

## **Buddhist-lamaist pagoda of Belgrade 1929-1944**

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**Abstract:** *The Kalmyk people, the people of Mongolic origins and Buddhist-Lamaist religion who lived people in Belgrade from 1920 till 1944. They came to Serbia as a part of the vast group of Russian refugees, who had fled Russia after the October Revolution. Majority of them (300-400 out of 500 in total) had settled in Belgrade, where the biggest Kalmyk colony in Europe was founded. Pagoda, which was built by them in Belgrade after smaller pre-war Buddhist pagodas in Russia, had been the first pagoda in Europe to have been built. The Belgrade Kalmyk colony ceased to exist in 1944, after its members had fled to Germany and later to the USA. During the struggle for liberation, the Pagoda was partly demolished and its function was altered later in absence of believers and equipment.*

**Key words:** *Kalmyks, Belgrade, Buddhism, Temple*

### **Kalmyk community of Belgrade**

Kalmyks are the West Mongolian people originating from the area of lower flow of the Volga. Ancestors of Kalmyk people (Goryats, Western Mongols) lived in Dzungaria, a vast, waterless, continental area between Tian Shan and Altay mountains, which is Xinjiang province in Western China nowadays. Due to over-population, Kalmyks were forced to migrate in the past. Kalmyk tribes (the Oyrats) mainly moved to the areas, which later became parts of the Russian Empire. Kalmyks are mainly nomadic tribes. Not only had Russian Empire striven to use Kalmyk people for defence of their southern borders from Tatars and highlanders from Caucasus since the Kalmyk people settled in the Russian Empire, but it also used them for warfare in Europe and Asia. Kalmyks had been waging wars as the elite horsemen, in special regiments, alongside with Russian Kozakhs.

Kalmyk language is a member of the family of the Uralo-Altai languages. Their alphabet was developed in 13<sup>th</sup> century and the writing systems were from top to bottom and from left to right. At the end of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there had been a reform of Kalmyk language and Russian Cyrillic alphabet was adopted as a Kalmyk alphabet, which was used by Kalmyk refugees every time their publications were printed and published. Kalmyks' literature was modest in their fatherland and it was predominantly oral (heroic epics, poems, fairy tale, fables, proverbs). Their literature was being developed under the influences of Buddhism and ancient Mongolian, Chinese, Hindu and Korean national literatures.

Kalmyks who settled in Serbia were part of numerous group of Russian immigrants, who had fled Russia after the October Revolution. When the refugees from the largest "evacuation of the Crimea" had spread in Europe, at the beginning of April in 1920 until the end of the 1923 there were 21500 refugees from Russia, among whom there were about 500 Kalmyks. The State Commission for the reception and accommodation of Russian allocated refugees, with the help of district and county authorities, cities and villages.

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The majority of Kalmyks, around 300-400, settled in Belgrade, creating the largest Kalmyk settlement in Europe. In Belgrade they were stationed in the southern and southeastern outskirts of the city, close to tility and construction sites on which they worked, starting from Karaburma on the Danube River, and through Bulbuder, Zvezdara, Cvetko market all up to Crveni krst, and many of them settled in suburban village Mali Mokri Lug. This neighbour's name used to be Mustafa Pasha fountain and Pašino brdo and it was being used as the hunting area as well (part of Učiteljsko naselje).

First years after Kalmyk settlement in Belgrade there was a difficult adjustment to the new environment, which was partly eased due to the fact that all Kalmyk settlers had spoken Russian alongside with Kalmyk language, so they quickly learned Serbian. Belgraders called them simply: "Chinese people" because of their looks. Among Russian settlers, who also mostly lived in Belgrade, there was a lot of members of aristocracy, property owners, contractors, employees and its military officer staff. Group of Kalmyk refugees had already been the poorest part of Russian settlers, both materially and educationally.

Shortly after the arrival of a group of refugees in the Yugoslav capital, Kalmyk leader – Lamaist priest asked Belgrade industrialist and landowner Milos Jaćimović to have Kalmyks employed in his tility in Mali Mokri Lug. Tility was located at the present-day Cvetkova pijaca in Zvezdara. Jaćimović hired them and gave them land near the tility. He gave them the bricks of which Kalmyks built about thirty storey houses, which enabled them to move out of the rented houses. In addition to workers who have worked at a tility in this village their relatives settled there as well. Every house was shared by two or three Kalmyk families and dwellings were modest. Besides the houses gardens, common well and shared bathroom were located.

At the beginning, most of the Kalmyks worked on the excavation of clay and its transport to the tility. Over time, some of them progressed, bought horses for themselves and became independent. They had more than one job to feed their families-transport of woods, coal, etc. Some of them have worked as coachmen. Kalmyks were great lovers of horses and used them at various times as a means of generating revenue. In this way the new environment continued the tradition of horse breeding. You were engaged in agriculture. Were preserved and some local crafts, and were especially adept at knitting and sewing. Given that the main role in the family leads to men, women Belgrade Kalmyks are not employed, but they contribute to the household budget making slippers and fur jackets that are sold in the market. It is also known that a number of Kalmyks, as unskilled laborers worked late twenties to build a bridge over the Danube, and was also engaged in the construction of the Albania Palace in Belgrade.

In the first years after arriving in Belgrade men had worn ragged Russian military uniforms, later they wore a simple civil suits which did not differ from the Serbian population in the area. The geographical position of the region in which they lived at what was then the outskirts of the city, in a working-class neighborhood Mali Mokri Lug, proves that the Belgrade Kalmyks settlements in socio – economic terms was marginal community. However, with the gradual improvement in the economic situation of some families, their needs were being increased as well.

Kalmyk community was quite conservative and was not open to the surroundings, being connected with single language and origins, immigrant destiny and especially belonging to the Buddhist religious community. Their contacts with its surroundings and abroad were rare, and only the Kalmyk clergy maintained ties with compatriots in Paris. There were occasional high clergies from Paris to have participated in rituals during major holidays. Kalmyks were not politically active. They did not return to the USSR after the Soviet declaration of amnesty for war refugees in 1923, despite strong pro-return advocacy of the Kalmyk Society for the Return to the Motherland with the headquarters in Prague. In Serbia, Kalmyks made friends with the first Serbian farmers from Mali Mokri Lug, who called them Chinese due to their exotic looks. It is known that there had been several mixed marriages. Kalmyk children played with Serbian neighbours' children, and they had a football field, which was named the

Chinese court. They attended primary school together. Upon having settled in Belgrade, in the new environment a new problem for the Kalmyks emerged- the education of children because enrollment in primary school had been obligatory, so they all the children had to start attending school. Kalmyks became more streamlined in the education of their descendents and the main care was to ensure conditions for their children to graduate from higher schools as possible.

Kalmykia children usually attended elementary school Russian or Serbian elementary schools. During the thirties of the last century, Kalmyks were trying to open their national school where the children could learn their mother tongue and script of the Buddhist faith, Kalmyk history and geography. However, despite the resulting approval, such schools had not started working due to lack of funds. During the great economic crisis of the early thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which had been felt throughout the world, the life of Kalmyks in Yugoslavia was affected too.

After having completed primary schools, some of had Kalmyks attended high schools, usually one in Russian language, but they had also gone to study abroad, mostly in Prague.

According to statistics, most Kalmyks lived in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and France between the WW1 and the WW2, and in much smaller numbers in Belgium and other countries. Most Kalmyk refugees, who were intellectuals and protagonists of the most important activities in their communities lived in Czechoslovakia, where they founded the Kalmyk committee of cultural workers (KKKR), which played an important role in their mutual rapprochement during the Second World War and afterwards.

Starting of the Second World War and the occupation of Yugoslavia had a major impact on change of lifestyles of Kalmyk families. Due to worsening of food supplies, the biggest concern of most citizens in Serbia and Kalmyks as well was how to feed and survive. A number of Kalmyks went to Germany at the beginning of the war, because there had been a severe shortage of skilled and unskilled labour force during the war years in German industry. Some Belgrade Kalmyks went to the Eastern front as German soldiers. Most Kalmyk families moved from Belgrade and some other Serbian cities went to Germany via Vienna at the end of the Second World War and the most during 1944. After German capitulation they were stationed at camps near Munich that had been led by American charities, where they had lived with other Kalmyk refugees (about 800 people) until the winter of 1951/1952, when they moved to the United States, mainly to the states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. A small number of Kalmyks who remained in Yugoslavia after the WW2 was mostly deported to the Soviet Union like most of Russian immigrants and since then they disappeared without a trace. In this way, Kalmyk settlements in Belgrade were completely disintegrated.

Kalmyks today live mainly in the United States as a nation that has been slowly disappearing because of assimilation in the American environment, in which they live. They do not have their national schools and mixed marriages contribute to their assimilation as well. They speak the languages of the countries in which they reside and only a small part of the Kalmyks adhere to the Buddhist religion. However, in the capital of the Republic of Kalmykia, which is part of the Russian Federation, largest Buddhist temple in Europe for 6,000 worshipers was consecrated in 2011.

During the fight for the liberation of Belgrade, which was being conducted in the vicinity of Mali Mokri Lug, the upper part of the attic of the Kalmyk Pagoda was partially demolished. Belgrade Baksha Umaldinov left Yugoslavia to Germany with his associates, belongs Menkov and Ignatov. It is assumed that Kalmyks probably took the equipment of Belgrade pagoda with them. Baksha Umaldinov died in 1946. in Bavaria. Photos of the German officer Helmut Klar were made in Belgrade during a visit Kalmyk temple in 1944. That was the last photo of very old baksha (Helmut.Klar, 1954). After damage in the bombing, the tower and sanctuaries ground were destroyed and turned into a cultural centre. Then it had been demolished, after which RO Buducnost-servis Hladjenje was founded there. Dilapidated building is still at that location.

## **Building of pagoda**

Kalmyks are Buddhists and the Kalmyks who had settled in Belgrade were Buddhists – Lamaist . More specifically, their religion was Lamaism with additions of Mongolian shamanism, the pantheon of local deities and cults pre-Buddhist historical figures. Among the members of the Kalmyk community custom of solidarity, which consisted of mutual legal assistance, as well as to visiting religious rites, and financing the sanctuary was a prevalent custom.

Among the Kalmyks who fled Russia there had been one of their priests and the refugees had been working hard to provide a space in which to practice religious rituals (pagoda) immediately after the immigration. The high priest Baksha ( senior lama, “master of the religion” adviser). In 1924, Manchuda Borinov asked and received permission from the competent authorities for the decoration of provisional Buddhist shrines in a rented apartment at 47 Vojislava Illica Street (the house still exists). It was a modest space, consisting of two bedrooms with carpets. Several symbolic figures decorated it, there was a bronze figure of the Buddha. Since late 1925, the shrine is located at a rented house at 51 Metohijska Street.

Baksha Borinov was dressed in a dark blue priestly robes, and his head was covered with a round, gold-embroidered cap. Not only had Baksha been in charge of the ritual, but he had also been the chief adviser to his countrymen in all of decisions concerning life, having been visiting them at work at tiling, having been encouraging them to endure and be patient. Belgrade Kalmyks were said to be very industrious and responsible and gained the trust of Belgraders . Kalmyks were saying that the Serbs treated them very nice. When John D. Prince, the ambassador of the United States in Yugoslavia from 1926 till 1933, visited a Buddhist Pagoda in 1927 and attended the service which was held on this occasion he wrote in his report that he had spoken to the “ head Lama “ about the conditions in which Kalmyks had been living in Belgrade.” He was also informed that Kalmyks had not complained about the treatment and that the government had let them perform religious rites in a private house (ie, in the house of the Lama ), though, as Lama added, they probably would have complained if they had been proposed even a small pagoda to be built since Buddhism had not been recognised by Yugoslav laws.” (Prince , 1928).

The idea of building a Buddhist temple in Belgrade conceived relatively quickly upon their arrival. Starting from the need “to preserve national independence and Kalmyk national culture “action to build” Kalmyk home to religious and cultural needs” started. The campaign to build a Buddhist pagoda in Belgrade started in 1928 by the abusha Alexeyev, a former colonel of the Russian army and the president of the” Kalmyk Settlement”, which was founded in April 1928 and Buddhist elder Manchuda Borinov.

The construction of the pagoda was supported by Dimitrije, the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church.. In a letter to the Ministry of Religion, Patriarch wrote: “Although public expression of Buddhism is not recognized by the Constitution and laws of our country , we find that there would be no damage to the state, or by any other religious community, if this small group of people in our country were provided means to satisfy their religious needs, while it would be damage to leave them without spiritual guidance.”(AJ, 69-175-276 Letter of the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Postal code 234 3/21 January 1925, the Ministry of religion, Belgrade).

The temple was built on the lot given to them by Milos Jacimovic, at the street which was named Buddhist, after the Pagoda (now Budvanska Street). Sanctuary brick hovel, in the form of a pagoda built by themselves, collecting donations. Financial assistance came from Kalmyks, the state, city, municipalities, retailers and royal family. Donors are listed by their names in preserved documents, and the sum given as well (one of the donors was the Princess Jelena, sister of King Alexander).Although the question of attribution of Buddhist temple remained open, it is likely that that was a project of Russian engineer Andrej Klepinin. The pagoda was built as a rather small one, with a square base of a cross, after

smaller pagodas in Russia dating before the First World War. Lovely exterior of the pagoda captivated the picturesque roof construction Far architecture of China and Japan. The building was modest in size, so it happens that the big Kalmyk holidays could not accommodate all worshipers. Therefore, during 1934 and 1935 the Kalmyks sought and received permission to repair a temple. Extensive modifications that they wanted to make were very expensive and were reduced to the building on a detached entrance and altar work. They managed to expand the temple for only 38 m<sup>2</sup>. The reconstruction project of Kalmyk Buddhist Temple was done by architect Jovan Novakovic 1935<sup>th</sup> The (Historical Archives of Belgrade, IAB, OGB, TD, XIX-49-1935 (1883-1942). There are few data about the architect Jovan Dj. Novakovic, although after World War I he had been a trustee of the Board for Reconstruction of Belgrade, and although he had done projects for many notable private homes in Belgrade (see D. Djuric – Zamolo Builders 1815-1914 Museum of the City of Belgrade, Belgrade, 1981). Ceremony of consecration of the pagoda took place on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1929. Consecration was attended by chief priest Baksha Namdzo Bimbusov from Paris and Belgrade Baksha Sandzama Umaldinov, accompanied by two Avalons. This act was attended by the entire Belgrade Buddhist settlement. The construction of the Buddhist-Lamaist pagoda in Belgrade had been the most important event in the life of Kalmyks in exile because of the temple became a space for their reunions and centre of their lives. For the time between the two world wars it was the only sanctuary of Kalmyks in Europe outside the Soviet Union, so Kalmyks from other parts of Serbia and Europe had been coming here, especially during their more important holidays. Kalmyks, as adherents to the Buddhist religion, had been drawing the special attention of foreigners in Belgrade and after the construction of the temple, they had become even more interesting, about which there are written documents.

Among rare texts about Kalmyk settlement in Belgrade press of that time, inspired text Stevan Popovic dedicated to celebration of the tenth anniversary of pagoda stands out: quiet, working, they go silent, as fearing that someone does not hold this against them, of hurting them. In Belgrade, they are not very much noticed. Here, however, the hours of coming home from work, one can see a little more of them, their wives and their children. Never noisy, never drunk and Belgrade police have never recorded any Kalmyk in their chronicles. They are, however, three hundred of them and they have been here for twenty years! ... Sons of the steppes are being suffocated by the town. Tall buildings reduce their horizons. Town dust bothers them. They are used to the countryside. So they went to the outskirts of Belgrade. There, where there still are uncultivated fields, where wheat is more yellow in the summer and where the corn rustling in the wind, they feel better. So there they are uncommon. Their dream would be to colonise some of our villages. There, in full nature they cherished their horses, their cattle, worked the land and would be satisfied ... Their pleasure is their pagoda. A Belgrade industrialist gave them land and a lot of building materials and Kalmyks were doing, he gave them money and – pagoda, their pagoda, appeared one day in 1929 here in Belgrade. The only Kalmyk Buddhist Temple in Europe! Belgrade can be proud of them ... “(S. Popovic, 1939). On tenth anniversary of the construction of the church, 1939, a solemn ritual in honor of the benefactor Milos Jaćimović was held at pagoda. Kalmyks thanked him with calligraphy Acknowledgement. After the ceremony guests were invited to the room and offered tea and cakes. Jaćimović’s grandson gave the Acknowledgement to the Belgrade City Museum. When the general architecture of the Kalmyk pagodas is analysed, it can be noticed that the construction of wooden buildings was present in their tradition. Since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, their pagodas had been built of brick and stone and usually had a large central area with a tower crowned with richly decorated carvings, murals and paintings and bronze sculptures. Compared with the complex temples for which Mongols and Kalmyks are known, it is concluded that the Belgrade shrine were few and modest. Church in Belgrade is built in the shape of a pagoda with three slightly twisted edge of the roof, which is one of the main types of the Mongol shrines that reflect Chinese architectural influence. Church is located in a fenced yard and surrounded by fruit trees. Alongside with temple, there was building with rooms for priests and classrooms for Russian and Serbian languages. Belgrade pagoda at the corners of the roof contained metal bells, which are echoed in the wind. At the top of the roof, there was the sky-double vajra pointed towards sky. Vajra Lamas is a symbol of truth and knowledge-the Absolute attribute the Tibetan deities

and ritual objects in Lamaist ceremonies. On the front of the building, above the door, there was a Buddhist emblem, two gazelles, as a symbol of joining the faith, and between them, the lotus flower, the wheel of Buddha's teachings with eight compartments (PAOK), which marked the eight paths of salvation from earthly suffering. On the ground floor there was only one window, while in each of the two upper floors there were four hole windows which were also painted and contributed to the creation of vibrant atmosphere of this temple. Apparently, the Kalmyks equipped pagoda with decorations from Russia. Opposite from the entrance to the lodge, was the altar. Upon the altar there were the next two statues of Buddha and iconic objects and relics, and below them bowls with sacrificial gifts. Left of the altar, in front of the window, there were two low tables for two Lamas and monks, and shelves for storing religious texts. Traditional religious images were hung on the walls – thin, as well as photos of Mongol and Kalmyk high religious dignitaries. Among the paintings hanging on the walls there was a picture the world's largest invaders Mongols of Genghis Khan. Besides images, which decorated the interior of the pagoda, there were lots of colored ornaments, floor was made of ordinary boards, and covered with industrial-made carpets. Higher ceiling was supported by four wooden colorful painted pillars with Buddhist symbols (the wheel of Buddha's teachings, lotus flower, etc.), which hung from the ceiling of the Buddhist flag colors (white, red, yellow, blue green) in the middle of the temple, in the opening high dome, under a canopy, there was a large round mirror ("As you see yourself in the mirror as they are, black or white, so you fully see the Buddha"). In the Belgrade pagoda there was the urn of lame Arcad Chubanov (1840-1894), who had the Lama of Kalmyks of the Don for twenty-one years. The remains of the great lamas were seen as a holy relic. The urn was located at Belgrade's pagoda until the Kalmyks had left Belgrade in 1944 They took it with them to Germany and later in the United States, where it is still today (baron temple, Howell, New Jersey).

Lamaist ritual objects were arranged on the tables of both the priests: the rosary with 54 strawberries, ochir (double vajra), a ring (a symbol of spreading the Buddha's teachings), cymbals, sacred records in Tibetan language, the contact line between the believers and the clergies, bowls with various grains, bowls of holy water (water of Saffron), bowls with a peacock feather (and bum), incense and fragrances.

### **Rites, rituals and ceremonies of Kalmyks**

Believers attended ceremonies in the temple of the Lamas by several hours waiting for spiritual purification and absolution in the next incarnation. Their participation in the ceremonies was based on the promotion of the welfare of not only the direct participants, but also the entire Kalmyk communities. In addition to the liturgy that was done three times a day, there were also significant dates in the life of Buddha, the Full Moon Feast, Feast of the New Moon, Tibetan New Year and others.

A comprehensive description of lamaist rituals in the temple of Kalmyks in Belgrade is given by John D. Prince in the aforementioned report, while visiting the temple in 1927.

Two priests serve and a singer, standing so close to each other, they start intoning mostly harmonious varying only two deep tones, prescribed hymns in honour of Buddha from Tibet Lamaist books in Tibetan ritual language. With great interest, I noticed that at the end of long phrases singers breathed a restrained sound.

In certain moments of the service, I think the name of the Buddha was mentioned in fervor, the chief lama covered his right hand with orange scarf to the ankle, so that three soaking double drink-offering consecrated sweetened water from one bronze bowl in which he previously laid layer of barley grain. Taking the pieces of this mixture, lama throws them to the right and left, and then sprinkles holy water, sprinkles the altar, but not the others who serve or present believers, which obviously means that the offering of the consecrated water makes the Buddha. Tissue is switched to his left hand whenever his left hand to touch the holy water is used. It is interesting to note that the sprinkles on top were made of a

peacock feather. Being well known that the peacock is a symbol dedicated to evil or negative influences, I asked the lama why he used such an obviously harmful emblem of holy water. He told me it was evil and “poisonous” thing, that peacock’s feather served to prevent malicious spirits to approach and poison the holy water; interesting example of Eastern homeopathy!

As the service continued and finally reached a climax suddenly ending up, chanting became very fourtone chanting that end with the word that resembled a very great role model our Amine. The individual would TROPAR chanter hit one of the other two curved silver pieces, all in the rhythm of singing. The main lama was clad in orange color vestments with a belt in the same color and over the left shoulder is a pale yellow orarion. Once or twice during the orarion serving he put orarian to his chest, almost in the same way they are Orthodox priests. Cloaking lame assistant was of the same cut but much darker orange color while his orar was also bright yellow. Singer was also dressed in a chasuble and a belt much darker but he had orarion which is the priestly insignia.” (Prince, 1928).

The biggest holiday of Kalmyks, including Belgrade Kalmyks, Cagan was a holiday, which is power holiday and was able to “drop” in the second half of February or beginning of March. Holiday symbolizes the victory of good over evil, truth over falsehood, of light over darkness, and was actually celebrated the beginning of spring. Cagan was reverently and solemnly celebrated holiday, and children particularly look forward to celebrating it, and on that occasion they receive a bit more expensive gifts, not just from parents, but also from friends. Also great was a holiday that was celebrated on 26<sup>th</sup> May. White old man (Cagan ovgen) is a major Buddhist-shamanistic deity of Kalmyks. According to Buddhism, the day was perfect and versatile Buddha at the top of a hill met Cagan-August, (the White Elder, Ruling the world). Celebrating the day when Cagan-avgå went down from heaven to visit all parts of the world in which faithful and blessed them live and to spend a full year in health and abundance. It is the white old man known to many people and he has many names: the benefits of a deity, ruler of the universe (kalm. Iki Burhan – great deity) etc..

Kalmyk consistently and solemnly celebrated their traditional holidays and festivities throughout the year. The origin of Kalmyk ceremonial complex is related to the old belief that Buddhism took over and turned into their ritual system to conform with a Buddhist canon. The main or major holidays are: Cagan al (white moon), Zul (holiday lights) and Urus-This (spring holiday). Mali holidays are: Gal tjal’gan (offering of fire), USN Arsan (osvećanje water) and Usn tjal’gan (offering of water).

Kalmyks celebrated holidays related to the Buddha, miracles that Buddha did (February), the birth, enlightenment, entry into nirvana (May), the first sermon (July) and descend of Tushit from the sky (October) as well. Staying at a Buddhist pagoda in Belgrade in 1932. during the July holidays related to Buddha’s life – first sermon, journalist Slovenian daily “Jutro” published a valuable description of the temple, which, inter alia, evidence that the equipment in Belgrade pagoda time changed and significantly supplemented:

“In Buddhist pagoda there is a pleasant shade. Windows are covered with beautiful curtains so that make sanctuary quite dark. Lights and large glass bowl shine from the ceiling. In the midst of the temple, the wall is an altar on which the oriental way of sitting there is the Buddha himself. Above and below it is ruled by two Buddhist saints, of which the first executive committee Buddhist lama named Baksha. There are gifts of Buddhist believers on the altar. Today they celebrated their greatest holiday and believers donated everything could due to their poverty. Some of them gave rice, other gave sweets and cakes ... and ten-dinar coin, I saw them on the altar ... There are pictures of senior priests and prophets of the Buddhist religion. On the right side of the altar there are mattresses on which Avalon sits during a religious ceremony that lasts for at least three to four hours.” (Suchy, 1932).

Belgrade Kalmyks ate their meals at the garden of the pagoda during the important holidays. They drank tea mixed with butter, milk and salt, and sometimes they ate horse meat as well. Some holiday changed or

even lost in new environment. For example, out of the three traditional holiday male competition (running, wrestling, and arrowing) only wrestling preserved.

Rites of burial changed as well. Before they moved from Russia, Kalmyks were burning their dead but such an act was prohibited in Serbia. However, the cult was kept in symbolic form. Belgrade Kalmyks were burying their dead compatriots at the New cemetery, but according to the rites of their religion. When burying the dead, a Buddhist priest drew a human figure on a piece of paper and wrote out the initial letter of the name of the deceased, after which it was symbolically burned paper on the vigil and the ashes mixed with the earth. A mixture of earth and ashes was poured in the mold shape of the pyramid, which was at the end of the ritual throwing of liquid water.

Kalmyk clergy see the overall life of each family and participated in all areas of their lives. Thus Avalon (until the end ordained monk who has completed twelve years of education under the guidance of senior Lamaist monks) named children, determined the day of the wedding, healed the sick, performed funeral rites. This important role of the clergy was fully retained in Belgrade Kalmyk community since its establishment in 1920 until closing in 1944 year.

Lamaist priests lived in celibacy and respected the other commandments of monastic life. They enjoyed higher reputation than the people who lived secular life and they were undisputed leaders of Kalmyk community in Belgrade. Most Kalmyk lamas were originally from pastoral families and only the high lamas usually belonged to the aristocracy. They spoke the languages of the scriptures – ancient Tibetan and Mongolian, and were highly skilled in Tibetan medicine and astrology. As members of the Gelugpa sect recognised for its highest Tibetan religious leader the Dalai Lama, in whom they saw the incarnation of Bodhisattva Avolokiteshvara.

## **Conclusion**

Kalmyks are a people of Mongol origin – Buddhist religion of the Lamas. They arrived in Serbia at the beginning of April in 1920 as part of the major group of Russian immigrants after the October Revolution. Most of them (300-400 out of 500 refugees) settled in Belgrade, forming the largest colony of Kalmyks in Europe. They quickly adapted to Belgrade and its residents. Soon after settling in, led by Buddhist elders to their high priest Baksha Manchunda Borinov (1872-1928), an initiative to build a Buddhist temple was launched. The temple was built in 1929 in the district of suburban villages of Mali Mokri Lug, street was named Buddhist (nowadays Budimska). The project was made by a Russian architect Andrej Klepinin in 1935 and prepared by the Belgrade architect Jovan Novakovic. The pagoda was built as a rather small pagoda, with a square base of a cross, modeled after Buddhist temples in Russia in the period before the First World War. On the beautiful exterior of the temple there was a roof construction of architecture of China and Japan which stood out). Kalmyk pagoda of Belgrade was the first Buddhist pagoda in Europe. Belgrade Kalmyks settlement ceased to exist in 1944 when its members fled to Germany and later to the United States. The temple had partially been destroyed during the struggle for liberation and its purpose was changed later due to the lack of believers. Despite modest architectural structure, the Buddhist – Lamaist pagoda of Belgrade was a reflection of tolerance and symbol of openness of Serbian society to foreign influences and news. Serbian authorities had sympathy for the preservation of national consciousness of Kalmyks and other representatives of emigration. In the period between the two world wars, Belgrade was the only one in Europe with a Buddhist pagoda.

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