

## The Mongolian script

At the very beginning of the Mongol empire, the Uyghur alphabet became the writing system of the Mongols; see TABLE 49.4. The whole set of symbols together with the orthography was borrowed, and for several centuries no new letters were created for the few Mongol phonemes unknown in Uyghur. This led to additional ambiguities (e.g., initial yodh more often represents *ǰ* than *y*, while medial tsadi renders both *č* and *ǰ*). Thus, in the orthography without diacritics, *qačar* ‘cheek’ and *ǰaǰar* ‘place’ have the same written form. And though the Uyghur alphabet can distinguish *d* from *t*, no initial *d* is marked, since this phoneme did not occur initially in Uyghur (so Mongolian *dalai* ‘ocean’ is written with initial *taw*). Medial and final *taw* was later used for syllable-final *d*, medial lamedh (*d*) for both *d* and *t*. In the late, classical orthography (17th–18th century), the angular tsadi marks *č*, the smooth tsadi renders medial *ǰ*. Initial yodh remained ambiguous until Manchu hooked yodh was accepted for initial *y* (19th century). Zain had the same value as shin = *s*; it became obsolete for classical Mongolian. As in Uyghur, several schools of orthography existed, with or without diacritics, and attempts were made to avoid ambiguity.

Dominance of this *vertical script* was challenged in 1269 by the introduction of Emperor Qubilai’s *square script* or *imperial alphabet* (’Phags pa, SECTION 40)—and in the seventeenth century by the Manchu alphabet, the *clear script*, the *svāyambhu* script, and the *horizontal square script* (the latter two were invented by Jñānavajra, the Khalkha high priest). However, none of these offered the simplicity of the Uyghur-Mongol vertical script. In 1587 Ayushi created an amplified version of this alphabet for the exact transcription of Sanskrit and Tibetan words; his new symbol for foreign *h* was taken from Tibetan. A modern version of Ayushi’s alphabet replaced the older Mongol renderings of Mandarin syllables.

The Mongol script is known in various handwritten, shorthand, printed, and ornamental styles. There exist several alphabetical orders, different from the Aramaic. In Inner Mongolia (China), this Mongol script now also serves for writing the Tungusic language Evenki. It was replaced by Cyrillic in 1946 in the Mongolian Republic, but recent political changes favor its revival. (For the use of Cyrillic in three varieties of Mongolic, see below.)

TABLE 49.4: *The Mongolian Script*

<i>Mongol. Value</i>	<i>Initial</i>	<i>Medial</i>	<i>Final</i>	<i>Separate</i>	<i>Miscellaneous</i>	<i>Mongol. Value</i>
a						
e						ba/e k/ga/e
i (yodh)						bi k/gi
o/u (waw)						
ö/ü=waw+yodh						
in non-1st syll.						
n before vowel						bo/u k/go/u
n syll./wd. final						
q						
γ before vowel						
γ syll./wd. final						
b						
s						
š						
s final (Uyg. z)						
t/d (taw)						
d/t (lamedh)						
l						Mongyol
m						
č						
j/y (medial: top, j; bottom, y)						ml
k/g						ja
r						
w/v						
h						
p						

- ‘You should know: that bodhisattva and mahasattva is wise in (the knowledge of) body. You should know: that bodhisattva and mahasattva is wise in watchfulness, thinking, acting as well as perceiving. That bodhisattva (is wise in the knowledge of) the sense organs and sense objects (lit. what is being generated and what is spreading.’

—From the printed Mongol Kanjur, vol. 49, folio 2A. Text without diacritics.  
Early 18th century blockprint.)

TABLE 49.8: *Mongolic in Cyrillic Script*

<i>Letter</i>		<i>Khalkha</i>	<i>Buryat</i>	<i>Kalmyk</i>
А	а	а	а	а
Ә	ә	—	—	ä
Б	б	б	б	б
В	в	w	(v)	w
Г	г	g	g	g
Һ	һ	—	—	γ (gh)
Д	д	d	d	d
Е	е	ye/yö	ye/yö	e/ye-
Ё	ё	yo	yo	
Ж	ж	j	j	ž (zh)
Ж	ж	—	—	j
З	з	j (dz)	z	z
И	и	i	i	i
Й	й	i̇	i̇	y
К	к	(k)		k
Л	л	l	l	l
М	м	m	m	m
Н	н	n-, -ng	n-, -ng	n
Ң	ң	—	—	ng
О	о	o	o	o
Ө	ө	ö	ö	ö
П	п	p	p	p
Р	р	r	r	r
С	с	s	s	s
Т	т	t	t	t
У	у	u	u	u
Ү	ү	ü	ü	ü
Ф	ф	(f)		
Х	х	x	x	x (kh)
Һ	һ	—	h	—
Ц	ц	c	(c)	c (ts)
Ч	ч	č	(č)	č (ch)
Ш	ш	š	š	š (sh)
Щ	щ	(šč)		
Ъ	ъ	mute shwa "hard sign"		
Ы	ы	long ii	ei/ii	
Ь	ь	i̇	palatalization	
Э	э	e	e	e initial
Ю	ю	yu/yü	yu/yü	yu initial
Я	я	ya	ya	ya initial

---

## Cyrillic script

Cyrillic script was introduced for Mongolic languages by Soviet authorities in 1939 (see SECTION 65), and in Mongolia in 1946 (TABLE 49.8).

Long vowels and diphthongs are written as vowel+vowel in Khalkha (i.e. Modern Mongolian) and Buryat; Kalmyk marks long vowels this way only in the first syllable of a word; in syllables after the first, short vowels are omitted, and long vowels are represented by a single letter. In Khalkha, -ий represents long *ii* following a palatal or palatalized consonant; -ы represents long *ii* following a non-palatal consonant. Khalkha orthography has complex rules specifying whether a short vowel in a syllable other than the first is to be written. “Buryat” is буряад *bur’ād* in Cyrillic Buryat, буриад *burriad* in Khalkha, and *buriyad* in Classical Mongolian. “Kalmyk” is хальмг *khal’mg* in Kalmyk, халимаг *xalimag* in Khalkha, and *qalimaγ* in Classical Mongolian.

---

## Bibliography

- Benzing, Johannes. 1985. *Kalmückische Grammatik zum Nachschlagen*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.  
Clauson, Sir Gerard. 1962. *Turkish and Mongolian Studies*. London: Royal Asiatic Society.  
Deny, Jean, et al. 1959. *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*, vol. 1. Wiesbaden: Steiner.  
Fuchs, Walther, et al. 1968. *Tungusologie* (Handbuch der Orientalistik, division 1, vol. 5, part 3). Leiden: Brill.

- Gabain, Annemarie von. 1974. *Alttürkische Grammatik*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Gabain, Annemarie von, et al. 1982. *Turkologie* (Handbuch der Orientalistik, division 1, vol. 5, part 1), 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill.
- Hamilton, James. 1986. *Manuscripts ouïgours du IX-X siècle de Touen-houang*. 2 vols. Paris: Peeters.
- Kara, György. 1972. *Книги монгольских кочевников* [Books of the Mongol nomads]. Moscow: Nauka.
- Ligeti, Louis. 1952. "A propos de l'écriture mandchou." *Acta Orientalia* (Budapest) 2: 235–301.
- Müller, Friedrich W. K. 1910. *Uigurica II*. Berlin: Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Nadeliaev, V. M., et al. 1969. *Древнетюркский словарь* [Dictionary of Ancient Turkic; with comparative table of scripts]. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Poppe, Nicholas. 1965. *Introduction to Altaic Linguistics*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Poppe, Nicholas, et al. 1964. *Mongolistik* (Handbuch der Orientalistik, division 1, vol. 5, part 2). Leiden: Brill.
- Radloff, Wilhelm. 1892. *Atlas der Alterthümer der Mongolei*, vol. 1. St. Petersburg: Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Róna-Tas, A. 1991. "The Sources in Runic Script." In his *Introduction to Turkology*, pp. 51–61. Szeged, Hungary: University of Szeged.
- Sims-Williams, Nicholas. 1981. "The Sogdian Sound-system and the Origin of the Uyghur Script." *Journal Asiatique* 269: 347–59.
- Sary, Giovanni. 1980. *Die chinesischen und mandschurischen Zierschriften*. Hamburg: Buske.
- Thomsen, Vilhelm. 1916. *Turcica: Etudes concernant l'interprétation des inscriptions turques de la Mongolie et de la Sibirie*. Helsinki: Société finno-ougrienne.
- von Le Coq, Albert. 1919. *Türkische Manichaica aus Chotscho II*. Berlin: Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Yartseva, V. N., et al. 1990. *Лингвистический энциклопедический словарь* [Linguistic encyclopedic dictionary]. Moscow: Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya.
- Zieme, Peter. 1991. *Die Stabreimtexte der Uiguren von Turfan und Dunhuang*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

# THE WORLD'S WRITING SYSTEMS

New York Oxford  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1996

Edited by  
Peter T. Daniels  
and  
William Bright

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
The world's writing systems / edited by Peter T. Daniels and William Bright.  
p. cm.  
1. Writing. 2. Alphabets. 3. Graphemes.  
I. Daniels, Peter T., editor. II. Bright, William, editor.  
P113.W714 1996  
214—dc20 96-2442