

FROM A MONGOLIAN MANUSCRIPT of the late 17th or early 18th Century—A book of Buddhist Scriptures, or rather Lamaist, since the Mongols received from the lamas of Tibet not only their religion but such culture as they possessed before their conquest of China. ¶ Mongolian, like Turkish and Manchu, is a language of Ural-Altaic origin. There are a high and a low form, one the written language of literature and documents, the other the spoken tongue of common intercourse. Until the year A. D. 1200, the Mongols had no writing: we can well imagine that a nomadic people of practically independent clans had little need for a script or for any literature other than their oral traditions. But when Jengis Khan overran Asia, and Mongol supremacy spread from the Pacific Ocean to the Volga, the need of a written language, if only for administrative purposes, caused the great conqueror to introduce the Uigur alphabet among his people. This alphabet was of Syriac origin, and although many experiments were carried out by Tibetan lamas at the order of later Mongolian rulers, including the trial in the 13th Century of an artificial alphabet known as Baspi, the Uigur was finally adopted. From this, with many additions, has come the script now in use. ¶ Mongol writing, due to Chinese influence, runs down the page in columns, but these read from left to right in contrast to Syriac. Most of the extant literature of Mongolia consists of translations from the Chinese and Tibetan, while the present manuscript is really a transliteration into the Mongolian alphabet of Tibetan prayers for the use of the priests, to whom they are often but the incomprehensible words of a cabalistic ritual.

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