

# Institute for Bible Translation



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## The Kalmyks

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The Kalmyks of Southern Russia are regarded as Western Mongols since they migrated westward from Mongolia in the beginning of the 17th century. The Kalmyk territory, south of the city of Volgograd in Southern Russia, is a steppe, ranging from arid in the west to semi-desert in the southeast. The capital city is Elista.



**Population:** 174,000  
(Soviet census 1989)  
Today approx. 204,000

**Language:** Kalmyk

**Language family:**  
Mongolian

**Region:** Kalmykia, Southern Russia

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism,  
Shamanistic traditions.  
Growing number of  
Evangelical Christians.

**Scriptures:** NT (1827-1894, vertical script)  
Gospel of Luke (1996)  
Children's Bible (1998)  
New Testament (2002)

Fifty years after arriving in the Caspian steppes in the 1630s, the Kalmyk population consisted of 300,000 people. In 1771 more

than 120,000 people attempted to return to China but most were killed along the way. Those who remained are the ancestors of today's Kalmyks in Russia. Charged with collaborating with the Germans, the Kalmyk republic was abolished in December of 1943 and all Kalmyks deported to Siberia. They were allowed to return in 1957.

The Kalmyk language belongs to the Mongolian branch of the Altaic language family as do the Mongol and Buryat languages.

Cattle breeding, particularly of sheep, is the principal Kalmyk economic activity. The processing of agricultural produce such as wool, meat, and fish is the main industry.

The Kalmyks are the only Buddhist people group on the European continent. Some evangelical churches have sprung up in Kalmykia in recent years.

Russian Orthodox monks spearheaded Kalmyk Bible translation in the late 1800s and the New Testament was printed in the old Kalmyk vertical script (unusable today) in 1827-1894. One hundred years later, in 1996, IBT, with the help of local Kalmyks, completed a new translation of the Gospel of Luke. IBT's Children's Bible was printed in 1998. The New Testament in modern language was printed in 2002. Some books of the Old Testament have also been translated in cooperation with SIL.