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TRADITIONAL ART OF BURIATIA 19th—early 20th centuries

FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE STATE MUSEUM OF ORIENTAL ART

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Buriatia - the gateway to the mysterious Central Asia - has exited and attracted generations of travellers and researchers. Its vast expanses appeared enigmatic, but the history, life and customs of nomad tribes which lived there, seemed even more thrilling.

The interest towards the ancient Buriat heritage, which emerged in the I9th - forst half of the 20th centuries, was shared, together with Russian and Buriat researchers, by their foreign colleagues. For instance, there were active scientific contacts with French scholars with the aim of studying local archeological materials of the ancient Stone Age and their comparison woth the already known European data.

Nowadays, Soviet scientists, many of whom are of Buriat origin, keep restoring, page after page, the history of this amazing people.

As in ancient times, the Buriats at present inhabit a vast territory in South-East Siberia, adjacent to Lake Baikal.

I923 saw the formation of the Buriat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, now an integral part of the Russian Federation.

The Buriat Republic occupies the area of 35I,3 thousand sq.km, with the population of 8I2 thousand. Capital - Ulan-Ude.

In the RSFSR, Buriats also live in the Ust-Ordyn Buriat autonomous district (20,6 thousand sq.km) in the Irkutsk province and in the Aginsky Buriat autonomous district (I9 thousand sq.km) in the Chita province.

These lands have been inhabited sice the dawn of time. Soviet archaeologists discovered the first traces of the Primitive Man in the valleys of the rivers Selenga, Djida, Uda, Khilha and Chikoy, dating back to ancient and new Stone Age (paleolith and Neolith). The excavations of settlements and burial grounds yielded interesting material: bones of ancient animals for which hunted the Primitive Man, numerous stone tools used for work and hunting: broken river pebbles, rude stone splinters, which were replaced in neolith by various types of work tools, decorations and ceramics, more sophisticated in shape and processing.

The so called ''deer stones,, are interesting cultural monuments of the Transbaikal tribes of the Age of Bronze. The most wellknown, called ''Ivolghinsky,, - is a stone slab 3,5 metres high, broadening upwards. Its surface is covered with intricate pictograms, deeply cut in the hard stone, reminding of waves and spirals, with images of deer among them, the biggest of which carries the disk of the sun on its horns.

The basic symbolic meaning of the deer stones was determined by the belief of the people about the possibility of resurrestion

of souls of the dead together with the sun which, in the course of millenia is born to die and dies to be born again.

The so called ''writings,, - ancient drawing in red ochre on smooth mountain sides, found at unreachable heights or in hidden caves of the Lake Baikal cliffs, belong to the Bronze or the beginning of the Iron Ages. Traditional ''writings,, consist of big ovals or rectangles painted in one uninterrupted line.

Inside they are filled with oval or round patches - bruches of the ancient painter's fingers. And as a rule near by on the dark stones one can see ranks of little stylised men standing in line and holding hands as in round dance, reminding ''yekhor,, - the Buriat bational dance. These men are drawn in a rude and simplistic way, with small oval heads, narrow, often slightly bend bodies, very thin legs and short stubs of hands. Above or to the side of the dancing men birds of prey are soaring.

Animals, usually horses in typical attitudes are also portrayed. Some possess naively and simply painted sex signs - inhabitants of steppes took constant care about fertility of domestic animals - the basis of prosperity and the main sourse of their existence.

Quite possibly, in the eyes of the ancient people these drawings on the cliffs possessed a powerful hidden force and were to promote the growth of the tribe, provide for its welfare and safety from real or imagined foes.

In these pictures the priority belonged not to the Sun=deer, but to the holy bird, the Totem - ancestor and protector which, with its wide wings could hide and defend its offspring from the evil and misfortunes.

Besides, Man always felt himself an integral part of wildlife and presumed that his own origin was unalienated from that of bords and animals.

An ancient legend tells about the origin of a Buriat tribe - the Khorintsy - from a maiden=swan. Once Khoridoy the Hunter saw swans descend on the smooth water of a lake and turn into maidens.

While they were bathing, Khoridoy hid the feathering of one of them. After the swans had flown away, one girl could not find her swan dress and became the hunter's wife. Later on she gave birth to II sons, who became the core of the Khoryntsy tribe.

Another tale is about the holy bull Bukha=Noyon, the founder of the Ekherit=Bulagat tribe. The cult of the bull was obviously connected with the development of cattle=breeding among ancient

Buriats. Bukha=Noyon was the lover of a beautiful maiden Budan=Khatan, and this union produced the Buriat's ancestor, Bulagata (alias Bulgat=Khara).

With the passage of time, tribes and peoples replaced one another, but each of them left its own inimitable trace in Central Asian culture.

By early I3th century, Mongol=speaking Buriat tribes had come to inhabit the Lake Baikal area. The geographic conditions of the region to a large extent determined the peculiarity of the way of life, occupation and culture of Western Buriats, living in adjacent to Lake Baikal areas (Alar, Balagan, Tunkin, Ekhiri=Bulagan, Kajan, Ungin, Idin, Olkhon Buriats) and Eastern=Transbaikal Buriats (Selenga, Tzongol, Barguzin, Khora and Agin Buriats). Throughout all their history Buriats remained nomad herdsmen. Even after voluntary joining Russia in the I7th century, when they had to live side by side with the Russian settled population, they remained loyal to named traditions. Only by late I9th century the development of land cultivation among Western Buriats lead to gradual replacement of nomad way of life.

Geographic, historic and economic reasons determined certain cultural differences among Eastern and Western Buriat tribes. For instance, before mid=I9th century almost all Buriats were Shamanists and in the second half of the I9th century began to accept Orthodox Christianity. Eastern Buriats, before the beginning of the I9th century remaind Buddhist and Orchodoxy among them w was spreading with great difficulties. Thus, over a lengthy period, with the linguistic and ethnic unity, two autonomous and in many ways original cultures were developing.

The life of a Buriat herdsman was a chain of constant changes and trips, following the herds of horses and flocks of sheep, goats, cows, etc. It was under these conditions that the Buriat traditional art was born. Especially developed was the artistic transformation of soft material: hides, thick felt, bone, as well as woodcarving and painting on metal.

The tribes, inhabiting modern Buriatia territory, learned to extract and process metal in remote ancient times. During excavations of the Primitive Man's settlements, Soviet archaeologists discovered not only metal objects, but whole rows of blacksmiths and smelters, dating to the Ist century A.D., belonging to the so called ''Kurumchi culture''. It is noteworthy, that many ancient ore pits, gold and silver deposits were known to Buriats long before the I8th century.

Among handicrafts, Blacksmith's work was the most veneered and consecrated by tradition. The legend explained such respect

by the fact that among the first skills, the knowledge to extract and process metals was received from sons of a heavenly deity, who had descended to Earth. The profession of smith was hereditary and to become one, each aspiring person had to pass through a complicated initiation rite.

In the poetic words of appeals towards spirits=protectors of blacksmith's work, which were said before and after the process the composition of alloys and additions were ciphered. They also contained the sequence of the phases of technological process of melting and forging. The secrets were passed from father to son, from generation to generation and contained the mystic gualities of Buriat craftsmen's masterpieces, their inimitable beauty and durability.

According to popular beliefs, blacksmiths as well as Shamans possessed magical forces, were able to prevent evil, give happiness and wealth. It was presumed that eny metal object - a knife or a steel - placed by a sickman's bedside could protect him from evil forces. European travellers who visited Buriatia in the I7th - I8th centuries testify that local hammersmiths could make silver and tin nicks on iron so skilfully that thier work is not inferior to damascene. Another withess described the various objects created by Buriat master's skilled hands: from huge man=sized pots for cooking to delicate ladies jewellery with sparkling gems.

Gradually among artisans stood out the specialists who were particularly good in making and adorning household items, weapons, harnesses, saddles, men's girdles, etc. For example, craftsmen from Irkutsk region, Olkhon and Kijinga were famous for adornment of iron plates and making silver nicks on iron tags for saddles, quivers, details of clothing.

Since in the life of the nomad herdsman the horse was of great significâns as a means of transportation, source of food and material for clothing and home building, no expence was spared to decorate its harness and saddle. Moreover the beauty and opulence of harness showed the owner's prosperity.

Another, no less traditional Buriat craft was wood=processing. Since ancient times wood has been used to make many necessary objects: frames of mobile home - the jurt, waggons, chests, cupboards, varios types of cutlery, frames of saddles and musical instruments, chess sets, toys, boards for book printing and making pictures of deities. All these different wooden objects has a common trait, dictated by the severe conditions of the nomad life: simplicity in making, functional character, comfort in use and solidity. These demands dictated to the craftsman the choice of a particular type of timber, the technology of its treatment and adornment.

For instance, to make wooden cups the birchtree root was utilised. It was taken only in summer when the tree is still full of juices and the bark can be easily peeled off.

With the arrival of cold weather, the borchtree wood becomes as hard as iron and can be used only for axe handles. Experienced artisans determined the quality and possible usages of wood right in the forest and removed the bark from the chosen tree to allow it to get dry in natural summer conditions. Afterwards, the tree was felled, its core was removed and placed in water for some time to clean the wood from tar.

Sometimes small pieces of wood were boiled in water. Various types of timber were used for different objects, e.g. small tugs for meat, mortars to pound tea, jugs, cups were hollowed out from whole pieces of birch or pinetree, as their wood is very hard and does not absorb smells.

Buriat woodcrafts attracted attention not only by their exquisitely simple shape, beauty and variety of types of wood. They were also adorned by carvings, painting and ornaments, which, like ancient writings, contained different good wishes of richness and health, numerous children and fertility of herds, luck in hunting and longevity.

The craftsmen who manufactured jurts - an ancient time=tested home of nomads=herdsmen, commanded great respect and awe. The multicentured evolution of the jurt has developed its clearcut proportions and rules of assembly and disassembly.

Its frame consisted of folding vertical walls. Each latticed section was built of narrow wooden planks which were crossfastened by narrow raw=hide belts. Such a construction of a wall section allowed to stretch or draw it together, thus enlarging or diminishing the internal living space of the jurt. It took two persons to work two hours to assemble or disassemble, for instance, a five=section jurt and just one camel or two horses could carry it.

The jurt was strictly oriented along the points of the world, with the entrance always being on the Southern, the warmest and least windy side. Then a small pole with a string attached to it was hammered into the ground and a circle was made. Along its diameter wall sections were placed, tying them up with horse=hair ropes. Long perches were fastened to the upper sides of the walls, their other ends resting against a hoop, thus jointly constituting the upper frame of the jurt. Through this circle in the roof the jurt was lit by sun shine, aired and ventilated from the smoke of the hearth.

For extra strength the jurt's walls were additionally tied up with ropes, then were covered with trick felt pieces, made of sheep

wool. For warmth in winter internal walls were insulated with trick felts, wooden floor was also layed.

The homes of Orientel Buriats, unlike their Eastern counterparts, as early as in the I9th century were already built of wood in the rectangular shape and were covered by roofs of wooden boards with openings for smoke. As a rule, Buriat homes did not have windows, but had between boards a small rectangular apperture to watch herds grazing nearby. Such houses had mostly earth floor, but the well=to=do could afford wooden planking.

The interior decoration of Western Buriat's jurts and Eastern Buriat's wooden houses are the same. The hearth was in the centre, placed under the aperture in the roof in such a way that the smoke could easily come out. On a trivet=prop over the hearth a pot to boil meat, tea or milk could usually be found.

Behind the hearth and opposite the entrance stood a special table where the Buddist believers would place copper or bronze likenesses of gods, low reliefs of painted clay, painted icons in special glass cases with offering to deities in front of them in small brass cups: frech water, grains, cow's butter; dried juniper or thyme leaves were burning, filling the jurt with a pleasant aroma.

The Buriats who professed their ancestors ancient religion Shamanism, instead of representations of Buddhist deities would have near the wall a box with Shamanist deities - ongons, decorated with squirrel, ermine or badger pelts which stood in the Northern part of the jurt, opposite the hearth. By the same wall there was a trunk with the most valuable things, belonging to the family living in the jurt. The guests of honour were usually seated there.

The men's half of the jurt was in the Western part to the left from the entrance. Footwear, wineskins, made of whole animals, hide and filled with KUMYS - a beverage from fermented mare's milk, hunting accessories, saddles were kept there.

The women's half of the jurt was in its Eastern part, to the right of the entrance, where the jurt's hostess did about the house and kitchenware was stored.

Not only the entire internal space of the jurt or the men's place there, but the order and number of objects inside were well organised. For instance, the cupboard was always the first to the right from the entrance, in the women's half of the jurt. Next followed the bed with thick felt covers and leather pillows, filled with wool and decorated with bright embroidery. The front and the sides of the bed were adorned by colourful painting with vegetable or geometric ornaments and symbols of good wishes.

Behind the bed, closer to a small table with the representation of deities there were chests for minor household items and for storing clothes. If the family had small children, there would be a wooden craddle hung between the bed and the chests.

Saddles, harnesses and hunting accessories were stored in the left, men's part of the jurt. The chests on which thick felts were piled up stood there too. In the same corner newlyborn lambs and calves were kept in a special enclosure in winter or early cold spring and in summer wineskins for fermenting milk were stored there.

To keep the jurt warm in winter in forestless steppes and to cook food, dry cow's and horse dung -the so calle a r g a l - was used.

It was collected and dried in summer. Firewood was used sparingly, mainly for kindling. One of the reasons of the wide use of argal for heating was because its smoke was less pungent than firewood's, it also gave fewer sparks, consequently, the hazard was smaller.

The nomad way of life determined not only the construction, shape or material of which the traditional Buriat home was built, but also the style of clothes, footwear, headdresses, jewellery and household items. Alongside with metal and wooden objects, the Buriats widely used leather vessels to keep grain, flour; leather sacks to carry personal belongings during roaming from place to place.

Cattle-breeding provided Buriats with practically all foodstuffs, dairy and meat being the staple food. Flour was much less used. Over centuries the nomads have invented and kept till today recipes of various tasty and nutritional dishes. Only boiled milk was used to prepare all sorts of cheese, sour milk, curds, butter, stimulating or alcoholic beverages.

Nomads were the first in the world to learn to prepare dry milk concentrates which preserved nutritional value for a long period. It is noteworthy that some recipes were believed to belong to a particular kin or a tribe and it was prohibited to divulge them.

Together with dairy products the Buriats main food was meat: mutton in summer, beef in winter. As a rule, they ate only meat cooked in broth mixed with rice or millet. Favourite dish was fresh mutton liver, wrapped in a layer of suet and fried on coals. Mutton's head, bottom chuck or sacrum constituted an exquisite dish which was served in exceptional cases for guests of honour.

It is of interest that for many centuries an ancient rule of slaughtering animals was strictly observed: utmost care was taken

not to spill blood on the ground; meat was cut only along joints, it was categorically prohibited to crush bones as it was believed that otherwise the animal soul could not resurrect or renew its external shape.

The traditions of nomad life were reflected in Buriats clothes, which were well suited for horse=riding, sharp drops in temperature during the day, were durable, comfortable and simple in sewing.

The gown was tho basis of both men's and women's wear. Winter clothes, for example, consisted of a straight for=lined gown d a e l whose left slap covered the right and buttoned on the side, which allowed the right hand to put and take things both from one's bosm the pocket. The collar was usually high and standing to protect from cold the neck and back of the head.

The special ''horse hoof'' style for the sleeve cuff protected hands from cold. The long girdle of the gown served not only for warmth, but also to decorate it and differed in material and execution: knitted, plaited, woven from hair, wool, threads, decorated with metal or bone laps. Brightly coloured silk girdles were mostly worn.

A tobacco pouch, a knife in sheath and a steel were fastened to the belt from the righthand side. These three objects were not only a daily necessity but decorated the man's outfit and were the owner's pride.

The Buriat steel k h a e t a e consists of a steel squired beam to strike sparks and a small leather case in the form of a purse fastened to it which contained pieces of flint stone and dry grass to make fire.

The purse=case was usually made of high quality dark leather with silver chased laps and stampings.

The steel was securely fastened to the girdle by a special pendant, moulded from bronze, silver and other metals, decorated with silver inlays, glass and semiprecious stones. The pendant usually consisted of two halves, linked by a hinge, the upper half was usually rectangular or oval and smaller that the lower, which had a semioval opening for the girdle, on which the steel was fastened.

The knife k h u t g a was as traditional accessory of the Buriat man's attire as the steel itself. Popular beliefs attributed to the knife the role of protector against evil forces. Traditionally, parents would hang over a boy's head a special custom= made knife which was considered his protection and after the owner's death, his soul could inhabit it. Steel knives were of various sizes: from 25 to 40 cm, their handles and sheaths were

adorned with silver, bone, horn and ornaments composed of vegetable and zoomorphological motifs with complicated symbols of good wishes.

The women's gown d a g e l consisted of two parts: a wide plaid skirt and a jacket with elongated sleeves and cotton wadded shoulders.

Unlike men's gowns, women's ones were made of brightly coloured cloth or were adorned with fancy multicoloured insets of silk or cotton. Woman's dress ahd to strictly correspond to her age, family and social status. If before marriage girls would wear a simple austere suit, reminding of men's, with a girdle on the waist, then after the marriage they would put on woman's dress with a detachable waist and a sleeveless vest over it. According to ancient customs, in men's presence women could only appear with a covered head and back, i.e. wearing a cap and a sleeveless vest.

Women's and men's suits were supplemented by headdresses, varying according to the season, age, social status or ethnic origin.

Winter men's hats m a n g a y with a narrow crown and broadening upwards cap band, were made of fox or wolves paws as tradition demanded. Summer headdresses with narrow tops were sewn of silk and adorned with purple silk tassels and silver points with insets of semiprecious gems.

During the Middle Ages the shape of the points d e n z e and the colour of the gem corresponded to the rank of the Buriat official. The common folk wore hats without points or with ones in the form of a flat metal plate with a pivot.

Women's caps reminded men's, but were not the indicators of belonging to a certain class which was typical for men headdress. Their style and decorations depended mainly on the age and family status.

The typical Buriat female headdress is a fur=lined cap, fashioned of bright cloth, mostly silk. In summer women usually wore head bands with coral, turquoise or amber beads sewn on them. On holidays, under the cap a velvet band would be worn, in the style of k o k o s h n i k [*], reminding Siberian Shamans headdresses - a proof of the ancient origin of this type of female cap.

Buriat women's jewellery is especially beautiful and exquisite. It simultaneously served as magic charms, symbols of belonging to a particular tribe or kin, at the same time being a sort of investment for the family or the clan.

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[*] Traditional Russian onion=shaped headdress

The jewellery was divided according to place of wearing: head, braid, ear, temple, temple=chest, shoulder, side and waist, for everyday wear (even during household chares) or for festive or special occasions: weddings, seasonal folk festival, etc. For example, quite recently Transbaikal Buriats still preserved the custom of wearing a specal ''amulet case'' on the chest with holy relics inside: small leaves with Buddhist prayers, likenesses of deities=protectors, made of clay, stone, metal, bone or wood as well as other sacred objects.

The ''amulet cases'' sizes were different: from I to 20 cm. The were custom=made of gold and silver by most skilled jewellers in different shapes: round, rectangular, oval or trapeze.

The exterior of the case was decorated by ornaments of styled plants or the letter=sigh with which the forst words of a Buddhist prayer begin.

In early 20th century these ''amulet cases'' lost their ritualistic significance and came to be considered as traditional female brest decorations.

Another women's breast decoration was a necklace with pendants. Following objects were used: a small metal case to keep needles, a powdercase, tweezers, small spates to clean nails, a small spoon to clean ears, and a vial for incense.

Meanwhile, if traditons allowed to wear an ''amulet case'' without any additional accessories, this necklace with pendants was customarily worn only together with the ''amulet case'' - a favourite decoration for Tunking and Kijinghin Buriat women.

Clamps for hair looked like tubes, 6-I3 cm long, and greatly varied in styles. They were covered with large chiselled ornament of geometric, vegetable or zoomorphological character.

Buttons were a popular Buriat jewellery item. They were round, flat or semiconical, sewn on female and girls gowns and adorned with chasing or deep engravings.

The shape of national Buriat footwear repeated the peculiarities of the shoes of Central Asian nomads: a broad top of the boot, a stitched felt sole without heel, and an upward bent toe cap that made the boots especially comfortable for horseriding. Coloured threads were used to stitch socks and tops and they were adorned by applications on leather. Animal sinew was used instead of ordinary threads which was dried in advance, then flattened and split into separate fibres from which very strong threads were plaited.

The Buriats also knew another type of footwear which was very simple to make: a piece of leather with small holes on the edges through which a narrow belt of a hair rope was passed with the

help of shich the edges of the leather were gathered and tightened around the shin of the foot. Thus, quite durable, strong, light, comfortable and easy to make footwear was ready.

Female footwear in style or material did not differ from men's. Just like men's boots, women's were the same for both left and right feet. Only their smaller size, brighter coloured leather and different ornaments indicated that they belonged to a woman.

Animal wool and skin processing and home craftsmenship were widely spread among Buriat nomad and seminomad population. For instance, sheep's fulled wool - thick felt was used to make covers for jurts, floor carpets, sacks to keep salt, various clothes and socks which were worn inside boots.

The process of manufacturing thick felt remained untouched for many centuries: sheared wool was fulled by sticks and spread in a 6-7 cm thick layer. Then it was turned on a long wooden stick, wrapped up by hides and by ropes.

On the ends of this shaft, short wooden tubes were put which were fastened to a horseman's saddle. For a long time he was rolling the rouleau in the steppe and the wool was packed into a homogeneous mass. Such method of thick felt making was typical for Eastern Buriats.

Western Buriats used another method: wool, rolled up into a shaft, was tied up by a rope in the middle. Its ends which were held by women, standing opposite sides and the shaft was rolling from one side to the other, gradually turning into thick felt. Women were used to do this difficult job and the only reward was the food, served by the hostess.

In the I8th century, Buddhism begins to actively penetrate into Buriatia. Its preachers Lamas - monks from Tibet and Mongolia - were mostly followers of the Gelukpa school, founded in the I5th century by Tzonkhava, a renown Buddhist figure. However, their activity challenged the uprooted Shamanist traditions in Buriatia and Buddhism was able to strengthen its positions only in remote areas of the country, where monasteries and temples were built and Buddhist communities appeared.

Works of painting, sculpture, architecture, applied and decorative art, created for the decoration of temples being built and home altars are linked with Buddhism. The names of the artists who created these works of art were unknown. The strict unbreakable rules of Buddhist canon regulated not only the craftsmen's activity itself, but also established the composition, colour, themes and sizes, rules and consequitive order of work. Each violation was severely punished by the Lamast church.

Starting to paint an icon, the painter stretched a thin cotton or flax canvas on an easel which consisted of a double wooden frame on a low wooden pedestal. The canvas was primed by a mixture of chalk and glue, polishing it several times until it became dense and elastic.

The composition of the future icon as well as all the minute details of images and ornaments were carefully worked out in a sketch which was then superimposed on the canvas and the contour was pierced, blowing into the pin holes dry dustlike brown and black paint. In their work the painters used special manuals, containing drawings and stencils, which allowed the masters not to create each time anew the images of numerous personages from the Buddhist pantheon.

Painters used a rich palette of colours, consisting of pigments of mineral, vegetable or animal origin, found in Buriatia itself or imported from various Eastern countries.

The typical colouring, used by Buriat painters was based on harmonious combination of basic colours - red, green and blue and their most suble hues. Brave and sometimes unexpected introduction of additional contrasting colours became a remarkable feature of their art.

Icons were sewn into framing of precious silk and brocade, the colour of which had to correspond to the general colouring of the painting. Round wooden bars were fixed into their upper and lower parts and the icon was suspended by the former in interior of the temple. Large multicoloured icons were meant for the altars and side passage aisles of it.

The altar contained representations of the main figures of the Buddhist pantheon, in the other parts of the internal space various painted images were hung, telling about the life and activities of various Buddhas of the past, present and future, bodhisattvas, other Buddhist figures, either mythical or actually existing in the past.

Small=sized icons, much more modestly adorned were meant for a small altar in jurts with candle holders and burning incens candles.

For each Buriat, the choice of icons was determined by the Lamas and was connected with a number of conditions. For instance, emotional people, who easily lost control were to have as their protectors calm and merciful gods=protectors. It was recommended to always have their images on themselves. Thus tiny painted icons less then I cm in size were placed in special miniature silver, gold or copper boxes which were beautifully adorned. Customarily one or several of them were worn.

Alongside works of painting, sculpture also played a significant part in the decoration of Buddhist temples. Silver, bronze, copper, pastes from the pitches of medicinal herbs, mixtures of animal fat; wood, bone, stones were widely used for sculptures. However, priority was given to bronze which was quite strong, accessible and relatively simple for treatment.

The Buriat sculptures in the I9th - early 20th centuries were mainly made of thin bronze leaves by hammering out the mould and were adorned by engraving, chasing or sometimes were painted.

For most veneered images special clothes were sewn: monk's cloaks, skirts, headdresses made of expensive cloth - silk, brocade and adorned by embroidery and application.

We exhibit a specimen of such a ''dressed'' sculpture which is now a great rarity.

Various decorations for the altar were made of iron, wood and other materials. Our exhibition shows several sets of altar decorations. Among them are wooden images of treasures - good wishes. According to the legend the list of them was composed by Buddha Sakyamuni himself.

The exhibition of traditional art of the Buriat people in the I9th - early 20th centuries represents only a small part of the cultural heritage created by talented masters of the Middle Ages, shows their creative interests and possibilities.

The study of the art of the period is the source of constant inspiration for the creative work of present=day Buriat artists.

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