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SURVEY RESULTS AT DZUUN KHUREE MONASTIC SITE, EASTERN MONGOLIA

Introduction

Since 2009, a joint University of Bristol / National University of Mongolia expedition has been studying the landscape archaeology of the upper Kherlen Valley (Eastern Mongolia) within the joint research project “Archaeology of the Kherlen river Basin”. The aim of the project has been to understand the landscape setting of burial sites and funerary monuments within a multi-period context, rather than focussing on particular periods or cultures. The conceptual background to the research is to understand cultural continuities over six millennia and to understand the use and re-use of particular landscapes as foci for ritual activity. Biannual excavation seasons, and annual surveys within the project have located, recorded and mapped multi-period sites in the area to the north of Baganuur.

The object of the 2014 survey season was the investigation of the Dzuun Khuree monastic sites and its environs. The site is located 25 km south of Mongonmorit soum centre of the Tuv aimag, on the west bank of the Kherlen river. In 2012 a series of excellent aerial images of the site emerged on Google Earth and Bing Maps, which showed detail of many of the buildings and features marked out in light snow coverage. The detail was sufficient to compile a reasonable plan of the site, and the expedition main purpose was to check the details and undertake more accurate mapping and to assess the significance of the site.



Fig 1. Panoramic view of Dzuun Khuree looking west towards sacred mountain.

Historical Background

Dzuun Khuree is the largest monastic site in the Mongonmorit soum. The other major site on the River Tenuun was recorded by the survey in 2009, and is smaller and less elaborate. The Dzuun khuree site has several alternative names: *Kherlen golyn zuun khuree*, *Khoegshin Khuree* and *Uvgun khuree*. The first name differentiates it from other the same name monasteries of Mongolia, like the *Dzuun khuree* of *Ikh Khuree* or *Dzuun khuree* in Uvs aimag and the monastery is cited by D. Maidar in the list of monasteries of Mongolia under this name (Maidar, 1972: 100). The name *Khoegshin Khuree* is mentioned in the oral histories of local people, so possibly was mostly used by local people and lamas of the monastery (Erdenebileg, 2014), while *Uvgun khuree* is cited by B. Rinchen and listed as site 445 in his book (Rinchen & Maidar, 1979: 56).

The Arts Council of Mongolia has undertaken a major survey of the monasteries in Mongolia, between 2005 and 2007 and have produced a website *Documentation of Mongolian monasteries*

(<http://www.mongoliantemples.org>) comprising an extensive information on the Buddhist temples and monasteries of Mongolia at the beginning of 20th century. The present paper acknowledges the use of the database of the website for the detailed historical information about the Dzuun khuree monastic site.

There are several different versions when the monastery was first founded. Recent publication on the history of monasteries of Mongolia (Banzragch, Sainkhuu, 2004) places its foundation in 1701, the iron rabbit year, or in year 40 of Enkh-Amgalan Khan, while Pozdnev cites the Erdeni-yin Erike chronicle that it was founded by Undur Gegeen Zanabazaar in year 50 of Enkh-Amgalan Khan (European 1711). Pozdnev (1971) maintains that this might refer to the construction of the Urga Hutuktu palace, rather than the whole monastery itself, suggesting that its foundation may be older. Alternative date is given in an archived record written by monks of the Dzuun khuree in 1937. By this source, the Kherlengiin Dzuun khuree monastery was first founded in the year of iron rabbit, the year 5 of Enkh-Amgalan Khan, (European 1665) by Darkhan Chin Van Gombodorj at the place named Uliastai. After several moves, in around the year 49 of Tenger tetgegch (European 1783), the monastery settled at the place named Togosiin denj, which may well be the locally worshipped Togos Khairkhan mountain, at the foot of which the monastery is now situated (Erdenebileg, 2014).

The monastery belonged to the 'yellow robe' (Gelugpa) sect of Buddhism and by the time when the monastery settled down at the foot of Togos Kharkhan mountain, there were 1200 monks and it had become one of the biggest religious centres in central Mongolia (Erdenebileg, 2014). According to another source, it had been the monastic city of the 2nd Bodga Jibzundamba, and was renowned as "... one of the five cherished places of Undur Gegeen Zanabazar in Mongolia" (Mongolyn sum hiidiin ..., 2009).

The monastery had a major role in education with 10 datsuns or religious colleges named as Tsogchen, Tsanit, Jud, Manba, Zurkhai, Yoga, Maidari, Lamiram, Jijgit and Duinkhor (Erdenebileg, 2014) and there were often more students at the site than monks (Information collected by ...). The monastic city consisted of 6 aimags, such as Toisolon (Toisomlin), Damchog, Sandui, Maya (Mikhamaya) and Gunrik aimags (Erdenebileg, 2014). The Khutagts (the incarnated priests) had their own palaces named "Ariun Sanvaartnii Khaalga", "Murguliin Talbai" and "Shar Sum". These palaces had fences which were all painted in white. Surrounding the palaces were red ger-shaped temples which were home to 1,000 monks. (Purev & Oyunbileg, 2003).

Tradition suggests that its plan was based on that of Gandan in Ulan-Bator, and the plan does indeed have similarities in plan and size, which is discussed below. All the buildings were made of wood, with some stone footings. The roof-tops were decorated with *Altan ganjir* finials. The whole site was surrounded by many brick and stone stupas, some of which had prayer wheels 'as big as oxcart wheels' (Information collected by ...).

By the end of the 19th century, the monastery was a major local economic centre, and in 1877 "... the Damchog aimag of the Dzuun khuree monastery housed 3490 horses, 33 camels, 1669 cattle, 88 yaks, 32229 sheep, 828 lan and 4 tsen silver items" (Erdenebileg, 2014), and in May 1934, the monastery housed 24 temples, 21 kitchen houses, 302 cattle, a total of 502 sheep and goats, with an income of 15688 tugrugs and expenditure of 15775 tugrugs. The site was also home to 101 Myandagtan monks, 209 taxed monks out of 502 monks in total and 145 children (Kherlen golyn zuun khuree, website). There were a great number of settlements around the

Khoegshin Khuree and Chinese traders did flourishing business including making handicrafts such as felt boots (Information collected by ...).

We have several records on the monastery when it was intact. The site was visited by Russian researcher Pozdneev in 1896, who left a lengthy description in his book *Mongolia and the Mongols* (1971). There are several photographs, taken by Pozdneev from the 1890's, which show the central temple area, with buildings made of canvas and wood and the Urga Hutuktu palace.



Fig 2. Monastic site at Dzuun Khuree, photograph taken in the 1920's, showing main temple (structure 5)



Fig 3. Monastic site at Dzuun Khuree, photograph taken in the 1920's, showing central temple area and the Urga Hutuktu palace

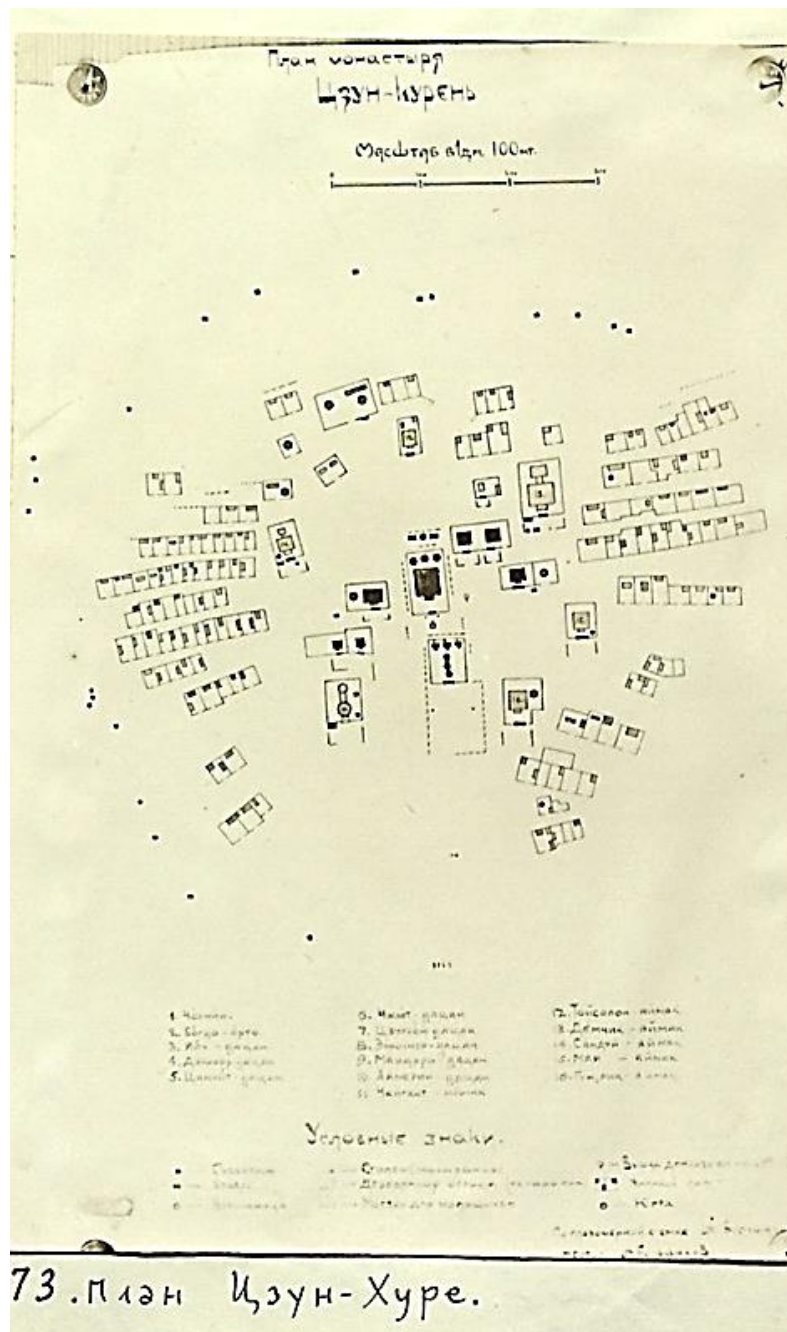


Fig 4. Plan of Monastic site at Dzuun Khuree, drawn in the 1920's by the anthropologist Klyagina
Names of aimags on the map:

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Tsogchen | 6. Jud-datsun | 12. Toisolon-aimag |
| 2. Bogdo-Orgoo | 7. Zurkhai-datsun | 13. Demchik-aimag |
| 3. Yoga-datsun | 8. Emchi nar-datsun | 14. Sandui-aimag |
| 4. Duinkhor-datsun | 9. Maidari-datsun | 15. Mai-aimag |
| 5. Tsanit-datsun | 10. Lamirin-datsun | 16. Gunrik-aimag |
| | 11. Jigjit-aimag | |

An accurate survey plan was compiled by the anthropologist Klyagina in the end of 1920's (<http://mongoliantemples.org/images/domm/sitescans/TÖMM051S.jpg>). It is remarkably

precise, although our survey shows considerably more temples, which presumably had been abandoned by this time.

In the beginning of 1930-s, as result of socialist economic regime introduced in the country, with high tax and confiscation of properties and livestock of Buddhist monasteries by communist government, the monastery began to diminish financially, and by the end of 1937 it was suppressed, the monks were dispersed and the buildings destroyed (Mongoliin sumhiidiin tuuhees ..., 2014).

Description of the Dzuun khuree site

The monastic site Dzuun khuree is located on a flat raised plain, around 1 km to the west of the Kherlen river, and 30m above the surrounding Kherlen flood plain. Its centre is located at 49U 0313413 /5320799 (48 0.806N/108 29.833E) elevation of 1382m. The site is bounded by small rivers to the east and west, so that it is effectively surrounded by water on three sides. The terrain is flat steppe grassland, and the site is crossed by a number of tracks. The main road from Baganuur to Mongonmorit passes with 500m of the site on the edge of the floodplain. The Elder's village is around 1km distant, and is one of the few permanent settlements in the area, although largely occupied only during the winter months.



Fig 5. Google Earth image of Dzuun Khuree (circular feature in the centre of image), located by the Kherlen river and two streams

On the ground there is very little to see. The main 'location' associated with the monastery is a stupa (49U 0313860/5320928) that is actually on the edge of the site, some 350m from its centre, and comprises a memorial platform made up of a mound 12m in diameter, with a metal sign and flags. Fired bricks have been laid in the form of a fylfot on the ground. There is also a scatter of decorated fired bricks, and small holes in the ground from former posts.

This stupa (17) is one of a series of 28 mounds that ring the site, from the south, clockwise to the north east. The east and south-east sides have no stupa mounds. Generally, they comprise low mounds of river gravel, around 8m in diameter, and up to 1.5m high, and in a number of cases there are square platforms on the top of the mound constructed of flat slabs of stone. In many cases there are scatters of brick, both fired red brick, and grey mud brick; some have a

Table 1. List of the stupas around the site. Coordinates are in UTM

№	East	North	ht.	dia.	Notes
1	313582	5321067	0.5	8	gravel mound, fired grey brick.. 6 ph
2	313504	5321083	0.5	8	gravel mound, fired grey brick, many terracotta frags, robbed
3	313502	5321141	0.5	6	gravel mound, much marmot activity
4	313385	5321116	1	6	low gravel mound, some bricks
5	313377	5321117	1.5	10	gravel mound, looted slabs, stupa bricks
6	313304	5321143	0.75	10	mud bricks and stone slabs
7	313192	5321108	0.5	6	low gravel mound
8	313186	5321136	0.75	14	large slabs and mud brick, many smashed terracottas on surface
9	313147	5321111	0.5	6	small grass covered mound
10	313134	5321084	0.5	8	grass covered mound quartz pebbles
11	313120	5321081	0.5	6	grass covered mound quartz pebbles, one large slab
12	313083	5321079	0	6	grass circle, one mud brick
13	313044	5321065	0.5	10	large broken stones, mud brick, moulded bricks
14	312945	5312976	1	8	mud and fired brick, some large stones, crutch left on mound
15	312914	5321019	0.2	2	low mound, quartz pebbles
16	312857	5321009	0.5	8	grass covered mound
17	312860	5312928	1	12	earth mound, mud and mounded brick, 6 post holes, memorial
18	312860	5312904	0.5	8	earth mound, large slabs forming square platform, 4.5m
19	312849	5312872	0.5	12	earth mound, some brick
20	312882	5312772	0.25	10	gravel mound, depression in centre
21	312887	5312709	0	6	grass circle
22	312918	5312660	1	8	earth mound stone slabs, mud and fired brick
23	312942	5312626	1.5	2	large slabs, fired brick
24	312962	5312539	1	7	earth mound, large slabs on square platform, 2m
25	312312	5312502	1	6	earth mound, large slabs forming square platform, 2m
26	313042	5312461	1	8	earth mound, large slabs forming square platform, 3m
27	313097	5312452	0.5	8	earth mound, quartz pebbles
28	313170	5312414	1	8	earth mound, large slabs forming double square platform, 3m

moulded curve, making it certain that they once formed part of the superstructure of a stupa. Most of the mounds had been robbed to some extent, and holes dug into them and the stones displaced. Two stupas (2 & 8), robbed in this fashion, contained terracotta plaques and stupa models. These are discussed below.



Fig. 6. Stupa 17, that is now the main marker for the site, with fylfot laid out in fired bricks

The *Klyagina* map provided a distribution of 21 stupas around the site, and it is likely that some of the very small mounds were missed or had already been destroyed. The mounds do not form a perfect ring around the site, suggesting perhaps that they developed over a period of time, with an original more regular ring, and the addition of new structures into the spaces between. Some would therefore date to the foundation of the monastery.



Fig 7. Stupa 26, showing low mound and constructed stone platform

In addition to the stupa mounds, there are 13 larger gravel mounds, up to 10m in diameter (but generally 6-8m), and 1m in height. These mounds did not have any associated brick or stone slabs and are not shown on the *Klyagina* map. The largest mound was 15m in diameter, and it seems its centre has been partly robbed as it forms a hollow depression. One of these mounds (312803531565) was partly eroded, and a deposit of burnt animal bone exposed. It seems that these might predate the monastery, and might be a burial mound, with associated deposits of large quantities of burnt animal bone (mostly sheep/goat) eroding from a buried surface. The distribution of the gravel mounds was along the ridge that formed the south east flank of the site, and would have been visible from the river valley below. There are however at least three mounds in the middle of the site, which were also made of gravel, and may be part of the group. It is probable that they predate the monastic use of the site. A midden deposit was also found at

the eastern edge of the site. This comprised bone, wood and pottery, and may be associated with the monastery in the more modern period.

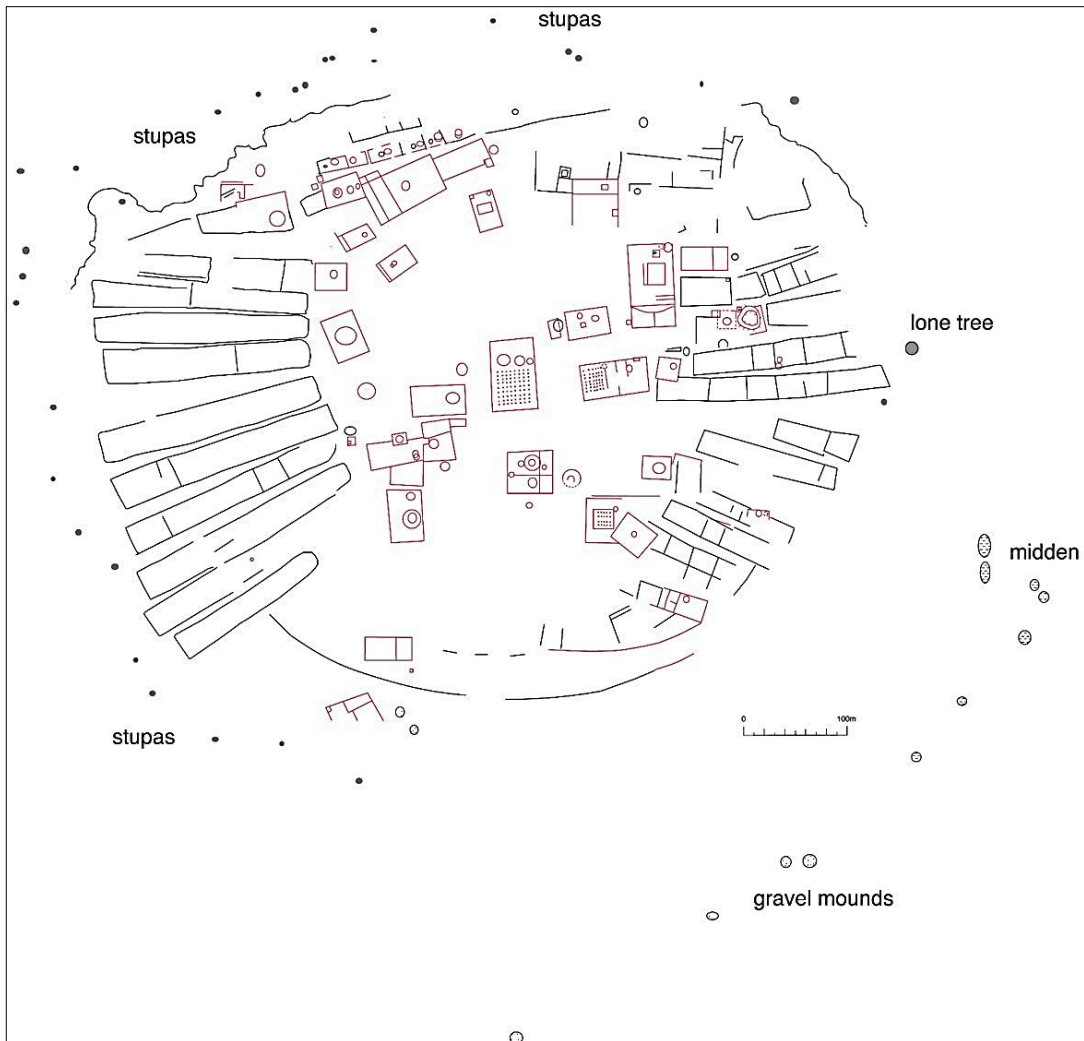


Fig 8. Plan of site, from survey and aerial photography, showing location of mound, buildings and stupas



Fig 9. Tree Shrine on eastern edge of site

The most impressive external feature was a tree shrine (312702531825) that had been deliberately cut down with an axe. The tree stump was surrounded by a pavement of flat stones, and to the south were two larger threshold stones. The type of tree seems to have been a local pine, and we counted around 100 rings. The tree is not mentioned in any of the 20th century descriptions of the site, and it may be quite ancient.

Monastic Buildings

The plan of the site is reasonably clear on a 2012 image on Google Earth, as well as on a Bing image, which was taken in a coverage of light snow. The lines of individual walls and post holes can be clearly seen on these images and have been transcribed at 1:1000 scale. This base map was used as the basis for our survey, where the features were very much less visible on the ground. When we were there, the wall lines were visible as slightly discoloured grass, and these were plotted using a hand held GPS. In addition there were some masonry features comprising flat stones on the grass. Some of these were wall lines, but the commonest were circular rings for what might have been ger-temples, or circular tents. The survey recorded 42 individual structures.

The monastic buildings form an oval, 750m east west and 600m north south. The site is largely flat and featureless, but a few elements seem to have involved earthwork banks and depressions. These may comprise buried mud brick structures, although across the site as a whole there was a near complete absence of fired brick fragments - which were only found at the stupas on the edge of the site. The basic plan is a temple area in the centre, with a perambulatory route, and aimags or monastic dormitories radiating from the centre on the east and west side. There is also some confusion in places, and it may well be that there is some superimposition of structures.

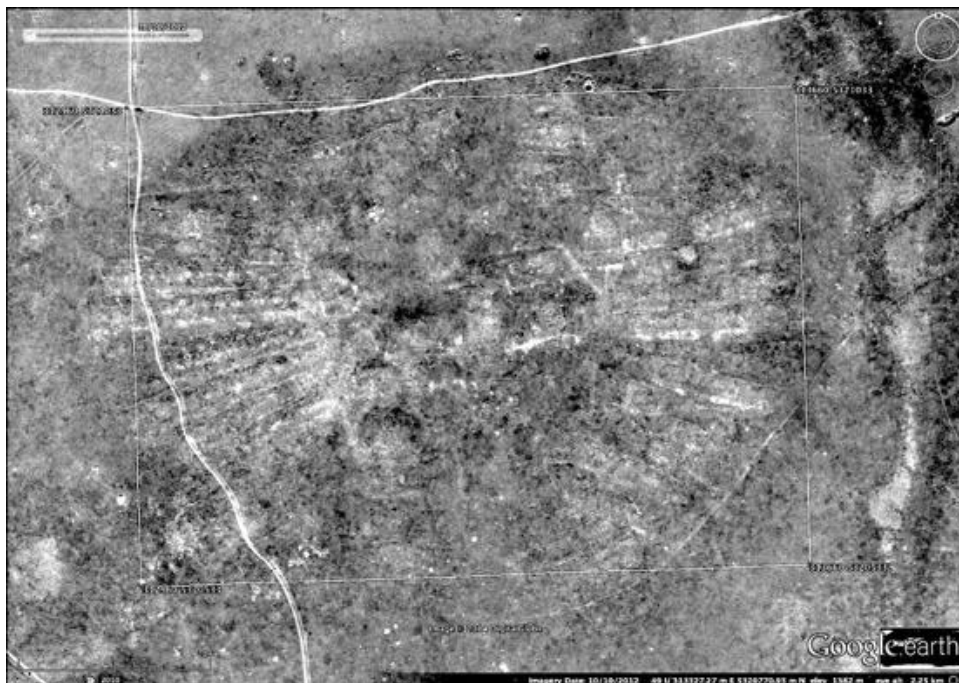


Fig 10. Google Earth image from 2012, showing main buildings on the site; corner coordinates are UTM and geo-referenced.

Aimags

The monastic buildings form an oval, 750m east west and 600m north south. The site is largely flat and featureless, but a few elements seem to have involved earthwork banks and depressions. These may comprise buried mud-brick structures, although across the site as a whole there was a near complete absence of fired brick fragments - which were only found at the stupas on the edge of the site. The basic plan is a temple area in the centre, with a perambulatory route, and

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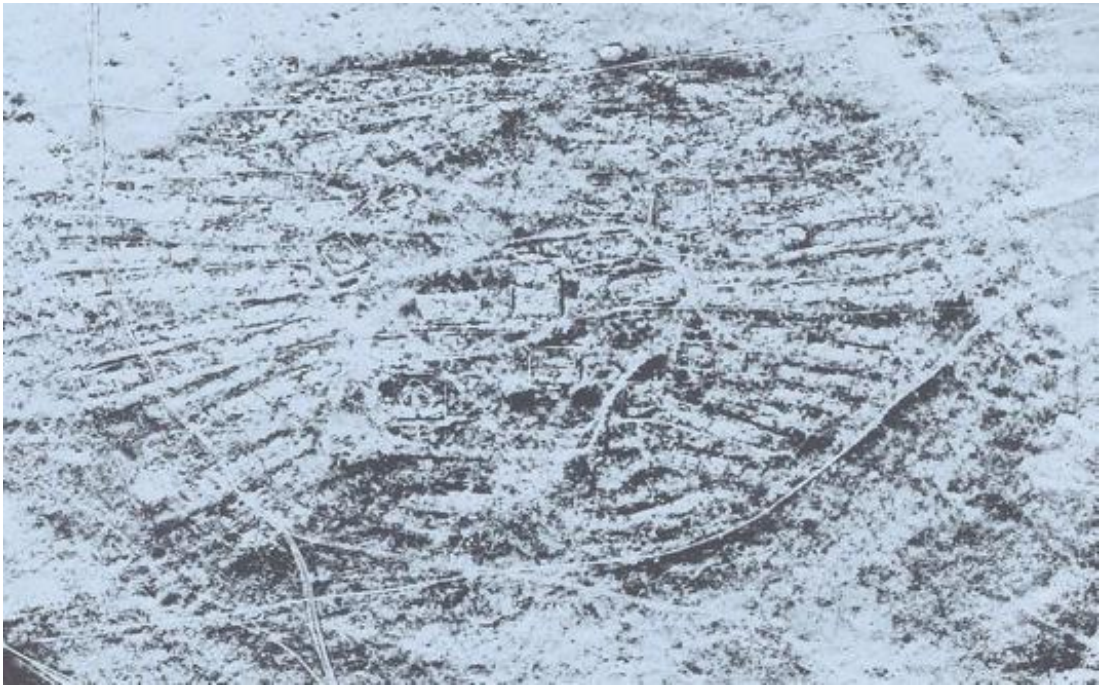


Fig 11. Bing image, showing the site covered in snow.

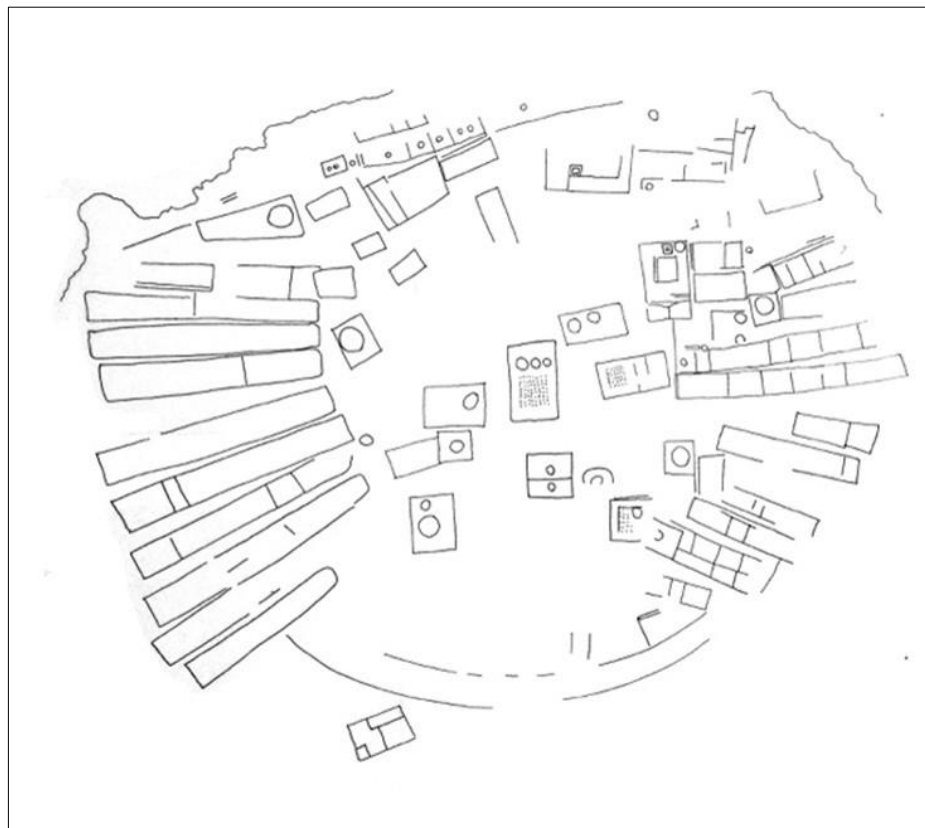


Fig 12. Transcription of Google Earth and Bing images, showing the main monastic buildings.

There are approximately 20 aimags, 10 to the west and 10 to the east that radiate out from the central temple area. Each aimag is up to 220m long, and was subdivided into individual cells - each has up to 15 cells, approximately 20m square. Within these would have been individual gers - these are shown on the *Klyagina* map, with one or two gers in each - so each aimag would have housed around 20 gers, making a total of 400 gers on the site or at its largest around 2400 lamas. By the 1920's, the number of lamas seems to have fallen and the *Klyagina* map shows about half of the aimags that were visible on the ground.

The aimags are very closely spaced, and there are very narrow paths between each. The surface of these paths was partly metaled with gravel, and there are several gravel pits where this material might have been obtained on the east side of the site.

Central Temple Area

The *Klyagina* map gives around 15 temple structures in use in the 1920's and most of these are visible on the plan that we compiled. Around 5 were rectangular structures, roofed, and supported on timber posts. The central main temple (structure 5) was 65x40m orientated north-south. It has a grid (8x9) of 72 robbed out timber posts that formed the main part of the temple. Behind this on the north side, were three circular stone emplacements (d. 10m, 8m and 4m) that may have formed the basis for ger shrines. The temple was probably made of timber and canvas walls, although unusually the outer wall was thick and may have been made of mud brick.

Structure 1 lay to 40m to the east. This was east-west, (60-30m), with a grid of 42 posts (6x7), and a series of spaces to the east. In one was a circular stone emplacement.

Structure 14 was the third visible temple with 20 timber posts (4x5), in a larger enclosure. This also had a circular emplacement in the courtyard.

Structure 4 may also have been a square roofed temple, although the post holes were not visible in the survey. This building, 76x40m, had a central building 20x20m in a large courtyard that also contained circular and square features.

The other eleven temples were most likely ger temples. These are stone circular emplacements, up to around 20m in diameter contained within square or rectangular enclosures, possible made from mud brick. Normally located centrally, but also sometimes in pairs, the based probably supported simple tented temples.

Around the whole temple complex, it was possible to trace a pathway that linked the main temples and may have been used for ceremonial processions.

The monastery had one internal stupa. This was located on the western part of the site (215/916), and was made from fired grey brick, and placed in a rectangular enclosure. The circular base had a diameter of around 4m, and had an attached southern pavement. A structure that looks like this is visible on the *Klyagina* map.

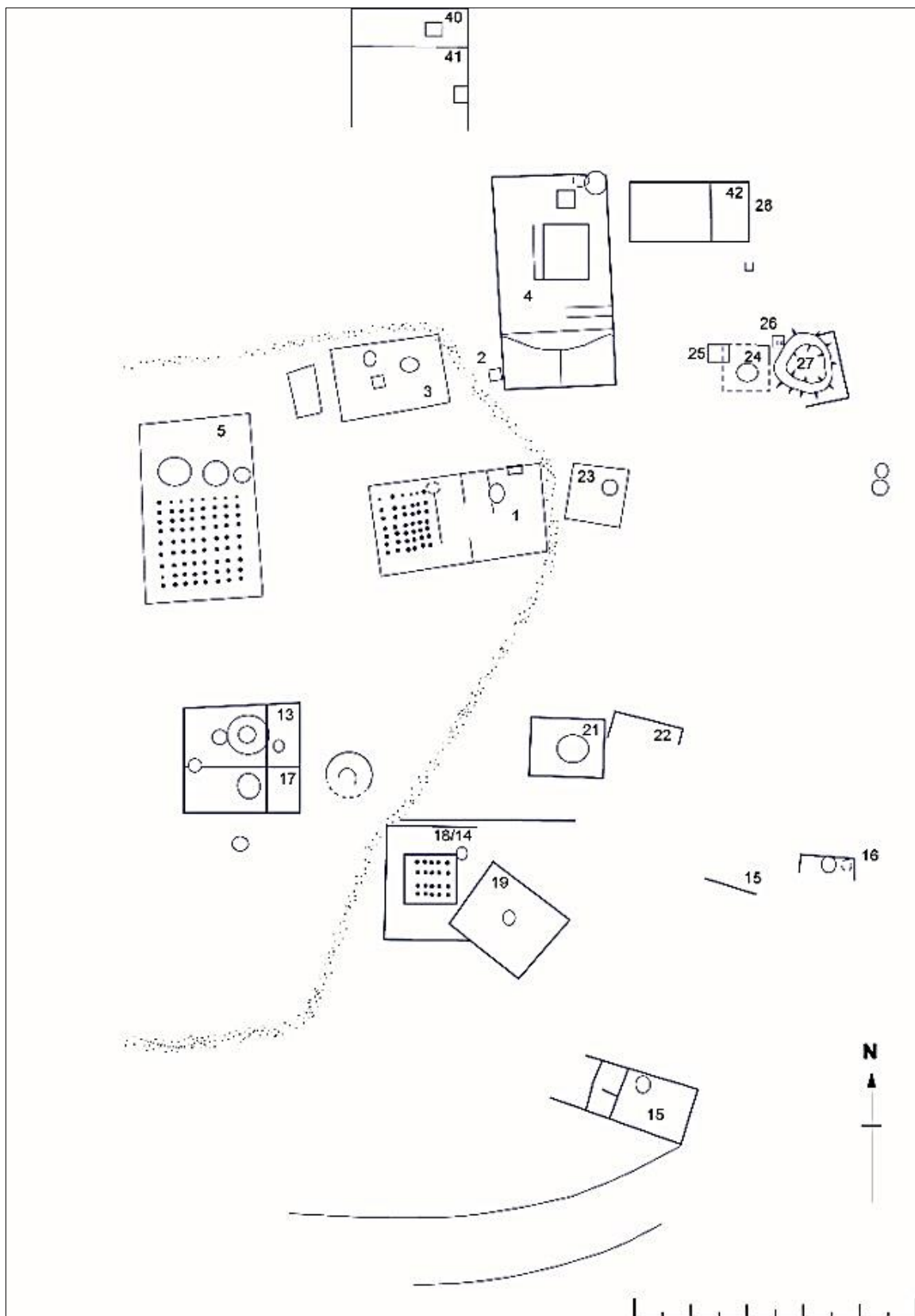


Fig 13. Field plan of the central area of temples, drawn from hand held GPS derived co-ordinates. 1:1000 scale



Fig 14. Kite photograph of circular emplacement in structure 5

In addition to the temples and aimags, there were a number of other structures whose function was not immediately clear. On the south of the site was a rectangular building 50x33m that seems to fall outside the regular plan of the site. It may have been a guest or administrative building. On the north edge of the site, are two rows of structure, with at least circular depressions, each with diameters of 6m. They do not feature on the *Klyagina* map, and may be earlier in date.



Fig 15. Part of Structure 5 showing details of wall-line and depressions for timber posts

Terracotta Plaques

A large number of broken terracotta plaques had been recently dug out of stupa 8, where many had been smashed and left on the surface and trampled by cattle and motor traffic. As they were so vulnerable to looting, we recorded as many as we were able to in the short time, by photography. The plaques were of exceptional high quality, and had been clearly built into the stupa, as part of its construction and dedication, although this would need to be confirmed on excavation. Subsequent robbing of the structure exposed its inner structure and this important cache of terracottas.

The dating of these plaques is unresolved. The tradition of placing plaques within stupas continued until the early twentieth century, and several examples of both plaques and the bronze stamp from which they were made have survived and are on display in the Zanabazaar museum, where they are dated to the 19th and early 20th centuries. However the examples from Dzuun Khuree are of a far better quality than these examples and suggest a level of technical expertise. The production of terracotta plaques is well known from Buddhist monasteries, developing a tradition that was established in India and South East Asia in the 12th century CE; an important centre for their production was the Burmese temple complex at Pagan (<http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection/7/10230/10262>). Examples have also been found in China apparently associated with Buddhism in the Laio / Khitan dynasty (907-1125). However the examples from Dzuun Khuree appear to be more closely inked to Tibetan models. This is particularly evidence in stupa models, one of which has a Tibetan inscription around its base. The stupas that are shown are clearly Tibetan rather than South East Asian. The most likely date is therefore the Zanabazaar period, when Buddhist links between Tibet and Mongolia were firmly established. Type 5, which shows a Buddha of Time, is similar to other examples in gilt silver from this period, now in the Zanabazaar Museum. A 17th century date would coincide with the historical foundation date for the monastery, and suggest that some of these stupa remains might be contemporary with its foundation.



Fig 16. Broken terracotta plaques from stupa 8, lying on surface, having been dug out

The plaques comprise a number scenes from the life of the Buddha as well as model stupas, and listed here is a selection of types that were found.

Type 1: Small stupa model, with inscription around base.



Type 2: Stupa model without inscription



Type 3: Seated Buddha



Type 4: Seated Buddha



Type 5: Buddha of time (Duinkhor)
(Zanabazar school?)



Type 6: Ten seated Buddhas



Type 7: Buddha with two figures below



Discussion

Dzuun Khuree was one of the major Buddhist monasteries in Eastern Mongolia, covering around 30 hectares, with an establishment of over 1000 lamas. Its plan is very similar to Gandan, which survives in Ulan-Baatar as an extant monastery, in both the circular layout of the site and the overall size (Gandan was around 38 hectares). The original layout of Gandan is recorded in a plan of c. 1913-5, now in the Zanabazaar Museum (Fig. 17), which shows the aimags and the central group of temples. It may well be, as the traditions suggest that Dzuun Khuree was modelled on Gandan, also founded in the 17th century. The finds from the stupas also confirm a likely 17th or early 18th century for the site.



Fig. 17. Layout of Gandan in a plan of Ikh Khuree (1913-1915, Zanabazar Museum)

There are some hints however that Dzuun Khuree may be earlier in date - a suggestion first made by Pozdneev (1896). One particular feature is the manner in which two of the temples are constructed with a regular grid of timber posts, rather than the more normal central chamber and ambulatory found in recent buildings. The grid arrangement was recorded in the excavations of the 14th century Buddhist monastery at Karakorum. It is however difficult to see how such a temple would have survived at Dzuun Khuree into the early 20th century.

Further research is clearly needed on this important site, and this is planned for an excavation season in 2015.

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ХУРААНГУЙ

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ХЭРЛЭНГИЙН ЗҮҮН ХҮРЭЭНИЙ ТУРЬД ХИЙСЭН ХАЙГУУЛ СУДАЛГААНЫ УРЬДЧИЛСАН ДҮНГЭЭС

Монгол улсын их сургуулийн Антропологи-Археологиин тэнхим, Английн Бристолын их сургуулийн Археологи, антропологиин тэнхимтэй 2008 оноос хойш “Хэрлэн голын сав газрын археологиин дурсгал” эрдэм шинжилгээний хамтарсан төсөл хэрэгжүүлэн хээрийн судалгаа явуулж байгаа билээ. Энэхүү төслийн хүрээнд 2014 онд Төв аймгийн Мөнгөнморьт сумын нутаг, Тогос уулын өвөр, Хэрлэнгийн баруун эрэгт байх *Хэрлэнгийн зүүн хүрээ (Зүүн хүрээ, Хөгшин хүрээ, Өвгөн хүрээ)* хэмээн олонд нэрлэгдэж байсан хийдийн турьд болон түүний ойролцоох нутагт хайгуул судалгаа явууллаа. Хайгуулын

явцад хийдийн тэгийг тогтоож, хийдийн дотор байсан байгууламжуудын дэвсгэр зургийг үйлдэв. Зүүн хүрээний сансрын зураг болон хайгуулын дэвсгэр зургийг харахад уг хийдийн ерөнхий зохион байгуулалт тухайн үеийн Их хүрээний Гандантэгчинлэн хийдийнхтэй төстэй байгаа нь түүхэн зураг, газрын зургийн харьцуулалтаас харагдаж байна. Хийдийн зарим суварганы үлдэгдэл, нуранги дотроос олдсон олон тооны шавар цацыг дүрслэлээр нь найман хэлбэр болгож болохоор байв. Түүхэн зарим баримт болон аман түүхийн сурвалжуудаас Хэрлэнгийн зүүн хүрээ 17-р зууны сүүлээр үүсгэн байгуулагдсан гэсэн мэдээ байдаг хэдий ч хийдийн төв хэсэгт буй гол дуганы архитектур, суварганаас гарсан зарим цацын дүрслэл, түүхэн зарим мэдээгээр түүнээс өмнө байгуулагдсан байж болохоор байна.