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THE DEVELOPMENT AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ANCIENT SCRIPTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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The study of ancient writing systems and languages of Central Asia is essential for understanding the region's cultural evolution and ethnic formation. Archaeological discoveries across Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan reveal a rich linguistic heritage dating back to the 5th–4th centuries BCE. These findings—such as the Khwarezmian, Bactrian, Sogdian, and Saka scripts—demonstrate the early intellectual and administrative sophistication of Central Asian societies. They also reflect the mutual cultural exchange between local civilizations and the broader Iranian and Hellenistic worlds. This thesis aims to analyze the origin, structure, and historical role of these ancient scripts and their contribution to the linguistic development of the region.

The Khwarezmian script, discovered on pottery at Katta Oybo'yirqal'a, represents one of the earliest examples of local writing in Central Asia. These inscriptions, dating from the 5th–4th centuries BCE, were written in the Khwarezmian language and based on the Aramaic alphabet. The use of Aramaic characters for administrative and religious purposes demonstrates the region's early engagement in written communication and its connection with ancient Near Eastern civilizations. [1]

The Bactrian language, spoken in the southern regions of modern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and northern Afghanistan, developed from both Aramaic and Greek alphabets. Bactrian texts from the first centuries CE show a linguistic adaptation of foreign scripts to local phonetic needs. The study of Bactrian vocabulary—more than one hundred words surviving today—provides insight into the sociocultural and political life of ancient Bactria.

Between the 1st and 4th centuries CE, the Sogdian language became one of the main written languages of Central Asia. Used widely along the Silk Road, it functioned as a lingua franca in trade and diplomacy. Sogdian inscriptions have been found from Samarkand to China, proving its international influence. The Sogdian script also laid the foundation for later writing systems such as Old Uyghur, Mongolian, and Manchu. [2]

The Saka tribes, nomadic peoples inhabiting the steppes of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, left one of the earliest Iranian-related inscriptions—the Issyk silver bowl near Almaty, dated to the 5th century BCE. The language of this inscription, though not fully deciphered, shares structural similarities with Avestan and early Iranian tongues, proving deep linguistic interactions across the region. [3]

Many ancient words have survived in modern Uzbek and Tajik languages, reflecting a remarkable continuity of linguistic heritage. Examples include 'bratar' (brother → birodar), 'nav' (new → yangi), 'zār' (gold → oltin), and 'shahr' (city → shahar). Place names such as Samarkand, Shahrisabz, Kitob, and Zarafshan also preserve ancient linguistic roots, serving as living evidence of the historical unity of language, culture, and identity in Central Asia. [4]

In conclusion, the development of writing systems in ancient Central Asia reflects a complex process of cultural adaptation, linguistic creativity, and regional interconnectedness. From the Khwarezmian script to the Sogdian language, each stage of this evolution demonstrates the intellectual achievements and intercultural exchanges of ancient Central Asian peoples. These

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scripts not only facilitated administrative and commercial communication but also laid the foundation for future linguistic and cultural developments. The preservation of ancient lexical elements and toponyms in modern languages proves that the spiritual and intellectual legacy of early Central Asian civilizations continues to shape the region's cultural identity today.

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