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Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala

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2. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DANDARON MANDALA

A copy (photo reproduction) of the Dandaron mandala can be found in a small one-story temple in the center of the Buryat capital, Ulan-Ude (see Fig. 27), where it hangs to the right of the altar between two windows. Its size is ca 1.3 x 1.3 m, which most probably corresponds to the size of the original mandala. An interesting fact is that this reproduction of the mandala does not precisely copy the original: the figure of Vajrabhairava in the inner circle is rotated clockwise by ninety degrees (it lies on its side); this is probably a technical mistake, which occurred when the reproduction was made. What is important however, is that the mandala is hanging in the temple where rituals in 2006 were conducted by “the last person to enter Dandaron’s sangha”, Tsyvan Anchenovich Dashitsyrenov (Tsyvan Lamkhai).¹ This means that the Dandaron mandala has not been forgotten after the death of its painter. On the contrary, it continues to occupy a place in the contemporary lived religion in Buryatia.

The picture of the mandala became widely known thanks to Vladimir M. Montlevich, who published a small color reproduction in his book *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. Lama Tsyvan continues in the tradition of Dandaron’s micro-sangha and it was he who concelebrated the ritual of the White Stupa of Vajrasattva, dedicated to Bidia D. Dandaron in the Kizhinga valley on the 18th of September 2006.²

1 Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati...*, p. 387.

2 For details about the construction and consecration of the White Stupa, see Andrey A. Terentyev, “O stupe Dandarona” [About the Dandaron’s Stupa, in Russian], *Buddizm Rossii* 40, 2006, pp. 66–67.



Lama Tsyvan Dashitsyrenov (on the left) in his temple in Ulan-Ude, talking to the author. Dandaron mandala hangs between the two windows. (October 2006, photograph by Andrej Fukas)

Lama Tsyvan Dashitsyrenov, who continues in Dandaron's tradition in the capital of Buryatia, also provided a valuable testimony of his first meeting with the teacher, Bidia D. Dandaron:

“When highly educated people, coming from the western USSR, started visiting B. D. Dandaron, the authorities (i.e. KGB, author's note) began to worry; they faced a new phenomenon, which, for them, was difficult to comprehend. Once, when I came from Irkutsk to see my father Anchin Dashitsyrenov for the holidays, I met with his teacher, Bidia D. Dandaron. It was then that Bidia D. Dandaron said Buddhism was going to spread through geometric progression throughout Russia. (...) After Dandaron and his disciples were imprisoned, many, especially older people, were frightened and feared that another year like 1937 might be coming... I was convinced that we must adhere to our belief and plunge into the center of events. They begged me, threatened me with imprisonment, and thereby confirmed my belief more than ever. That year was decisive for me and predestined my later life.”³

³ Andrey M. Strelkov, “Bidia Dandaron: Zhiznenny put i dukhovny podvig” [Bidia Dandaron: The Life and Spiritual Development, in Russian], *Tainy Buryatii*, spetsvypusk, 2003, p. 20.

The mandala itself can be “read” in several ways; the main approaches being the religious and the academic one. The first approach represents an attitude of a believer and is the primary way of “reading” the mandala.

The visual anthropology expert David Morgan aptly describes such an approach on the general level:

“The study of visual culture will regard the image as part of a cultural system of production and reception, in which original intention does not eclipse the use to which images are put by those who are not their makers. Scholars will therefore investigate not only the image itself but also its role in narrative, perception, scientific and intellectual classification, and all manner of ritual practices, such ceremonies, gift-giving, commerce, memorialization, migration and display – thereby understanding the image as part of the social construction of reality.”⁴

To understand the Dandaron mandala according to this approach therefore does not mean to restrict oneself to the “theological”, immediately religious, aspects of the mandala, but also to take note of its extra-religious context.⁵

2.1 Religious or “theological” approach

The religious or theological approach is the basic form of interpreting the mandala. This was the main reason for creating the mandala; as a meditation aid of one particular group of Buddhists in a particular time and place.

Most information about this way of reading, or more precisely of “using” the Dandaron mandala can be found in an extensive book written by Vladimir M. Montlevich, one of the first disciples of Bidia D. Dandaron. The author mentions certain events surrounding the origins of the mandala, in particular the date of its completion⁶ (19 October 1974, i.e. a week before Dandaron’s death);

4 David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press 2005, p. 30.

5 Further recommended reading on this topic includes: Meher McArthur, *Reading Buddhist Art: An Illustrated Guide to Buddhist Signs and Symbols*, London: Thames and Hudson 2002; regarding mandalas: Denise Patry Leidy – Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment*, New York – Boston: Asia Society Galleries, Tibet House, and Shambhala 1997; Tibetan meditation and visualization of mandalas: Luis O. Gómez, “Two Tantric Meditations: Visualizing the Deity,” in: Donald S., Lopez, Jr. (ed.), *Buddhism in Practice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995, pp. 318–327; and Jonathan Landaw – Andy Weber, *Images of Enlightenment: Tibetan Art in Practice*, Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications 1993.

6 “Everyone knew what had happened [Bidia D. Dandaron’s death on 26 October 1974, author’s note], but no one spoke about it. Not a single word. Everyone dealt with it alone and without words. The teacher left on the 26th day and the Vajrabhairava mandala was finished and

however, he does not mention any concrete description of the subject of the depiction. A partial description of the mandala, which can be found on the internet website,⁷ does not contain explanation of Dandaron's line and the individual figures either.

The Dandaron mandala is a circular painting with multiple depictions of the deity, Vajrabhairava, whose name is depicted in the center. This type of mandala is characterized below by David Morgan. Of course, he does not refer to the Dandaron mandala, which he was not familiar with. He speaks about those mandala depictions that comprise both natural, e.g. historical figures, and supernatural beings, usually known from various Tibetan Buddhist pantheons:

“A host of divine figures and lamas are pictured around the outer circle, which contains a pictorial narrative of teachings that circumscribe the central, symmetrical feature of the mandala, inside which are located the deity and his consort. Devotees prepare for mediation by careful study of the image, learning the procedure and meaning of its stages and undergoing an initiation rite to prepare them for union with the god, whose sexual union with emptiness, or no soul, signifies the goal of the meditator. Careful study of the mandala, as one study put it, helps devotees visualize themselves within the realm of the deity. Once inside the perfected universe of the deity, the practitioner can move a step closer towards spiritual enlightenment.”⁸

2.2 Academic approach

The academic approach involves knowledge of (not identification with) the previous approach; it attempts to describe, analyze and include the religious and historical context of Dandaron's sangha and his mandala. David Morgan, cited above, writes:

“To investigate an image as a social reality means to regard its significance as the result of both its original production and its ongoing history of reception.”⁹

The author points out that every image which enters a social reality must be examined as part of that reality. The same applies to the Dandaron mandala,

the first print made on the 19th day of the month of October. This concordance allowed us to say: ‘The teacher became united with the *zhinkhor* (mandala)’.” Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati...*, p. 454.

7 See <http://pravidya.net>.

8 David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze...*, p. 30.

9 Morgan David, *The Sacred Gaze ...*, p. 32.

which became part, albeit not a dominant one, of the contemporary and recent history of Buryat Buddhism. Its importance is accentuated by the period in which it was created: the Leonid Brezhnev era of clandestine religious activity. However, it did not get lost in the KGB archives. Instead it appeared in a temple in Ulan-Ude at the turn of the last century. A color reproduction was published in a book, and selected details are available on-line. The relationship between the creation of the Dandaron mandala and its subsequent and recent dissemination has become loose; the mandala has ceased to be closely and clearly associated with Dandaron's group. Instead, it has become public property, whose religious dimension has gradually faded into the background and lost its dominant character.

If you want to understand the Dandaron mandala, it is paramount to understand the historical context of its conception first, because the mandala, *inter alia*, portrays a visual account of that context. Due description and analysis of the mandala may only be performed on the basis of a certain level of familiarity with the history of Tibetan Buddhism and the Buryat religion.¹⁰ In order to undertake an academic description and analysis, you must know how believers use the mandala and what their attitude to, and understanding of, the mandala is.

One of the prerequisites for an academic interpretation of the mandala is a certain understanding of its religious background (the traditional Vajrabhairava mandala in Tibet, Mongolia and Buryatia) and the specific historical context of the Buryat sangha in the Russian and Soviet state, as well as the interconnected context of the spread of Buddhism to south-east Siberia. In particular it means that it is necessary to be aware of the life story (including mythology, or recent hagiography) of Bidia D. Dandaron and the concrete circumstances which gave rise to the creation of the mandala. We must highlight the three most important elements of the mandala that reveal its essence: the relationship between the tradition and modernity in Dandaron's sangha, which illustrates the time and conditions of its emergence. Namely, it is a depiction of Dandaron's line of previous rebirths captured in the mandala, where B. D. Dandaron is depicted as a khubilgan. Another key element for understanding the mandala is the correct identification of figures and events – both historical and mythical – which are present in the mandala and have a known photographic model. Another interesting feature is the identification of places found in the so-called cemetery circle of the Dandaron mandala.

¹⁰ For history of the relationship between the sangha and state in Buryatia see e.g. Nikolay V. Tsyrempilov, "Chuzhie lamy: Rossiiskaya politika v otnoshenii zagranichnogo buddiiskogo dukhovenstva v 18 – nachale 19 v." ["'Alien' Lamas: Russian Policy toward Foreign Buddhist Clergy in the Eighteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries, in Russian], *Vestnik SPbGU*, ser. 13, 2010, vypusk 4, pp. 9–18; see also Nikolay V. Tsyrempilov, "Alien Lamas: Russian policy towards foreign Buddhist clergy in the 18th – early 20th centuries", *Inner Asia* 14/2, 2012, pp. 245–255.





Fig. 29

Dandaron mandala, right upper corner.

◀ Fig. 28

Dandaron mandala, author Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov, 1974. The real size, material and dyes of the original are unknown.

The understanding of the religious background of the mandala is primarily based on the traditional Vajrabhairava mandalas in Tibet, Mongolia and Buryatia. Particularly the Buryat mandalas served as a model for the Dandaron mandala. According to Vladimir M. Montlevich, the authorship of the mandala must be attributed to the whole of Dandaron's sangha. Zheleznov's role as the painter was certainly essential, but he must have discussed the *object*, the *setting* and the *colors* with the other members. He could not have acted upon his own decision. Although not mentioned by Vladimir M. Montlevich, we may assume that a principal role in its creation was played by Bidia D. Dandaron himself.

In the right upper corner of the mandala, no figure closely connected with Dandaron can be found. In this respect it differs from the other three corners, which contain realistic portraits of Dandaron. Along the outer perimeter of the mandala, there are seven offerings in bowls made from human skulls, Skt. *kapala* (Tib. *thopa /thod pa/*). They are placed in a row and at its end lies a white "pipe", made from a human thighbone (Tib. *kangling /rkang rling/*, or *kangdung /rkang dung/*).¹¹ *Kapala* is a bowl for the *nectar of immortality*, made of the calvaria – the top of human skull. A cloud of smoke emanates from the "pipe", creating the background, a smoke aura, for the figure of the sitting Padmasambhava (Skt. literally *Lotus-Born*, Tib. *Pema Jungne /padma 'byung gnas/*, in Tibet known as *Guru Rinpoche /gu ru rin po che/*, literally *Precious Master*), Kashmiri scholar, tantric master and "subduer of demons". Padmasambhava brought the Indian, tantric form of Buddhism to Tibet during the reign of the Tibetan king Thrisong Detsen (*/khri srong lde btsan/*, 754–797).

In the corner next to Padmasambhava, stands a figure named Simhamukha, a blue deity with the human body and lion head, jumping on a naked human corpse. In his right hand he holds a curved knife, Skt. *kartri* (Tib. *digug /gri gug/*), in his left hand he holds a *kapala*, filled with blood, and a staff, Skt. *khatvanga* (Tib. *khatamga /kha twam ga/*).¹² An interesting connection between this deity and B. D. Dandaron has been reported. A year before his death, on 28 October 1973, B. D. Dandaron wrote a letter from prison to Nadezhda Sanzhimitypovna Munkina:

"You write that you are worried about how I experience the turning point between the two finitenesses. It is necessary to perform the *Sendemyn Dogzhur* [protective ritual of the dakini Simhamukha, note of Vladimir M. Montlevich], and therefore it is advisable to visit the Eravna old man [Lama Agramba Gatavon, note of Vladimir M. Montlevich], or to do it in another way."¹³

11 For more details about *kapála* and *kangling* see e.g. Robert Beer, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols*, Chicago – London: Serindia Publications 2003, pp. 110–112.

12 For more details about the knife and the staff see e.g. Robert Beer, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols...*, pp. 102, 112–113.

13 Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati...*, p. 422.



Fig. 30

Dandaron mandala, right lower corner.

In another letter, dated 2 July 1974, written to his disciple Viktor N. Pupyshev, he recommends meditating on Sendema, i.e. on Simhamukha.

The third figure in the right upper corner of the Dandaron mandala is Yamaraja with a Shakti (a partner), standing on a bull.

In the right lower corner of the mandala we can see Bidia D. Dandaron as a yogi dressed in leopard skin, sitting in the lotus position (Skt. *padmasana*). He has a miniature human skull in his hair, his right hand lifts a *kapala* filled with blood, and he holds a bell, Skt. *ghanta* (Tib. *drilbu /dril bu/*) in his left hand. The handbell represents the female principle of the *perfection of wisdom* (Skt. *prajñāparamita*). It is one of the perfections (Skt. *paramita*), realized by an adept for awakening (Skt. *bodhi*) on his bodhisattva's path according to the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine. The complementary instrument and principle is a men's weapon *vajra*, thunderbolt (Tib. *dorje /rdo rje/*).¹⁴

Bidia D. Dandaron is depicted as a tantric master in the lower left corner of the mandala, raising his right hand with the *kapala*, with the tantric bell in the left hand, similarly to the previous image. He wears a "ritual robe" of the color orange with a wide blue rim with a double vajra on the chest; Skt. *vishvavajra* (Tib. *dorje gyadam /rdo rje rgya gram/*). Vishvavajra is also called the full vajra and is formed by four tips representing the four cardinal points. It is a symbol of the perfect stability.¹⁵

In the left upper corner, Bidia D. Dandaron is portrayed as a teacher in civil European clothes; it is the only depiction of this type in the whole mandala. The mandala contains six portraits of Dandaron altogether; four present him as a Buddhist teacher, guru; one portrays him in a prison uniform and one in a traditional Buryat overcoat. None of the images shows him in a monk's robe, as is the case with Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov. The reason is that B. D. Dandaron had never formally been a monk; he had never joined a monastery. Firstly, because he did not get the opportunity (the anti-religious Stalinist reprisals started when he was a boy) and secondly, Tsydenov's tradition did not support monastic life.

14 For more details about these tantric instruments see e.g. Robert Beer, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols...*, pp. 92–95.

15 For more details about these tantric instruments including various depictions and forms see e.g. Robert Beer, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols ...*, pp. 95–97.



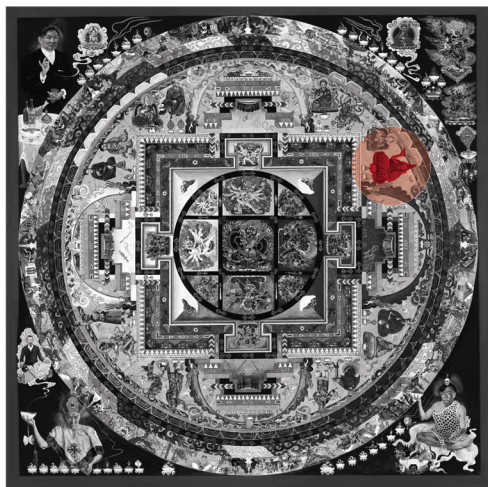
Fig. 31

Dandaron mandala, left lower corner.

2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala



On the center sits the 13th Gyayag Lama Kalzang Tsultrim Tenpay Nyima. He died in 1913 in the khenpo of Jampaling Temple in the Kumbum Monastery, Tibet. Zheleznov painted the 13th Gyayag Lama from a photograph dated to 1912 (see Fig. 33); Dandaron mandala.



Bidia D. Dandaron as a recognized reincarnation in the line of Gyayag Lamas

At least two photographs of the 13th Gyayag Lama Kalzang Tsultrim Tenpay Nyima have been preserved. One is quite old; it was first published in 1894, and therefore must have been taken prior to that year. The photograph was published by Prince Esper Ukhtomskii in his book about the journey of Tsarevich Nikolai II around the world. Its steel engraved reproduction was later published by Albert Grünwedel in 1900.¹⁶

The other photograph is about twenty years younger and is dated to the year 1912; this photograph served as a model for Aleksandr I. Zheleznov when painting the 13th Gyayag Lama in the Dandaron mandala.

The 13th Gyayag Lama is captured here as a tantric master in the midst of a ritual; however, this is not a real ceremony in a monastery, but an arranged scene. The lama wears the typical yellow hat of the Gelugpa order and, compared to the mandala, his hands as well as the ritual objects are in a different position. In the photograph he holds a vajra in the right hand and a handbell in the left; in the mandala, he holds a *kapala* in his right hand.

The figure of the lama (see Fig. 35, on the right) in the Dandaron mandala resembles the man in the photograph (see Fig. 37). Because the person in the mandala (next to Akpa Lama) is the 13th Gyayag Lama, we may assume that the following figure is probably the 14th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama Lozang Tenpay Gyaltsen. If this assumption is correct, it means that A. Zheleznov knew both the identity of Dandaron's "tulku twin", the 14th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama, and that he knew what this twin looked like as an adult man. If we assume that he is about twenty to thirty years old in the photograph, it should date back to years 1936–1946, a time when the atmosphere was not favorable for cultural and religious interactions in either the traditional regions in the USSR or in Amdo. Another known picture of him comes from the end of the 20th century and was published in a book written by the Buryat Buddhistologist Tsymzhit Purbuevna Vanchikova after Dandaron's death (see Fig. 38). There is one more detail visible in the mandala: the pattern on the left sleeve of the lama's robe ("grid"). In both cases it is almost identical and precisely corresponds to the photograph of the 13th Gyayag Lama, whereas there is no similar photograph of his 14th (Tibetan) follower. The only available picture is a shot of his face, published by Andrey

¹⁶ See Albert Grünwedel, *Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet und der Mongolei: Führer durch die lamaistische Sammlung des Fürsten E. Ukhtomskij*, Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus 1900, p. 78, Fig. 63. The first publication of the photograph see in Esper E. Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvye Gosudaria Imperatora Nikolaya II. na Vostok, 1890–1891 gg.* [Tsar's Nikolai II Travel to the East, Tsar Nikolai II, in Russian], Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus 1894–1898.



Fig. 33

A photograph of the 13th Gyayag Lama Kalzang Tsultrim Tenpay Nyima, dated to 1912. Source: Andrey M. Strelkov – Evgeny A. Torchinov – Marina. V. Mongush – S. V. Riabov, *Buddizm: Kanony, Istorija, Iskusstvo* [Buddhism, Canons, History, Art, in Russian], Moskva: Dizain – Informatsia – Kartografia 2006, p. 440.



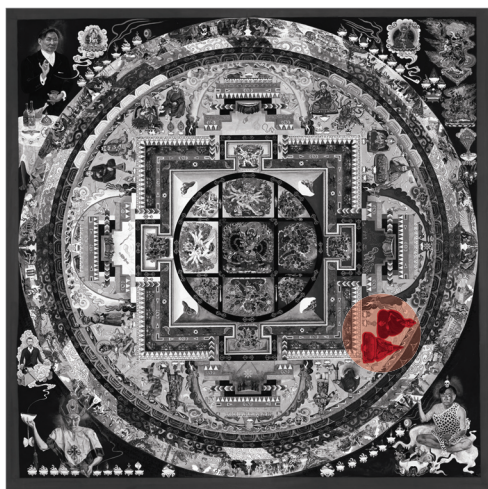
Fig. 34

Undated photograph of the 13th Gyayag Lama Kalzang Tsultrim Tenpa Nyima, picture taken before 1894. Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets.

2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala



Akpa Lama, on the left (this depiction is based on the photograph from 1912, see Fig. 36); on the right is the 14th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama Lozang Tenpay Gyaltzen; Dandaron mandala.



M. Strelkov.¹⁷ Maybe Aleksandr I. Zheleznov used the “lower part” which both lamas have in common and he only changed the faces.

If the man in the mandala really is the 14th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama, the mandala painter A. Zheleznov had to know the photograph from Kumbum in 1974, and the photograph must have been taken some time before the year 1945. There must have been a connection; however, we are talking about the period of Stalinist reprisals when any communication with a foreign country came with the threat of capital punishment and many Buryats were sentenced to death as “spies in the services of Japanese imperialism”. Although Dandaron never mentioned the 14th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama (and he did not speak of himself as such), it is possible that the 14th Gyayag Lama is portrayed in the mandala and that would mean he knew of him (or at least Zheleznov knew of him) and, moreover, that he knew what the 14th Gyayag Lama looked like. However, Dandaron’s sangha did not publish the description of characters in the mandala and it is speculative to presume the presence of the 14th Gyayag Lama on the basis of visual similarity. Nevertheless:

“The 14th [Tibetan] Gyayag Lama came from the Kokenur Mongols, like his previous rebirths. He was a highly educated man and one of the teachers of the 10th Panchen Lama, whose family also came from Amdo. Aginskoe Monastery Emchi Lama Geleg Balbar, who spent his childhood in Kumbum and Labrang, personally knew the 14th Gyayag Lama; he was his disciple. Grandpa Balbar told us that *Rinpoche* (the 14th Gyayag Lama) maintained friendly and supportive relationships with Buryat lamas. A *loilan*, three-dimensional Kalachakra mandala, was built for the 14th Gyayag Lama in Kumbum in 1987. The mandala, twelve meters in diameter, is located in the building constructed especially for this purpose. The 14th Gyayag Lama meditated inside this mandala for three years until he left his body in 1990.”¹⁸

The above mentioned Aginskoe Monastery Emchi Lama Geleg Balbar told about the three-dimensional meditation mandala of the *Wheel of Time* (Skt. *Kalachakra*, Tib. *Dunkhor /dus 'khor/*), which is located in the Kalachakra temple in the Tibetan monastery of Kumbum, Amdo. The mandala is made of wood and a common visitor is not allowed to enter it; even taking pictures is restricted by the monks, at least this was the situation in summer 2001, during the author’s visit.

The tantric doctrine of the Wheel of Time is the subject of the *Kalachakra Tantra* and it relates to the Shambhala myth, according to which the kingdom of Shambhala is the place of maintenance and dissemination or spreading of the

17 Andrey M. Strelkov, “Bidia Dandaron: Zhiznenny put i dukhovny podvig” [Bidia Dandaron: The Life and Spiritual Development, in Russian], *Tainy Buryatii*, spetsvyypusk, 2003, p. 6.

18 Andrey M. Strelkov, “Bidia Dandaron: Zhiznenny put”, p. 6.



Fig. 36

Akpa Lama, photograph of 1912; source: Tsymzhit P. Vanchikova et al. (ed.), *Zemlya Vadzhrapani: Buddizm v Zabaikalie* [The Land of Vajrapani: Buddhism in Transbaikalia, in Russian], Moskva: Dizain – Informatsia – Kartografiya 2008, p. 310.



Fig. 37

The 14th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama Lozang Tenpay Gyaltsen, Russian transcription: *Dzha-yag Rinpoche XIV Lobsan Danbii Zhaltzan*, 1916–1990; Jampaling Temple in Kumbum Monastery, Tibet; source: Andrey M. Strelkov, “Bidia Dandaron: Zhiznenny put i dukhovny podvig” [Bidia Dandaron: The Life and Spiritual Development, in Russian], *Tainy Buryatii*, spetsvypusk, 2003, p. 6.

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Fig. 38

The 14th (Tibetan) Gyayag Lama Lozang Tenpay Gyaltsen, 1916–1990; Jampaling Temple in Kumbum Monastery, Tibet; source: Tsymzhit P. Vanchikova et al. (ed.), *Zemlya Vadzhrapani ...*, p. 310.



Fig. 39

A three-dimensional model of Kalachakra mandala, Kumbum Monastery, Amdo, Tibet, August 2001, photograph by Luboš Bělka.



Dandaron mandala, left upper corner.

2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala



Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov, the left depiction is based on the photograph of 1891 (see Fig. 42); the right depiction based on the photograph of 1919 (see Fig. 43); Dandaron mandala.



Kalachakra teaching. According to Tibetans, this is its main function, albeit not the only one. This tantric text predicts that Shambhala will be a place of spiritual and secular renewal after the Buddhist world is saved from destruction by enemies of the religion (i.e. Buddhism) and barbarians.

Most probably, there are only three known photographs of Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov. The first one dates back to the year 1891 and two, complementary ones come from 1919. The first photograph is a typical drawing-room picture taken in a photo studio, a very popular undertaking in the 19th century. At that time, Tsydenov was forty one years old (he was born in 1850);¹⁹ he is dressed in the traditional Buryat monastic robe, his hair is cut short and he wears a moustache. The traditional Buryat boots with upturned toes are worth noticing. There are no special decorations or luxury items visible in the picture; Tsydenov looks calm and modest.

His left hand rests on a round table, and below it, there is probably a Tibetan book wrapped in canvas. In the mandala, Tsydenov is painted exactly as in the photograph and his robe is of the monastic red color (see Fig. 41).

This photograph is in fact used twice in the Dandaron mandala. First as the mentioned color copy (see Fig. 41 and Fig. 42) and for a second time, Aleksandr Zhelezov depicted only the face (see Fig. 31). A remarkable point is that Tsydenov is portrayed in civil, not monastic clothes. He does not even wear typical Buryat clothes, but is dressed in the latest Euro-American fashion, in tailcoat, with a bowler hat and a leather travel bag. And, like a true gentleman, he also has a slender cane. How can this be explained? According to the stories told within Dandaron's group, Lubsan S. Tsydenov visited Italy. Nowadays, it is not possible to say whether he really did go to Italy or Western Europe and whether this is a depiction of those travels. In this context we can cite the testimony of Andrey M. Strelkov:

As for the *modernization* of Buddhism in the yoga community of Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov, we can say there were certain circumstances that would not be possible in a traditional monastery. According to A. M. Zhelezov's words, Sorkhoi's residents had subscriptions for journals, including international ones. Lamas studied foreign languages and literature; Sorkhoi had a rich Russian language library focused on belle-lettres. Once, when Buddhist laymen came to order a ritual with the lamas, they were surprised to see Samdan Lama reading a European book, wearing European

¹⁹ Nikolay Tsyrempilov, "Samdan Tsydenov and his Buddhist Theocratic Project in Siberia", in: Johan Elverskog (ed.), *Biographies of Eminent Mongol Buddhists*, International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies 2008, p. 117; see also Nikolay V. Tsyrempilov, *Buddizm i imperiya. Buryatskaya buddiiskaya obshchina v Rossi (18 – nach. 20 v.)* [Buddhism and Empire. Buryat Buddhist Community in Russia (eighteenth – beginning of twentieth century, in Russian)], Ulan-Ude 2013.



Fig. 42

Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov in 1891; see Luboš Bělka, *Tibetský buddhismus v Burjatsku* [Tibetan Buddhism in Buryatia, in Czech], Brno: Masarykova univerzita 2001, p. 70, Fig. 3.



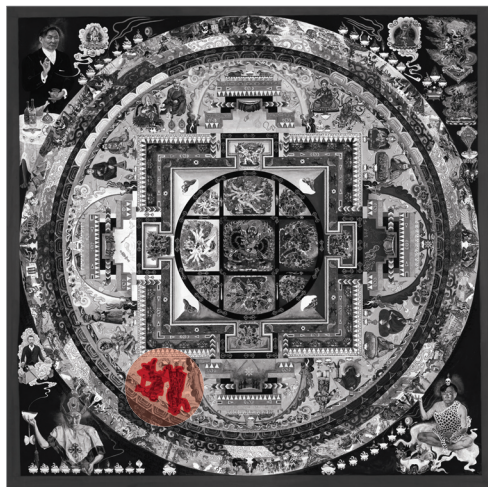
Fig. 43

Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov and Dorzhi Badmaev in 1919; see Luboš Bělka, *Tibetský buddhismus v Burjatsku...*, p. 73, Fig. 4.

2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala



Bidia D. Dandaron, the left depiction is based on the photograph of 1965 (see Fig. 45); the right depiction based on the photograph of 1956 (see Fig. 46); Dandaron mandala.



clothes. Some say Sorkhoi was illuminated with electric lamps using batteries brought from Warsaw. (...) A well-known Orientalist prof. Aleksei M. Pozdneev visited Sorkhoi and discussed with Samdan Lama.²⁰

Another explanation why L. S. Tsydenov is dressed in civil, not monk's clothes is provided by the Swiss scholar Herbert Schwabl. He was inspired by information received from Dandaron's disciple Donatas Butkus:

The photographs of L. S. Tsydenov were forbidden in Buryatia after 1972. In 1996 I saw his photograph in Aginskoe Monastery, kept by monks. Some said he had disrobed and left for Italy or the Himalayas, and his spirit dwelt somewhere in the West.

In one picture from 1919, Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov and Dorzhi Badmaev are captured together. This photograph exists in at least two versions. In one of them, Tsydenov is portrayed with a crown, clad in blue ritual attire;²¹ in the other one without the crown and without the upper embroidered gown. However, in this section of the mandala, Dandaron's stepfather Dorzhi Badmaev is missing; both figures are representations of Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov. The first portrays Tsydenov in 1891, when he had his picture taken, probably in the photo studio in Kulsky Stanok.

If we compare the photograph (Fig. 43) and the painting (Fig. 41), there are apparent differences, mainly in Tsydenov's clothing. In the painting he wears a large crown with small human skulls and he has an ornamented gown over the coat. His left hand with prayer beads is positioned in front of his body.²² The crown and the ornamented attire should represent the insignia of the king of three worlds, Dharmaraja, the theocratic ruler of Buryatia, which Tsydenov proclaimed himself in 1919.²³

²⁰ Andrey M. Strelkov, "Bidia Dandaron: Zhiznenny put ...", p. 8.

²¹ Its reproduction was published in e.g.: 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, photographic supplement (no paging).

²² Tsydenov's photograph with the crown was taken immediately before or after the first photograph, where he does not wear the crown. That it is not a subsequent photomontage is evidenced by a different position of the left hand with the prayer beads; otherwise the two pictures are almost identical. Tsydenov's photograph with the crown was published in the above mentioned book of V. M. Montlevich (*Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati...*, photographic supplement (no paging), Fig. 1 follows page 384.

²³ Nikolay V. Tsyrempilov, "Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov i ideya buddiiskoi teokratii v Zabaikalie" [Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov and his Buddhist Theocratic Project in Siberia, in Russian], *Vostok (Oriens)* 6, 2007, p. 64–75.



Fig. 45

Bidia D. Dandaron, photograph by A. I. Ponomariov, 1965, Ulan-Ude; published e.g. in: Luboš Bělka, *Tibetský buddhismus v Burjatsku...*, p. 96, Fig. 12.



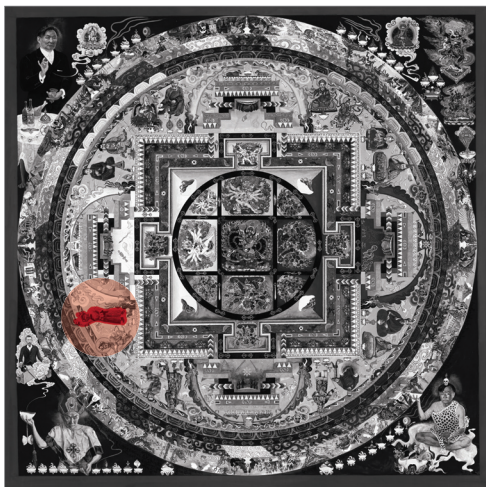
Fig. 46

Bidia D. Dandaron, photograph of 1956, Moscow. Archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets.

2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala



Bidia D. Dandaron, the right depiction is based on Vladimir M. Montlevich's photograph of 1971 (see Fig. 48); on the left, a figure of the sitting siddha (probably Jalandhara); Dandaron mandala.



Bidia D. Dandaron, photograph of 1971, author Vladimir M. Montlevich, Kizhinga, Buryatia. Archive of Herbert Schwabl. (This picture was also published in: Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati..., photographic supplement (no paging).

The depiction of B. D. Dandaron in the attire of a tantric master is one of his most popular portraits, which was however developed more or less by accident. According to Vladimir M. Montlevich, the set of pictures was made by the well-known Ulan-Ude photographer A. I. Ponomariov in 1965. He was commissioned to prepare a propagandistic brochure on the bloom of Buddhism in the Soviet Union. In the depository of the Ethnographic Museum on the outskirts of Ulan-Ude he found, besides other objects, tantric attire, worn by lamas. The photographer asked the museum staff to dress in this attire and to stand as models for the brochure. All of them refused, either for fear or respect for the monastic robe. Thus B. D. Dandaron, who was invited as a consultant, was the only one who dared to put it on.

Thus the magnificent Dandaron's portrait with the tantric Kalachakra crown came into the world. The brochure was published, and the face of Dharmaraja Dandaron became famous all over the Buddhist world.²⁴

These photographs are usually published in the edited form. The background is retouched or cut away so that the impression of an authentic photograph of transmission of the dharma by the Master to his disciples was created, and not a photograph with various museum props in the background.

Bidia D. Dandaron is portrayed standing in the Buryat national costume, a green *deel*, with his right arm raised. Next to him a siddha, probably Jalandhara, sits on a tiger skin. Three offerings lie at Dandaron's feet: a bottle of vodka, a shell and a wind horse lungta (Tib. */rlung lta/*) in the kapala.

The photograph of Dandaron's mother Balzhima Abidueva (see Fig. 50) was taken by Vladimir M. Montlevich in 1971 during his visit to Kizhinga, where she lived. Montlevich made a series of photographs, which he partially published later. Balzhima Abidueva lived to the ripe old age of 104; she died on 3 December 1973, while her son was still alive.²⁵

Of course, the painter of the thangka A. I. Zheleznov personally knew Balzhima Abidueva, and it may be interesting that she is the only woman in the entire mandala (see Fig. 49) – apart from *dakinis*, who are supernatural beings.

The figure in the mandala (see Fig. 51) represents a Gelugpa monk holding a bell and a vajra. A typical feature is his moustache, which was rather rare in case of monks. Such moustaches were worn for instance by the 13th Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso */thub bstan rgya mtsho/*, who lived from 1876 to 1933. The Dalai Lama was

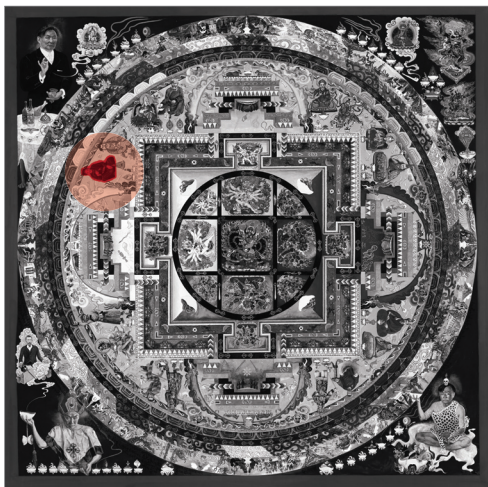
24 Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati...*, p. 385.

25 Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati...*, p. 424.

2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala



Balzhima Abidueva (1869 – 3 December 1973), Dandaron's mother, sitting on the left, portrayed according to V. M. Montlevich's photograph of 1971 (see Fig. 50); Dandaron mandala.



Bidia D. Dandaron and his mother Balzhima Abidueva, photograph of 1971, author Vladimir Montlevich, Kizhinga, Buryatia.

also known in Russia and the Soviet Union thanks to the Russian traveler Piotr K. Kozlov,²⁶ who had the opportunity to photograph him (see Fig. 52). We cannot say for sure whether the figure in the mandala really is the 13th Dalai Lama.

The lower right corner of the mandala is dominated by Bidia D. Dandaron as a yogi dressed in leopard skin, sitting in the lotus position (Skt. *padmasana*). He has a miniature human skull in his hair, with his right hand he raises a kapala filled with blood, his left hand is in his lap holding a bell. He wears necklaces and bracelets, sits on a goat skin, and to his left, by his feet lies a large kapala with offerings, which are known under the term “*inner offering*”. The inner offering occurs only once in the entire mandala, although there are thirty-eight offerings placed in kapalas. Its symbolism is closely related to *Yamantaka Tantra*.

The vast white skull-cup arises above the three heads as a unified skull... The rim of the skull-cup is embellished with a golden leaf-shaped edging, and its interior is colored blood red. The five great meats are depicted in their directional positions with their heads facing outwards – unlike their description which specifies that their heads face inwards. The five nectars are positioned between the five meats, with three lumps of yellow feces to the left of the cow at the front, four curved ovals of marrow to the right of the cow, blue urine behind the central man, red blood to the left of the elephant’s head, and white semen to the right of the elephant’s rump.²⁷

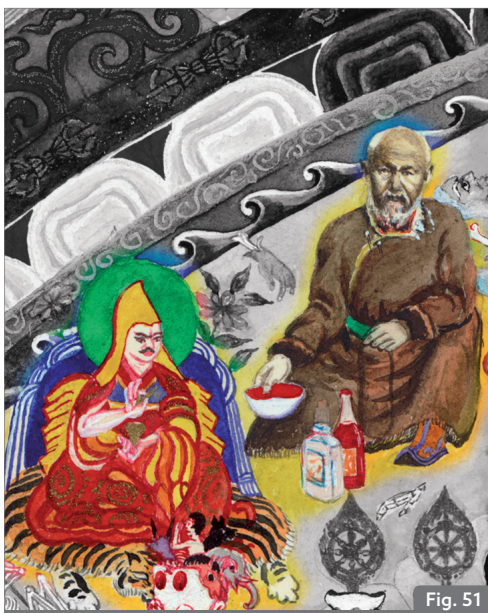
The lower left corner of the mandala is dominated by B. D. Dandaron portrayed as a tantric master; he is dressed in an orange ritual robe with a wide blue rim in the lower part and a double vajra on the chest (Skt. *vishvavajra*), on his head he has a red decorated lama’s hat with a miniature human skull on top. His right hand raises a kapala with a tantric drum, in his left hand he holds a bell. A cloud emanates from the kapala, and his spiritual teacher Lubsan Samdan Cydenov, surprisingly dressed in European clothes, is inside the cloud; in the lower part there are ten kapalas with offerings.

Here Dandaron is captured as a tantric master. Contrary to the photograph and the painting (see Fig. 44, Fig. 45), where Dandaron is portrayed in a museum and thus an artificial environment, the other photographs of him (see Fig. 55) and their interpretation in the mandala (see Fig. 53, 54 and 56) are more natural

²⁶ See Kozlov Piotr K., *Mrtvé město Chara-choto (Mongolsko a Amdo). Expedice Ruské zeměpisné společnosti 1907–1909* [The Dead City Khara-khoto (Mongolia and Amdo). Russian Geographical Society Expedition 1907–1909, in Czech], Praha: Pokrok 1929, p. 387. The depiction in the mandala differs from the photograph, but Kozlov certainly made several pictures and moreover he met with the Dalai Lama more than once.

²⁷ Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, Boston: Shambhala Publications 1999, p. 330.

2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala



Dandaron's stepfather Dorzhi Badmaev (approx. 1840–1920) sitting on the right; on the left is most probably the 13th Dalai Lama. Badmaev's portrait is based on the photograph from 1919 (see Fig. 43); Dandaron mandala.



13th Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso (Tib. /*thub bstan rgya mtsho*/, 1876–1933), photograph by Piotr K. Kozlov.



Fig. 53



Fig. 54

Bidia D. Dandaron in the attire of a tantric master, Ulan-Ude, 1972, photograph by Vladimir M. Montlevich. Source: Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati*, photographic supplement (no paging).

2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala



Bidia D. Dandaron in a yoga posture, offerings in the front; Dandaron mandala.



Bidia D. Dandaron, undated photograph, author Vladimir Montlevich. Archive of Herbert Schwabl. This photograph has never been published before.



Fig. 57

A detail from the Vajrabhairava thangka – portrait of Bidia D. Dandaron, author Aleksandr I. Zheleznov, end of the 1960s, allegedly destroyed; from the estate of Oktiabrina F. Volkova. Nowadays in the archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets.



Fig. 58

Bidia D. Dandaron in the ritual attire of a tantric master; Dandaron mandala.





Fig. 59

Thangka of Vajrabhairava and B. D. Dandaron, whose portrait is at the top; author Aleksandr I. Zheleznov, end of the 1960s, allegedly destroyed; from the estate of Oktiabrina F. Volkova. Nowadays in the archive of Aleksandr I. Breslavets. Size 43 x 85 cm, finished in 1971, gouache on paper.



Fig. 60

Bidia D. Dandaron on the left, Aleksandr I. Zheleznov on the right, photograph of 1971, author Vladimir M. Montlevich, Ulan-Ude, Shishkovka, Buryatia. Source: Vladimir M. Montlevich (ed.), *Bidia D. Dandaron – Izbrannye stati: Chernaya tetrad; Materialy k biografii; Istorija Kukunora; Suma Kenpo* [Bidia D. Dandaron – Selected Works: The Black Notebook; Materials to the Biography, Kukunor History, in Russian], Saint Petersburg: Evrazia 2006, photographic supplement (no paging).

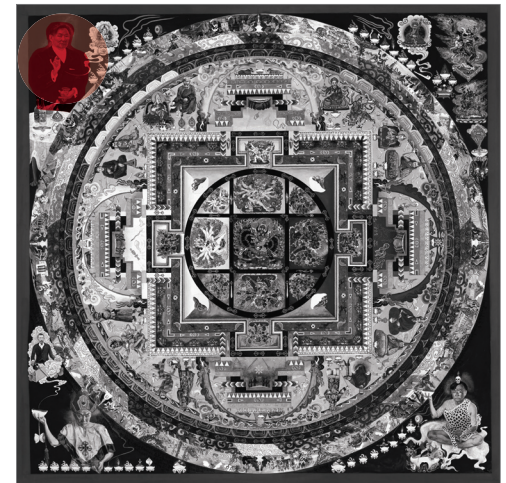
and realistic. Dandaron had pictures taken by his disciples in the position of a tantric master, dressed in a robe that he probably used during rituals (however, this most likely does not concern the photograph, in which he is dressed in a leopard skin and sits on the ground in front of a showcase, see Fig. 55). Some of these photographs served as models for paintings in the mandala. His depiction with a *kapala* in his right hand is actually identical with another portrait of him, where he is depicted in the same position at the top of the Vajrabhairava thangka (not the mandala). This thangka (see Fig. 57 and 59)²⁸ is said to have been destroyed and the portrait survived only in a colored photograph.

²⁸ First published in: Luboš Bělka, “Burjatský buddhismus: Tradice a současnost / Buryat Buddhism: Tradition and Presence”, in: Daniel Berounský – Luboš Bělka – Jindřich Štreit, *Na konci světa / At the End of the World*, Volary: Stehlík 2000, p. 133, Fig. 6, see also: Luboš Bělka, “Bidia D. Dandaron a burjatský buddhismus ve 20. století” [Bidia D. Dandaron and Buryat Buddhism in the 20th century, in Czech], in: Lukáš Pecha (ed.), *Orientalia Antiqua Nova* 7, Plzeň: Dryada 2007, p. 15.



Fig. 61

Bidia D. Dandaron, depiction is based on the photograph of 1971 (see Fig. 61), author Vladimir M. Montlevich; Dandaron mandala.



2. Description and analysis of the Dandaron mandala

In the upper left corner, Bidia D. Dandaron is again depicted as a Buddhist teacher. He is dressed in civil European clothes, bareheaded. His right hand raises a dorje, in his left hand he holds a bell. A cloud emanates from his chest with Vajrasattva and a shakti; seven kapalas with offerings and a drum are placed before him. Dandaron stands behind a table covered with a white tablecloth, with two bottles (with the popular Stolichnaya vodka and orange liquor), an offering cake of torma (Bur. *balin*), kapala, meat with a bone and a hand drum *damaru* (Tib. *ngachung /rnga chung/*).