

## Poetic Model of Sacred Places / *Modelo poético de lugares sagrados*

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### ABSTRACT

The poetic interpretation of the symbolism of sacred places is a significant theme in the study of Kazakhstan's cultural heritage, including its literature. This research aims to analyse the literary techniques and linguistic tactics through which Kazakhstani writers recreate and illustrate the symbolism and significance of holy sites. The primary method used is analytical, specifically semiotic analysis, formal analysis, and historical-cultural analysis. Other methods employed include comparative, methods of generalisation, and systematisation. The study found that sacred places play a pivotal role in Kazakhstan's national identification. Their poetic interpretation showcases a complex interweaving of historical memory, cultural traditions, and spiritual values of the Kazakh people. Analysis of literary works revealed that writers actively employ various stylistic and rhythmic techniques to convey the unique significance of these places. Metaphors, allegories, symbols, repetitions, and other linguistic tools are most commonly used to craft a multi-layered image of a sacred site.

**KEYWORDS:** Spiritual centre; Linguistic technique; Symbol; Cultural heritage; National identity

### RESUMO

*A interpretação poética do simbolismo dos lugares sagrados é um tema significativo no estudo da herança cultural do Cazaquistão, incluindo a sua literatura. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar as técnicas literárias e as táticas linguísticas através das quais os escritores cazaques recriam e ilustram o simbolismo e o significado dos locais sagrados. O principal método utilizado é o analítico, especificamente a análise semiótica, a análise formal e a análise histórico-cultural. Outros métodos empregados incluem comparativos, métodos de generalização e sistematização. O estudo concluiu que os locais sagrados desempenham um papel fundamental na identificação nacional do Cazaquistão. A sua interpretação poética mostra um complexo entrelaçamento de*

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*memória histórica, tradições culturais e valores espirituais do povo cazaque. A análise das obras literárias revelou que os escritores empregam ativamente várias técnicas estilísticas e rítmicas para transmitir o significado único destes lugares. Metáforas, alegorias, símbolos, repetições e outras ferramentas linguísticas são mais comumente usadas para criar uma imagem em várias camadas de um local sagrado.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Centro espiritual; Técnica linguística; Símbolo; Herança cultural; Identidade nacional*

## **Introduction**

Sacred places, constituting a multifaceted part of the cultural heritage of many nations, play a central role in shaping national self-awareness. Understanding their symbolism and significance requires not only a cultural analysis but also a consideration of the historical context in which they were formed. Throughout the ages, various civilizations and cultures have crafted their unique sacred spaces that mirrored their religious, spiritual, and cultural values. In Kazakhstan, as in many other countries, these sacred sites have become symbols of national identity, acting as distinctive “bridges” between the past and the present and serving as sources of inspiration for writers, artists, and philosophers.

According to Albert Katz, Carina Rasse, and Herbert Colston (2023), when studying sacred places, it’s essential to view them not just as physical entities or pilgrimage destinations but also as cultural artefacts endowed with deep symbolic and historical connotations. Nazgul Kadrimbetova, Aisulu Kupayeva, and Aliya Mutali (2021) also concur that the significance of shrines in public consciousness cannot be fully grasped without analysing the historical, social, and political circumstances in which they emerged. In this context, the research by Amen Askhat *et al.* (2020) is dedicated to analysing the sacred valuable places as a key element of Kazakhstan’s spiritual and historical heritage. The authors believe that, in Kazakh culture, sacred sites represent an intertwining of spiritual, cultural, and natural elements that form the unique worldview and spiritual realm of the people. It’s known that, in the traditional Kazakh worldview, many natural elements were considered sacred. Specific mountains, rivers, lakes, or trees were believed to have a special energy or a connection to ancestral spirits. Alongside these, mazars – sacred burial sites – play a significant role, often becoming pilgrimage

destinations. They are typically associated with the memory of saints, heroes, or other notable figures.

According to Ali Rafet Özkan *et al.* (2019), in Kazakhstan, a country with a rich cultural heritage and complex history, sacred places have borne witness to many pivotal events: from ancient shamanic rituals to periods of Islamisation, from colonial influence to Soviet atheisation, and ultimately to the era of national revival and independence. These events serve as mirrors, reflecting the evolving cultural and spiritual paradigms, as well as the resilience of the people's traditions and beliefs.

The symbolism of Kazakhstan's sanctuaries, as depicted in literature, was described by Cemile Kinaci and Üyesi Balci (2019). The scholars argue that sacred sites are often viewed as portals between the earthly and spiritual realms. That is, they are places where individuals can reach out to deities, ancestors, or spirits of nature. Another symbolic aspect is that of healing sources. Many sacred sites are believed to emanate a unique spiritual energy. People might visit in search of healing, inspiration, or spiritual renewal (Shumka, 2022). Furthermore, many sacred sites serve as crucial memory landmarks, associated with significant historical or mythological events. They might stand as monuments to great leaders, heroes, saints, or other important figures. Within the cultural context, numerous shrines represent symbols of national unity, pride, and cultural heritage (Boyko; Kuleshov, 2023). In Kazakhstan's literature and art, sacred sites are often portrayed as spaces where the individual and collective interweave, where the past meets the present, and where human experience confronts eternal and universal truths. These are places that evoke profound emotional and spiritual reactions in an individual and play a pivotal role in shaping their identity, values, and worldview (Young, 2023).

In this study, a comprehensive set of methods typically used in literary research was employed: analytical, comparative, generalisation, and systematisation. Given the specific nature of the topic under consideration, the analytical method encompassed semiotic analysis, formal analysis, and historical-cultural analysis. Through analysis, it was possible to identify structural and semantic characteristics of works for further examination from the perspective of using linguistic devices (metaphors, epithets, and others). The authors analysed sacred places as cultural symbols that convey deep meaning beyond physical locations. This aligns with a core tenet of semiotics - the study of signs and symbols and how they construct meaning. The study examines the historical and

cultural context in which sacred places gained symbolic significance for the Kazakh people, providing insight into the associations and meanings attached to these places over time. Literary analysis enables an understanding of how writers use language, motifs, and imagery related to sacred places to represent abstract ideas about spirituality, cultural identity, and the connection between past and present. This aligns with a semiotic view of how signs, such as words and images, create meaning. Sacred places are analysed as representations that allow people to conceptualize beliefs, values, history, and worldviews. As symbols, they convey these intangible aspects of culture. Semiotic theory focuses on the symbolic function. The text examines the evolution of meanings and representations of sacred places across different eras. Semiotics acknowledges that the relationship between signs and meaning is fluid and contextual. Formal analysis focused on the structure and form of the text, revealing stylistic peculiarities, composition, and other features. The historical-cultural analysis assisted in immersing into the historical and cultural context to understand how attitudes towards sacred places evolved and changed throughout different epochs.

The comparative method was used to compare representations of sacred places in works by different authors, genres, or literary movements. This made it possible to identify the unique features of each work. A crucial aspect was the analysis of stylistic peculiarities; for example, how are sacred places represented in poetry compared to prose? How are they perceived in folk songs compared to classical literature? Based on the data collected, the generalisation method was used to identify general trends, patterns, and main characteristics in the depiction of sacred places. The systematisation method was used to structure and organise the data into logical and coherent systems and categories.

The primary purpose of this research is to analyse the most frequently used linguistic means of representing sacred places in the literary works of Kazakh writers. The study aims to achieve this goal through a comprehensive examination of different periods, styles, and genres within Kazakh literature, examining how representations of sacred places have evolved over time and in different cultural, historical, and political contexts. The research seeks to identify recurring themes, stylistic nuances, and cultural meanings associated with the representation of sacred places in Kazakh literature.

This study adds to the interdisciplinary understanding of how sacred sites influence the formation of national identity and cultural heritage in Kazakhstan. The research illuminates the symbolic significance and cultural resonance of sacred sites within Kazakh society through an analysis of their representation in literature. The thesis contributes to the field of literary studies by analysing the linguistic strategies used to represent sacred sites, providing insights into the intersection of language, culture, and spirituality in literature. This research enhances the scholarly understanding of Kazakh literature and the broader concept of the representation of sacred space in literature, contributing to academic discussion and cultural recognition.

### **Historical-Theoretical Context of the Depiction of Sacred Places in Kazakh Literature**

Sacred places represent unique intersections of spirituality, history, and national identity. They not only reflect spiritual and cultural heritage but also serve as a platform for dialogue between the past and present, tradition and innovation, national and global (Barroso, 2017). The formation of sacred places in various world cultures, including Kazakhstan, is closely linked with historical processes and socio-cultural peculiarities of regions. To understand their profound symbolism and place in Kazakh literature, it's essential to consider the country's major historical events and the global context (Serraino, 2016; Doszhan, 2023a).

Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical concept of the "chronotope" offers a valuable perspective for analysing the function of sacred places in Kazakh literature. Bakhtin (1937) proposed that the chronotope unites spatial and temporal dimensions in a literary work into an artistic whole. The "chronotope of the sacred place" interlaces geography, history, and cultural memory to symbolically convey intricate meanings. For example, mausoleums combine spatial attributes such as grave sites and architectural structures with temporal elements like the passage of time and ancestral linkage. Literature uses rich chronotopes to turn physical spaces into landscapes that are infused with cultural significance.

According to Kadrimbetova, Kupayeva, and Mutali (2021), in ancient cultures such as the Sumerians, Ancient Egypt, and the Indus Civilization, sacred places were often associated with religious practices, worship rituals, and sacrifices. Additionally,

temples, pyramids, and ziggurats served not only as religious centres but also as symbols of social order. In ancient Mesopotamian city-states like Ur, Uruk, and Eridu, ziggurats (stepped pyramids) symbolised the connection between earth and sky, acted as “dwellings” for deities and were venues for primary rituals. Moreover, these structures were meant to emphasize the authority of priests and city rulers. In turn, the pyramids and temples of Egypt, such as the majestic structures in Giza or Luxor, were not only places of worship for gods but also reflected the social hierarchy of Egyptian society. Pharaohs, considered divine rulers, built these monuments as symbols of their divine status and eternity. In ancient cities like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, religious structures and sanctuaries were meticulously planned. According to some studies, they served as both ritual sites and observatories for astronomical observations. While many aspects of the religious practices of the Indus civilisation remain a mystery, it’s clear that sacred places played a central role in its cultural and social life. In the literature of each of these cultures, sacred places were often associated with a meeting point between man and the divine and served as symbols of eternity, power, and the sacred connection between heaven and earth. Sumerian hymns and myths, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, described sacred cities and ziggurats as places where humans interacted with gods. Pyramid texts and hymns of the Theban period often extolled the divinity of pharaohs and their connection with the gods, emphasizing the eternity and lasting significance of the pyramids. These texts were carved directly onto the walls of burial chambers, serving simultaneously as religious prayers and historical documents (Boshoff, 2022).

Unlike other cultures, for the Kazakhs, natural power places such as mountains, rivers, steppes, springs, caves, and the like were primarily considered sacred, rather than man-made ones. They served as a link between the heavens and the earth, becoming unique points of communication with higher forces and ancestral spirits (Breed; Iğmen, 2020). For instance, the mysterious Kazakh steppe, brimming with enigmas, gave birth to countless tales where nature was not just a backdrop but an active participant in events, a place where humans interacted with invisible forces. The monument of *Bayterek*, for instance, and the sacred spring of Tamshaly are perceived as power places connecting with the cosmic order. The *Bayterek* monument is located in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. It symbolizes the ancient tree of life, atop which, according to legend, a

falcon finds life force every year. This monument stands as a reminder of ancient Kazakh myths and legends, connecting the past with the present (*Figure 1*).



*Figure 1* – The Bayterek monument in Astana. *Source:* Central Asia Travel<sup>1</sup>

The sacred spring of Tamshaly (Eastern Kazakhstan) has long been considered a place of healing and rejuvenation. It is believed that the water from this spring has healing properties and can assist in resolving many issues. Numerous pilgrims visit to drink from its waters and perform rituals (*Figure 2*).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.centralasia-travel.com/uploads/gallery/1373/baiterek-08.jpg>. Access in March 2023.



Figure 2 – The Tamshaly spring. Source: Silk Road Adventures<sup>2</sup>

Numerous natural landmarks serve as venues for shamanic rituals. Ceremonies held at these sites aim at communicating with spirits and nature. These are termed *Ovoo* and are located throughout the country. An *Ovoo* is a stone pyramid or pile of stones, often placed on mountaintops or other elevated places (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – Ovoo pyramid. Source: LOCA4MOTION (2011)<sup>3</sup>

During ceremonies near an Ovoo, fires are often kindled, offerings left for spirits, or ritual dances performed. Sacred trees are scattered across Kazakhstan's territory.

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<sup>2</sup>[https://silkadv.com/sites/default/files/Kazakhstan/Priroda/Priroda\\_Zapadnogo\\_Kz/Priroda\\_Mangyshlaka/Tamshaly/0\\_10\\_22%20154-min.JPG](https://silkadv.com/sites/default/files/Kazakhstan/Priroda/Priroda_Zapadnogo_Kz/Priroda_Mangyshlaka/Tamshaly/0_10_22%20154-min.JPG). Access in March 2023.

<sup>3</sup>[https://loca4motion.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/06-dsc\\_4611.jpg](https://loca4motion.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/06-dsc_4611.jpg). Access in March 2023.



Ribbons are usually tied to them, sacrifices are made beside them, asking the spirits for blessings. These trees are often located near water sources or other places with potent energy. Caves and gorges have long been utilised by shamans for meditation, fasting, and communing with spirits. Their relative seclusion and the mysterious atmosphere of such places provide ideal conditions for deep spiritual immersion (Kudaibergenova, 2017).

Among the most significant man-made sacred places in Kazakhstan, the mazars (mausoleums) stand out. These are burial sites of saints or notable figures and have become pilgrimage centres where people seek spiritual renewal and protection. One of the most renowned is the Mausoleum of Arystan Baba, located in Oraz, Turkistan region (Figure 4).



Figure 4 – The Mausoleum of Arystan Baba. Source: Anur Tour Kazakhstan<sup>4</sup>

This *mazar* is the burial place of the saint who, according to legend, was the spiritual mentor of Khoja Ahmed Yassawi. Dating back to the 12th century, this mausoleum is frequented by pilgrims even today. Many believers assert that visiting Arystan Baba's *mazar* before visiting Yassawi's enhances the spiritual impact of the latter.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tourstouzbeakistan.com/uploads/sights/Arystan%20baba/Arystan%20baba.jpg>. Access in March 2023.

Also renowned is the Mausoleum of Domalak Ana, located in the Almaty region. Domalak Ana is a sacred woman, the patroness of lineage and childbirth in Kazakh culture. Women wishing for children visit with prayers and requests. Surrounding the mausoleum are stone stelae – *balbals*, which also hold cult significance. The Mausoleum of Shapan Ata in Western Kazakhstan is dedicated to Shapan Ata, a distinguished warrior and hero. The site serves not just as a place of worship but also as a reminder of the bravery and valour of the Kazakh people. Many pilgrims come here seeking fortune and strength during critical decisions or challenging times in their lives (Sakhi; Selçuk, 2022).

Another popular sacred site to note are the ancient petroglyphs. For instance, the Tanbaly petroglyphs bear witness to the ancient religious practices and mythology of the Kazakh people (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – Tanbaly petroglyphs. Source: UNESCO (2017)<sup>5</sup>

The Tanbaly petroglyphs, one of Kazakhstan’s most significant archaeological sites, are located in the Zhambyl region. This unique historical-cultural complex comprises over 5,000 rock drawings spanning different eras, from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. The drawings depict hunting scenes, dances, rituals, and sacrifices. They

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<sup>5</sup> [https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/thumbs/site\\_1145\\_0007-360-360-20230224102620.jpg](https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/thumbs/site_1145_0007-360-360-20230224102620.jpg). Access in March 2023.

also feature various animals like goats, bulls, and deer, as well as human figures, sometimes in cosmic or shamanistic scenes. Many of the drawings are thought to be associated with the religious and ritual practices of the region's ancient inhabitants. Some images are interpreted as shamans in trance or communicating with spirits. Some researchers believe that the petroglyphs might have served as astronomical markers or calendars, reflecting observations of celestial movements. The Tanbaly petroglyphs provide a unique insight into the worldview, religious beliefs, and social structure of ancient Kazakh tribes. They attest to the profound spirituality and connection with nature of the people who inhabited this region thousands of years ago. Additionally, this site represents essential cultural heritage, underscoring the historical and spiritual connection of contemporary Kazakhs with their ancestors (Kadrimbetova; Kupayeva; Mutali, 2021).

With the advent of Islam in Central Asia, the landscape of Kazakhstan's sacred sites began to be enriched with new holy locations (Kudaibergenova, 2018). Whereas sacred places were primarily linked to nature earlier, now *mazars*, architectural monuments dedicated to Muslim saints, were added. Nevertheless, even in these new sacred locations, a reverence for nature and ancestors persisted. Their significance complemented rather than replaced old beliefs. They became pilgrimage destinations, and their portrayal in literature took on new hues associated with Islamic mysticism and asceticism. Numerous mosques, madrasahs, and other religious buildings were constructed in honour of significant Muslim saints or pivotal religious events. In literature, these edifices might symbolise wisdom, tradition, and the continuity of historical process.

Literature is a crucial source of knowledge about these sites. The first works in which they were portrayed were ancient epics, legends, and beliefs. Initially, they served as "vessels" of collective memory, preserving and transmitting stories, myths, and legends from one generation to the next. Later, writers began to address the topics of sacred places, reflecting on human existence, spirituality, and life's purpose (Piata, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2022a). Sacred sites provide an ideal context for these reflections, being places where humans meet higher powers, nature, and ancestors. Moreover, with their unique ambiance, natural beauty, and mystique, sacred sites become picturesque backdrops in literary works, adding depth and layering to the narrative. Lastly, sacred places in

literature can be employed as metaphors or symbols to convey various ideas or emotions (Stamenković *et al.*, 2023).

It's worth noting that Kazakhstan was part of various Russian state formations for many years, deeply influencing its literary process. Sacred places in Russian and Kazakh literature might be portrayed differently, reflecting the cultural and historical differences between the two actions. This process is reciprocal: on one hand, Kazakh culture assimilated certain elements of Russian culture, and on the other, it maintained and developed its unique characteristics. In Russian literature, sacred places often are associated with Orthodox churches, monasteries, and natural sites of mystical or religious significance, such as sacred springs. These places could serve as a refuge for the soul, a place of reflection, or repentance. In contrast, in Kazakh literature, sacred sites are often linked to ancient shamanistic practices, reverence for nature, and ancestors. Nevertheless, under the influence of Russian culture and literature, images of Orthodox churches, crosses, and icons began to appear in Kazakh prose and poetry, integrating into the traditional concept of sanctity.

During the era of modernism and postmodernism, Kazakh literature began to actively reinterpret traditional images and symbols, including sacred places. Influenced by globalisation and cultural exchange, these sites could be portrayed as sources of national revival or, conversely, critically reinterpreted in the context of contemporary social and political processes. Therefore, the portrayal of sacred places in Kazakhstan's literature is a vital means of shaping national and cultural identity and a tool for exploring the depths of the human soul and culture.

The analysis of sacred places in Kazakh literature provides a comprehensive understanding of their historical significance. These sites have been an integral part of Kazakh culture since ancient times, serving as focal points for spiritual practices and manifestations of a deep reverence for nature. The introduction of Islam expanded the network of sacred sites, blending seamlessly with pre-existing beliefs rather than displacing them. Despite experiencing periods of colonialism and Soviet influence, the symbolic importance of these sites has persisted, kept alive through folklore and literature. In the modern era of independence, there is a resurgence of interest in revitalising these sacred places, signalling a renewed appreciation for Kazakh heritage and spirituality. As literary motifs, sacred sites serve as conduits between the past and

present, offering glimpses into the historical experiences and collective identity of the Kazakh people. They stand as enduring symbols of cultural resilience and continuity, reflecting the timeless connection between humanity and the sacred landscapes that shape the understanding of the world.

### **Theoretical Basis of Poetic Features in the Depiction of Kazakhstan's National Sacred Sites**

One way to immerse oneself in the context of Kazakhstan's sacred sites through literature is by formulating a poetic model of their artistic images. Poetics is a branch of literary studies that examines the laws and peculiarities of poetic creativity. It reveals the foundations of rhythm, metrics, rhyme, and other nuances of verse composition. Great emphasis is placed on the creative process: from the moment of inception and formation of a poetic image to the peculiarities of inspiration and all stages of creating a poetic work (Kinaci; Balci, 2020). An essential part of studying poetics is analysing the poetic language, highlighting its features that differentiate it from prose. This refers to various tropes, metaphors, epithets, and other stylistic elements. Poetics also investigates the structure of the poetic text by analysing its composition and dynamic development. Moreover, within this discipline, the genre-specific nature is studied based on the peculiarities of different poetic genres (Katz; Rasse; Colston, 2023).

A poetic model is a systematised set of principles, criteria, and concepts applied for the analysis and interpretation of a poetic text. It acts as a sort of “map” allowing for a deeper understanding and analysis of the specifics of poetic language, structure, rhythm, stylistics, and other aspects of poetic work (McGuire, 2018). Serving as a key tool for analysing and interpreting a poem, the poetic model considers several essential aspects. First and foremost, it focuses on its structural elements, namely its design, composition, and the components that stand out in it. One of the main points of the model are linguistic and stylistic features: tropes, rhyme, rhythm, as well as the lexical and syntactic characteristics of the text (Rasse, Onysko; Citron, 2020; Rasse, 2022). Thematic aspects play a crucial role, revealing key themes, motives, and central ideas of the work. The cultural-historical context is considered: every poem reflects its connection with a particular era, events, and cultural traditions of its time. Additionally, the poetic model

accentuates the functions and genre affiliation of the text, aiding in understanding the role of a given piece and the literary genre to which it belongs (Snoj, 2021).

Considering the characteristics of Kazakh culture, the poetic depiction of sacred places in Kazakhstan’s literature is based on the following foundations shown in *Table 1*.

Linguistic and stylistic modelling	Sacred places are often described using a range of tropes (metaphors, symbols, allegories) intended to convey their sacred significance. This might encompass the use of specific lexicon, sentence structures, and stylistic techniques to create the desired impression of the place.
Symbolism	In literature, sacred places frequently serve as symbols representing profound spiritual, cultural, and historical values. They might reflect the connection between humans and nature, the past, ancestors, or spiritual beings.
Narrative strategies	In works by Kazakhstani authors, sacred places can provide a backdrop for the action, act as a place of transition or transformation, or become a central plot element.
Cultural-historical context	The portrayal of sacred places is inextricably linked with the cultural and historical specificity of Kazakhstan. This reflects the national memory, historical heritage, and spiritual traditions.

*Table 1* – The poetic depiction of sacred places in Kazakhstan’s literature. *Source:* Compiled by the authors based on Clea Waite (2020)

Thus, it can be concluded that sacred sites often serve as representations of cultural ideals such as freedom, eternity, and connections to ancestry and nature, and bridge the gap between the past and the present. Poetic techniques in Kazakh literature translate practical descriptions into complex cultural symbols that combine nature, history, spirituality, and national identity. The multiplicity of techniques allows religious places to transcend their physical surroundings and embody the Kazakh spirit and vision. Their evolving literary portrayals offer insights into the historical events and internal spiritual essence of the country.

## **Analysis of Linguistic Tools Most Frequently Used to Describe Sacred Places in Kazakh Literature**

Among the works that mention sacred places, poetry holds a special place. For instance, the renowned Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbaev frequently turns to natural landscapes in his works – the steppes, mountains, which for the Kazakhs are places of unique sanctity (Zhaparova; Dadebaev; Zhaksylykov, 2016). Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope (1937) is highly applicable to the analysis of poetic depictions of sacred locations. Kazakh poets skilfully connect spatial and temporal details through poetic techniques such as metaphor, rhythm, and lyrical imagery. These elements combine to form chronotopes that embody the Kazakh worldview. For instance, Abai Kunanbayev’s poems about the steppe vividly combine the expansive space of the steppe landscape with the enduring timelessness of nature and culture. His poems about Mount Koktobe, symbolising wisdom and enlightenment, illustrate the deep cultural roots of the Kazakh people and their strong connection to nature. In Abai’s works, nature is not just a beautiful backdrop or decoration – it becomes an active participant in a dialogue with the reader, a mirror reflecting the soul of the nation (Doszhan, 2023b). Mountains, rivers, steppes – they all are symbols of eternity, continuity, and the deep connection of the Kazakh people to their historical homeland. Poems about Mount Koktobe aren’t just odes to the beauty of nature; they reflect on eternal values, wisdom, and the search for truth.

The poem “The Gloomy Fire of Captivity” represents a powerful poetic statement where, through images of nature and specific cultural vocabulary, the soul of the Kazakh people, their history, traditions, and hopes are revealed (Kunanbaev, 1918). The use of numerous tropes makes the text especially expressive and rich, allowing the reader to deeply understand the meaning and emotions embedded by the author:

1. Metaphors: “gloomy fire” (comparing something uncertain or dark to fire), “brown flame” (comparing soil or sand to flame), “my camel-like dreams” (equating dreams to camels that trek across the desert), “a pinch of soil and salt” (signifying essence, roots).

2. Symbols: “camels” (symbol of perseverance and resilience), “stars” (hope, eternity, dream), “sun” (life force, hope, enlightenment).

3. Allegories: the entire text can be viewed as an allegory of the struggle, perseverance, and hope of the Kazakh people.

The author uses specific vocabulary related to nature (“desert,” “camels,” “sun,” “flame”), emphasizing the connection of the Kazakh people to the land and nature. Moreover, words such as “*batyr*,” “*akyns*,” “*aryks*” highlight the cultural and historical context of the poem. *Batyr* is a title bestowed upon a hero, a person who has distinguished himself in battles and fights, bravely and steadfastly defending his lands and people. In literature, the image of a *batyr* often symbolises courage, valour, and uncompromising commitment to justice. *Akyns* are folk poets who created and performed poems on topical subjects touching on the social and spiritual aspects of Kazakh life. They were unique chroniclers of their time, conveying knowledge and history through their works. *Aryks* are irrigation canals, vital in agrarian culture. Given the arid climate, *aryks* became essential for sustaining agriculture and, consequently, people’s lives. Thus, these words help the reader better understand and feel the emotions, moods, and worldview of the people of that era, which the work discusses.

Concerning sentence structure and stylistic techniques, the author uses repetition (“They go, they go”), which provides rhythm to the poem and intensifies the effect of persistence. Diverse rhymes and rhythm make the text harmonious and melodic. In terms of thematic aspects, the poem reveals themes of man’s connection with nature, national identity, the struggle for one’s land and culture, and hopes for a better future. Abai Kunanbaev’s poem mentions the following sacred places and images of particular significance to Kazakh culture: natural landscapes – the steppes. They are an essential part of the Kazakh national landscape, symbolising freedom, infinity, and unity with nature. Mountains are associated with grandeur, resilience, and wisdom. Earth is mentioned several times, and its images (“gloomy fire,” “handful of earth and salt,” “crushed stone fire”) symbolise roots, the human connection to homeland, and the sacred importance of one’s origin place. The sun in the poem represents a symbol of life force, hope, and enlightenment. Sand is associated with the desert, further highlighting the peculiarities of the Kazakh landscape.

Among prose works, it is worth mentioning *Abai’s Way* by Mukhtar Auezov (1942). Sacred places hold a special place in his work. For Auezov, these places serve as key symbols, emphasising spiritual values and the cultural heritage of the Kazakhs. Through metaphors and symbolism, the author conveys the spiritual significance of the mausoleums (Pavlichenko, 2023). They appear to the reader as a connecting link between



the past, present, and future of the Kazakh people. Furthermore, mausoleums and other sacred places act in the novel as a kind of “landmark” around which the community’s life is built, places where key events occur (Gainullina *et al.*, 2014).

In his poems, Olzhas Suleimenov pays special attention to such sacred sites as ancient petroglyphs and archaeological monuments of the region. In his works, these symbols are viewed as evidence of the ancient culture and history of the Kazakhs, emphasising the continuous connection of the people to their past. Particularly notable is the work *Az and Ya. The Book of a Well-intentioned Reader* (1975). In this book, Suleimenov presents his vision of the history and culture of Turkic peoples, including Kazakhs, through the lens of linguistics, archaeology, and literary studies. The petroglyphs frequently feature symbols such as the Tamga, which indicate clan or tribal affiliation and are etched into stone or metal as unique signatures. Celestial bodies, such as the Sun and Moon, also appear often and represent the cyclicity of life, eternal renewal, and divine origin. Another common symbol is the Tree of Life, which embodies the connection between heaven and earth, human and divine. The monuments often depict animals, such as deer, wolves, or snow leopards, which symbolize various aspects of human life or character traits, such as bravery or sacred knowledge. Petroglyphs feature geometric figures, including circles, crosses, and spirals, which carry varied meanings. For example, spirals symbolize eternal movement or the soul’s path. Stone stelae, known as *balbals*, are erected on graves and serve as both memorials and sacred symbols reflecting the spirit of the ancestors.

In the poem “The Spill,” there is a rich symbolism related to the concept of the road as a metaphor for the journey of life. Through the lens of personal experience, the poet depicts his connection to history, ancestors, cities, and nature. The image of the Volga is presented as a symbol of grandeur, beauty, and the unfathomability of nature and life. Suleimenov focuses on the eternal theme of human connection to nature, past, and future (Ram, 2001). Among the tropes, metaphors and similes can also be discerned. The poem begins with a strong image - “by the azimuth of nomadic generations,” evoking a sense of a long journey tied to the history of the people. The poet uses the metaphor “grey veins of ancient cities” to describe historical roots, reminiscent of the circulatory system, emphasizing their vibrant and pulsating nature. “Suddenly – silence. And a cry – the Volga’s massive smile” – this phrase creates a contrast between silence and a sudden

shout and is also associated with the powerful and sacred image of the Volga River. The poem's vocabulary is also tied to historical context, especially words like "azimuth," "map," "ancient cities," "debt," "steppe," and "mountains" which are imbued with sacred meaning, pointing to holy places and national identity. Concerning syntax and rhythm, special attention should be paid to the structure of phrases and word choice. For instance, "I flow as a donor's brown droplet" – this is not just about movement but "flowing" like a river, which could symbolize the eternal flow of time. The genre specifics suggest that the poem belongs to the lyrical genre, where the author expresses his feelings and emotions related to the past, present, and future, as well as his place in the world. Suleimenov skilfully combines personal experiences with national history and culture, emphasising the importance of memory and preserving cultural heritage. The syntactic and lexical features of the poem add dynamism and infuse the text with profound meaning. Overall, the poem is a vivid example of lyrical poetry, where the author's individual feelings intertwine with national and universal motifs.

Magzhan Zhumabayev is another prominent Kazakh poet from the early 20th century whose lyrics are marked by profound emotionality. He frequently draws upon natural imagery and motifs. In some of Zhumabayev's works, he also touches upon the relationship between humans and nature, cosmic and spiritual themes. Studying the poetry of Zhumabayev, one can discern how, through natural images and symbols, he conveys the deep spiritual and cultural aspects of his people, including their relationship to sacred places and their significance (Özkan *et al.*, 2019). The poem "The Powers Have Waned, The Banner Has Fallen" is a lyrical work where the author expresses his pain and longing for a lost cultural heritage while emphasizing the importance of preserving language and cultural traditions for future generations. This poem could be interpreted as a call for introspection, advocating careful regard for national heritage and cultural values. Tropes: allusions – references to Proud Altai and the Golden Horde represent historical and cultural ties. Repetitions and parallelisms are employed to amplify the emotional impact on the reader and highlight key moments in the text. Metrics and rhyme: the poem uses free verse, lacking strict rhyme and metrical regularity. Sacred places in the poem play a vital role, emphasising the author's (and perhaps the entire nation's) connection to its historical past. They serve as spiritual landmarks in a world that seems lost and detached from its roots. The Golden Horde is a historical site, representing power and

grandeur of Turkic-Mongol peoples in many minds. Mentioning it in the poem may reflect the deep roots of culture and national identity. Proud Altai is a mountain range, one of the most ancient and mysterious places in Asia. Altai is often associated with spirituality and sacred energy, a place where heaven touches earth. These locations remind of grandeur and pride lost in the past but recoverable.

Abish Kekilbayev is a renowned Kazakhstani writer and public figure. His oeuvre includes novels, stories, poems, and essays. Kekilbayev is known for his works grounded in the history and culture of Kazakhstan. The author often turned to the history of the Kazakh people, their traditions, customs, and mentality, as well as depicted the lives of the Kazakhs during different historical periods and explored human relationships amidst social and political changes. Kekilbayev's ballads *Ballads of the Steppes* (originally *Dalalar balladasy*) (2008) are a landmark in Kazakh literature, embodying historical memory, spiritual quests, and the author's philosophical musings on the fate of the Kazakh people, their roots, traditions, and future. The primary content of these ballads is a reflection on the life of the Kazakh people throughout different historical epochs. Kekilbayev investigates timeless themes - love, betrayal, sacrifice, the fight for freedom, and the clash of tradition and innovation. His affection for his homeland, its vast expanses, and the steppe as a symbol of freedom and infinity is particularly evident in *Ballads of the Steppes*. Here, the steppe is not just a backdrop or setting; it becomes an active participant in the events, a character in its own right, interacting with people, their fates, and feelings. Kekilbayev's choice of vocabulary draws directly from the natural elements of Kazakhstan, including its steppes, mountains, and rivers. These elements serve as backdrops for the narrative and as symbols representing concepts such as infinity, eternity, or variability. Kekilbayev also uses numerous metaphors and similes linked to nature, portraying the steppe as a living organism that "breathes," "sleeps," or "weeps," The use of imagery in Kazakh culture amplifies the sacred significance of nature. Furthermore, Kekilbayev's syntax mirrors the rhythms of nature. Long, flowing sentences symbolize the boundless expanses of the steppe, while short and abrupt ones convey the unpredictability of the weather or sudden shifts in life.

It is important to note that the translation accurately captures the metaphorical meaning of the expressions and words. The authors inherently own the metaphors,

symbols, and stylistic devices used in their works, reflecting their unique perspectives and artistic vision.

Based on the analysis of works by Kazakhstani authors describing sacred places, the following conclusions can be drawn: elements of the poetic model allow for the creation of a rich and multifaceted image that reflects the deep connection of the people to their history, culture, and spirituality. Metaphors and symbols are commonly used to represent intangible concepts such as cultural memory, national identity, spirituality, and the relationship between man and nature (Kim *et al.*, 2022b). By using metaphorical language, geographic places can take on philosophical and symbolic dimensions. The repetition of words, phrases, or images related to sacred places emphasizes their emotional impact and culturally symbolic status. The repetition gives these physical settings a sense of reverence and historical permanence. Poetic depictions use rhythm, meter, and rhyme to establish an elevated, melodic tone that amplifies the sanctity and significance of these sites. The formal structure matches their spiritual weight. Allusions to mythology, history, and legend reinforce the role of sacred places as storehouses of collective memory and cultural heritage, connecting contemporary identities to the shared past (Yensenov *et al.*, 2016). The use of personification with vivid descriptors gives sacred places agency, life, and character, reflecting the intimate relationship between people, culture, and landscape. Contrasts highlight the cultural losses and revivals, as well as the cycles of decay and rejuvenation that sacred places have endured over time, as seen in the nation's collective experience. The use of archaic, folkloric, and modern language signals the balance between historical continuity and contemporary relevance in the evolving symbolic meanings of these places.

## **Conclusions**

Sacred places occupy a central position in preserving the national identity of Kazakhstan, acting as a link between historical memory, cultural traditions, and spiritual values. Historically, Kazakhs have particularly valued natural sacred places, such as mountains, rivers, steppes, springs, and caves, as well as man-made ones: mausoleums, petroglyphs, and others. Literature, particularly poetry, is one of the main sources of knowledge about these places. The chronotope theory offered a conceptual framework

for exploring how Kazakh literature transformed sacred places by combining spatial and temporal attributes. The analysis showed how poets created intricate chronotopes through poetry and imagery, weaving together material details, history, and symbolism. Descriptions of these sanctuaries are most frequently found in the works of Abay Kunanbayev, Mukhtar, Olzhas Suleimenov, Magzhan Zhumabayev, Abish Kekilbayev, and others. To analyse them, the method of creating a poetic model was used. The poetic model is a comprehensive approach to the analysis of poetic texts, which includes the study of various aspects of versification, such as metrics, rhythm, rhyme, tropes, stylistic, and linguistic features. This model aims for a profound understanding of the peculiarities of a specific poetic work both in the context of its internal structure and in the broader cultural and historical perspective.

Poetics, as a science, deals with studying the regularities of the creation and perception of poetry. Thus, the poetic model of a poem allows researchers to delve deeper into the essence of a poetic text, identify its main characteristics, and understand its impact mechanisms on the reader. Kazakh writers, in their works, actively employed various poetic, stylistic, and rhythmic techniques to create a deep and multi-layered image of sacred places. Among the most frequently encountered tropes are: metaphors (sacred places are often compared to living beings or spiritual elements. For instance, a mountain might be described as “standing eternally, like an ancient guardian,” and a river as the “living vein of the earth”); allegories (sacred places can symbolise spiritual paths or historical epochs. A river can represent the journey of life or the historical flow of time, while a desert might symbolize trials or spiritual quests); symbols (specific elements of nature, such as trees, stones, or animals, can serve as symbols of sanctity or spiritual strength); repetitions (frequent repetition of certain words or phrases emphasises the significance of the sacred place. For example, describing a mountain where the word “majestic” is repeated several times highlights its power and sanctity); epithets (descriptive adjectives, such as “ancient spring,” “vast steppe” or “mighty mountain,” give sanctities a unique quality and emphasise their sacredness).

These and many other techniques enable writers to create a multidimensional image of sacred places, imbuing them with spiritual and cultural significance in the context of Kazakh culture. A future research perspective could be the study of how the

representation of sacred places in Kazakh literature has evolved over time, especially in the context of modern socio-cultural processes and globalisation.

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## Statement of Author's Contribution

Marzhan Mirazova drafted the article and made critical revisions to the intellectual content and provided the final approval of the version to be published. Zhanat Aimukhambet was responsible for all aspects of the work, ensuring that any questions regarding the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work were thoroughly investigated and resolved. Zhibek Bultanova outlined the conception and design of the article, and was responsible for acquiring the data. Yelena Sabiyeva and Tatyana Ahmetova conducted analysis and interpretation of data.

## Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

## Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [*Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies*] to Open Science, this journal publishes only reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

## Review I

1. The work is fully in line with the stated topic.
2. The purpose of the work is clearly and explicitly stated. The article considers the symbolism of sacred places, shows their cultural significance; identifies the historical periods that gave sacred places spiritual and cultural meanings, describes the preserved folk traditions and beliefs that reflect the self-consciousness of the nation. On the example of the most representative texts of Kazakh writers, the author identifies and analyses the linguistic means of depicting sacral places of Kazakhstan. All this allows the author to make reasonable conclusions and outline the prospects for further research of the problem.
3. The author provides an analytical review of the latest research revealing the background of the issue. But it remains unclear what theoretical approach the author realises when speaking about the semiotics of sacred place, what works of semioticians he relies on.
4. The problems of interpretation of sacred places in literature and art have recently attracted more and more attention of researchers. The article considers this problem in the aspect of studying the linguistic means and artistic techniques most often used by writers to create an image. The author relies on the “poetic model” proposed by literary scholars, building his analysis as a study of linguistic means of depicting sacred places in Kazakh literature. The novelty of the work is related to the involvement of new empirical material - works of Kazakh writers.
5. Language and style meet the requirements for scientific articles.
6. *Notes for paper accepted with suggestions:*
  1. The author, unfortunately, does not refer to the works of M.M. Bakhtin. Although it is obvious that the use of Bakhtin’s concept of “chronotope” (in this case, “chronotope

of sacred place”) would have helped the author to better understand how the poetics of sacred place is formed in the works of Kazakh writers.

2. Conclusions on the paragraph “Analysis of linguistic tools most frequently used to describe sacred places in Kazakh literature” sound very generalised, reflect little the specificity of the analysed linguistic material and artistic techniques of particular authors, and need to be improved.

3. The principle of translating examples from the original language/Russian into English requires special explanation. Two questions arise: 1) How accurately does the translation capture the metaphorical meaning of the expression/word; 2) Does the author or the translator own the metaphor? ACCEPTED WITH SUGGESTIONS [Revised]

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