

A Notorious West Mongol Adventurer of the Twentieth Century

Arash Bormanshinov

From 1890 to 1922, a certain character was fated to play a role of no small importance among the Mongols and Oyrat (Oirats) in West Mongolia and adjacent regions inhabited mainly by various kindred Oyrat nationalities. He never discussed or disclosed his true identity. On several occasions he claimed to be a Russian citizen, but he hardly knew any Russian. He may just as well have been born in Mongolia. Thus the place and date of his birth remained a mystery. He always went under different names and aliases. Several times he vanished without leaving a trace, and each time for a period of about ten years, a circumstance which makes the mystery surrounding his person even more intriguing and inconceivable. His probable name was Dambijantsan.

The first known appearance of the enigmatic Dambijantsan dates from the year 1890. In the spring of 1904, a well known Don Kalmyk *baqši* and *emči*, Dambo Ul'ianov (1844-1913), was passing by the nomads' encampment of a sizeable group of the Ölöd¹ at the source of the Kash (Kax He) River, a tributary of the Ili, in Sinkiang. He was the second ranking member of a secret Kalmyk mission to Tibet in 1904.² A local monk, Dorji by name, asked Ul'ianov whether he was the same Danbi Dzhal'tsan, who proclaimed himself to be a grandson of Amursana (Amar Sanan in Ul'ianov's spelling) while passing through that locality as far back as 1890. That person said that he was a Russian citizen, and that he would come back with his forces in the near future in order to liberate the Mongols from the Chinese yoke.³

¹ Dambo Ul'ianov refers to all Oirat (Oyrat) tribes of Inner Asia, who are closely related to the Kalmyks in Russia ethnically and linguistically, as Kalmyks. However, the latter ethnonym is unknown in Inner Asia.

² A. Bormanshinov, "A Secret Kalmyk Mission to Tibet in 1904," *Central Asiatic Journal* 36, No. 3-4 (1992), 161-187.

³ D. Ul'ianov. *Predskazaniia Buddy o Dome Romanovykh i kratkii ocherk moikh putesthestvii v Tibet v 1904-1905 gg.* (Prophecies of Buddha about the House of Romanovs, and a Brief Sketch of My Journeys to Tibet in 1904-1905), St. Petersburg, 1913, pp. 26-27 (hereafter cited as Ul'ianov).

In August 1905, on the return voyage from Lhasa, one of the hired hands (Sandji Donir by name, a learned monk from West Mongolia who came to Tibet as a pilgrim) asked Dambo Ul'ianov whether he knew or had heard of a certain Danbi Dzhal'tsan, a citizen of Russia. This monk told of a stranger who cropped up from Russia among the Toryud Kalmyks back in 1890.⁴ At that time, he was about 25 years of age and was dressed as a monk. He said that he would return with armed forces in the near future on a certain day and month in the year of the dragon. He is said to have traveled to Urumchi and then to Peking and Urga.⁵ It was in the latter that he was arrested and sent to the frontier Russian consul by order of the Urga Khutukhtu⁶ for his anti-Chinese and pan-Mongolian attitude.⁷ Continuing their journey from Tibet, the Don Kalmyks came to the Tsaidam Qoşud (Ul'ianov's Tsaidam Kalmyks). Here they learned about the widespread popularity of this mysterious character who had passed through that part of the world at some earlier time.⁸

In June 1892, while traveling in Mongolia, the well-known Russian Mongolist A. M. Pozdneev (1851-1920) was asked by a literate clerk, Yondon by name, whether he had heard something concerning Donbi-chzhantsan. Pozdneev was told by the clerk that in the fall of the previous year (1891) a certain famous lama bearing that name who was about 30 to 40 years of age, had passed through Mongolia west to east. He claimed to be the grandson of Amursana, whose supposed son Temürsanu was his, Dambijantsan's, father. Furthermore, he went about with his story about his eventual return from the north with armed forces to bring about the liberation of the Mongols from Chinese domination. Yondon wanted to know if Pozdneev knew anything about a movement of troops from the north. The latter had neither heard about Donbi-chzhantsan nor knew anything concerning a military expedition to Mongolia.⁹

⁴ Apparently, the Toryud of Sinkiang are meant.

⁵ The old name of the capital of Mongolia.

⁶ The Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu.

⁷ Ul'ianov, pp. 46-47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹ A.M. Pozdneev. *Mongoliia i mongoly. Rezul'taty poezdki v Mongoliu, ispolnennoi v 1892-1893 gg.* (Mongolia and the Mongols: Results of a Journey to Mongolia Carried Out in 1892-1893). Vol. I. St. Petersburg, 1896, p. 45 (hereafter cited as A. M. Pozdneev).

It should be noted here that the first creditable notice of Dambijantsan (alias Ja Lama) in Russian and non-Russian sources, is in Pozdneev's account of his journey in Mongolia in 1892. And it was Pozdneev who was the first to identify Ja Lama as a Kalmyk by birth, a native of the Lesser Dörböd *ulus* of the Astrakhan *guberniia*.

The legends about Amursana and his eventual or imminent return for the sole purpose of liberating Mongols and Oyrat from China's oppression persisted incessantly. During his stay at the Dörböd nomads' encampment in the Kobdo region in June of 1908, B. Ya. Vladimirtsov (1884-1931), the great Mongolist, was asked by a young Dörböd herdsman what he knew about Amursana. The latter was still purportedly alive in Russia and was to present himself among the Dörböd shortly.¹⁰

In the spring of 1912, A. V. Burdukov (1883-1943), another future Mongolist, came to know a lama who gave his name as Badma. He met him not far from his trading station on the Khangel'tsik River in West Mongolia.¹¹ Badma turned out to be our hero, Dambijantsan. Every year Burdukov traveled to Russia and upon return he had to listen to the same naive question as to when Amursana was intending to come in order to liberate the Mongols from Chinese dominion.¹²

The true identity and even the real name of the charismatic Dambijantsan cannot be established with any degree of certainty. The name Dambijantsan (*bsTan-pa'i rgyal-mts'an*)--if, indeed, it was his real name--like many other names of Mongolian-speaking peoples, is of Tibetan origin. The fact that his name appears in various spellings is one of the contributing factors in the difficult task of unraveling this dubious character. He was popularly known as Ja Lama, a nickname of Dambijantsan.¹³ What follows is a rather long list of the different

¹⁰ B. Ya. Vladimirtsov, "Poezdka k kobdoskim dërbëtam letom 1908g." (A Journey to the Kobdo Dörböd in the Summer of 1908), *Izvestiia Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* 46, No. 8-10 (1911), 325.

¹¹ Burdukov's spelling of a river in West Mongolia which could not be located on any map. It flows in a locality north of the Khan Khukhei Mountain ridge, a spur of the Khangai Mountains, southeast of the Ubsu Nuur and north of the Khirgis (Khyargas) Nuur.

¹² A. V. Burdukov. *V staroi i novoi Mongolii. Vospominaniia. Pis'ma* (In Old and New Mongolia: Reminiscences and Letters). Moscow, 1969, pp. 65, 67 (hereafter cited as A. V. Burdukov).

¹³ The late Owen Lattimore (1900-1989) was affectionately known among his Mongolian friends and admirers as "La Baqši."

names with unstable spellings which are used in referring to him in scholarly publications:

1. Donbi-chzhantsan (A. M. Pozdneev, 1896);
2. Danbi Dzhalt'san (D. Ul'ianov, 1903);
3. Dambi-Dzhantsin (I. M. Maiskii, 1921);
4. Dambi-Dzhantsan (A. D. Kallinikov, 1926);
5. Dambin Jansang (H. Haslund-Christensen, 1935);
6. Dambin Lama (S. Hedin, 1936);
7. Dambijantsan (O. Lattimore, 1955, R. Rupen, 1964, Ch. Bawden, 1968);
8. Dambi-Dzhamtsan (A. V. Burdukov, 1969);
9. Dambijaa (History of the M. P. R., 1976);
10. Lubsan-Dambi-dzhantsan (W. Kotwicz, 1914);
11. Chal Lama (H. Perry-Ayscough, 1914);
12. Dschal-Lama (H. Consten, 1920);
13. Dscha Lama (I. J. Korostowetz, 1926);
14. Ja Lama (E. Sarkisyanz, 1955);
15. Chzha-Lama (Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v epokhu imperializma . . ., 1933);
16. Tushegoun Lama (F. Ossendowski, 1923) and Tushegun Lama (N. K. Roerich, 1929);
17. Badmachzhab or Badma-lama (B. M. Lapin, 1939);
18. Dawa (A. V. Burdukov, 1969);
19. Dawa Shabrong (The Diluv Khutagt, 1982);¹⁴
20. Amur Sanaev (A. V. Burdukov, 1969);
21. Shiret Lama (A. V. Burdukov, 1969);¹⁵
22. Shirep Lama (F. Adelman, 1971);¹⁶
23. She-rap (Shes-rab) Lama (G. N. Roerich, 1931);¹⁷ and
24. Pal-den (dPal-ldan) (G. N. Roerich, 1931).¹⁸

To the above list of Dambijantsan's names appearing in various spellings, one more should be added. It is his only name in Russianized form or ending. He used the name of Irinchinov when he served as one of the eighteen armed guards who were employed to escort the fourth

¹⁴ *Shabrong* is a young *khubilgan* or a minor reincarnation.

¹⁵ A dubious spelling.

¹⁶ Another dubious spelling.

¹⁷ Sharab (*šes-rab*), Skt. *prajña*.

¹⁸ Baldan (*dpal-ldan*).

Central Asian (and second Tibetan) expedition led by the famous explorer and traveler, N. M. Przheval'skii (1839-1888), in 1883-1885).¹⁹ In the group photograph of the expedition's armed escorts, he is seen standing at the extreme left. His physical features strikingly resemble those of Ja Lama (as seen in the photographs of him in the first two decades of this century). It is the first pictorial record of the charismatic adventurer that can be traced hitherto. Whether Irinchinov was his real name or an assumed one remains a mystery.

George N. Roerich held the opinion that Dambijantsan's real name was Baldan (*dPal-ldan*), a common male name among the Mongols and Oyirad.²⁰ When A. V. Burdukov met him in the spring of 1912, he declared that his name was Dawa.²¹ According to the Dilowa Khutukhtu (1884-1965), another person who knew Dambijantsan personally, the latter had gone to Tibet some years before 1912, at which time he called himself Dawa Shabrong.²² A. V. Burdukov, who knew him best of all after 1912, refers to him as Dambi-Dzhamtsan. He informs us that Dambi-Dzhamtsan was twice recognized by the Russian consuls in Mongolia in the 1890s and again in February 1914 as a Russian citizen, Dambi-Dzhamtsan Amur Sanaev by name.²³ He is reported by a number of authors (I. Maiskii, 1921, p. 255; I. Korostowetz, 1926, p. 223; G. Roerich, 1931, p. 226; R. Rupen, 1964, p. 73; A. Burdukov, 1969, p. 379 n. 42; F. Adelman, 1971, p. xix) to have served as a guide of P. K. Kozlov's expedition to Mongolia and the Kham province of Tibet in 1899-1901.²⁴ He was then supposedly

¹⁹ N. M. Przheval'skii. *Chetvertoe puteshestvie v Tsentral'noi Azii. Ot Kiakhty na istoki Zheltoi reki. Issledovanie severnoi okrainy Tibeta i put' cherez Lob-nor po basseinu Tarima* (The Fourth Journey in Central Asia: From Khiakhta Towards the Riverhead of the Yellow River; An Exploration of the Northern Borders of Tibet and the Journey via the Lob Nor Along the Tarim Basin). St. Petersburg, 1888. II + III + 536 pp., 3 maps.

²⁰ G. N. Roerich. *Trails to Inmost Asia: Five Years of Exploration with the Roerich Central Asian Expedition*. New Haven, CT, 1931, p. 224 (hereafter cited as G. N. Roerich).

²¹ A. V. Burdukov, p. 65.

²² O. Lattimore and F. Isono. *The Diluv Khutagt: Memoirs and Autobiography of a Mongol Buddhist Reincarnation in Religion and Revolution* (Asiatische Forschungen. Band 74). Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982, p. 76 (hereafter cited as *The Diluv Khutagt*). For Shabrong see n. 14.

²³ A. V. Burdukov, pp. 68, 114.

²⁴ P. K. Kozlov. *Mongolia i Kam. Trudy èkspeditsii Imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva, sovershennoi v 1899-1901 gg. pod rukovodstvom P. K. Kozlova* (Mongolia and Kham: Transactions of the Expedition of

known as She-rap (Shes-rab) Lama (G. Roerich, 1931), Shiret-lama (A. Burdukov, 1969, a note by E. M. Darevskaja) or Shirep-Lama (I. Maiskii, 1921 and F. Adelman, 1971). It is said that P. K. Kozlov was unable to go to Lhasa himself and sent Dambijantsan (alias Sharab Lama) there in 1900. After returning from Lhasa, he never rejoined the Kozlov expedition. He lost contact with it (as he had not found Kozlov at the place agreed). He somehow found his way to Khara (Qara) Shahr, from there to Kobdo and Urga, and then again to Kobdo. Thereupon he disappeared for another ten years.²⁵ The foregoing contentions need, however, further elaboration and verification. There is no hard evidence to support their assertions. None of the aforementioned six authors either quote their sources or give an exact citation. Kozlov's armed detachment consisted of 18 soldiers and Trans-Baikal Cossacks.²⁶ They are all listed by name. This roster, however, does not list any person by the name of She-rap, Sharab, Shirep or Shiret.²⁷

The date and place of Dambijantsan's birth are shrouded in great mystery. He never revealed either his ethnic background or his true name, date or place of his birth. A. V. Burdukov knew Dambijantsan very well in the years from 1912 to his death in 1922. He met him for the first time in the early spring of 1912. At that time Dambijantsan appeared to be at the age of 40 to 45, i.e., born between 1867 and 1872.²⁸ A. M. Pozdneev was told in 1892 by a Mongol clerk, Yondon by name, that in the previous year a lama of about 30 to 40 years of age (i.e., born between 1851 and 1861), who was called Donbi-chzhantsan, had passed through Mongolia.²⁹ In 1905 the above-mentioned Dambo Ul'ianov was asked by a Mongol pilgrim in Tibet whether he had heard of a monk, Danbi Dzhal'tsan by name, who appeared from nowhere among the Toryud as far back as 1890. This pilgrim told Ul'ianov that

the Imperial Russian Geographical Society Accomplished Under the Leadership of P. K. Kozlov in 1899-1901). Vol. I, part 2. St. Petersburg, 1906. X, 257-732 pp., 2 maps.

Second, abridged edition of vol. I, part 1 was published in Moscow in 1947, repr. 1948, 438 pp.

²⁵ A. V. Burdukov, p. 379.

²⁶ We should recall here that the Przheval'skii fourth expedition in Central Asia in 1883-1885 also had eighteen armed escorts. See n. 19.

²⁷ P.K. Kozlov. *Mongolia i Kam* (Mongolia and Kham). Moscow, 1948, p. 37.

²⁸ A. V. Burdukov, p. 65.

²⁹ A. M. Pozdneev, p. 45. For full citation see n. 9.

that monk was about 25 years of age, i.e., born approximately in 1865. Robert Rupen states explicitly that Ja Lama was born in 1860.³⁰ Regrettably, he failed to point out the source of his information. The late Fred Adelman conjectured that "his birthdate is probably near 1870."³¹

Equally puzzling is the question of Dambijantsan's nationality and the place of his birth. Was he a Volga Kalmyk, a West Mongol or a Qalqa Mongol? It has been reported that he was a Russianized Siberian Mongol, a true Mongol, a Chinese from Manchuria and even a Buriat.³² Even the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic and consular representatives in Mongolia were not fully confident about whether he was a Kalmyk or Buriat by nationality.³³ Most of the sources refer to him as a Russian citizen without any further elaboration. In response to repeated requests from St. Petersburg, the governor of the Astrakhan *guberniia* confirmed that Ja Lama was by birth an Astrakhan Kalmyk.³⁴ R. Rupen also asserts that Ja Lama was born at Astrakhan,³⁵ but, according to Burdukov, he was born in the *khoshun* of Batarkho *gün* in Ashikh-khurgun-chuluu, on the Uliasutai-Kalgan route in the Tushetu Khan *ayimaq* in South-Central Mongolia.³⁶ If his place of birth could be firmly established, then it would shed light relative to his ethnic origin. In this respect the archives of the Astrakhan province could prove to be very valuable.

The Dilowa Khutukhtu, one of a very few people who knew Dambijantsan well, writes in his *Political Memoirs* that the latter came to Uliasutai (Uliastai) from the "Northwest" in 1889. He was arrested by local authorities for having crossed the frontier without proper documents. Two Russian traders in Uliasutai, however, took res-

³⁰ R. Rupen. *How Mongolia is Really Ruled: A Political History of the Mongolian People's Republic, 1900-1978*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1979, pp. 9, 135 (hereafter cited as R. Rupen).

³¹ F. Adelman. "On the Authority and Significance of Pozdneyev's Mongolia and the Mongols," in A. M. Pozdneyev. *Mongolia and the Mongols*. Volume I: 1892. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1971, p. xviii.

³² O. Lattimore. *The Desert Road to Turkestan*. Boston, 1929, repr. New York: AMS Press, 1972, p. 235 (hereafter cited as O. Lattimore).

³³ I. Lomakina, "Golova Dzha-Lamy" (The Head of Ja Lama), *Nauka i religiia* 1 (1992), 57 (hereafter cited as I. Lomakina).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁵ R. Rupen, p. 9.

³⁶ A. V. Burdukov, p. 72.

possibility for him and he was released.³⁷ He then vanished and reappeared elsewhere in Mongolia in 1890. This time he proclaimed himself for the first time to be the reincarnation of Amursana.³⁸

Several authors (Ul'ianov, Burdukov, Maiskii), however, put Ja Lama's first arrival in Western Mongolia at 1890. The place from which he came is shrouded in mystery. He kept silent as far as his past life, occupation and even his true name were concerned. In the summer of that year, Ja Lama led a vigorous campaign against the Chinese. He was arrested, put into irons and sent under escort to Uliasutai. By chance, he found himself at an assembly of Mongol princes of the Dzasaktu Khan *ayimaq* taking place near that town. When he saw the provincial governor (*amban*) and other high Chinese officials present, Ja Lama spoke boldly, demanding that the Chinese be sent packing as it was not their business to meddle in the internal Mongolian affairs.³⁹ He evaded an inevitable punishment owing to the intervention and intercession of the Russian consul in Urga, Ya. P. Shishmarev. Shishmarev identified Ja Lama as a Russian subject, a Kalmyk from the Astrakhan province, Damba-Dzhamtsan (Amur Sanaev), secured his release and expulsion to Russian.⁴⁰

In the autumn of 1891, Ja Lama reappeared in Mongolia driving two white camels. Since then he was popularly called by Mongols "a lama with two camels." He came wearing a fur cap surmounted by a golden *Kālačakran vajra* upon it, which caused a furor among them. Again he was arrested for anti-Chinese propaganda and transported to Uliasutai. After he produced a Russian passport, the Chinese let him go without examining his baggage. His baggage was full of leaflets

³⁷ *The Diluv Khutagt*, pp. 73-74.

³⁸ The infamous Khoid *tayisi*, whose 1755-1757 rebellion against his former allies and masters, the Chinese, brought about an almost total annihilation of the Oyrad in Dzungaria. Amursana escaped first to the Kazakhs and then to Siberia, where he died of smallpox at the age of 35 near the city of Tobol'sk on September 21, 1757. See *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)*. Ed. by Arthur W. Hummel. Washington, D.C., 1943, pp. 9-11; I. Ya. Zlatkin, "Russkie arkhivnye materialy of Amursane" (Russian Archival Materials Concerning Amursana), in *Filologiya i istoriya mongol'skikh narodov. Pamiati Borica Yakovlevicha Vladimirtsova*. Ed. by G. D. Sanzheev. Moscow, 1958, pp. 289-313.

³⁹ A. D. Kallinikov, "Aratskoe revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v doavtonomnoi Mongolii" (The People's Revolutionary Movement in Pre-Autonomous Mongolia), *Revoliutsionnyi Vostok* 6 (1934), 51.

⁴⁰ A. V. Burdukov, pp. 67-68, 378 n. 42; Kallinikov, p. 52.

with appeals to Mongols to overthrow the hated Chinese rule.⁴¹ His wanderings took him this time to Kobdo and from there he returned to Uliasutai. The fate has taken him from Uliasutai to Urga, where he was arrested again and deported to the frontier town of Kiakhtha.⁴²

After his last arrest by Chinese authorities, Ja Lama vanished for twenty long years, if we were to disregard his questionable participation in the Kozlov expedition to Central Asia and the Kham province of Tibet at the turn of the century. His whereabouts and what he was doing during that considerable stretch of time is shrouded in complete mystery.

Ja Lama is next heard of at Khara (Qara) Shahr in 1910. He reappeared suddenly among the kindred Toryud of Sinkiang (Xinjiang) after having changed his name again and shaved his beard.⁴³

After a prolonged stay among the local Toryud at Khara Shahr, he left for Kobdo. In the spring of 1912, he proceeded to the Khangel'tsik, where he stayed at the camp of the Bayid prince, Tümen Gün by name.⁴⁴ Upon his arrival here, Ja Lama imparted to the Prince and others the information that he was a direct descendant and reincarnation of Amursana, and that his mission was to liberate all the Mongols from the Manchu-Chinese yoke. It was here where Burdukov met him for the first time.⁴⁵ Burdukov said in passing that he had doubts as to whether Ja Lama and Dambijantsan of the 1890s and 1910s was one and the same person.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, political events in Mongolia developed with a swift speed. After the Khalkha Mongols declared their independence from China in 1911, the Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu of Urga was elevated to become the temporal ruler of Mongolia. The Chinese garrisons at Urga and Uliasutai (Uliastai) surrendered to the Mongols without offering any resistance. However, the governor (*amban*) of the

⁴¹ I. M. Maiskii (Maisky). *Sovremennaiia Mongoliia* (Contemporary Mongolia). Irkutsk, 1921, p. 255 (hereafter cited as I. M. Maiskii); G. N. Roerich, pp. 225-226.

⁴² I. M. Maiskii, p. 255; G. N. Roerich, p. 226.

⁴³ A. V. Burdukov, p. 379 n. 42 by E. M. Darevskaia (not by I. Ya. Zlatkin as Owen Lattimore wrote).

⁴⁴ A. V. Burdukov, p. 379 n. 42; I. M. Maiskii, p. 256 (his information, as a rule, is based on oral communications from A. V. Burdukov and P. I. Kriazhev, a Russian trading merchant in West Mongolia).

⁴⁵ A. V. Burdukov, p. 65; I. M. Maiskii, p. 208.

⁴⁶ A. V. Burdukov, pp. 68, 379.

Kobdo province turned down a Mongolian demand to surrender the garrison of the town of Kobdo.

Dambijantsan quickly mobilized a force of up to 5,000 Oyrad from the Kobdo province and Mongols. On May 6, 1912 he laid siege to Kobdo. The reinforcement of Chinese cavalry promised by a loyal pro-Manchu and pro-Chinese Toryud Prince Palta⁴⁷ never arrived. Someone is reported to have sent a secret message to the Oyrad that several hundred Chinese troops had been dispatched from Shara Süme to reinforce the garrison of Kobdo.⁴⁸ That timely warning enabled Dambijantsan to organize a successful ambush of the reinforcements. The captured carbines, ammunition and other weaponry proved very useful to the Oyrad and Mongols besieging Kobdo. After three months of stand-off, the town finally fell on August 6, 1912. Burdukov, in a vivid account, minutely describes the long siege and fall of Kobdo.⁴⁹

During the autumn of 1913, B. Ya. Vladimirtsov recorded in the northwestern part of Mongolia an epic song of approximately 800 verse lines devoted to the siege and fall of Kobdo. It was performed at his request by a Bayid rhapsodist, Mandikhany Parchen *tuul'ci* by name (1855-1926), an impoverished *tayiji*.⁵⁰ The latter not only witnessed, but took an active part in the assault of Kobdo. He recited his epic before a large crowd of people, many of whom were themselves the participants in that historic event. Two or three months later, he had forgotten his epic song altogether.⁵¹

The town of Kobdo was almost totally destroyed and reduced to heaps of ruins of clay. The Sino-Russian Agreement of November 1913 called for the inclusion of the Kobdo district into Autonomous Mongolia. In recognition of great services rendered to the emerging Mongolian state, the Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu conferred on Dambijantsan both the high religious title of Nom-un Khan Khutukhtu

⁴⁷ A. Bormanshinov, "Prince Palta," *Proceedings of the International Conference on China Border Area Studies*. Taipei, 1985, pp. 1015-1040 (hereafter cited as A. Bormanshinov, 1985).

⁴⁸ A. Bormanshinov, 1985, p. 1023.

⁴⁹ A. V. Burdukov, pp. 70-91.

⁵⁰ *Mongolo-oiratskii geroicheskie èpos. Pervod, vstupil'naiia stat'ia i primechaniia B. Ya. Vladimirtsova* (The Mongol-Oirat Heroic Epos: Translation, Introductory Article and Notes by B. Ya. Vladimirtsov). Petrograd-Moscow, 1923, repr. 1971, pp. 31-34 (hereafter cited as Vladimirtsov, 1923).

⁵¹ Vladimirtsov, 1923, pp. 34, 41.

and the secular, ducal position of a *khoshun* (Banner) prince Tüshe Gün. He also became a military governor of the Kobdo region. The local princes presented him with about 1,000 yurts and a *khoshun* along the Kobdo River some sixty miles northwest of Kobdo.⁵²

The treatment of Dambijantsan in Mongolian historiography is of some interest. The story of his leading role in the seizure of Kobdo in 1912 has been tuned down in favor of others, mostly Communist partisans, or passed over in silence. He is usually referred to as a bandit, reactionary, armed robber, etc. Charles R. Bawden, an eminent British Mongolist, was right when he stated:

It is the custom nowadays for Mongol historical writing to tone down the part played by Dambijantsan in the liberation of Kobdo. . . . Indeed, some scholars go so far as to deny, in the face of all the evidence, that he took part in the battle at all. All the credit is given to Magsarjav and Damdin-suren, and the decisive contribution of Dambijantsan and Togtokh's comrade, Genden, is minimized.⁵³

After the capture of Kobdo, Damdinjantsan inflicted a savage reprisal directed at both military and civilian Chinese. The governor of the Kobdo province and other officials were saved from inevitable death only after an intervention by the local Russian consul.⁵⁴ Hermann Consten, a German traveler, was present in Kobdo at an atrocious massacre of Chinese and other captives.⁵⁵ Ferdinand Ossendowski, a Pole and an *Officier d'Académie Française*, was another eyewitness of a brutal murder of an innocent Mongol shepherd in 1921.⁵⁶ The Dilowa Khutukhtu gave a lurid description of Damdinjantsan's despotic rule over the Kobdo Mongols involving the seizure and carrying off of people suspected of disobeying his orders or who went against him and his ideas. The latter inflicted all the

⁵² I. M. Maiskii, p. 257; N. G. Roerich, p. 228.

⁵³ Ch. R. Bawden. *The Modern History of Mongolia*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968. 2nd rev. ed. London-New York: Kegan Paul International, 1989, p. 198.

⁵⁴ I. J. Korostovetz. *Von Cinggis Khan zur Sowjetrepublik. Eine kurze Geschichte der Mongolei unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der neuesten Zeit*. Berlin-Leipzig, 1926, repr. 1974, S. 223. M. N. Kuzminskii was the Russian Consul at Kobdo in 1912-1913.

⁵⁵ H. Consten. *Weideplätze der Mongolen im Reiche der Chalcha*. Band II. Berlin, 1920, S. 214-217.

⁵⁶ F. Ossendowski. *Beasts, Men and Gods*. New York, 1922, pp. 116-117.

conceivable and inconceivable suffering, repression, torture, and murder.⁵⁷ G. N. Roerich and other authors maintain that on his orders ten human chests were cut open and their hearts torn out by Dambijaltsan himself.⁵⁸ He issued an order that the chest of a Kazakh chieftain be cut open and his heart torn out, after which the skin was flayed from his body.⁵⁹

Dambijantsan was arrested in his yurt by surprise on February 8, 1914. His arrest was carried out by a detachment of eighty Siberian Cossacks commanded by Captain Bulatov on orders of the Russian consular officials at Kobdo. The latter recognized Dambijantsan as a Russian citizen, an Astrakhan Kalmyk, Dambi-Dzhamtsan Amur Sanaev by name.⁶⁰

In her useful notes to Burdukov's memoirs, E. M. Darevskaja writes that although there were several reasons for the arrest of Dambijantsan, official archival documents of the period prove that he was arrested by the Russian frontier authorities at the request of the Bayid and other West Mongolian princes, who presented a petition to the Russian consul at Uliasutai in late January 1914. The reason given for their requesting the arrest of Dambijantsan was his autocratic and despotic misbehavior.⁶¹

Ja Lama was taken to the town of Biisk and imprisoned for about a year in the prison at Tomsk. Afterwards, he spent some time at the notorious Aleksandrovskii central prison near Irkutsk. Subsequently, he was exiled to the Yakutsk region. In 1916, in compliance with his pleas, the Russian authorities returned him to his native Lower Volga region, first to Tsarev (today's Akhtubinsk) and then to the nearby city of Astrakhan. He remained there until early 1918, when he fled eastward to Mongolia. B. Ya. Vladimirtsov met Ja Lama in Astrakhan in September 1917.⁶²

On March 7, 1914, the Russian diplomatic agent in Mongolia, A. Ya. Miller, sent a dispatch to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, S. D.

⁵⁷ The Diluv Khutagt, p. 76.

⁵⁸ G. N. Roerich, p. 227.

⁵⁹ I. M. Maiskii, p. 257; The Diluv Khutagt, p. 166.

⁶⁰ A. V. Burdukov, p. 114. According to I. Lomakina (see n. 33), Captain Bulatov had at his disposal 300 Cossacks, p. 58.

⁶¹ A. V. Burdukov, pp. 384-385 n. 70; The Diluv Khutagt, p. 79.

⁶² A. V. Burdukov, pp. 362-363.

Sazonov, on the arrest of Ja Lama and his expulsion to Russia,⁶³ a fact which testifies to the great importance attached to the arrest of this despotic adventurer by the Russian government.

After his flight from Russia, Dambijantsan reappeared in the Selenga Valley of Mongolia in the summer of 1918. From there he went westward to see the Jalkhanza Khutukhtu of Uliasutai, an old acquaintance of his. After that he moved southwest to Prince Jalchin (G. Roerich's Jal-tsen) Beise.⁶⁴

The reappearance of Dambijantsan in Mongolia and his independent and insubordinate attitude toward the Urga government gave rise to anxiety, especially in view of his unreliable behavior and abuse of power in the past. The government even pronounced an anathema upon him and issued an order for his immediate arrest. Under such an inauspicious turn of events Dambijantsan was compelled to move on to a remote place out of reach of the Mongolian authorities. He succeeded in gathering more and more followers on his way there. His new *khoshun* was actually a fortified castle, surrounded by walls and watch towers. It was located on the northern slopes of the Baga Ma-tsung (G. Roerich's Ma-tzu) Shan Mountains (Maajin Shan), on the border between Mongolia and the provinces of Sinkiang and Ninghsia. The new *khoshun* of Ja Lama consisted of some five hundred yurts of people and an armed detachment of three hundred troopers.⁶⁵ His new dwelling complex became known as Dambijantsan's "*baišing*." Several foreigners, among them Owen Lattimore, Henning Haslund-Christensen and Sven Hedin, brought back brief descriptions and photographs of its ruins. Lattimore visited that place in 1926.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v èpokhu imperializma. Dokumenty iz arkhivov tsarskogo i Vremennogo pravitel'stv 1878-1917 gg. Serii III. 1914-1917 gg.* (International Relations in the Age of Imperialism: Documents from the Archives of the Tsarist and Provisional Governments: 1878-1917. Series III: 1914-1917). Moscow-Leningrad, 1933, pp. 55-56.

⁶⁴ A. V. Burdukov, p. 399 n. 142; I. M. Maiskii, p. 258.

⁶⁵ A. V. Burdukov, *ibid.*; I. M. Maiskii, *ibid.*; G. N. Roerich, p. 231; The Diluv Khutagt, p. 167; Henning Haslund-Christensen. *Men and Gods in Mongolia (Zayagan)*. Tr. from the Swedish by Elizabeth Sprigge and Claude Napier. New York, 1935, p. 153 (hereafter cited as H. Haslund-Christensen).

⁶⁶ O. Lattimore, "The House of the False Lama," *The Atlantic Monthly* 142, No. 12 (1928), 774-784, repr. in his *The Desert Road to Turkestan*. Boston, 1929, pp. 230-244; Haslund-Christensen, pp. 150-158 (ch. xvii: A Robber's

In the fateful year of 1921, Ja Lama stayed neutral, supporting neither Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg and other White Russian forces, nor the Red regime of Sukhebaatur. Such a self-helpful stance gave rise to a great deal of suspicion in Urga concerning Ja Lama's loyalty toward the new "people's" government in Mongolia. His bands of armed mounted brigands ambushed caravans of Tibetan traders across the Gobi desert slaughtering most of the caravan men, driving off the caravan animals, and carting off the camel loads of silks, furs, and other valuables.⁶⁷

In such a contingency, the Urga government decided to act urgently and resolutely. On October 7, 1922, it issued a top secret order to liquidate Dambijantsan at any price.⁶⁸ Sukhebaatur entrusted three military men with the execution of this sentence: Narangiin Dugarjav Beise, Commander of the Southeast Frontier Region, Damirangiin Nanzad (Nanzad Baatur), a military commander and partisan, and D. Baldandorji, Head of the Internal State Security Office. Dugarjav and Nanzad took with them to Ja Lama's stronghold in Ma-tsung (Maajin) Shan four soldiers: Dashi (Dashzeweg), Damba (Luvsandamba), Sodnomdorjii and Dawaa.⁶⁹

There are several versions of the assassination of Dambijantsan in the autumn of 1922. According to various accounts, the assassination took place not in 1923 (G. Roerich, O. Lattimore, R. Rupen), 1924 (H. Haslund-Christensen) or 1936 (L. Forbath).⁷⁰ Kh. B. Kanukov, a leading Kalmyk Communist functionary of the 1920s, had no role in Ja Lama's liquidation in spite of his deceitful boasting in his writings. Another instance of disinformation can be found in a book

Stronghold in the Desert); Sven Hedin. *Die Seidenstrasse*. Berlin, 1936, 87-96 (Dambin Lamas Räuberburg).

⁶⁷ G. N. Roerich, pp. 231-232; *The Diluv Khutagt*, p. 167.

⁶⁸ *Revoliutsionnye meropriiatiia narodnogo pravitel'stva Mongolii v 1921-1924 gg. Dokumenty* (Revolutionary Acts of the People's Government of Mongolia in 1921-1924: Documents). Comp. by Ts. Nasanbaljir. Ed. by Ts. Puntsagnorov. Moscow, 1960, pp. 130-132; I. Lomakina, *ibid.* No. 2 (1992), 43.

⁶⁹ *History of the Mongolian People's Republic*. Translated from the Mongolian and annotated by William A. Brown and Urgunge Onon. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, pp. 192, 768, 796-799; *The Diluv Khutagt*, p. 126.

⁷⁰ L. Forbath. *The New Mongolia*. London-Toronto, 1936, p. 187.

published in Elista in 1970.⁷¹ Even though none of the four Kalmyk cavalymen mentioned in it, among them Kh. B. Kanukov, was involved in any way in the assassination of Dambijantsan, a myth about Kanukov's supposedly active role still circulated as recently as 1992.⁷² Owen Lattimore erroneously states that in 1923 or 1924, "ten men rode out of the desert to his north saying that they were lamas of the Bogdo Khan . . . Three of them, as chiefs of the mission, were admitted to his chamber . . . they shot him with automatics."⁷³ Furthermore, H. Haslund-Christensen,⁷⁴ L. Forbath,⁷⁵ G. Roerich,⁷⁶ and R. Rupen⁷⁷ all mistakenly ascribe the shooting of Ja Lama to Baldandorji. The truth, however, is that Baldandorji and his twenty-five or forty soldiers served only as a backup unit and were still some distance away from Ja Lama's stronghold.⁷⁸

The most trustworthy accounts of Ja Lama's assassination have been advanced by Veronika Veit⁷⁹ and Dilowa Khutukhtu.⁸⁰ Veit's study is an annotated translation from the Mongolian of D. Nanzad's recollections, which appeared within a book published in Ulan Baator

⁷¹ *S internatsional'noi missiei. Vospominaniia uchastnikov Mongol'skoi Narodnoi revoliutsii* (With an International Mission: Reminiscences of Participants of the Mongolian People's Revolution). Elista, 1970, pp. 39, 61.

⁷² I. Lomakina, p. 43.

⁷³ O. Lattimore, p. 240. For full citation see n. 32.

⁷⁴ H. Haslund-Christensen, pp. 156-157. This author writes that Baldan Dorje (his spelling) presented himself as a high lama. After several days he pretended to be dying and when Ja Lama bent over the ostensibly dying man, the latter shot him with his hidden revolver. There is not a word of truth in this story.

⁷⁵ L. Forbath, p. 187. He writes that Baldan Dorzhe (his spelling) "managed to crawl up to the entrance of Dja's [Ja Lama. A. B.] tent and raising himself to his knees immediately fired his revolver." This is a pure invention.

⁷⁶ G. Roerich, p. 233. According to him, "Balden Dorje approached the lama with a ceremonial scarf and shot him with a pistol hidden beneath it. Ja Lama fell dead." It appears that someone misinformed the great scholar.

⁷⁷ R. Rupen. *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*. Part I. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964, p. 193. The author is not quite correct that "In 1923, Baldan Dorji, commander of the Mongolian state police, personally went to his refuge to dispose of Ja Lama, shot him . . ." As a matter of fact, Baldandorji and his troops were nowhere near Ja Lama's fortress that day.

⁷⁸ The Diluv Khutagt, pp. 126-127.

⁷⁹ Veronika Veit, "Die Ermordung Dambijzancans," in *Serta Tibeto-Mongolica. Festschrift für Walther Heissig zum 60. Geburtstag am 5.12. 1973*. Herausgegeben von Rudolf Kaschewsky, Klaus Sagaster, Michael Weiers. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973, pp. 351-363.

⁸⁰ The Diluv Khutagt, pp. 126-127, 172-173.

in 1961. The author of the present article recalls Dilowa Gegen's account to him in Philadelphia in the late 1950s. Both Nanzad and Dilowa Gegen adduce a virtually identical chain of events culminating in Ja Lama's death. Nanzad and Dugar (Dugarjav) Beise arrived safely in Maajin Shan accompanied by four soldiers. Nanzad was dressed in the attire of a lama. Ja Lama complied with Dugar's request and came to his guests' yurt without any bodyguards to give his blessing to a sick man. That "sick" man was Dashi, a wrestler. Just as Ja Lama was about to bless him with his extended hand, Dashi, who pretended to be seriously ill, grabbed him by the wrist, while Dugar grabbed him by his other arm. Here is Dilowa Gegen's description of what happened next:

They twisted his arms behind his head. While the two men were holding his arms back, Nanzad grabbed his pistol from the top of his boot, and . . . shot him in the neck . . . They all shot him many times in the chest and neck. His head was almost severed by the number of shots in the neck.⁸¹

Ja Lama was decapitated, and his head was first carried on a lance to Uliasutai and then transported in a large bottle filled with formalin all the way to Urga.⁸² There it was handed over to the Mongolian Scientific Committee for safekeeping. In the late 1970s, the present author learned from his former mentor, Nicholas Poppe, that Ja Lama's severed head was still preserved in formaldehyde in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Leningrad. I. Lomakina has just recently informed us that a colleague of N. Poppe, V. A. Kazakevich (1896-1937?), brought it there in 1925 and that it has been stored away ever since as exhibit No. 3394.⁸³ This mummified exhibit is labeled "head of a Mongol."⁸⁴ H. Haslund-Christensen acquired Ja Lama's saddle and its heavy silver appurtenances. They are now preserved in a glass case in the famous Ethnographical Museum in Stockholm.⁸⁵

Thus was the ultimate fate of the notorious adventurer, imposter Amursana and false lama, the details of whose turbulent life and whose real name, date, and place of birth and even his true ethnic background remain shrouded in mystery to the present day.

⁸¹ The Diluv Khutagt, p. 173.

⁸² G. Roerich, p. 233.

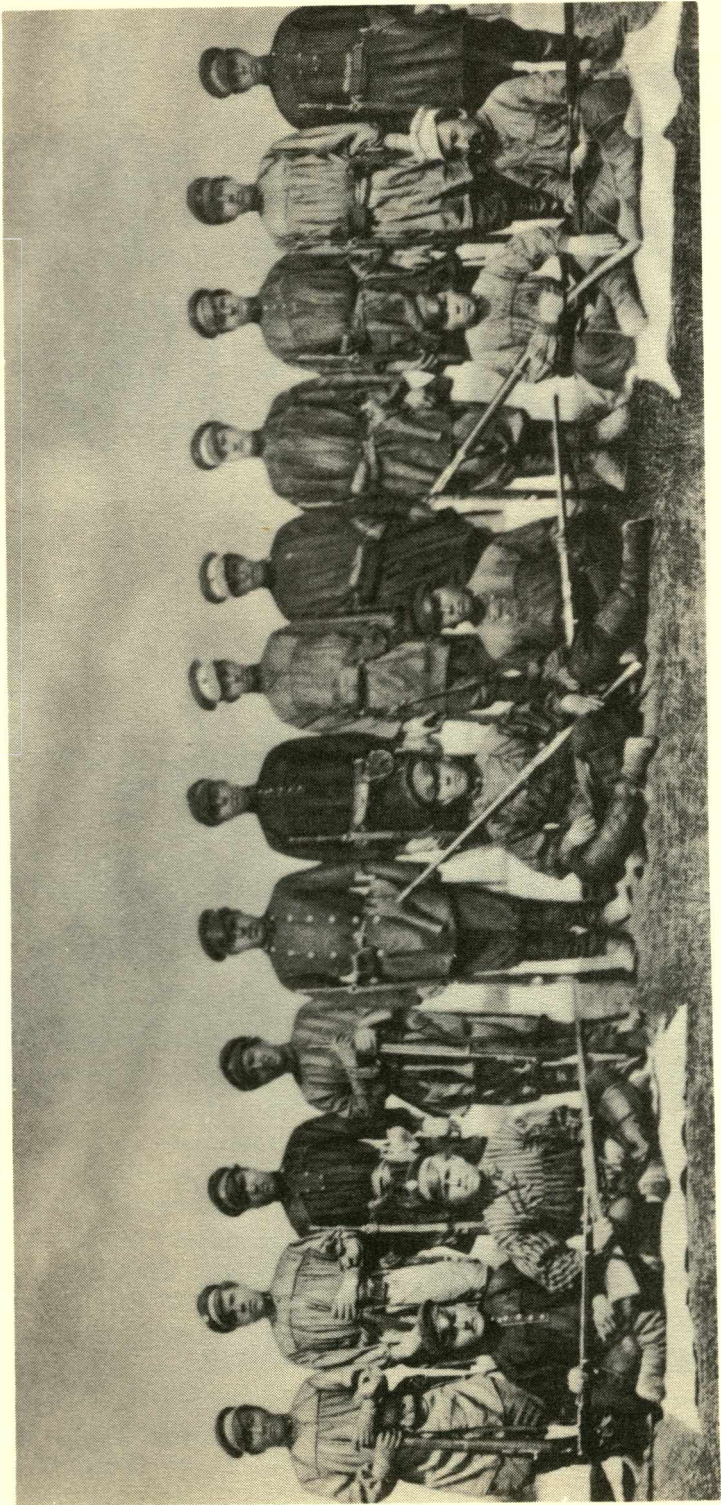
⁸³ I. Lomakina, p. 44.

⁸⁴ I. Lomakina, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ H. Haslund-Christensen, p. 166.

Captions To Illustrations On Following Pages

1. Dambijantsan, alias Irinchinov, as an escort during the N. M. Przhevalskii fourth Central Asian expedition in 1883-1885. He is standing at the extreme left. This is the first known photograph of him.
2. Dambijantsan, second from right, among the leading personalities of the Kobdo district. From W. Kotwicz, *A Brief Survey of the History and Present Political Situation of Mongolia* (in Russian). St. Petersburg, 1914.
3. Dambijantsan aiming a rifle. From H. Haslund-Christensen, *Tents in Mongolia (Yabonah)*. New York, 1934.
4. Dambijantsan's fortified stronghold in Ma-tsung Shan. From S. Hedin, *Die Seidenstrasse*. Berlin, 1936.



2.



3.



4.

