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Published in the Russian Federation
Bulletin of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanities
of the Russian Academy of Sciences
Has been issued since 2008
ISSN: 2075-7794; E-ISSN: 2410-7670
Vol. 34, Is. 6, pp. 160–166, 2017
DOI 10.22162/2075-7794-2017-34-6-160-166
Journal homepage: <http://kigiran.com/pubs/vestnik>

UDC 391

Interpretation of the Newly Discovered Uighur-Mongolian Inscription on the Arshan Cliff

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Abstract. The paper deals with a newly discovered Mongolian inscription on the rock wall in Arshan area of Inner Mongolia, which is 'tngri yaĵar-un biĉig' ('A text of the heaven and earth'). Due to Uighur Mongolian writing features and contents, it can be concluded the inscription was made in the 13th–14th centuries. Its location may also indicate some ties with the period preceding the establishment of the Mongol Empire. The article describes the current state of the inscription, attempts to interpret the text and characterize the circumstances of its creation in general, thus making suggestions as to who, when and what for made the inscription. Still, as of today the available data is not sufficient enough and further research is required. And, finally, the paper mentions that the whole area is associated with Genghis Khan's youngest brother – Temüġe Otĉigin and his progeny, which again implies the inscription can be dated back to the initial stage of the making of the Mongol Empire.

Keywords: Uighur-Mongolian, inscription, cliff, Mongol

1. Basic Information

In June 2015, Professor Wei Jian 魏坚 at Renmin University of China was requested to send and invite the author to recognize a picture about inscription on the rock wall. The inscription was written by Uighur Mongolian (Uyiyurjin Mongyol) and the marks are not very clear, but the words just as tngri 'heaven', biĉig 'words', kümün 'human', biĉibe 'wrote' in it can be recognized. And the brushwork owns the features which exists in 13th–14th

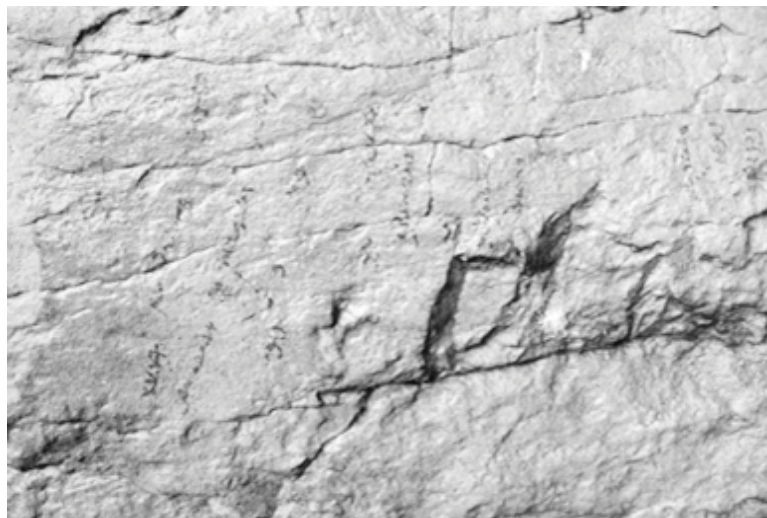
centuries obviously. Then, due to the time, the author was unable to do rigorous research, and only identified preliminarily, made several speculation and returned the feedback as reference to the picture provider. Since then, the related brief report appeared in the network soon [Li Aiping 2016], and it is not rigorous and the title is also somewhat optional. Therefore, it is necessary to do some academic discussion in the article.



Picture 1. A general view of the southern side of the rock

In April 2017, the author had an on-the-spot investigation. The inscription is on a rock in slope of west bank, the Khadag South River, which is a branch of the Khalkhyn Gol River (Qalq-a γool), Tianchi 天池 town, Arshan 阿尔山市, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The east cliff of the rock is almost vertical, and about 7~8 meters high (picture 1), the two Uighur-Mongolian inscription are located a meter off the ground. Under the two inscriptions, there are a few bright colored petroglyphs using

vermilion. And between them, the surface of the rock has cavity from the top to the ground, make the cliff form the two surfaces with angle. In the left surface, there is a group of Uighur-Mongolian characters, and a colored painting about deer and beast (wolf or dog), which has distance from the character is under them. When turn to the right surface, it also has fragmentary Uighur-Mongolian marks, under the marks, there is also a colored painting about two animals, deer and beast (wolf or dog), and



Picture 2: 11 lines character in left surface

a man on horse. The line of the petroglyph is close to reality, the theme 'hunter chase deer' and the style is widespread in petroglyphs of Eurasia, and the age of petroglyph is elder than the character. The petroglyph was found by Mr Bai jiangang 白剑钢, a local shutterbug, in 2011. In 2014, the media reported the newly found petroglyph [Li Aiping, Deng Zhiyang 2014] while at that time, they did not notice and report the Uighur-Mongolian inscription.

From the view of literature value, the

inscription is the first found character relics of the Mongolian Empire or Yuan Dynasty in Arshaan mountains, Daxinganling 大兴安岭 region up to now, also it is the latest found cliff marks in ancient Mongolian. Previously, it has been found cultural symbol in Daxinganling region, just as a group of rich and unique petroglyphs and inscriptions in other characters, etc. Also in Arshaan region, there has been made new findings, just like in 2014, section member, Mr Deng Zhiyang 邓智洋 from

government of Bailang town 白狼镇 discovered many marks about Qidan 契丹 script nearby local Bailang peak. Moreover, the author also found symbol marks which are clearly modern Mongolian, similar to Jurchen 女真 script and Buddhist mantra wheel from others photos. Therefore, the Uighur-Mongolian inscription is not isolated, it is a part of the traditional history and culture in Daxinganling region. And it is no doubt that the inscription contains the important information about the history, geography and human environment in this area.

Character Interpretation

In the right surface of the cliff, there are three character marks which are very vague, except 'noqai jil', the meaning of 'dog year', and the rest is fully vague and needs further study. In the article we will focus on a set of

concentrated inscriptions in the left surface. There are more than ten lines of character in the left surface (picture 2), similar to present-day Mongolian, with the characters put from top to bottom, and the rows arranged from left to right. The words in third last line appear once separately from those words. There is a word in front, with fonts blurred that can not be recognized. From the concentration of ink, it seems to have no relationship with the words behind, therefore, we can ignore it temporarily. The first 4 lines of characters can be connected into sentences and express a certain significance, the following 6 lines are words arranged, seemingly to present the duties and names. The distance from line 1 to line 10 is 24 cm, and the first as well as the second line which have more words are 12 cm long.

The first line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>mgri</i>	<i>γajār</i>	<i>-un</i>	<i>bičig</i>
(translation)	heaven	earth	s(genitive)	character

The second line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>surqu</i>	<i>kümün</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>surtaqui</i>
(translation)	learning (now and future)	people (plural)	use (object)	learn(imperative and plural)

The third line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>kü</i>	<i>bei</i>	<i>ǰ-e</i>	<i>kemen</i>
(translation)	(tone of emphasizing)	had(now and finally)	j-e(modal particle)	speak(continue, conjunction)

The forth line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>bičibe</i>	<i>bi</i>
(translation)	written(now and finally)	I

The fifth line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>unuγučı</i>
(translation)	foal's management

The sixth line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>saruqači</i>
(translation)	sacrificial offerings management

The seventh line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>quyay</i>
(translation)	armor

The eighth line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>gorilun</i>
(translation)	Hhorilun

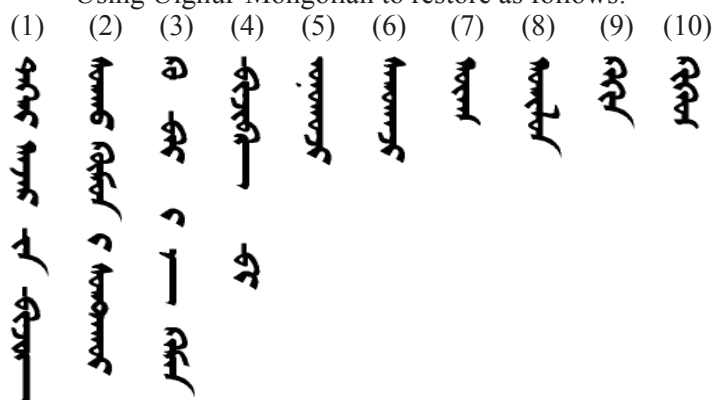
The ninth line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>gekin</i>
(translation)	Gekin

The tenth line: (pronunciation transliteration)

	<i>gikeüs</i>
(translation)	Gikeus

Using Uighur-Mongolian to restore as follows:



1-1. **[[tngri]]**: means ‘heaven’. The writing of this is the most clear, the shape of prefix ‘t’ is triangular, which is similar with the ‘t’ in -tur, the additional components of dative, in the epitaph of ‘Yesüngge stele’, but is slightly different from the common forms in Turpan 吐鲁番 manuscripts. The written form of the word reflects the Mongolian fixed wording. In phags-pa (Payba) script, this word should be read as dēngri. In *Secret History of Mongols* (*Mongyol-un niyuča tobčiyān* 元朝秘史), the pronunciation with Chinese words to express is ‘騰格理’ (tenggeri).³ Now in the spoken language it usually is tengger.

1-2. **[[yaʃar]]**: means ‘earth’. The writing is not clear. And the shape of the word is distortion, the reason of that should be to avoid the rock cracks and intended to tilt the suffix to the left. The initial ‘ya’ is in thick ink, the word-medial ‘a’ is faintly visible, and the semicircle stroke of the suffix ‘r’ can also be distinguished, the whole word fully in line with the style ‘ya ar’, ‘earth’ of Mongolian in 13–14 century. In *Secret History of Mongols*, the pronunciation with Chinese words to express is ‘合札刺’, the sound in phags-pa is ‘qa ar’, and there is no difference in speech.

1-3. **[[un]]**: additional components of possessives, is equivalent to Chinese ‘的, 之’ (‘s). Upper part of font is not complete enough, though it has the possibility to be ‘-yin’ or ‘-in’, according to its appearance after the word ‘ya ar’ and from the perspective of general orthography, it should be ‘-um’. In addition, it highlights sharp corners at the top of circle of character ‘u’, and it is similar with the first stroke of ‘b’ in the inscription, which is obviously the writer’s style. 13-14 century, in Uighur and Uighur-Mongolian handwritten information, such as Turpan manuscripts, it has the similar style of writing, and should also

belong to the writer’s style.

1-4. **[[bičig]]**: means: ‘book’, ‘manuscript’, ‘character’ and so on. The mark is clearer, stroke ‘g’ at the end is slightly damaged, but does not affect the identification. In structure of bičig, ‘i’ is not linked with ‘b’. Left falling stroke of character ‘g’ appears a certain arc. These belong to the writing style in 13–14 century, and it ought to say the characteristics of Uighur are preserved. Highlighting sharp corners at the top of the characters is also because the writer’s writing style. In *Secret History of Mongols*, the pronunciation with Chinese words to express is ‘必赤克’ (bičig, §203), and translated as ‘manuscript’, the sound in phags-pa is bičig, and there is no difference in speech.

2-1. **[[surqu]]**: ‘learn’, the future tense of verbs. Except the contour of surqu’s initial ‘su’ or ‘so’ and suffix ‘u’ can be distinguished, the middle part is not clear. The whole word is shorter, it can be speculated as ‘surju’, ‘surču’, ‘sutu’, ‘suju’ and so on from the shape of character. However, the author consider that the word has responding and progressive relationship with the following words No.2-4, therefore the roots of the two words are the same. In *Secret History of Mongols*, the words generated from root ‘sur-’ are ‘速兒合阿速’ (suryaasu, §149), ‘速兒忽’ (surqu, §149), ‘速兒合忽’ (suryaqu, §149), ‘速兒罕’ (suryan, §149), ‘速魯勒察速’ (surulčasu, §224), ‘速兒秃孩’ (surtuyai, § 260), ‘速翁’ (surun, § 260) and so on. The basic meaning is ‘learn’, ‘train’, ‘habit’, and is the same to Mongolian now.

2-2. **[[kümün]]**: means ‘people’. The mark is clearer, and the structure is completed, only the later character ‘-ü’ in the structure of ‘kümün’ is slightly damaged, it seems to appear character shape in double circle, which is the double word belly in Mongolian character. And the later word belly present the plural addition ‘-d’,

which can be read as 'kümüd', then it should be regarded as the plural of 'person'. But the interpretation is very weird as this, which does not match the habit using 'kümüs' to represent plural at modern times. The word 'kümün' itself can mean an indefinite number, therefore regard it as 'kümün' is more secure.

2-3. **[-i]**: The ink of the mark is very thick, and the factors may be addition, modification or deletion, etc. Therefore the stroke overlap and can not be determined as character or symbol. From the perspective of sentence structure, the probability is less for symbol appearance here, so we judge it originally as a single character. By observing its shape, the upper part of the circle is thick in ink and slightly prominent, the lower part is tiny, which is close to the shape of '-i', the additional component of objective case in Mongolian. Although there also has the possibility to emphasize the modal particle '-kü', '-kü' appears immediately after the next word, so it seems superfluous here. Moreover, it can not be excluded the possibility that the writer has written one of the characters from '-i', '-ü', and '-kü', then smear and revise it.

2-4. **[[surtaqui]]**: 'learn', the imperative form of verb. The structure of the word is not clear enough, and it is another difficulty in the inscription. Its roots seem to be identified as 'sur-', that is 'learning', therefore it corresponds to the former No.2-1 character 'surqu'. According to its morphology, the rest can be assumed to be '-taqui', which is morphological affix. '-taqui' contraposes 'surqu kümün' (scholars) here, expressing the meaning for hope or emphasizing wish. However, affix '-taqui' is not seen in the literature and is estimated no longer used earlier.

3-1. **[[kü]]**: emphasizing modal particle. The mark is not clear enough, and it can be judged as 'kü' from its writing morphology. In *Secret History of Mongols*, the pronunciation with Chinese words to express is '古'(kü), which translated as '也', and it is in high frequency of use, appears freer and has the meaning of emphasizing.

3-2. **[[bei]]**: verb 'have'. Generally read as 'bui' or 'bui', and may be affected by spoken language. In *Uighur-Mongolian literature letter from Argun Khan to Philip*(1289), there are examples that the writing style of 'bui' and 'bei' are mixed used [Dobu emkidkibe 1983]. In *Secret History of Mongols*, the pronunciation with Chinese words to express is '備' (bui / büi), which translated as '有' and in high frequency of use. This character and the '-e' behind are used together, means judgement,

and are equivalent of modern Mongolian 'biġe'.

3-3. **[[j-e]]**: emphasizing modal particle. It is more used together with 'bui / bui', and appears as 'bui j-e / bui j-a', 'büyü j-e'. In *Secret History of Mongols*, the pronunciation with Chinese words to express is '備者', and translated as '有也 (modal particle)' which is in high frequency of use.

3-4. **[[kemen]]**: linking verb. In *Secret History of Mongols*, the pronunciation with Chinese words to express is '客延'(keen), and translated as '么道' which owns high frequency of use in official documents during Yuan Dynasty.

4-1. **[[biġibe]]**: means 'written', and represents the past tense. The tail of the character is incomplete, but it can still be judged as '-be' from handwriting tendency.

4-2. **[[bi]]**: the first person pronoun 'I'.

5. **[[unuŋuġi]]**: unuŋu was an one year old colt, '-ġi / -ġin' represents a noun suffix of a kind of career, that is to say 'foal's management'. And unayaġi or unayaġin is written language in modern Mongolian. In *Secret History of Mongols*, it is '兀訥忽臣' (unuŋuġin, §279, §280), and is translated as 'the people managing mare'.

6. **[[saruġaġi]]**: It is not clear enough, we speculate it to be 'saruġaġi', and it may be the different writing forms of 'saruġaġi'. In *Secret History of Mongols*, there is '必列兀列徹 撒兒忽答察' (bileür-eġe sarqud-aġa, §70), and translates 'bileür' into '余胙', 'sarqud' means '胙', that is to say 'bileür' and 'sarqud' are the same. '胙' in Chinese means meat for sacrifice in ancient times. According to the previous studies, 'bileür' is Mongolian and refers to the remaining meals in ceremony, 'sarqud' is Turki and has the same meaning to the former character, in *Secret History of Mongols*, it represents the remaining meals of all kinds of supplies which offered respectfully in the rituals of ancestral sacrifice [Ozawa Shigeo 1993]. Here the character should mean the man who manage the sacrificial offering.

7. **[[quyay]]**: The mark is not clear enough, the overall structure is difficult to determine, and we can only guess from the prefix 'qu' and suffix likes 'ġ' or 's', then the closer word should be 'quyay', which is 'armor'. There is a book named Chinese and foreign language translation *Hua-yi yi-yu* 华夷译语(A), Hongwu 洪武 edition, in 'utensil class 器用 门', it uses Chinese to mark '忽牙黑' (quyay), and in Yongle 永乐 edition(B), it uses Uighur-Mongolian character to express 'quyay', they are both means 'armor', and belonged

to common vocabulary of Altaic. In Qing Dynasty, 'quyay' also means able-bodied man. And it also refers to not only armor, but also suit and formal dress in Mongolian literature of the 17th–18th centuries. If we consider this word and word No.5-6 associated, the word seems to be a position title, too. And if it refers to dress manager or armor maker specially, there requires further research because lacking of suffix 'či / čin' to represent their profession.

8. **[[qorilun]]**: Except here, the word appears once alone elsewhere and it is clearer which can be judged as 'qorilun/qurilun'. If root is 'qori', the word may be related to 'qori' in part '豁里秃马惕' (qori tümed, §240) of *Secret History of Mongols*. However, root 'quri-' seems to have relationship with 'quriqu' in Mongolian, which expresses 'collect', 'gather' and so on. In 13–14 century, affix '-lun / -lün' can be used for female names, for examples, 'alan/alun yoa' (阿蘭 豁阿, §7), nomolun (那莫倫, §46), temülün (帖木倫, §60), čaalun (察阿倫/察阿倫, §157) in *Secret History of Mongols*. The word are guessed may be related to women's exclusive occupation.

9. **[[gekin]]**: The structure of the word is relatively clear, pronouncing 'gekin' or 'kekin'. The word should also be related to a kind of occupation, but the meaning is unknown.

10. **[[gigeüs]]**: The word is similar with the former No.9 character, the structure of it is clear, and the pronunciation should be gigeüs, kikeüs or gikeüs. Here, '-s' should also be the plural additional components of noun suffix. When considered about 'unuŋučı' before, the word might be different written forms of 'gegüs', that is the plural of mare. In *Secret History of Mongols*, it pronounces '格温'(geün, §141), '格兀惕'(geüd, §279, §280), and is translated as mare 骡马. In Chinese and foreign language translation *Hua-yi yi-yu* 华夷译语(B), it is 'gegüd' in Uighur-Mongolian. And in *Secret History of Mongols*, it said that: '格兀惕 合兒合兀勒周 兀訥忽臣 撒兀勒伯'(geüd ɣaryaulju unuŋučin saulbai, §280), which means 'prepared mares, and arranged Ru Ma Guan'. That is to say, in order to get the mare's milk, it arranged special staff to manage the mare. In the inscription, because of the appearance of Ru Ma Guan, it is reasonable to find mare here. In conclusion, the feature of words No.5-10, special name, should be same, and the words are all related to the special profession which people engaged in.

3. Sentence Meaning and Judgement of the Age

Because in the inscription there is no

punctuation to make segmentation, the line 1 to line 4 can have two methods to make segmentation. The two methods making segmentation can be established, but the meaning of the sentences will be significantly different.

First, recognizing the whole sentence as a complex sentence. For example:

tngrı ɣajar-un bičig surqu kümün-i surtaqui kü bei j-e kemen bičibe bi.

'The people who learn the text about heaven and earth, then let them learn', those were written by me.

In this way, 'bičig', 'text' should refer to 'characters'. In other words, this is a inscription called for people to learn characters, the main idea of the sentences is to emphasize learning characters. The object to 'learn' is 'the text about heaven and earth', and it is clearer. However, 'the people who learn' is general reference without clear identity. Under the circumstances, the followed words, 'unuŋučı', 'saruqači', 'quyay', 'qorilun', 'gekin', 'gikeüs', may be the scope of occupation the 'learners' were engaged in, and it means the people who engaged in those occupations need to learn 'the text about heaven and earth', clarifying the occupational category of the learners.

Second, when combined with form and arrangement of lines and made segmentation to 'bičig', it will be:

tngrı ɣajar-un bičig: surqu kümün-i surtaqui kü bei j-e kemen bičibe bi.

The text about heaven and earth: 'people who want to learn then let them learn', those were written by me.

In this way, 'the text about heaven and earth' becomes independent phrase, and present the function of title. While, 'people who want to learn then let them learn', those were written by me.' is also independent complex sentence, expressing what title indicates or the specific content of text. The following arranged professional title 'unuŋučı', 'saruqači', 'quyay' are also independent nouns, which seem to be the goal or object for 'learning'. In other words, these occupational skills are the content to be learned.

Moreover, in this way, the inscription will present somewhat a writ program completely, and the elements that constitute the writ all appear. That is: foreword of writ 'licensor': 'heaven and earth', text: learning issues, conclusion: the writer, supplement of text or conclusion: kinds of occupations. In writs just like imperial edict, letters, contracts of Mongolian period found past, it is not seen the form of 'text about heaven and earth'. And if

the interpretation is established, the inscription can be described as another type of writ.

It is obvious that the two kinds of interpretation is different. In the current conditions, it is difficult to decide which is right, and perhaps there are other interpretations. It needs further research because as in the second interpretation, it also has possibilities for writing inscription or professional attributes of witness that arranged the kinds of occupations behind.

As mentioned before, the inscription can be basically judged as written in the 13th-14th centuries from the writing features of Uighur-Mongolian.

The inscription is in the basin of the Khalkhyn Gol (Qalq-a yool), nar the source of Tao'er River (toor-un yool). In *Secret History of Mongols*, in 1204, this area was where the Genghis Khan reorganized alliance system, appointed leaders of one thousand families, one hundred families and ten families, established Che'erbi officer and guards, then it is the important base that witnessed the decision which made to have decisive battle with Naiman (§175). In the right surface of the cliff, there are Uighur-Mongolian marks 'noqai jil', which is the meaning of 'dog year'. The year 1214 was the Chinese Jia Xu 甲戌 year and the 'dog year' (§253), because Jin Xuan Zong 金宣宗 (Emperor of Jin) sued for peace, Genghis Khan withdrew from Zhong Du 中都, and ordered Hasar to go north along the coast to conquer the Jurchen 女真 general Puxian

Wannu 蒲鲜万奴 (Buqanu), then passed the Songhua River 花江 (ula müren), Nen River 嫩江 (nau müren), turned t to Tao'er River 洮儿河 (taur müren) and back to the headquarters. Moreover, according to *History of the Yuan Dynasty* and *Jami'al-Tarikh*, it was also in this year, the basin of the Khalkhyn Gol became the first fief of Temüge Otčigin's family. In the period of his son Jibuyan, the territory started expanding eastward, when in the period of his grandson Tačar, the territory of Otčigin family reached the basin of the Songhua River, and the basin of the Khalkhyn Gol was no loner the center. Therefore, it is possible that the inscription is associated with the early stage of the Mongol Empire, and it will be the focus for further research in future.

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УДК 391

Интерпретация недавно обнаруженной уйгурско-монгольской надписи на скале Аршан

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена изучению недавно обнаруженной наскальной надписи в области Аршан Автономного района Внутренняя Монголия. Характерные черты уйгуро-монгольской письменности позволяют датировать надпись XIII–XIV вв. Ее местоположение также может указывать на связь с периодом, предшествовавшим становлению Монгольской империи. Описывается текущее состояние надписи, осуществлена попытка ее интерпретации, уточнения обстоятельств ее создания. Тем не менее, автор заключает, что имеющихся на сегодняшний день данных недостаточно для окончательных выводов, что поднимает вопрос о необходимости дальнейших исследований. Наконец, автор отмечает, что данная область связана с именем младшего брата Чингис-хана — Темуге Отчигином, в вассальное владение которого некогда перешла эта и смежные территории. Данное обстоятельство вновь указывает на то, что надпись могла быть сделана на начальном этапе создания Монгольской империи.

Ключевые слова. уйгурско-монгольская письменность, наскальная надпись; монгольский язык