

International Linguistic Association

Monthly Lecture Series

Saturday, April 1, 2022. 11 AM – 12:15 PM (EDT)

Peter T. Daniels

Past President, International Linguistic Association

The limits of his Emperie (full manye dyuerse contrees):
Paths of enlightenment written eastward through Inner Asia



Peter T. Daniels was probably the first linguist whose specialization has been entirely in the writing systems of the world. He holds degrees in linguistics from Cornell University and the University of Chicago – where he came under the influence of the Assyriologist I. J. Gelb, whose *Study of Writing* (1952, 1963) was the first linguistically informed treatment of the subject. Daniels's first publications were on ancient calligraphy and on the little-known decipherments that were less spectacular than those of Egyptian and Linear B, but in 1987 he turned to the theoretical investigation of writing. His innovative typology of writing has prevailed in the field; his approach to the origins of writing in syllabically organized languages has led to a variety of invitations to contribute to survey volumes and to international conferences. He co-edited the standard reference work *The World's Writing Systems* (Oxford, 1996), and his *Exploration of Writing* was published in 2018 by Equinox. An introductory textbook is in preparation for Cambridge University Press.

In 2018, he was asked to present a popular talk at Oxford University's Bodleian Library, focusing on a unique manuscript housed there bearing a text in Tibetan, Mongolian, and Sanskrit. He took the opportunity to describe the progress of writing as it developed across the continent of Asia in dual streams of scholarship, tradition, and innovation – in effect, a history of writing. Along the way he also took into account several other treasures from the Bodleian (with the expectation that they could be displayed at the venue; as it happened, the display area was entirely occupied by a show of the art of J. R. R. Tolkien), including the first printing of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, an early version of Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*, and several others. The talk is being repeated here for the first time.

The announcement of the Oxford event read as follows:

From Mandeville to Marlowe, and before and beyond, the Orient fascinated Europe; and perhaps Inner Asia did so most of all. Tibet remained inscrutable, but the Mongol Hordes were storied and feared. Among the most important but least known achievements of both Tibetans and Mongols were writing systems of their very own. To look at them, a common origin might scarcely be suspected; but they are but two way-stations of the dual journey of writing, by a southern and a northern path, not from the Chinese East, but from the Aramaic West. Not lux ex oriente, but littera ex occidente.

Date & Time: April 1, 2022 at 11:00 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

ZOOM LINK: <https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/85103409163>

Meeting ID: 851 0340 9163 **Passcode:** 116215

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