambuu (Sambuu *zurkhaich*), who had been an astrologer monk in Zayayn Khüree, became the chanting master (*umzad*), monk Norovoo of Luu Günii Khüree became the disciplinary master (*gesgüi*; later replaced by monk B. Tsenden-Ish, of Zayayn Khüree), and Pürevdaavuu from Shiva Shireetiin Khüree became the *gonir* (later replaced by Dorjgotov from Zayayn Khüree). The *daamal nyarav* ("administrator, manager" and bursar) was J. Jamsranjav, but he was later replaced by Kh. Natsagdorj.<sup>2</sup> The *stūpa* standing to the west in front of the ruined Tsogchin Temple was erected in 1990, when Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekhi Khiid opened.

At the beginning, forty boys took the vows of *genen*,<sup>3</sup> including T. Sharkhüü (religious name: Bumsan), S. Jargalsaikhan, S. Mönkhgerel, J. Davkharbayar, Kh. Baasanjargal, B. Günsennorov, and L. Chinzorig.<sup>4</sup> During the 1990s-2000s the elderly monks all passed away, and the community of the monastery is now run by the monks who were newly enrolled children in the monastery in the 1990s. At present about thirty monks (of whom only three took novice's precepts; the others are only *genen*) belong to the community led by abbot (*khamba*) Kh. Baasanjargal (born in 1973). The monks of the monastery come from different districts of

1. The survey of Zayayn Khüree was carried out by Zs. Majer and K. Teleki in 2009 and 2010 within the framework of the Monaco-Mongolian Joint Archaeological Expedition (<http://archo-steppe.com>). Data was updated by K. Teleki from 2011 to 2015 within the framework of the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA PD 83465) fellowship and the János Bolyai Research Scholarship. The research results were summarized in a monograph entitled *History of Zaya Gegeenii Khüree, the Monastery of the Khalkha Zaya Pandita*, Ulaanbaatar, 2013. The present article is based on the monograph. We are grateful to the monks of Tsetserleg for helping our research.

2. Yadamsüren 2009: 41.

3. Mo. *genen* or *usvh*, lay devotee who has taken the five precepts. However in Mongolia, the term *genen* is not only used for laypeople but also for novices who take the pre-novice precepts called *barmaravjin/barmaravjün* (Tib. *bar-ma rab-byung*). All new monks (*lam khuvrag*) joining a monastery have to take the basic *genen* lay precepts as well as the *barmaravjin* precepts completed by special monastic rules, such as having their heads shaved, and wearing monastic robes. Later, they take more precepts to become novices (*getsel*), or fully ordained monks (*gelen*).

4. Yadamsüren 2009: 44.



Fig. 92

Entrance to Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekhi Khiid (Sandui Khuivilgaany Dugan). (Ph. K. Teleki, 2013).

Arkhangai Province as Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekhi Khiid is the central monastery of the whole province. Some of them have further training in Ulaanbaatar or join the Gūshig Datsan Monastery of the present incarnation of Zaya Gegeen there. A few monks go to study in South India, for instance Bumsan, a fully-ordained monk (*gelen*), who studied in Goman Datsan (Tib. Sgo-mang College of Drepung Monastery) for more than ten years.

The present incarnation of Zaya Gegeen, Luvsandan-zanpūljinjigmed was acknowledged in 1999 by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, and studied at the Sera Jey College of Sera Monastery (Bylakuppe, South India) from 1999 to 2004 where he took the full ordination of *gelen*. He now lives in Ulaanbaatar, but often visits Arkhangai Province and Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekhi Monastery, especially for major religious events, as he is the head of both the revived parent-monastery in Arkhangai and of its Ulaanbaatar centre, known as Gandangejeelin or Gūshig Datsan.<sup>5</sup>

5. Gūshig Datsan, named after a famous temple in Zayayn Deed Khüree, has been operating in a yurt since 2004, and at present a new temple building is being built near Tasgaany Ovoo, east of

As Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekhi Monastery operates in the remaining building of Sandui Khuivilgaan, who was a reincarnated monk in Zayayn Khüree, it has a special atmosphere (fig. 93, fig. 94). Apart from the original pillars, ceiling and other decorations, many old and new statuettes, painted scrolls and ornaments decorate this spacious temple, which is one of the most beautiful temples in Mongolia both inside and outside. The most honoured objects of the temple are the relics of the Zaya Gegeens. The main deities worshipped in the monastery are Buddha Śākyamuni, Jigjid (Yamāntaka), and Lha-mo. Lha-mo, the main protector of the monastery, was already the main protector of the old Tsogchin and therefore of the whole Zayayn Khüree. The monastery possesses a new Tibetan *Kanjur* and several old *sūtras*.

Gandantegchenlin Monastery. The community consists of about twenty monks who were either disciples (*shav'*) of Zayayn Gegeen in Ulaanbaatar, or came from the parent-monastery in Tsetserleg. The main protector of the temple is Lha-mo. The system of ceremonies differs from the schedule of the parent-monastery in Tsetserleg: the monthly ceremonies are held as in other Gelukpa monasteries of Ulaanbaatar. See Majer and Teleki 2013: 132-134.



◀ Fig. 93

*Ceiling of the Sandui Khuvilgaany Dugan. (Ph. K. Teleki, 2009).*

▼ Fig. 94

*Altar with the statuette of Buddha Śākyamuni. (Ph. K. Teleki, 2009).*



Mongolian temples have differences in their ceremonial systems, and also in their daily chanting called *Tsogchin* (Tib. *Tshogs-chen*, “general assembly/great assembly”), which is a set of various shorter and longer texts. The specialities of the *Tsogchin* readings in this monastery are that the monks recite the eulogies of Zaya Gegeen, called *Lamyn magtaaluud* (“Eulogies of the Lama”) or *Londongalsan sudar* (Tib. *Blo-dan bskal-bzang*, “Nice *Kalpa* with Intellect”), and also *Bulgan Uulyñ san* (incense offering [Tib. *bsang*] to the local spirits of Mount Bulgan). As for monthly ceremonies, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of each lunar month the Sakhuis ceremony honouring the wrathful deities protecting the Buddhist Teaching is held, as it was held traditionally on this day in the old Zayayn Khüree.<sup>6</sup> At the request of individuals, the Oroin yerööl (Tib. *Smon-lam*) ritual can be held on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, and the Tsegmediin chogo or Tsevegmediin chogo<sup>7</sup> ritual on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. In addition to performing these ceremonies and daily chanting, monks read religious texts at the request of individuals for fixed prices or for donations, as in other Mongolian Buddhist monasteries.

As for annual ceremonies, the monks of Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekh Khiid celebrate the festival days of the Buddha. For instance at Tsagaan Sar, the Mongol lunar New Year, they perform the fifteen-day ceremony of Choimbrel or Choinpürel jon aa,<sup>8</sup> which commemorates Buddha’s defeat of the six masters, the holders of heretical doctrines (*tersüüd*, Tib. *log-par lta-ba*). This ritual is usually held in Tibetan and Mongolian Gelukpa monasteries from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of the first lunar month, but here it is held from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>. The Tseder Lkham (Tib. *Tshes gtor Lha-mo*) ceremony is performed on New Year’s Eve in honour of Lha-mo to ensure well-being in the coming year. For the commemoration of Tsongkhapa on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the first winter month (*zulyn 25*), hundreds of butter-lamps are lit by the monks and local inhabitants on the hillside of Mount Bulgan, which is a wonderful experience in devotees’ lives. Individual male devotees regularly worship Tsongkhapa’s rock painting at Mount Bulgan (women are not allowed to climb up the hill). Monks of the monastery and devotees worship the *ovoo* of Mount Bulgan and the Sairyn Ovoo (today in Tsenkher District) in summer, as well as Khaan Mountain. Suvarga Khairkhan Mountain, which is situated south of the monastery in Tsenkher District, is venerated every four years in summer. Zaya Pandita Luvsanprinlei and the monks of the old Zayayn Khüree used to worship this holy mountain, part of the Khangai Range. The Mongolian state started to worship it again in 2009: Suvarga Khairkhan is one

of the holy mountains worshipped nationally for the well-being of the Mongolian state and the Mongols.

As Mongolian monasteries do not get support from the state, their existence and development depend on donations and the efforts of their communities.<sup>9</sup> This is why Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekh Khiid has developed in stages: new *stūpas* were erected in 2006 and 2012, new prayer wheels were put into place in recent years, the heating system was modernized in 2013, and a new building, the Nomyn örgöö was built in 2014 east of the temple building in order to house the offices of the eminent monks of the monastery, to serve as residence for the present incarnation of Zaya Gegeen, as well as other *rinpoches* who are occasionally invited by the monastery to give initiations and explain the Buddhist teachings to local monks and laypeople. The roof and the walls of the temple building were renovated in 2011 thanks to state support because it is classified as Mongolian historical heritage, and the community bought the land the temple stands on. A large-scale project of the monastery is to erect a new building within the monastery’s enclosure, housing a school to train young novices. The monastery, being the “provincial monastery,” has close connections with other monasteries in Arkhangai Province, and also has a branch in Erdenet City.

### Galdan Zuu, Temple of Worship

Galdan Zuu Temple was rebuilt on its original site, at the foot of Mount Bulgan, and reopened in 1994 (fig. 59, fig. 95). The old temple once housed the famous Zuu (Tib. *Jo-bo*), a statue of the young Buddha Śākyamuni, given by Galdan Boshogtu. In 2008, a concrete stairway was built leading to the temple and a new Korean-style Buddha statue was built in front of it (fig. 95). In 2011, the new statues of Zuu Śākyamuni and his two disciples, made by G. Pürevbat and his students, were enshrined in the temple, and Galdan Zuu was renovated and repainted. Today only one monk, appointed from Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekh Khiid, belongs to this temple.

### Ölzii Badruulagch Khiid

Ölzii Badruulagch Monastery operates in a yurt temple situated to the west of the ruined Main Assembly Hall, within a fenced-off courtyard (fig. 96, fig. 97). In front of the temple entrance one can see large stones taken from the old Dood Khüree site.

In 1996, nineteen people, including monk Ch. Choidor, L. Lamstüren and his older brother, L. Laagansüren and others, decided to re-open the old Dood Khüree or Ölzii Badruulagch Monastery on this site.<sup>10</sup> It opened in spring 1998, first in a

6. In the majority of Mongolian monasteries, the Sakhuis ceremony is held on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the lunar month.

7. Tib. *Tshe-dpag-med-kyi cho-ga*, ceremony to worship Tsevegmed (or Tsegmed, Ayuush, Tib. *Tshe-dpag-med*, Skt. Amitāyus, the Buddha of Boundless Life).

8. Tib. *Cho-phrul chen-po'i dus-chen* or, Tib. *Chos-phrul bco-linga*, “Fifteen Miracles,” the great festival days commemorating Buddha’s miracles. This 15-day ceremony was introduced in Lhasa by Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelukpa School.

9. The monastery has a bank account for donations: Tugs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgeruulekh Khiid: Khaan Bank, Swift code: AGMOMNUB. Account number: 5135645735.

10. Yadamsüren 2009: 53.



Fig. 95

*Galdan Zuu with the statue of Buddha Śākyamuni in front. (Ph. K. Teleki, 2011).*

yurt that was put up to the west of the Museum of Arkhangai Province, in front of the ruins of the Main Assembly Hall. It moved to the present site, to the west of the old Main Assembly Hall in 2005. At the beginning, the temple had eight monks. Since 2004, L. Chinzorig (born 1974) has been the abbot of the monastery, and nowadays ten to fifteen monks belong to the community.

Concerning monthly ceremonies, on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, the monks chant the Ikh tsogchin. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the Tsegmediin chogo and *Kanjur* rituals are held. The Sakhuis ceremony is held on the 29<sup>th</sup> of each month. Lha-mo is the main protector of the monastery. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month the Dar' Ekhiin mandal shivaa (Tib. Sgrol-ma'i mandala bzhi-ba, the Four Maṇḍalas of Tārā) is performed. The Ikh tsogchin is also performed on "great days" (*düitsen ödör*), i.e. on the great annual festival days. The monks perform the Khuuchin khural and Tseder Lkham ceremonies with thanksgiving offerings before the lunar New Year, and then perform the Choinpürel jon aa at the beginning of the lunar New Year for fifteen days.

The monastery possesses a new Tibetan *Kanjur*. The monks also chant special texts in honour of Zaya Gegeen, such as the *Londongalsan* (*Zaya gegeenii magtaal*, a eulogy to Zaya Gegeen), *Lkhaarav soldev* (or *Zaya gegeenii soldev*, Tib. *Zhabs brian (?) gsol-'debs*, "invocation," an invocation to Zaya Gegeen) as part of daily chanting, and the monastery has some old ritual implements and accessories, and *sūtras*. As for the text recitations requested by individuals, some have prescribed prices, whilst others are recited for donations, the amount given being left up to the donator. The monks are working hard to develop their monastery.

### OVOOS AND SPRINGS

Some of Tsetserleg's main districts were named after geographic sites: the districts of Arslan Tsokhio (Lion Cliff) and Tsagaan Davaa (White Pass) are situated to the west of the old monastery, and Tsogt Uul (Glorious Mountain), Bor Tolgoi (Brown Hill), and Naran Bulag (Sun Spring) are located to



Fig. 96

Ölzii Badruulagch Monastery. (Ph. K. Teleki, 2009).

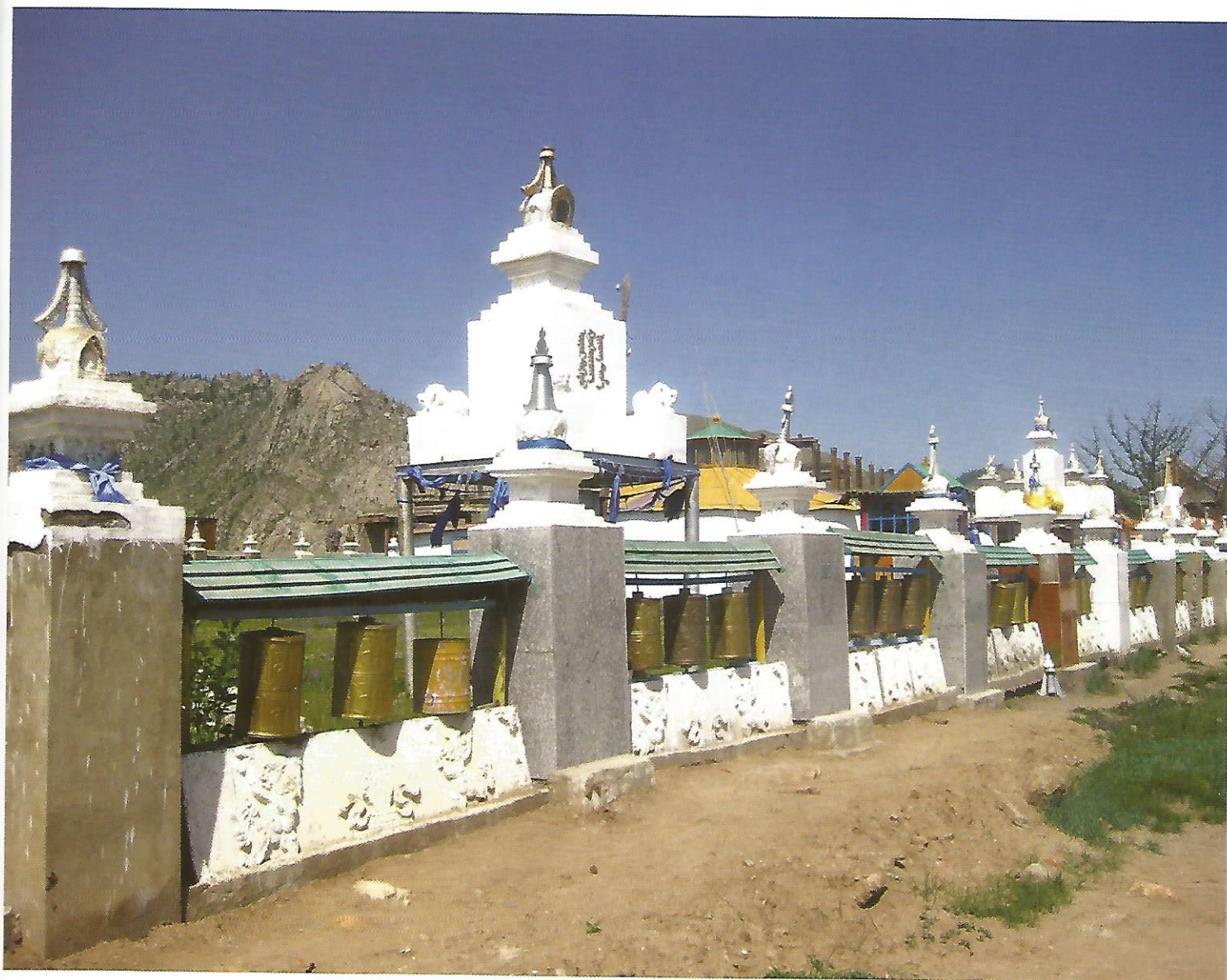


Fig. 97a & b

*Ölzii Badruulagch Monastery.  
(Ph. J. Magail, 2015).*

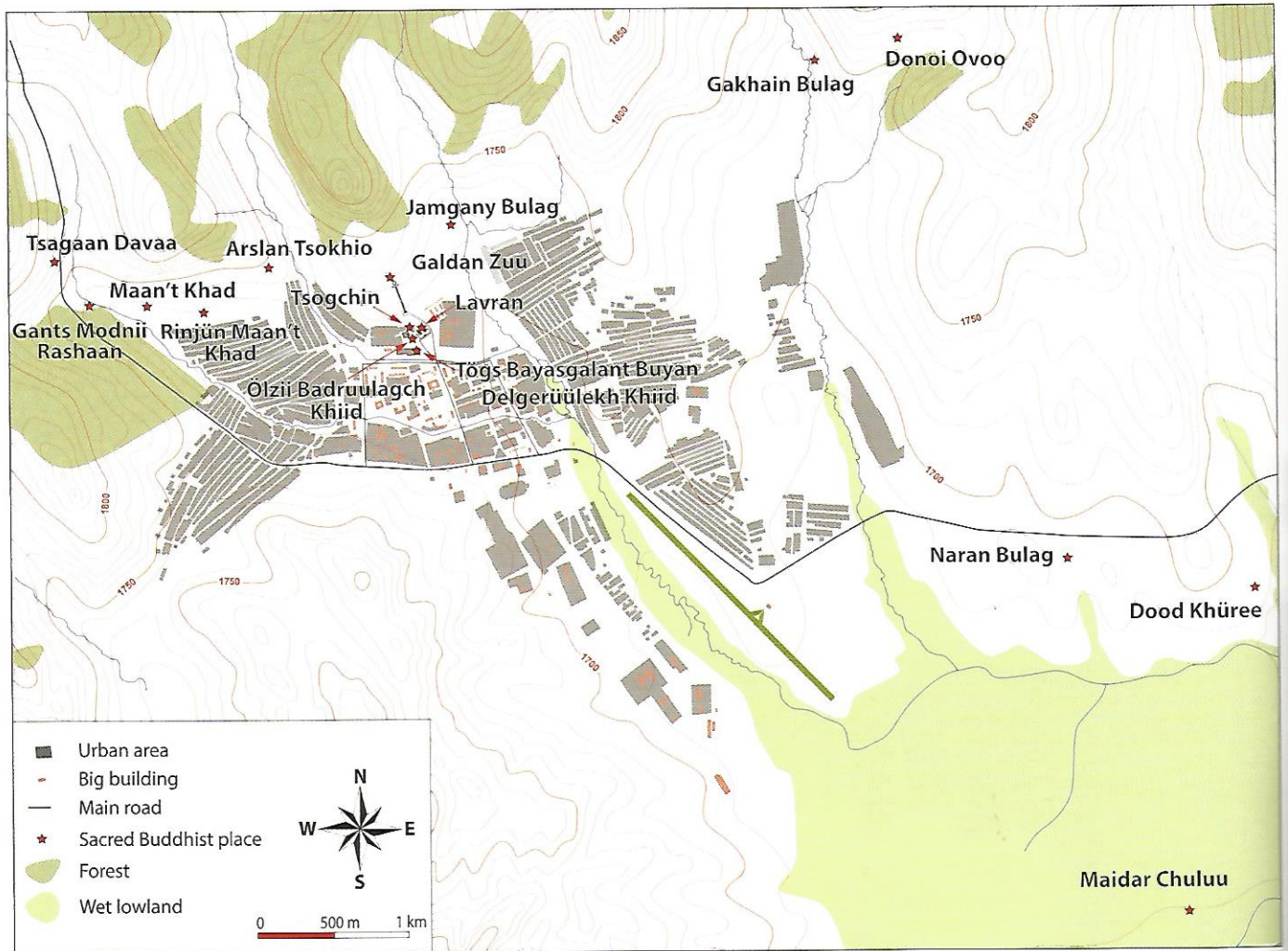


Fig. 98a

Map of Tsetserleg with location of sacred sites around Zayayn Khüree. (Map F. Burle & J. Magail, 2014).

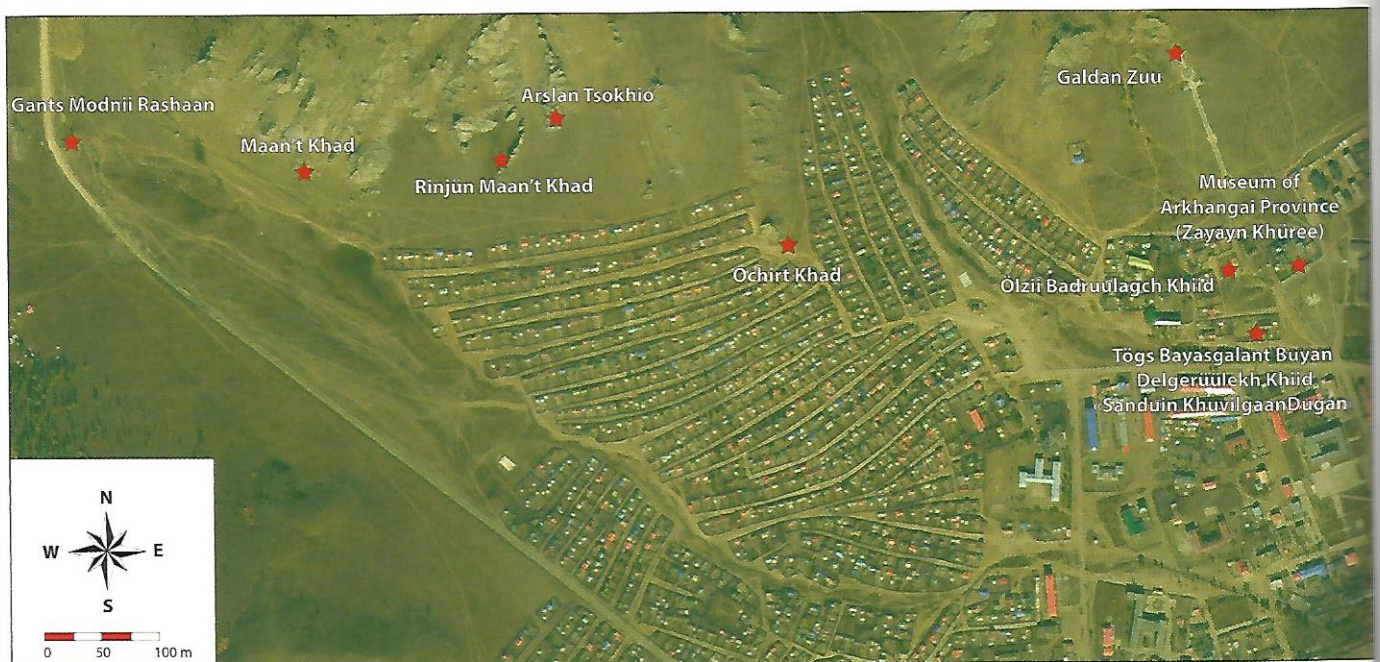


Fig. 98b

Map of Tsetserleg with GPS location of sacred sites around Zayayn Khüree. (Map J. Magail, 2014).



Fig. 99

Ovoo at Mount Bulgan. (Ph. K. Toleki, 2012).



Fig. 100

The holy "spring of the lonely tree" Gants Modny Rashaan to the west of the city of Tsetserleg.  
(Ph. A. Simonet, 2012).



the east of the old monastery. There are two rock formations, towering above the enclosures on the west, namely Arslan Tsokhio and Ochirt Khad (Vajra Cliff). Both the surrounding area and further afield have many rivers, mountains, and other beautiful scenery.

According to Kh. Baasanjargal, abbot of Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerüülekh Khiid, thirteen mountains in the area used to be venerated by monks of the old Zayayn Khüree. Seven of them are close to Tsetserleg City:

- Bulgan Uul to the north of Deed Khüree with an *ovoo* on its summit (fig. 99);
- Sairyn Ovoo (or Sain eriin Ovoo) to the southeast, on the right bank of the river Urd Tamir (today Tsenkher District). It was worshipped by the monks of the Medical College (Mamba Datsan) of Dood Khüree;
- Bayanberkh Uul is located to the north of Dood Khüree. It was worshipped by monks of the College of Buddhist Doctrine of Deed Khüree (Choir Datsan);
- Khaan Uul is to the east behind Bayanberkh Uul;
- Maan't Uul is to the southwest of Deed Khüree (there is an antenna on its summit today);
- Bor Tolgoi is situated southeast of Deed Khüree. It was worshipped by novices whose duty was to serve tea for the monks at ceremonies (*manzach*);
- Sangiin Tolgoi is a hill to the south of Deed Khüree, on the banks of the Urd Tamir. It is said that Sangiin Tolgoi has auspicious features and resembles a *maṇḍala* with the river resembling a blue *khadag* (offering scarf).

The area is abundant in rivers, brooks, and holy springs (*rashaan*). The springs do not freeze over in winter. Nearby sacred rivers and springs are as follows:

- The Urd Tamir River is about three kilometres to the south of the city
- Jamgany Bulag is a holy spring (*rashaan*) to the east, in the northeast valley of Mount Bulgan, near Gurvan Bulgan tourist *yurt* camp (fig. 74). The spring is fenced off. According to oral tradition, this spring gushed out after the Thirteenth Dalai Lama visited it in 1905 or 1906. S. Tüdev claims that the Dalai Lama created the spring with his stick, whilst others say that he peed there. S. Tüdev also claimed that it was a deep spring that once had goldfish in it.<sup>11</sup> There is another spring north of Jamgany Bulag.
- Gakhain Bulag is situated east of Jamgany Bulag, south of Tsogt Uul. Vegetables are grown in the valley.
- Gants Modny Rashaan is a holy spring to the west. This spring, whose name means "the spring of the lonely tree" got its name from the tree standing beside it. The tree is fenced off and is venerated with ceremonial scarves (fig. 100).
- Dund Gol (river), or Baast as it is known today, flows through the city from the west, and runs in front of the present-day monastery. It once acted as a kind of southern border of Deed Khüree.

- A rock with a holy spring that heals eye problems is located west of the Galdan Zuu.

- Naran Bulag is situated between Deed and Dood Khüree, south of the road.

- Khadat Bulag and Urd Bulag are located east of Dood Khüree. These streams flow to another Dund Gol, then to the Urd Tamir River.

- Donoin Bulag is located at Donoi, to the east of the city, where the old Donoin Süm or Lusyn Süm temple once stood (fig. 101). Tantric practitioners (*zoch*) meditated there and performed rituals to pacify local spirits residing in the hills and waters. Today, there is an *ovoo*.

## OTHER SACRED SITES

When one walks around the modern town of Tsetserleg now, it is challenging to imagine the old monastic city of Zayayn Khüree, how monks lived and where they went in their spare time. They undoubtedly visited sacred sites in the vicinity of the monastery. The sites in the vicinity of Zayayn Deed Khüree and Dood Khüree that are now being worshipped again are as follows:

- The rock paintings of Tsongkhapa and his two disciples, Khaidüv Je (Tib. Mkhas-grub rje, 1385-1438) and Gyaltsav Je (Tib. Rgyal-tshab rje, 1364-1432), Tārā, Buddha and other deities painted on the rocks of Mount Bulgan (fig. 89ab, fig. 90ab). Eight of the original paintings remained up until now, and these were repainted in 2013 on the occasion of the initiation of S. Bayantsagaan, head of Lamrim Datsan in Ulaanbaatar (fig. 102). These paintings, especially that of Tsongkhapa, are worshipped by monks and laymen.

- The pictures of Green Tārā and White Tārā were carved and painted on the hillside of Bayanzürkh Uul, north of Dood Khüree. Today, this has become a place of worship again. The area is decorated with silk scarves and prayer flags (fig. 103).

- Maidar Chuluu (Maitreya rock) is a sculpture depicting Maitreya, the Buddha of the future (fig. 76). It is situated on the left bank of the Urd Tamir. According to S. Tüdev, the stone was erected on the river bank to protect Dood Khüree from the danger of flooding of the Urd Tamir, and the stone itself was floated down the river from Donoi. The fenced-off stone sculpture is still worshipped by local people today. There is also a prayer wheel beside it.

- Rinjün Maan't Khad (the Rock With the Miraculously Appearing *Mantra*), on which it is said that the *mantra* (*maan'*) *Om maṇi padme hūm* miraculously appeared spontaneously (*rinjün*, Tib. *rang-'byung*, self-arisen, self-existent), is situated northwest of Deed Khüree. The *mantra* itself is visible in the form of moss growing in a strange shape on the rock. There is another rock with the *mantra Om maṇi padme hūm* carved and painted white nearby.

11. See Tüdev's account, Chapter 3.



Fig. 101

*Donoi. (Ph. K. Teleki, 2009).*

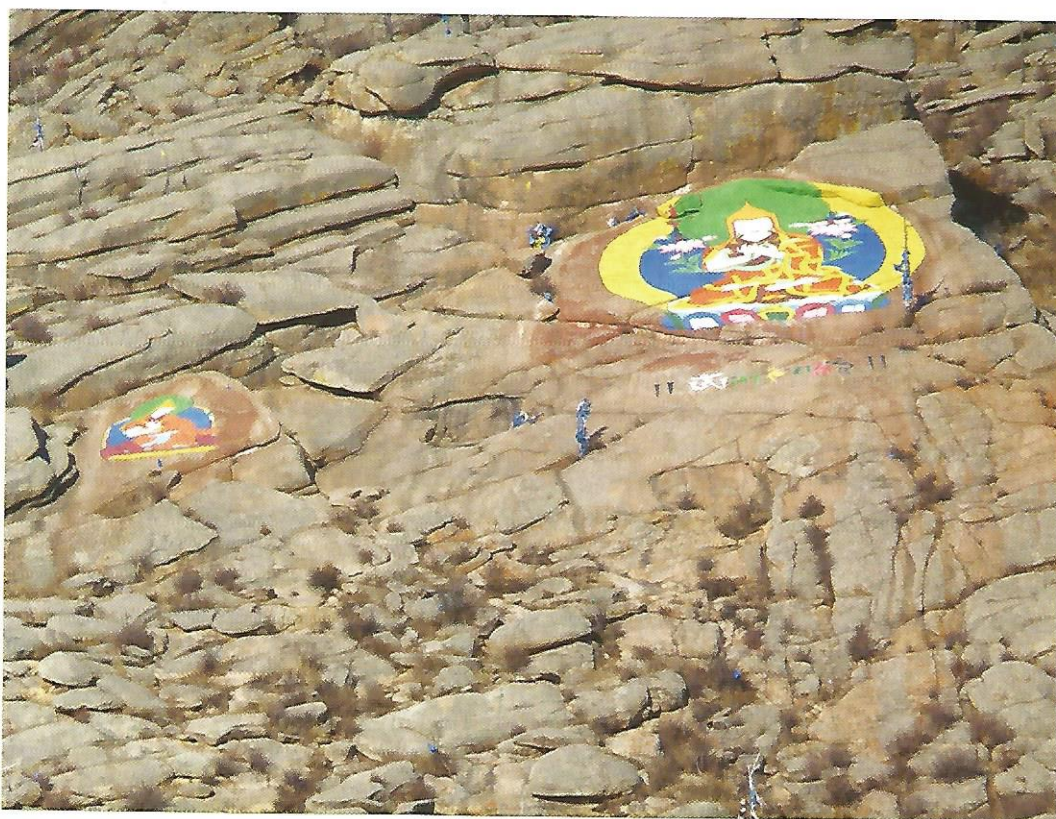


Fig. 102

*Rock paintings at Mount Bulgan. (Ph. K. Teleki, 2013).*

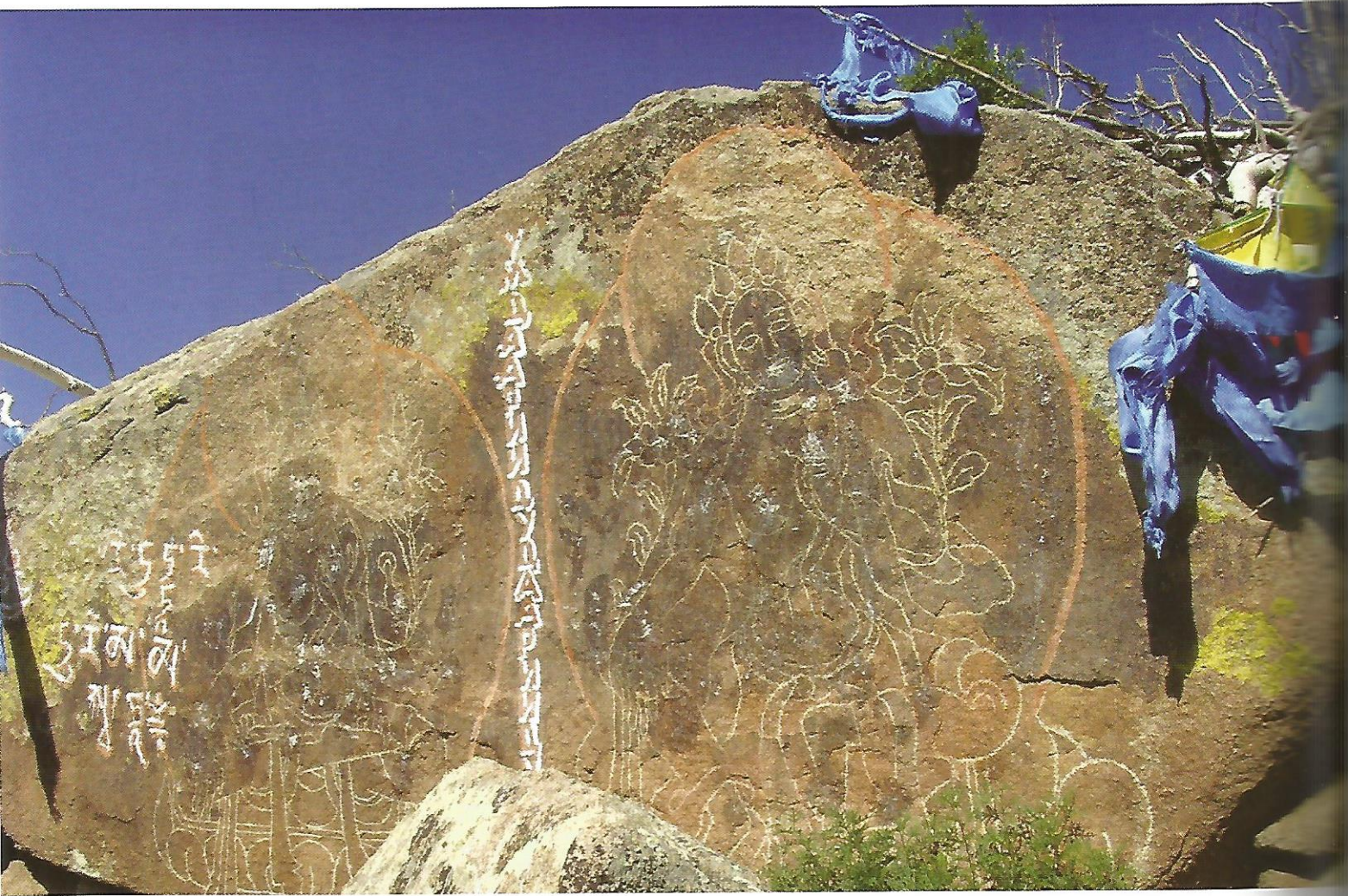


Fig. 103

Rock carving of Tārā on the hillside of Bayanzürkh Uul. (K. Teleki, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

There are few written sources that allow us to document the history of Zayayn Khüree. However, due to the efforts of ex-monks of Zayayn Khüree after fifty years of repression, the religious tradition was revived and their knowledge was passed down to a new generation of young monks. At present, as the old monks have all passed away, the younger generation is trying hard to preserve and develop the intangible heritage they inherited from their masters. Though many of the artefacts, masterpieces of the tangible heritage of Zayayn Khüree, were

destroyed in 1937, the holy springs and mountains remained, and oral tradition preserved many stories about the sacred sites. After 1990, these sites started to be worshipped again by the monks and inhabitants of Tsetserleg, the inheritors of the culture of Zayayn Khüree. In July, 2013 the more than hundred years old “mummies” (dissicated corpses, *güden*, Tib. *sku-rten*) of Zaya Pandita Luvsanprinlei and the Fourth Zaya Gegeen gilded by monk artist G. Pürevbat were placed on the main altar of Tögs Bayasgalant Buyan Delgerütökh Monastery. These are the most precious objects of worship in the temple as well as unique relics of the Mongolian Buddhist culture.