

The photographs, drawings and texts published in this book are part of a collection of more than three thousand tattoos accumulated over a lifetime by prison attendant Danzig Baldaev. Tattoos were his gateway into a secret world in which he acted as ethnographer, recording the rituals of a closed society. The icons and tribal languages he documented are artful, distasteful, sexually explicit and sometimes just strange, reflecting as they do the lives and traditions of convicts.

Skulls, swastikas, harems of naked women, a smiling Al Gopone, medieval knights in armour, daggers sheathed in blood, benign images of Christ, sweet-faced mothers and their babies, armies of tanks, and a horned Lenin – these are the signs by which the people of this hidden world mark and identify themselves.

With a foreword by Danzig Baldaev, and an introduction by Alexei Plutser-Sarno on the symbolism of thieves' tattoos.



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RUSSIAN CRIMINAL TATTOO ENCYCLOPAEDIA VOLUME I

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# RUSSIAN — CRIMINAL — TATTOO



## ENCYCLOPAEDIA VOLUME I

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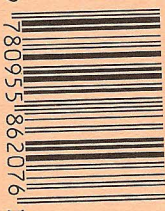
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**Danzig Baldaev** was born in 1925 in Ulan-Ude, Buryatiya, Russia. The son of an 'enemy of the people', he was subject to repression in communist Russia and sent to an orphanage for children of political prisoners. After serving in the army in World War II, he came to Leningrad in 1948 and was ordered by the NKVD to work as a warden in 'Kresty' – an infamous Leningrad prison – where he started drawing the tattoos of criminals. His collection of tattoos, which he has been recording in different reformatory settlements for criminals all over the former USSR, for more than fifty years (1948-2000), comprises some three thousand six hundred images.

**Sergel Vasiliev** was born in 1936 in Chelyabinsk, Russia. After graduating from the MVD Academy, Moscow, he became a staff photographer for the newspaper *Vechnyy Chelyabinsk*, where he has worked for the past thirty years. He has received many honours including International Master of Press Photography from the International Organization of Photo Journalists (Prague, 1985), Honoured Worker of Arts of Russia, and the Golden Eye Prize. His work has been exhibited internationally and is held in numerous museums' collections. He is author of more than twenty books, including *Russian Beauty*, (1996) and *Zonen*, (1994).

**Alexei Plutser-Sarno** was born in 1962 in Moscow. He is a leading contemporary Russian scholar (a student of the acclaimed philologist Professor Yuri Lotman), who graduated from the Department of History and Literature of Philosophy, Tartu University, Estonia. A lexicographer specialising in Russian folklore, he is author of various articles and books including *Plutser's Dictionary of Russian Four-Letter Words*, (Limbus Press, 2001) and *Notes from Russia*, (FUEL Publishing, 2007) compiled from his collection of hand-made Russian street notices.

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