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CELEBRATION OF THE 750TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SECRET
HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS

SUMMARY

The explanatory note reproduced below is submitted by
Mongolia.

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

'THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS'

In 1990 there will be the 750th anniversary of the 'Secret History of the Mongols', the outstanding historical and literary monument of the thirteenth century. It is not known who was the author of this work.

The vast mountainous-steppe zone of Mongolia makes up part and parcel of two important regions of world civilization, that is the Eastern part of Central Asia and the extreme East of the so-called Eurasian steppe belt stretching from the banks of the Danube and the Mediterranean. Mongolia was at a cross-roads of world communications since time immemorial. Two great roads - the 'Great silk road' and the Eurasian steppe corridor, also known as the 'Silk road of the steppes', linked Mongolia with the ancient civilizations of the East and the West. Mongolia is regarded as a locus classicus of Central Asian nomadism. There originated empires of nomadic peoples and a great historical process of meeting and cross-meeting of peoples and cultures took place. The nomads had borrowed and made their own much of other people's cultural and religious values. On the other hand, they acted occasionally as transmitters of the acquisitions of different cultures. They also bequeathed to others the achievements of their own distinctive culture and strikingly inimitable art skill and folklore.

'The Secret History of the Mongols (SHM)' is a history-chronicle retold in epic style and impregnated with steppe aroma.

It says not only of the old genealogy of Mongol khans, of the life and deeds of Chingiz-khan as the founder of the Mongol State. It also gives a very vivid and truthful panorama of the nomadic mode of life of the Mongols and provides the richest material for understanding the different aspects of the Mongol society in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries.

The 'SHM' is also a great literary monument distinguished itself with the highest artistic, aesthetic and poetic values. It is an unique phenomenon in the literary history of nomadic peoples. It is not quite by chance that the 'SHM' used to be compared with great literary monuments of other peoples - 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey', 'The Alexander Romance', 'Chanson de Roland', 'Slovo o polku Igorove'. 'SHM' is considered as not only the capital monument of the thirteenth century Mongolian literature, but it is one of the great literary monuments of the world. It contains more than a hundred verses and some of its paragraphs represent epic poems finely composed in rhymes. At the same time it is the richest treasure-house of Mongolian folklore.

The 'SHM' as a truly great literary work is remarkable for its invariable universal humanity literary values, that's heroism, bravery, honesty, mobility and dignity of man and people's desire for peaceful and independent life.

The script in which the first opus magnum of the Mongols had been recorded, goes back by its origin to the Phoenician, Aramaic and Sogdian system of writing. A detailed examination shows the traces of religious and mythological notions of the ancient Oriental peoples, in particular the influence of the Zoroastrian-Manichaeen cult of Light in the Mongolian legend

of the virginal conception of Alan-qua from the Father-Light, the foremother of the Chinggis Khan's clan.

From the very beginning the 'Secret History' had become known throughout the Orient and had been serving during all these 750 years as one of the main sources on the history of Mongolia and other countries of Central Asia. The 'Secret History' and its traditions laid the foundation for some of the fundamental historical works of the Orient, such as 'Jami-al Tavarikh', the first universal history compiled by the Persian author Rashid-al-Din (1247-1318), the 'Yüan-shi' (History of the Yüan Dynasty), the famous book by Chinese chroniclers on the history of the Mongol Empire in China, and many other annals. Since the times of Rashid-al-Din and through his book most of the historical and political ideas of the 'Secret History' had been, as a rule, reiterated in practically every significant historical writing of Central Asian countries, including the Moghul empire in India. The famous chronicle 'Akbar-nama' of the great Moghul historian Abu-L-Fazl (1551-1602) gives a detailed description of the Alan-qua legend, comparing it with the legend of Virgin Mary, raising the legendary foremother of the Mongols to the rank of the 'Theotokos' ('Mother of God'), similar to the Virgin Mary of Christians.

The original of the Mongol text did not survive. The Chinese bibliophiles have preserved the 'SHM' by transcribing the Mongol original into the Chinese characters in 1382 and making an abridged Chinese translation. In 1866 the 'SHM' was translated into Russian from the above-mentioned Chinese translation.

The 'SHM' has been translated, except Chinese and Russian, into English, French, German, Japanese, Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Turkish and other languages.

Thus the 'Secret History of the Mongols' could be considered not only as the remarkable masterpiece of the Mongolian literature, but it is an outstanding literary monument of world significance.