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# Poetic Culture, Cultural Memory, and Spiritual Identity: Reclaiming Turkic-Kazakh Heritage from Soviet Repression to Independence

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study examined the transformation of Turkic-Kazakh poetic culture as a form of spiritual heritage, cultural memory, and identity preservation from the Soviet period to the era of Independence. It also explored how poetic texts and press materials served as symbolic resources for sustaining collective meaning amid ideological repression and supporting cultural renewal in the post-Soviet context.

**Methods and Materials:** This historical-analytical study used archival documents, Soviet-era press materials, and contextual textual analysis. Relevant sources were drawn from archival collections and periodicals such as *Ak Zhol*, *Birlik Tuy*, and *Saule*. The works and public activities of selected Kazakh poets, writers, and intellectuals, especially those associated with the southern Turkestan region, were examined to identify patterns of censorship, exclusion, and later recovery of poetic heritage. Data were interpreted through analysis, synthesis, historical comparison, and thematic reading.

**Findings:** The findings showed that Turkic-Kazakh poetic culture served not only as a literary form but also as a repository of collective memory, moral values, and spiritual identity. During the Soviet period, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, this cultural sphere was subjected to political repression, ideological filtering, and removal from public discourse. Many poets and intellectuals who preserved national symbolism, oral traditions, and cultural continuity were marginalized, persecuted, or consigned to archival silence. In the era of Independence, the rediscovery of these materials helped restore cultural memory and renew national and spiritual self-understanding.

**Conclusion:** Reassessing repressed poetic heritage highlights poetic culture as a resource for collective identity, symbolic meaning, and cultural resilience.

**Keywords:** Turkic-Kazakh spiritual heritage, poetic culture, cultural memory, spiritual identity, Soviet repression.

## Introduction

It is a noble cause to glorify the poetic culture of the deep-rooted Turkic-Kazakh spiritual heritage for the patriotic generation. By deeply studying the rich history of our people, we come to know our poetic art, which offers a unique perspective. In any case, we must continue to instill in the minds of the rising generation our poetic art, which was transformed during the period of independence, and our poetic culture, which was weakened during the difficult period, so that the spiritually mature youth of New Kazakhstan can take a firm step towards a bright future (Dave, 2007). Only then will we truly embark on the path of spiritual renewal and, at its peak, see our pure art, which has been preserved for centuries and is deeply intertwined with people's lives (Beyer & Finke, 2020; Privratsky, 2013).

In any case, the Turkic-Kazakh spiritual heritage is a unique treasure that defines the nation's face (Kendirbaeva, 1994). Moreover, it is known that a country that glorifies its original spiritual wealth and preserves its poetic culture to the fullest extent will be able to overcome the challenges of globalization without stumbling, and its direction will be clear and correct. So, not to mention our poets and songwriters who, in ancient times, "cried out equality" from their enemies and expressed their dreams in immortal poems, the Alash intellectuals, scholars of the nation, and enlightened writers, who, despite being forced to operate within the narrow confines of strict censorship during the former Soviet period, stood as a symbol of honesty and urged the nation through their works to preserve its native culture, not to be separated from its national identity, and not to abandon its traditional poetic art, have a special place, of course, the National poetic art has gone deep into the world. In the late 20s of the twentieth century, both in the press and in other speeches on high pulpits, "be a Turk!" our main goal should be to distinguish between the black and white slander covered by our Lions, who, despite their works, did not lose their Kazakh status, became teachers of the nation, the public, formulate their archival documents accordingly, inventory their literary heritage, and seriously study the rich spiritual treasures of future generations (Beyer & Finke, 2019; Dubuisson, 2010).

The main purpose of the scientific article is the tasks of the research work, which were taken as the main

object in this direction, considering the extensive archival documents stored in the archives related to the poetic art of writers and poets of the southern region, whose public activities and creativity fell into a political filter in the Soviet period and were prohibited for widespread distribution inside the country, glorifying the poetic culture of the Turkic - Kazakh spiritual heritage and giving their works a basis, the works that are still unknown to us as an important source: To identify individuals who, in their original works, glorified the poetic culture of the Turkic-Kazakh spiritual heritage, which was suppressed during the Soviet period, and were therefore exiled; In this regard, analyze the significance of positive and negative materials published in Soviet periodicals; The transformation of our poetic culture, glorified by the nation's readers, during the era of Independence and its promotion to future generations (Jiménez-Tovar & Lavička, 2020; Kokaisl & Hejzlarová, 2023).

## Methods and Materials

In this article, we relied on Soviet press and archival materials and attempted to apply several methods and approaches. In studying the issue, concrete facts served as the basis, while methods of analysis and synthesis, a historical-comparative approach, theoretical interpretation, and historical research techniques were employed. In our view, it is also important to make the study's results public. Archival and press materials related to the poetic culture of the Turkic-Kazakh spiritual heritage, which was subjected to pressure during the Soviet period, undoubtedly pave the way for future monographic research.

The poetic culture within the Turkic-Kazakh spiritual heritage, our spiritual treasures, represents a core value that, throughout centuries of historical development, has experienced periods of growth and flourishing, as well as restriction and suppression—especially having passed through the strict filter of censorship under the misguided policies of Soviet rule. In today's era of globalization, it is transforming, and in the age of Independence, it has been reunited with its people. Undoubtedly, for our nation—distinguished by its mythological worldview and rich oral literature—the roots of poetic culture run deep. However, analyzing the evolutionary processes of poetic art in the works of the

Kazakh democratic intelligentsia of the early 20th century, we conclude: before the revolution, the poetic art created by steppe talents such as Akan Seri, Birzhan Sal, Zhau Musa, and others gradually shifted toward a new quality, found broader expression in written literature, and the works of these figures were frequently published in the Soviet Kazakh press during the 1920s–1930s. Archives contain many valuable materials hidden away in rare collections. Therefore, introducing these works into scholarly circulation is of great importance. Thus, in this field, we must rely on clarity and truth.

In the southern region, one of the prominent writers who was closely associated with the Alash intellectuals was Tanirbergen Otarbayuly. Born in 1893 in the village of Qatynkopir in the Shymkent area, he studied between 1905 and 1910 at a madrasa under the guidance of his skilled teacher Kenzhekozha, and before the revolution worked as a teacher in villages near the city. Only in 1920, after realizing that the new government had firmly established itself, did he join the Communist Party. From then on, he dedicated himself entirely to educational activities: he taught Kazakh language at the KazPedTechnicum of Syrdarya province, served as school principal in Shymkent from 1923 to 1925, and as head of the children's home named after Qozhanov, worked as a teacher at the seven-year Kazakh school named after Ahmet in Shymkent from 1923 to 1928, and in 1934, taught at the Kaplanbek Zootechnical and Veterinary College in Saryagash. At the same time, Otarbayuly also made a notable contribution to our national literature.

From a young age, he immersed himself in the poetic culture of the Turkic-Kazakh spiritual heritage — epic tales of batyrs, proverbs, qissa-dastans, and folk stories — in other words, the oral literature of the Alash community. Thus, his poetry could not help but carry the tones of Turkic tradition and the spirit of national identity. He performed the shared Turkic epic *Alpamys* on the dombra, knew *Koroghlu* by heart — a work popular not only among Kazakhs but also among Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, Turkmens, Tajiks, and Kyrgyz — and, while serving as a mentor to such figures as Bauyrzhan Momyshuly, Abdilda Tazhybaev, and Qurmanbek Sagyndyqov, consistently promoted the Kazakh-Nogai cycle *The Forty Batyrs of Crimea*. He also wrote in that very style himself, which, of course, did not escape the attention of Soviet critics and vigilant overseers.

Indeed, the nationally minded teacher's story, The Myrzabi Incident, along with a number of his poems and articles, were published between 1920 and 1926 in *Aq Zhol*. This newspaper became the mirror of the Alash movement. As a regular contributor to this paper, he left a significant mark. Quite by chance, in the rare manuscript collections of the Uzbek archives, we discovered his poems *Qazyghurt* and *Boztorgai*. The latter, published in *Saule* magazine, a supplement to *Aq Zhol*, contains the following lines:

The blue sky shimmers like a boundless sea, the sun's light — the soul's warmth, a gentle glow. The earth, revived, adorned in youthful green, Melts softly, like golden butter aglow.

The beauty of the road lies in deep ravines, where countless herds are grazing at their ease. Upon the wide steppe, freely grown and vast, Most nomads here are wealthy with their beasts.

The sun's bright rays descend from the high sky. They glisten, flashing like lightning's flare. The endless, boundless, open steppe expands — Her playful gaze delights in freedom there. Above, the bird of freedom sings its tune. It dances to the music in the air.

Especially, when mourning for its land, the skylark sings — of sorrow, sings of care. Thus, by taking the image of the skylark as a symbol, the poet longed for the age when “a skylark could lay its egg upon the fleece of sheep,” yearned for distant freedom, and looked anxiously toward the future of his simple people — a subjugated nation. At the same time, with unease, he wondered: “*Who knows? While soaring freely in the sky, might not some bloody hand from afar suddenly seize it?*” — expressing his deep concern about the bloody policies of the Soviet regime, its thirst for ruthless repression, and the terrifying course of a so-called “freedom-loving,” “proletarian” government that had abandoned religion.

Conveying such thoughts in veiled and allegorical form, in another poem entitled “*Qazyghurt*,” published in *Saule*, the poet revered a pan-Turkic value, celebrating Qazyghurt as the sole refuge of life on earth after the great flood, and sang of this sacred land with heartfelt devotion.

Can any mountain be like Turkistan's mountain? With many ores, with gold and silver in abundance? If its mountain were not gold, its soil not silk, would every eye covet it, would enemies appear?

Kazygurt is the lowest of those mountains, yet even in its lowliness, it has its wonder. Convenient, fit for dwelling is its land, the elder among the great mountains.

Kazygurt is praised in people's words, preserved in song since early times. It is called the choicest of mountains, and thus its legend is told: "On the top of Kazygurt, the Ark remained. If it were not holy, why would it remain?" In the time of the great flood, the famous deluge, this tale was passed down from ancient times.

Around it, the Kazakh people used to dwell, driving forth their four kinds of livestock. White yurts, like white domes, were set up; mares were tied for kumis to be made.

With their flocks in pens, the sheep lay. They drank saumal, ate butter. Their Khan ruled the people and cared for the land. They lived free and in peace as they wished. In those days, the Kazakhs had no sorrow. Sheep were in thousands, horses in plenty. The people were rich, their warriors strong. When foes came, they blazed like fire.

The men of those days were warriors, Lions all, only soldiers of might. If on their path a worthy foe appeared, The age itself would turn against the foe.

Back then, the battles of the Alash were fierce. They never ended in ashes or dust. However, here and there, some lagged, Quarreling, contending for fortune's share.

In other words, in such a lengthy poem the author openly conveys that a heavy sorrow has darkened the brow of Kazygurt, that the great mountain — once a blessed homeland for the Alash — has been trampled under foreign feet; he tells that the Alash people no longer exist, that its mighty and fearsome warriors are gone, and that a nation deprived of its freedom no longer even has the weary herds grazing on the steppe. At the same time, he places hope in the rule of people with low incomes, which arose with the dawn of a new day and the appearance of the sun after the revolution. In our view, the author's central idea is tied to this, and his ambiguity and hints at the end — where he seems to show support for authoritarian power — represent a desperate attempt to revive, through poetry, the concept of Kazygurt as the essence of Turkic poetic culture.

Overall, in the southern region, the sacred, legendary Kazygurt mountain rises with its two peaks. In the legend that has reached us about its holiness, it is said:

"The Creator made earthly life from four elements — soil, water, air, and fire. He made man the master of all living things. He gave to man the earth, its fruits, crops, plants, animals, birds, beasts, fish, and all others — everything to satisfy his needs. Man was meant to live in accordance with noble virtues. However, if he trampled those virtues, he would face the Creator's severe wrath.

### Findings and Results

As the years passed, the descendants no longer heeded their ancestors' commandments; they trampled on morality and reached a state that could no longer be endured. Then the Creator, to punish such a generation, sent the first disaster — the catastrophe of the soil. In this calamity, all the sinners suffocated and perished under the earth. However, the merciful Creator, so that life on earth would not cease, preserved from the disaster the descendants pure of sin, along with all that was necessary for their survival."

After the soil disaster, life on Earth developed again. However, humanity once more turned to cruelty, forgot its Creator, and reached the point where it trampled moral values, losing the ability to find a way to stop the evils it had created. To restrain this, the Creator then sent a flood to the earth. After this disaster, to continue life on earth, the Creator granted prophetic qualities to a pious man named Yashqar, who had not departed from the path of righteousness, and entrusted him with the mission of sustaining earthly existence after the flood. For this, the Creator ordered Yashqar to build an ark in which pairs of all living beings — animals, insects, plants, crops, fruits — could fit. That ark survived the flood.

That is, Noah's Ark came to rest on Mount Kazygurt, and Mount Kazygurt was considered the sacred starting point of life's renewal on earth. Therefore, the famous poetic line "On the top of Kazygurt the Ark remained; if it were not sacred, why would it have remained?" became known to every Kazakh. Tanirbergen understood this early with a special insight. Moreover, although in his poems there are often themes of the generosity of Soviet power toward people with low incomes, his major works, such as "Kazygurt," "Boztorgai," and "If You Look, the Present Times Are Harsh" — nourished by the heights of national poetic art — should not be overlooked and must serve future generations.

The truth is that, although he obeyed the dictates of Bolshevik power and followed its lead, he could not restrain the grief in his heart from flowing into his poetry. Because he regarded Turkic poetic culture and the words of his ancestors as part of his soul, he was slandered and suffered much persecution. Already in 1925–26, anonymous letters of denunciation were sent against him to the education inspector of Shymkent district, saying: “T. Otarbayev is a lazy man, unable to manage leadership in the field of education properly.” Thus, the innocent teacher, whose soul was scorched by falsehoods and who was harassed without cause, sent the following reply:

“...Since my youth, I have been engaged in education — either studying or teaching. In this path, I have endured much hardship and poverty, and spent my life in constant hard labor, being the son of a poor Kazakh.”

Before the Revolution, even though I was not a supporter of the Soviets, I was not a hard-hearted man who thought only of myself and my stomach. Whether against Kazakhs or others, my ultimate goal was to stand against oppressors, against colonialists, tyrants, and those profiteers who exploit the labor of others. In this regard, both my past and later deeds, as well as my life story, bear witness.

The Revolution came. The bright light of the Soviet government’s generosity fell equally upon the working and oppressed classes. The wishes of those who had lived under oppression and coercion were fulfilled. I, too, am the son of a poor man who suffered much from hardship. Because of my poverty, I welcomed this Soviet generosity with open arms. I sincerely loved it with all my heart, and since my aim was the destruction of oppressors and tyranny, I understood that the most fundamental path to this lay in teaching. For this reason, I did not participate in other kinds of political or administrative work (even though four years ago I was elected as a member of the uyezd executive committee by the representatives of people with low incomes), but continued my work as a teacher.

Even before the Revolution, from 1910 — that is, from the age of 17 — up to this day, I have been constantly engaged in education. Because it is the work I love, I have never, in any place or time, allowed myself to neglect it as far as my strength permitted. I do not know, unless there are particular enemies against me. However, impartial people familiar with the situation in the

district, including impartial teachers, should confirm the truth of my words. From your note sent to the uyezd education inspector, it appears that some people have lodged complaints against me. There were indeed days in summer when I could not conduct classes. However, it was not without reason. There were valid causes.

At present, students in the 1st and 2nd basic classes at the technicum are publishing a wall newspaper. The articles they send to the newspaper “Ak Zhol” are printed without changes, just as they were written. Although there are textbooks in the Kazakh mother tongue suitable for primary schools, proper textbooks for secondary-level schools, such as the technicum, are sorely lacking. Therefore, in teaching the mother tongue in the basic classes of the technicum, the teacher bears the heavy responsibility of producing materials at a level comparable to book publishing. Even so, the fact that the technicum students are now capable of writing articles and producing a wall newspaper should speak for the value of my work at the technicum. For this reason, I consider your reproach to the uyezd education inspector regarding me to be unjustified — either due to a lack of awareness of my actual situation or to complaints from enemies.

I ask that, if possible, you inquire of trustworthy, impartial people in reliable positions who know my situation, and then give a fair evaluation of my work. If a person, in the work he loves and devotes himself to, cannot receive the due recognition and appreciation, and instead of gratitude receives curses, then there can be no punishment heavier, no burden harsher than that. Therefore, I ask you to investigate thoroughly, to look with fairness, and to give an evaluation in the way of justice.

January 20, 1924.

Teacher at the Shymkent Technicum and head of the “Ahmet” school: T. Otarbayuly.

However, in 1935, the second secretary of the Keles District Committee, Narodny, together with the district NKVD chief, Dynnikov, expelled him from the party with baseless accusations such as: “He is in league with the Alash Orda member Khayreddin Bolganbayev, he allowed a socially alien element to enter the technicum at Kaplanbek as a teacher, he himself is a devout religious man, was once an imam in his youth, preached and spread religious epics and dastans, and although he lived in an atheist society and served the Soviet government,

he never renounced the name ‘Tanirbergen’ given to him at the call to prayer. By this name and by his works, he clearly demonstrates his Pan-Islamist and Pan-Turkist views.”

Unable to prove his innocence but spared from exile, Otarbayev was arrested again in 1938 and imprisoned in the stone jail of Tashkent. There, he was labeled an “enemy of the people” and, by court verdict, sentenced to five years. In 1942, he died of heart disease in a camp in the Komi ASSR. During the Khrushchev Thaw, in 1957, he was fully rehabilitated.

In summary, Mahmud al-Kashgari's works frequently mention the name Kazygurt. In the “Oghuznama,” the account of how water was drawn from the Karaspan near Kazygurt at the time of Dede Korkut's birth shows that songs and legends about Kazygurt have come down from ancient times and have become part of the common spiritual heritage of the Turkic-speaking peoples. In this sense, it is reasonable that the well-known ethnographer Zhagda Babalyquly firmly stated: “Nauryz began at Kazygurt.” This is because Nauryz, as a festival of the new year, is considered a national rather than a religious holiday and is celebrated among all brotherly Turkic peoples, with their Nauryz songs preserved everywhere.

In the early years of the Soviet government, the Nauryz holiday was celebrated across the country. As a fine example of national poetic culture and art, the Nauryz song regularly appeared in the periodical press, with several articles published in *Ak Zhol*. The issue of *Ak Zhol* dated March 22, 1922, was devoted to the New Year – the Nauryz festival – and was linked to a week proclaimed by the Bukhara Republic to collect aid for the starving in Kazakhstan. In that issue, Ghazymbek Birimzhanov, in a substantial article about our great holiday, wrote:

“Happy New Year!

Today is the New Year of the peoples of the East – Nauryz.

Today is the common festival of the peoples of the East.

For several years, they were oppressed by enemies, only now opening their eyes and only now beginning to resist the conquerors, and today is the day when all the peoples of the East remember the past year and wish for a new life in the new year.

Today, spring dawns brightly, a different kind of light comes from the sun, and all living and non-living things

are freed from the grip of winter, and nature changes; everything shines with special radiance. Today, day and night are equal, and from now on the days will grow longer, light will spread, and darkness will diminish.

Truly, the dark days are departing; the earth, darkened by snow, is opening; snow is melting; life and work are becoming easier; livestock are thriving; and the bright days are returning.

Today, the Kazakh people, with the banner of Alash, recall the customs of their ancestors, drink their Nauryz koje, invite one another, visit from village to village, young men mount their horses, young boys ride their foals, and when they meet, they stop and joyfully talk; girls and women gather together, and contests between villages will take place...

Today is the day when the Kazakh citizens sent from Kazakhstan to Bukhara will embrace and meet with the citizens of Bukhara, sharing sorrow and joy, and join hands to care for the starving Kazakhs.”

“Today is a holiday. This day is a day of joy. Today is the day when the peoples of the East raise the banner of unity. Today is the day when compassion and brotherhood between Bukhara and Kazakhstan will be strengthened,” he wrote, openly stating that during the past year, famine had devastated Kazakh life. He did not hide that even at this time, during the Nauryz holiday, the Kazakh people were utterly exhausted, weakened to the point of collapse, on the verge of death, and that their only wish, their only hope was that: “May the efforts of the Kazakh people not be in vain as before, may the last groaning voice of a dying nation be heard, and whether by the whole world or at least by kindred and equal peoples, may they rescue their perishing brothers from the grip of death and the snare of massacre...”

Nevertheless, the totalitarian system, which regarded the Nauryz holiday as a “remnant of the old,” completely banned its celebration beginning in 1926.

Indeed, already in 1921, in the pages of *Ak Zhol*, under the title “Happy New Year!”, “Madiyar” – Mirzhakyp Dulatov – wrote:

“...Today is the New Year of the peoples of the East – Nauryz! Today is a symbolic day, as bright spring dawns, the sun rises in thunder, and living beings seem to be freed from the grip of winter!

Today, day and night are equal, livestock thrive, the earth darkens, the snow melts, streams rush, and it is the day that signals change in nature!

Today is the day when the peasant's life becomes easier, when spring returns, when people give thanks and rejoice!

Today is the day when the Kazakh-Kyrgyz people, under the banner of Alash, recall their ancestral customs, cook Nauryz koje, invite one another, embrace and greet, share sorrow and joy, and gather together in lively festivity!

Today is a holiday!

Today is a national holiday!

However, as the saying goes, 'fasting and prayer are possible only in times of plenty.' To celebrate such days as a true holiday is possible only in times without deep worries. It used to be that people were carefree, their livelihood secure, and the times peaceful. However willing we may be to sacrifice life and property for our ultimate goal, after so many years of wars upon wars, the people's economy is ruined, and their hearts are heavy. In such circumstances, holidays like Nauryz cannot be celebrated with merriment and revelry as before. However, Nauryz must not pass unobserved."

"Happy New Year!", he emphasized, and indeed, in translation from Persian meaning "new day," at this common holiday of the Turkic peoples, "even the blue stone of Samarkand melts," people's hearts soften, and the broad-rooted Kazakh people, like Qydyr Ata – the patron of goodness – wished prosperity, unity,

In more detail, the fresh young girls and tender boys were guided toward generosity, delicately trained in manners, and imbued with the virtues heralded by Az-Nauryz. Instilling this essence in the growing generation, drop by drop, is a sign of our reverence for tradition, the preservation of our rich culture, and our fidelity to the covenant of our ancestors.

The great national holiday, which had begun to be forgotten, was revived throughout the republic starting in 1988. In 2009, at the initiative of the First President of the independent country, N. Nazarbayev, the deputies of the Majilis fully supported the amendment to the current law "On Holidays in the Republic of Kazakhstan." In 2010, according to the 64th resolution of the UN General Assembly, March 21 was established as the "International Day of Nauryz". However, as early as

happiness, and wealth for their families and communities, cradled in harmony. That is, the free people, revering the ancestral saying "One of forty is Qydyr," at the Nauryz holiday saw every guest as a blessing, planting trees together, cleaning canals and irrigation ditches in unity with their kin, considering as a good omen the well-being of their nation, the abundance of dairy products in a land sustained by livestock, and the banishment of misfortune into the earth, while the wise elders bestowed their blessings before the people.

In other words, the virtuous daughters of a blessed nation prepared the "uyqy ashar" meal for the young men. At the same time, the courageous sons of an exemplary people in turn gifted them the "selt etkirer," expressing the collective wish that from Nauryz to Nauryz they would reach safely, that the people live in peace, and the land remain tranquil. This wish came true, enveloping the vast steppe in joy, and the holiday culminated in national games such as "Audaryspaқ," "Sokyr teke," "Togyzqumalaq," "Kokpar," etc., and also in the unique tradition of impromptu verbal art found nowhere else – the great *aitys*, which reached its peak. Thus, the worldview of a devout nation, firmly rooted in customs, traditions, and morality, resonated deeply with the surrounding world and pristine nature. Every year at this celebration, the sons and daughters of the people, noble in purpose and pure in thought, were spiritually renewed and enriched.

## Discussion and Conclusion

1991, Nauryz, as one of the main holidays of a sovereign nation, had been included on the list of state holidays by decree of the President of the Kazakh SSR.

In short, a conscientious nation regarded losing its cauldron as equivalent to losing its identity as Kazakhs. During famines or times of invasion and hardship, people considered the black cauldron the foundation of their livelihood; even if they abandoned other belongings when migrating en masse, they ensured that the hearth fire did not die and carried the black cauldron with them. The tradition of raising a large cauldron at Nauryz also carries this meaning for those who understand. Emphasizing in detail the cauldron as a symbol of unity, prosperity, and abundance, the scholar also did not rule out in this same work the possibility that the word "nauryz" might have entered the vast Kazakh steppe

from kindred Central Asian states (Jiménez-Tovar & Lavička, 2020; Uyama, 2015).

In short, while the Nauryz holiday served not only as a guarantor of harmony in the homeland but also as a reconciler of quarrels, a restorer of relations in Kazakh villages, and a promoter of good behavior and human virtues such as honesty, purity, kindness, fraternity, and generosity, urging and strengthening people toward these values, during the Soviet period its functions and significance underwent a deliberate distortion process. It was even condemned from a class perspective as an “ancient and unnecessary culture.”

During that same Soviet period, celebrated heroes whose bravery inspired immortal poems of Turkic-Kazakh poetics and whose wisdom was well known to the people, the former *bi* and *bolys*, were turned into “class enemies” and erased from memory (Yessekeyeva & Venbrux, 2021).

Interestingly, in issue No. 555 of the “Aq Jol” newspaper in 1925, Ghyلمان Shorekuly’s extensive poem “About the Former Biys and Batyrs of the Kazakhs” was presented to the public, in which the author first begins with:

“Many are eloquent in speech and mind, but above them stands Zholdoly. Their chests are full of vast wisdom, Merciless when justice is at hand— If granted power to decide. A promise once given—never broken,

Their trust and risk are tied to the Divine. More faithful than the people of today.

Moreover, if you ask what true faith is: It is a word once spoken—kept unbroken, Not burning with greed at the sight of bribes, But standing firm in the justice of truth.”

At the same time, he poetically recalls the warriors of the past, “whose arrows were bound in yellow leather so they might always be ready,” bringing to memory the heroic lives of Esentemir’s brave Mynbay, Sultangel’di, Kol-Taubay, and Qara Toqay Qolbaraq. After the poem was published, H. Dosmukhameduly also explained in the newspaper: “The author of this poem is one Gylman Shorekuly. In this poem are mentioned: Aday, Berish, Alasha, Masqar, Asyq, Tana, Taz, Esentemir, Baybaqty — tribes of the Baiuly of the Little Horde. Kete — a clan of Alimuly. Malay — a subdivision of Kete. Kerderi — a clan of the Seven Tribes. Qarabura — a subdivision of Alasha, Qarakempir, and Jaugastı — subdivisions of Sherkesh. Qarau’ran — a subdivision of Asyq. Zhayyq, Qaratoqay,

Shindige — subdivisions of Berish. Qayypaldy Tore opposed Janggir Khan and, around 1828, fled with part of the people from Bokeylik to Khiva. After Qayypaldy’s flight, at Janggir’s request, the Tsarist government issued an order forbidding the Bokeylik Kazakhs from crossing to the eastern bank of the Zhayyq. Seil became khan of Aua in 1862. After the fall of Aua, he and his son were captured and died in prison. All of the people mentioned in these poems must have lived during the nineteenth century”.

As a result, our heroes who fought for freedom, along with the precious songs about them, were left to gather dust in archives as if they were worthless, and were not published in the press. However, the heroism of those batyrs and the wisdom of our forefathers continued to live on in the works of local poets and singers; though not written down, they spread widely among the people. One of these poets was Ergobek Quttybayuly, who sang of Az-Gharab Alatau Batyr — a man whose entire life was devoted to the struggle for freedom during the Jungar invasions. Distinguished for his bravery, wisdom, and might, he defended the needs and dignity of his people, becoming a unifying symbol for the Konyrat tribes during his lifetime. Alatau Batyr (1560–1640) was a commander, political leader, and hero whose fame spread widely among Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Turkmen forces. In truth, there is no shortage of folklore and genealogical records about Alatau Batyr (Dukeyev et al., 2025).

Ergobek Quttybayuly was born in 1865 near the present-day “ShAuildir” karakul sovkhov in today’s Qyzylqum district. He died at the age of fifty-two in 1917 in Ashchy, Uzbekistan, at the home of his nephew Tilla, son of his brother Qalybek. According to oral accounts from local elders of Arys — Isabay and Torekhan, the free-spirited poet Ergobek quarreled with relatives from Qulshygash’s Esaydar lineage and, around 1915, moved closer to Tashkent. At that time, in 1915–1916, the plague spread across the land, which eventually led to the devastating “hare famine” that left people destitute. During these trials, the poet forgot his own personal sorrows and, grieving for his people and the fate of the Kazakhs, composed numerous poems and laments (Zeinullin et al., 2025).

In the September 22, 1990 issue of the *Kommunizm Tany* newspaper of Arys district, two of Ergobek’s works — “My Name is Ergobek” and “Are You Shaghyrbay the

*Interpreter?*” — were published. His works only began to be recognized nationwide in the 1980s. An article about his poetry appeared in *Qazaq Adebieti* newspaper in 1980, and his poems, laments, and improvisations were later included in volumes 2–3 of the anthology *Five Centuries Sing* published between 1985 and 1989.

From the *aitys* of Ergobek and Oserkhan, one can discern the profound reflections of a noble poet. According to the data we have received, the exact year is unknown, but this significance occurred at the “September gathering.” In that verbal duel, Ergobek was insulted with the words: “The curse of girls has struck the bald ones’ colts, these will not exceed forty households.” Hinting that “a well-structured word finds its proper course, while a poorly-structured word returns to its speaker,” the spirited poet Ergobek replied:

«Are you there, son of the Sky who has migrated, who has surpassed Qultay? Not only in Kazakh lands but in the city of Ufa, the beginning of Qultay’s hijra was recorded».

Thus, he calmly conveyed that the small clan of Qultay had produced not only heroes renowned among the Qongyrat, but also figures who were pillars of the entire nation of Altyn Alash. With the force of his words, striking like a cudgel “whether it hits the tree or just its branches,” he tried to temper Oserkhan’s fiery ardor. “Alas, from this unruly Bald one who cannot stand to see others!” — he reproached his opponent, exposing the hot-temperedness and mischief that had run in their blood since ancient times. Even when Oserkhan, “like one who cannot get enough of wrestling after being thrown down,” rambled on:

«The Balds have about a hundred households, but we, too, have sacred spirits with powerful words. If you keep bowing down to Qultay in pity, then become the forty-first sheep droppings, and take care of the chores.» —

By striking at the heart, Ergobek declared that such divisiveness and discord did not befit the descendants of the revered Er Alatau, whom the people of Alash held in high esteem. Only then did Oserkhan the poet, who until that moment had been brimming with arrogance, admit his defeat. Though older in age than Ergobek, recognizing the true worth of words, he asked for forgiveness.

When it comes to *aitys*, his spirit would ignite, and when he struck his *dombra*, the ancestral soul would not let him rest, showering words of wisdom like fine rain— looking at Ergobek Kuttybaiuly’s style and manner, at his

wit that never ceased to mention Alatau Batyr as a sacred symbol, one cannot say he had little knowledge of Kazakh history and the chronicles of the ancestors. In fact, even during the difficult Soviet era, when glorifying that ancient warrior was considered dangerous and survival itself was seen as a great fortune, he did not hesitate when the moment came, loosening the reins and, roaring like a lion before a great gathering, declared:

«The mother of Alatau was Bagara, Equal in wisdom, beauty, and dignity. The people of the six clans of Koktyuly were generous. Their blessings spread to the whole of the Alash. Where would Ergobek flee from his people, if not for Hasan’s wooden horse before him?» Thus showing that he also knew about Alatau’s mother, Bagara. In that thawing period, some “men of the pen” who had stirred public uproar by claiming “Alatau Batyr never existed in history,” finally grew silent. The baseless dispute came to an end (Mussatayeva et al., 2024).

One of the *aitys* preserved in the people’s memory is the verbal duel between Ergobek and the Turkmen poet Myrzagyr. Though the exact time is unknown, in this contest, Myrzagyr, who came weeping “Elim-ai” from afar, immediately challenged his opponent. While greeting him, he reproached the Kazakh poets for failing to show the depth of their art, reminding Ergobek that they had not even properly welcomed a guest from afar, let alone asked about his well-being. However, with his wisdom as rich as a fruitful tree and his knowledge of words since childhood, Ergobek responded with:

«Oh, Myrzagyr, do not boast, without yielding to sacred words. The Alakol has passed from you, A yoke that cut your throat. Alatau, whose might was great, Karasai, who repelled the enemy— Did they not strike down foes? Speak of the heroes who defended the people, do not wail in vain».

Faced with this retort, Myrzagyr was silenced and, realizing that his lament was misplaced in a time of peace, admitted his fault: «The unbeliever forgot Allah, The traitor forgot his mother tongue. “If the tongue falters, it is the devil,” So said Iskender Namazmynshi.

Oh, my talented youth, My poetry in my mouth, My child in my heart! Ergobek, forgive me, I nearly insulted the spirits of Alatau and Karasai!» —and with that, he even took off his cloak and gifted it to him.

As for Ergobek’s *Zhutaikorim* epic, that is another matter. Here, we more often refer to the version by Akpantai Baigutov. Although the vanished Soviet regime

claimed to have destroyed and erased the history and culture of other nations, since independence, historical records and relics have been discovered in many places, even from distant countries. In recent years, a small portion of the great legacy of Aliaskar Baigutuly—the last of the Sypra chroniclers of the Kazakhs, who wrote down our secret chronicles and recorded and renewed events and great figures every 70 years—was found in our own land. Many events and epochs that seemed legendary to us, along with the images of towering figures, are now being revealed. Among these are new records about Alatau Batyr, a well-known figure in our history, who is even included in the encyclopedia (Burkhanov, 2020).

As Alau bi Kosbakyuly once said: «Sacred Turkistan, from the land of Jideli-Baysan. The saint I prayed to was Konyr Ata. From the ninety tribes descended. My battle cry was Alatau.»

When researching about Alatau Batyr, who in ancient times raised his war cry against the ancestral enemy, we often rely on genealogical accounts and legends. The stories of the iron-wristed, towering, eloquent, noble ancestors who grew up in the sacred soil of the Kazakh land will always seem like legends to younger generations. Indeed, if we look closely, the courage, perseverance, generosity, wisdom, foresight, wit, and eloquence of our ancestors—who defended the vast steppe with filial devotion and national pride—are like an endless epic themselves, are they not?!

There are quite a few of our warriors whose names are known to the people, who defended against enemies without staining the name “Kazakh,” who thought about the future of the nation, who stood for unity and harmony, yet whose life stories were never fully inscribed in stone. As we mentioned earlier, during the totalitarian period, when the regime aimed to build a godless society, much of the national history was erased. The traces left by countless great figures were buried in the sands of time, leaving no mark behind. Many elders, who carried within them a treasury of poetic memory, like an island of wisdom, passed away without ever unlocking their “chests of secrets,” fearful of the era’s harshness.

When Tolenshi Batyr, the grandson of Alatau Batyr, raided his grandmother’s native village three times, it was said that a maiden’s grievance cursed him, and thus he was given the name “Qultai” (“slave-like one”). The reason was to prevent him and his descendants from

taking up arms. However, though they might have been executed, the rulers dared not violate the sacred spirit of Alatau Batyr, whose life was steeped in blood vengeance but who eventually ended that cycle of violence and became a legend. Thus, the descendants of the great Alatau warrior were branded with the name “Qultai.”

The number of households was not allowed to exceed forty, and this was strictly monitored. If they did surpass forty, they were redistributed among other clans and tribes. From Qultai-Sadik came warriors. From Qultai-Anyk came those who praised Allah. From Qultai-Munlyq came those who were burdened with curses and exile. Thus, this lineage was divided into three: those blessed with warrior strength, those blessed with prayers, and those burdened with curses.

One of their ancestors, from among the Ashamayly Kerei, was known as “Or Altai,” “Kari Altai,” and “Qul Altai – Momyn Qultai.” Their descendants, too, never exceeded forty households. When Islam spread among the Kazakh people, they became known as “Or-Altai,” “Ker-Altai,” and “Momyn-Qultai.” It is said that Islam entered Kazakh territory more readily through the peaceful and devout Momyn-Qultai people, while the Or-Altai and Ker-Altai resisted (Nurdauletova, 2023).

Therefore, when speaking of Alasha Khan, the honorific titles included “Alantau, Alatau, Ulytau, Alimtau, Altai.” It was Az-Gharab who awarded such a title to Alatau Batyr in Ulytau. He placed a bird of prey on his hand, set an eagle’s claw upon his right shoulder, and when the warrior rose to the call of battle, after enduring bloody wars and earning legendary status for his courage, he was given these noble ranks.

Even the renowned poet Ergobek, recognized by the people, often faced reproach in competitions and festivities, where the curse of the “Qultai” name was cast in his face. Both the khans and the colonial rulers used this to humiliate and break his spirit. In anguish, Ergobek sometimes spoke of how his life had been scarred by the curse of the maiden’s grievance. However, in his poem “*Alqyndyrdy az Qultai*,” he predicted that in fifty years the people would renew, and in one hundred years the cauldron of life would turn. He never doubted that the small, cursed lineage of his ancestors would one day grow and flourish as a people.

The conclusion here is that even the most prominent representatives of national poetics broke under the strain, becoming instruments of Stalinist terror, and to

save their own lives, resorted to such compromises. The tragedy of these writers, caught in the whirlwind of history, must be spoken of openly (Fleming, 2019).

In conclusion, introducing future generations to the poetic culture of the Turkic-Kazakh spiritual heritage, which suffered greatly under Soviet oppression, is a sacred duty. Since independence, extensive work has been done in this direction. Archival documents, long kept inaccessible, are gradually being declassified. During the era of independence, the Nauryz holiday was revived, and along with it, our priceless spiritual treasures and poetic culture are being studied in depth. Therefore, evaluating the policies of the administrative-command system that orchestrated the “red death slaughter” from today’s peaceful perspective, and passing on the genuine works of writers who became victims of political repression, is of utmost importance.

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#### Authors’ Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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