The Khutagt White Temple in Mongolia

History

According to Sereeter (pp. 87-88), the decision to construct this palace was made in 1838. It was finally built in 1840 by the 5th jewelsündamba khutag on the right bank of Tuul River (today on the west of the First or Central Electricity Plant (Tów tsakhlilgaan kombinat, Negdügee stants). The two-storey, white-coloured Tibetan-style central building was made from bricks with a highly ornamented hexagonal gilded brass roof. The temple was encircled by three fences that enclosed an area measuring 51×46 ald (1 ald being 1.6 m) (See Banzragch, p. 15). The great treasury (ikh san) financed the construction of the palace.

According to Dashtseren lama, Güngaaedejidlin or Tsagaan süm was a palace more than a temple as lamas did not reside there permanently. According to Pürew (Mongoliin uls töriin tów, p. 59.), this building was used as the summer residence of the 6th, 7th and 8th jewelsündamba khutagts. Mairad lists this palace under the name of Öwgön tsagaan süm or ‘the old white temple’ but do not mention any other data about it.

As Jügder’s painting shows there were three fences surrounding the temple complex, which was situated inside the courtyard. The internal fence was octagonal shaped with seven gates.

According to Sereeter (p. 88.), within the palace complex of Güngaaedejidlin there were buildings including Amitabha temple (Awidiin süm), the Temple of Öndör geegen (Öndör gegeenii süm), the Palace of the Bogd (Bogdiin lawran), and the Yurt palace of the gate (Üüdnii ger tugdum/tugdam).

Jambal (English text pp. 8-9, Mongolian text pp. 686-687.) describes some of the images kept in this temple. He describes a Jigjid (Tib. ‘jigs-byed, Skr. Bhairava, epithet of Yamantaka) statue made of steel, which was said to have been made in the time of the 8th bogd. It was one cubit high (the measure being üzüür tokhoi in Mongolian, equaling to the measure from the elbow to the end of the middle finger) and the sparkling implements it held were all skilfully made of silver. There was also a similar statue of Damjan Dorlig (Tib. dam-can rdor-legs, the oath-bound protector Vajrasadhu) riding a goat. The body of the statue of Jamsran (or Ulaan sakhius, Tib. lcam-sring), the Red Protector) was made of iron with the head being gilded (painted with gold). There was also a precious Khadjid (Tib. mkha’-spyod, Skr. Dakini) image at this temple, which was venerated by the 5th bogd when he was performing the Khadjid meditation (ninchin, most probably Tib. snyings-chen). It was a gilded brass statue completely covered by cloths, with only one hand visible. These images were sent by the Dalai Choinkhor won in Sain noyon khain aimag (his territories were situated in the present Zawkhan, Khöwsgöl and Arkhangai aimag boundaries). According to Sereeter (p. 88.), among these were the valuable statues of the ten wrathful protectors.

Data provider: Dashtseren lama of Züün Khüree Dashchoollin monastery (Born 1921)
Sources: Banzragch, Ch., Sainkhüü, B., Mongol khüree khidiiin tüükh (emkhtgel). Ulaanbaatar 2004
Maidar, D., Mongoliin khot tosgonii gurwan zurag, Ulaanbaatar, 1970
Sereeter, Ŭ., Mongoliin Ikh Khüree, Gandan khüülin tüükh bütetsiiin towch. 1651-1938. Ulaanbaatar 1999
Pürew, O., Mongoliin uls töriin tów. Ulaanbaatar 1994
Painting by Jügder (1913)
Photos: Tsültem (58, 59), Maidar (142), Sereeter (88), Shepetilnikov (23), Geleta/Forbáth (200)

GPS was taken on the west side of the First or Central Electricity Plant, inside the fence
Elevation 1283 m
N 47º55.570
E 106º52.696

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Jambal also tells how Öndör Gegeen’s clothes were kept here. There was a hat in the form of a skull-cap (tow’ malgai) with four leaf-shaped peaks (sarawch). There were also his big red Mongol boots, and his summer gown (deel) similar to a Buryat gown, ‘made of stuff like yellow silk pleated at the waist and with a lining of gauze, with small cuffs and a rough fur collar like black otter fur’. The clothes, wrapped in a bundle, were kept next to a papier-mache statuette of Öndör Gegeen. A portrait of the jewtsün Daranata (Skr. Taranatha) was also in the White Temple. According to Jambal, it was sent to the Choijn lamiin süm after 1938, along with many other paintings and ritual objects from all over the capital, where it was at the time Damdinsüren interviewed him in the 1950’s. It is presumed that it is there to this day, though we were not able to confirm this.

The Great Financial Unit (Ikh jas) and the Öndör Gegeen Financial Unit (Öndör gegeenii jas) provided the funds for all expenses from 1925. However, most of the complex was completely destroyed in 1938 though, according to Pürew (Mongoliin uls törin töw, p. 63.), the Tsagaan süm was used as a leather factory for some years after this.

Current situation
There are no remains today. O. Pürew informed us of the exact site of the old temple, which is outside the walls of the Central Electricity Plant on the south-west. However on Rinchen’s map, compiled by Pürew himself, it is marked inside the wall of the plant, but this only means some some ten meters difference.