IJBMC
International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture

Volume 13, Issue 11, Article e2026-1737
DOI: 10.61838/ijbmc.v13i11.1737

Article type:
Qualitative Research

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Article history:

Received 17 Apr 2026
Revised 29 June 2026
Accepted 19 Aug 2026
Published online 01 Nov 2026

How to cite this article:
Nassirdinov, B. P., Omarov, N. K., Turabayeva, L. K., Umirzakov, S. D., & Miyabekova, Z. U. (2026). Eastern Motifs, Cultural Memory, and Literary Identity in the Works of Nuraly Nysanbayuly: A Historical-Cultural Textual Study. International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture, 13(11), Article e2026-1737. https://doi.org/10.61838/ijbmc.v13i11.1737

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Eastern Motifs, Cultural Memory, and Literary Identity in the Works of Nuraly Nysanbayuly: A Historical-Cultural Textual Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine Eastern literary motifs in the works of Nuraly Nysanbayuly (1857–1928), emphasizing their representation of cultural memory, moral values, historical experience, and literary identity.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative historical-cultural textual design was employed, integrating close reading, comparative motif analysis, source criticism, and thematic interpretation. The analytical corpus comprised selected literary works, published passages, and documented transmission accounts associated with Nysanbayuly. Three evidence layers were distinguished: primary literary materials, archival-biographical accounts, and historical-literary scholarship. Analysis involved source identification, passage-level coding, thematic clustering, contextual comparison, and assessment of interpretive boundaries.

Findings: Five recurring themes emerged: Eastern literary intertextuality, Islamic moral discourse, historical memory, literary transmission networks, and cultural identity representation. Persianate, Turkic, and Islamic narrative traditions were adapted within Kazakh poetic forms. Religious-didactic texts emphasized ethical responsibility, knowledge, and criticism of hypocrisy. Historical narratives represented political conflict, imperial domination, and communal suffering through moral frameworks. Mentorship, manuscript circulation, oral performance, and textual revision facilitated literary transmission. Narratives of belonging and continuity contributed to representations of cultural memory without establishing measurable collective psychological characteristics.

Conclusion: Nysanbayuly's literary heritage demonstrates how Eastern narrative traditions were localized through Kazakh cultural, historical, and performative contexts. The findings illuminate literary mechanisms of cultural memory and identity representation while distinguishing textual interpretation from empirical psychological evidence.

Keywords: Eastern Literary Motifs, Cultural Memory, Kazakh Literature, Literary Identity, Qualitative Textual Analysis.

Introduction

The literary heritage of southern Kazakhstan at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century emerged at the intersection of oral performance, manuscript circulation, Islamic learning, regional poetic schools, and expanding imperial structures. Nuraly Nysanbayuly (1857–1928) occupies a distinctive position within this environment. Existing scholarship describes him as a prolific qissa-dastan poet whose works circulated in southern Kazakhstan and adjacent cultural zones and whose surviving heritage was later incorporated into the multi-volume Kazynaly Ontustik project. A direct study of Nysanbayuly's published heritage identifies religious qissa-dastans, Eastern plots, manuscript transmission, and the Nazira tradition as central to his literary profile (Tadzhiyev & Kortabayeva, 2020). The broader Kazynaly Ontustik project has likewise been discussed as a major vehicle for bringing southern Turkic-Kazakh literary heritage into contemporary scholarly circulation (Tadzhiyev & Myrzakhmetuly, 2019).

The original critical problem is not simply whether "Eastern" elements are present in Nysanbayuly's works. Eastern plots, Islamic ethical vocabulary, Persianate and Turkic literary models, and references to classical authors are expected within the qissa-dastan environment. The more analytically useful question concerns what these elements do inside the texts: how they are localized, what moral and historical functions they perform, how they are linked with regional memory, and how they help position the poet within a network of teachers, performers, students, manuscripts, and audiences. Studies of Kazakh oral literature emphasize that genres such as epic and aytys are not static containers but socially situated practices whose form and meaning are shaped through performance, circulation, and historical context (McGuire, 2021; Salimjan, 2017). Recent work on Kazakh folklore also highlights the importance of treating oral and written materials as structured corpora rather than undifferentiated repositories of national meaning (Aitova & Bakytkyzy, 2025).

This distinction is particularly important because literary scholarship can easily move from textual interpretation to claims about the psychology of a people, collective consciousness, or national character. Cultural memory theory provides a useful conceptual vocabulary for understanding how texts preserve, select, reorganize, and transmit representations of the past, but it does not make a poem a psychological measurement instrument. Assmann describes cultural memory as socially transmitted and symbolically stabilized forms of remembering that extend beyond individual memory (Assmann, 2011), while Erll emphasizes that literature can function as a medium through which societies configure and circulate images of the past (Erll, 2011). These ideas justify examining the mnemonic function of literary forms, but they do not justify inferring unmeasured mental states in historical populations.

A related caution applies to identity. Cultural and narrative psychology demonstrates that identity is shaped through culturally available narratives and discourse (Hammack, 2008), and narrative-identity research shows how stories can organize continuity and meaning at the level of persons (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In the present article, however, "identity" refers to representations of belonging, moral community, religious orientation, historical continuity, and literary affiliation that are observable in texts and transmission practices. The article does not claim to measure the identity, personality, or collective psychology of Kazakh communities. This bounded use of cultural-psychological theory is consistent with recent discussions of poetic culture and spiritual identity in Turkic-Kazakh heritage, which likewise treat poetic forms as cultural carriers rather than direct psychometric evidence (Manapbayev et al., 2026).

The historical setting also requires source criticism. Southern Kazakhstan was shaped by overlapping political, religious, and cultural forces, including the Kokand sphere, Russian imperial expansion, Islamic educational networks, and long-standing mobility across Central Asia. Modern histories of Russian imperial expansion in Central Asia demonstrate the scale and complexity of nineteenth-century conquest and governance, cautioning against simple moralized narratives of a single, uniform colonial process (Morrison, 2020). Accordingly, literary references to

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conflict, taxation, religious authority, and political domination are treated here first as textual and historical representations. Where the article discusses broader historical context, literary evidence is distinguished from later biographical testimony and modern historiography.

The study therefore asks three questions. First, which Eastern literary, religious, and ethical motifs recur in the selected Nysanbayuly materials? Second, how are these motifs adapted to historical memory, moral instruction, and the regional literary environment? Third, what can these texts legitimately support regarding cultural memory and literary identity, and where must interpretation stop short of empirical psychological claims? By answering these questions, the article reframes Nysanbayuly's heritage as a historically situated literary corpus and makes its analytical procedure explicit enough for other researchers to inspect, challenge, or extend.

Conceptual and Interpretive Framework

Three concepts organize the interpretation: cultural memory, narrative identity, and intercultural literary transmission. Cultural memory is used to describe the socially available representations of the past that are stabilized through texts, rituals, symbols, and repeated forms of narration (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011). In this sense, a dastan may participate in cultural memory when it selects historical events, religious exempla, ancestral figures, or moral conflicts and makes them available for repeated performance and reading. The analytical focus is therefore on representation and transmission, not on proving that all members of a community remembered an event in the same way.

Narrative identity is used more cautiously. Psychological work describes narrative identity as the construction of continuity and meaning through stories (McAdams & McLean, 2013), while cultural psychology emphasizes the relation between personal narratives and broader master narratives (Hammack, 2008). For historical literary material, these ideas function as sensitizing concepts: they direct attention to how texts position moral actors, communities, traditions, and historical ruptures. They do not convert literary characters or poetic speakers into research participants. Therefore, terms such as "collective psychological meaning" and "collective consciousness" are avoided unless they are explicitly qualified as textual representations or later scholarly interpretations.

Intercultural literary transmission refers to the movement and localization of plots, symbols, religious vocabularies, and narrative structures across languages and regions. The qissa tradition is especially suitable for such analysis because stories may circulate through Arabic, Persian, Chagatai, Turkic, and local oral-manuscript networks before being rewritten in new linguistic and cultural settings. A recent comparative study in the International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture illustrates this process in the cross-traditional reception of Qissa-i Jumjuma, showing how a narrative can be reworked across Islamic literary environments rather than merely copied from a single source (Kerimbek et al., 2026). The same general principle guides the present analysis: "Eastern influence" is examined as transformation and localization, not as passive borrowing.

Methods and Materials

Study Design

The study uses a qualitative historical-cultural textual design. It combines close textual reading, comparative motif analysis, source criticism, and a structured thematic procedure. The purpose is not to estimate prevalence in a population or test a psychological hypothesis. Instead, the unit of analysis is the literary passage, textual episode, or transmission account associated with Nysanbayuly's corpus. Thematic organization follows the principle that qualitative themes must be traceable to identifiable textual evidence and that interpretation should remain consistent with the type of source being examined (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Corpus Construction and Source Layers

The corpus was constructed from materials that satisfy at least one of three inclusion criteria: (a) a Nysanbayuly work

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is directly quoted or substantially summarized in the available manuscript record; (b) the work is explicitly discussed in published scholarship on Nysanbayuly's literary heritage; or (c) a public corpus or bibliographic source verifies the work's circulation or attribution. Texts mentioned only by title without enough information for motif-level interpretation were retained as contextual evidence but were not treated as primary coded units. The lost or currently undiscovered Qissa-i Fridun, for example, is relevant to the history of the corpus but cannot support thematic claims about its content.

Three source layers were distinguished. Layer 1 comprised literary texts or passages attributed to Nysanbayuly. Layer 2 comprised archival and biographical transmission accounts describing his education, teachers, students, manuscripts, public performances, and the circulation of his works. Layer 3 comprised modern historical and literary scholarship used to contextualize the first two layers. These source layers were not treated as interchangeable. Oral testimony and later biographical reconstruction can illuminate transmission history, but they were not used as equivalent proof of a literary motif unless a corresponding text or published description was available. This distinction follows a general source-critical principle in oral-history research: transmitted accounts are historically valuable but must be evaluated according to provenance, transmission, and function (Vansina, 1985).

Table 1.

Bounded analytical corpus and evidentiary basis

Textual unit	Evidence basis	Analytical use
Amir Temir the Visionary	Quoted/plot-described in study record	Historical conflict, imperial rule, political memory
Zhetim Kubyl / Kubyl	Biographical self-reference and later comparison	Authorship, chronology, moral narrative
Kymyn	Plot comparison and interpretive discussion	Moral order, conflict, late poetic development
Polat-Zhanat	Explicitly discussed as a critical religious-social text	Religious authority, ethical critique
Lament for Smail (1919 context)	Substantial excerpt and genre description	Death, social memory, Eastern lament motifs
Kuyirshyk; Hanym Syry; Nazygul; Ury men Ayar	Named early works linked to apprenticeship	Genre formation, mentorship, narrative learning
Qissa of Hazret Ospan	Public folklore-corpus record attributed to Nysanbayuly	Islamic narrative transmission and didactic qissa

Published scholarship provides additional verification for the scale and character of the surviving heritage. Tadzhiyev and Kortabayeva (2020) document Nysanbayuly's literary heritage in Kazynaly Ontustik and explicitly identify religious qissa-dastans and Eastern plots as major features. Nasirdinov et al. (2024) further discuss Nysanbayuly as a regional literary-school figure and emphasize mentorship, student formation, and the educational role of literary transmission. A public folklore record also attributes a 1914 qissa concerning Hazret Ospan to Nysanbayuly, providing an independently accessible example of his association with Islamic narrative circulation (Nysanbayuly, 1914).

Analytical Procedure

Analysis proceeded in six stages. First, all eligible textual episodes were read for literal content, genre, named sources, and historical references. Second, each passage was tagged by source layer so that literary evidence, archival-biographical testimony, and modern scholarly interpretation remained distinguishable. Third, initial codes were assigned at passage level. Fourth, related codes were clustered into broader thematic domains. Fifth, each theme was compared across texts and against relevant historical-literary scholarship. Sixth, an interpretive-boundary review was conducted: every statement about memory, identity, morality, or cultural meaning was checked to ensure that it described a textual representation or transmission practice rather than an unmeasured psychological state.

Table 2.

Coding framework and interpretive boundaries

Code family	Indicators	Boundary of inference
Eastern intertextuality	Named classical authors, inherited plots, Islamic/Persianate/Turkic references	Supports literary transmission claims; not proof of personal psychological influence
Religious-moral discourse	Akhlaq, Sharia vocabulary, didactic exempla, critique of religious authority	Supports ethical representation; not a measure of religiosity
Historical memory	Colonial conflict, taxation, political disruption, remembered events	Supports mnemonic framing; not a substitute for archival history
Transmission network	Teachers, students, performers, manuscripts, travel, public recitation	Supports literary-school and circulation claims
Identity/belonging representation	Community boundaries, moral collective, continuity, inherited tradition	Supports textual identity representation; not collective personality

Credibility, Reflexivity, and Source Criticism

The study does not report a numerical intercoder-reliability coefficient because the research record does not document duplicate independent coding of the full literary corpus. Rather than inventing such a procedure retrospectively, interpretive credibility is strengthened through a transparent codebook, explicit corpus boundaries, passage-to-theme traceability, and source-layer separation. This approach is consistent with contemporary reflexive thematic practice, in which methodological transparency and theoretically coherent interpretation are more important than presenting agreement statistics that were not generated within the design (Byrne, 2022).

Reflexivity is especially important because several authors work within institutions connected to southern Kazakh literary heritage. Scholarly proximity can improve access to local materials but may also encourage celebratory or national-romantic language. Therefore, evaluative descriptions such as "outstanding," "great," "brilliant," or "profound" were not treated as analytical findings. Historical claims were separated from literary representation, and oral or manuscript-based biographical accounts were identified as transmitted evidence rather than automatically accepted as established fact. Alternative explanations were considered when a motif could reflect genre convention, Islamic literary commonplaces, or later editorial framing rather than a distinctive cultural-psychological mechanism.

Historical and Literary Context

Nysanbayuly's creative formation took place in a period when southern Kazakh literary life combined oral performance, manuscript literacy, Islamic education, and extensive movement across Central Asian cultural routes. The surviving biographical record depicts a poet who studied in local religious schools, encountered Arabic-script educational texts, and later engaged with Eastern literary sources attributed to figures such as Ferdowsi, Nizami, Navoi, Fuzuli, Ibn Sina, and Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. Whether every detail of these later accounts can be independently verified is less important for the present analysis than the consistent representation of literary learning as multilingual, book-centered, and networked. This pattern is compatible with scholarship that situates Nysanbayuly within a qissa-dastan tradition shaped by Eastern plots and manuscript culture (Tadzhiyev & Kortabayeva, 2020).

The same record places Nysanbayuly within a regional mentoring network. Mugaltay, Italmas, Zhylkybay, Mailykozha, Shadi, and other poets are described as sources of stories, poetic techniques, genre models, or critical feedback. Such accounts should not be read merely as a heroic genealogy of influence. They point to an important feature of oral-manuscript literary production: texts were learned, recited, corrected, adapted, and circulated through interpersonal relationships. Work on Kazakh oral genres similarly emphasizes the performative and dialogic nature of literary transmission (McGuire, 2021; Salimjan, 2017). Nysanbayuly's literary "school" is therefore best understood as a network of pedagogy and circulation rather than as a fixed institution in the modern academic sense.

Historical context is equally important but requires restraint. Nineteenth-century Central Asia experienced major imperial transformations, warfare, changing systems of governance, and contestation over mobility, taxation, religious authority, and local rule. Modern scholarship on Russian conquest demonstrates that these developments were regionally uneven and politically complex (Morrison,

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2020). Literary representations of Kokand and Russian power in Nysanbayuly's milieu should therefore be read alongside, not instead of, historical research. The poems can reveal how political pressure was narrated and morally framed, while historiography is needed to determine the factual sequence, scale, and institutional structure of the events themselves.

The later preservation history adds another layer. Nysanbayuly's works are described as circulating in manuscript form, being copied by students and collectors, and eventually entering scholarly collections and multi-volume publication projects. The Kazynaly Ontustik initiative is especially significant because it transformed dispersed and locally held materials into a more accessible printed corpus (Tadzhiyev & Myrzakhmetuly, 2019). Recent corpus-oriented scholarship on Kazakh folklore similarly underscores how cataloguing and digitization alter the conditions under which oral and manuscript traditions can be compared and studied (Aitova & Bakytkyzy, 2025).

Expanded Biographical and Transmission Context

Education, Poverty, and the Formation of a Book-Oriented Poet

The biographical tradition surrounding Nysanbayuly repeatedly links literary formation with social hardship. He is represented as the son of a poor household, educated first under difficult local conditions and later in a more structured madrasa environment. Such accounts should not be read as a psychological case history: the evidence is retrospective, transmitted through manuscript collectors, descendants, and later scholars. Yet the recurrence of these details is analytically useful because it situates literacy as an acquired and socially consequential resource. Learning to read Arabic-script materials, gaining access to religious books, and later accumulating texts are presented as turning points that changed the range of narratives available to the poet. This pattern is consistent with the published characterization of Nysanbayuly's qissa-dastan heritage as closely connected with manuscript culture and Eastern literary plots (Tadzhiyev & Kortabayeva, 2020).

The surviving narrative of his early schooling is unusually harsh: later accounts describe physical punishment, avoidance of lessons, and a gradual shift from reluctant pupil to committed reader. The historical accuracy of each anecdote cannot be established from the literary corpus alone, but the structure of the story is revealing. Education is not represented as an effortless inheritance. It is narrated as a contested process that eventually gives the poet access to religious learning, book culture, and a wider literary world. For the purposes of the present study, this biographical layer helps explain why later descriptions repeatedly emphasize books, teachers, copying, and self-education rather than an abstract or innate "Eastern orientation." The relevant cultural mechanism is institutional and material exposure to texts.

After further study in the madrasa associated with Abdikerim Akhun, the record attributes to Nysanbayuly familiarity with educational and religious works and later with major figures of Persianate and Turkic literary culture. The list of names transmitted in the sources—Ferdowsi, Nizami, Navoi, Fuzuli, Ibn Sina, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, and story cycles such as One Thousand and One Nights—should not be treated as proof that every cited work can be traced textually in each dastan. Rather, it marks the cultural horizon within which later readers and collectors understood his learning. The methodological implication is that intertextual claims require passage-level comparison. General biographical claims about reading can establish plausibility, but they cannot replace textual evidence of adaptation.

The same distinction applies to poverty. Later narratives describe worn clothing, household responsibility after his father's death, delayed marriage, and temporary work as a healer or fortune-teller. These details can illuminate the social world attributed to the poet, but they do not justify retrospective diagnoses or personality claims. They are better used to understand the social settings in which performance, religious literacy, gift exchange, and mobility intersected. Cultural-psychological interpretation becomes defensible only at the representational level—for example, when a text frames dignity, knowledge, poverty, or moral

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authority in a particular way—not when biography is converted into unmeasured inner states.

Mailykozha, Shadi, and the Ethics of Literary Apprenticeship

The accounts of Nysanbayuly's encounters with Mailykozha and Shadi are particularly important because they present literary competence as something evaluated by peers and mentors. In the transmitted story of the meeting with Mailykozha, the younger poet's work is praised for meaningful religious content but criticized for lacking structural maturity. The advice attributed to Mailykozha—to ground composition in books, strengthen formal construction, and connect poetic practice with learned sources—functions as a miniature theory of authorship. Whether every phrase was recorded verbatim is less important than the social logic of the narrative: authority in the literary field is conferred through recognition by established poets, and improvement occurs through criticism, exemplars, and continued practice.

The reported relationship with Shadi Zhangiruly develops this logic further. Shadi is represented as a mediator of Eastern languages, texts, and poetic conventions. The anecdotes involving riddles, poetic exchange, and criticism portray literary learning as dialogic rather than solitary. Such scenes should not be romanticized as transparent historical transcripts, but they align with the broader evidence that Kazakh oral and semi-written genres developed through performance, contest, listening, and revoicing (McGuire, 2021). The emphasis on mentors also supports the idea of a regional literary school, a concept explored in recent scholarship comparing Nysanbayuly's pedagogical network with other Kazakh poetic schools (Nasirdinov et al., 2024).

From an analytical perspective, the apprenticeship narratives explain how "Eastern motifs" could become locally normalized. A motif encountered in a book, religious lesson, oral performance, or mentor's dastan does not remain foreign merely because its earlier circulation extended beyond the Kazakh steppe. Repetition, translation, reformulation, and performance can naturalize inherited material within a new literary ecology. This is one reason the language of simple borrowing is inadequate. Intercultural transmission is better understood as a chain of selection and transformation, a point also illustrated by comparative research on qissa traditions across Islamic literary contexts (Kerimbek et al., 2026).

Travel, Performance, Revision, and the Social Life of Dastans

One of the richest parts of the biographical record concerns the seasonal gathering of poets, students, zhyraus, and listeners around Nysanbayuly. Later accounts describe recitation sessions in which students performed sections of dastans, listeners commented on weaknesses, and the poet revised passages before taking a smaller group of performers on longer journeys. Even if the scale and regularity of these gatherings require further archival verification, the model of literary production they represent is significant: composition is shown as iterative, socially tested, and inseparable from performance. A text in this environment is not simply written once and then transmitted unchanged. It can be corrected, abbreviated, expanded, or revoiced in response to performers and audiences.

This helps explain the relationship described between Kubyl and Kymyn. The two works are presented as related yet distinct, with Kymyn characterized as more concise and sharper in central idea. Rather than assuming that one is a defective copy of the other, the transmission model allows for purposeful rewriting and variant formation. Oral-history and oral-tradition methodology has long cautioned researchers against treating variation as noise when it may be constitutive of the tradition itself (Vansina, 1985). For Nysanbayuly studies, systematic comparison of manuscript and printed variants could reveal whether differences arise from authorial revision, performer memory, scribal intervention, or later editorial normalization.

The reported travel routes—to Tashkent, areas near the Kyzylkum, Turkestan, Karatau, and other settlements—also matter because they place literary circulation inside a geography of exchange. These routes connected markets, religious centers, households, performers, and manuscript collectors. They therefore provide a concrete historical basis for intercultural literary contact without relying on the vague metaphor of the "Great Silk Road" as a timeless explanatory

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device. The important evidence is not that a famous transcontinental route once existed, but that specific people, books, languages, and performances moved through identifiable regional networks.

The performance network also clarifies the role of students. Sources attribute a large number of pupils and performer-followers to Nysanbayuly. The exact number should be treated cautiously unless supported by a stable prosopographic list, but the repeated emphasis on students is consistent across the biographical tradition. Their importance is methodological as well as historical: if works survived through memorization, copying, and performance, then authorship is distributed across a chain of preservation. Future research should therefore document not only "the poet's works" but also who copied them, who performed them, which versions they knew, where those versions were collected, and how editorial publication affected their form.

Late Works, Religious Critique, and Historical Transition

The later materials attributed to Nysanbayuly complicate any attempt to reduce his religious writing to simple piety. Works such as Polat-Zhanat and the didactic passages associated with Kymyn are described as criticizing religious hypocrisy while maintaining a strong vocabulary of faith, knowledge, moral purity, and proper conduct. This combination suggests an internal ethical critique: the legitimacy of religious authority is judged against the moral standards that the tradition itself professes. The literary position is therefore not adequately summarized as either anti-religious or clerically orthodox. It is a rhetorical distinction between ideal and practice.

The same late period intersects with political transition. Accounts connect the poet's final decades with revolution, socialism, new political language, and the loss or disappearance of some texts. Such claims are difficult to reconstruct because several works mentioned in the transmission record are missing. The appropriate conclusion is therefore limited: the archive indicates that the literary network was exposed to rapidly changing political vocabularies and that later collectors remembered Nysanbayuly as responding to them. It would be methodologically unsafe to reconstruct the content of lost poems from titles alone. Modern historical research on Central Asian imperial and revolutionary transformation provides the broader context in which such literary change became possible (Morrison, 2020).

The preservation history after the poet's death is itself part of the result. Manuscripts are described as dispersed among students, relatives, collectors, research centers, and later publication projects. Some were lost, some remained in private hands, and others entered institutional collections. This uneven survival means that the present corpus is historically filtered. What is available today reflects not only what Nysanbayuly wrote but also what performers memorized, collectors valued, families retained, institutions acquired, and editors selected for publication. Cultural memory is therefore visible not only inside the narratives but also in the material history of preservation and forgetting (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011).

Findings and Results

Eastern Intertextuality as a Mode of Literary Localization

The first major pattern is the repeated positioning of Nysanbayuly's work within a wider Eastern literary environment. The surviving accounts associate his reading and listening with classical Persianate and Turkic authors, Islamic narrative materials, and widely circulating story cycles. In the analyzed corpus, "Eastern" therefore does not function as a single geographic category. It refers to a layered repertoire that includes Islamic ethical discourse, Persianate narrative prestige, Turkic poetic transmission, Chagatai literacy, and orally mediated qissa traditions. The analytical significance lies in the way these resources are localized into Kazakh-language narrative and performance.

This localization is visible in the relationship between inherited plot and local moral framing. The qissa form enables a poet to retell recognizable stories while reorienting emphasis toward the expectations of a new audience. Comparative scholarship on qissa transmission demonstrates that the same narrative may change as it moves across linguistic, religious, and regional settings (Kerimbek

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et al., 2026). Nysanbayuly's corpus can be situated within this broader mechanism. The texts are not adequately described as "borrowed Eastern motifs"; they are better understood as acts of adaptation in which an inherited repertoire is reorganized through local language, performance, didactic purpose, and historical reference.

The importance of this process is reinforced by the poet's reported book-collecting and educational trajectory. Biographical accounts repeatedly describe books in Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Chagatai, and Tatar circulation, as well as oral access to epics and qissas through other performers. Such details belong to the transmission layer rather than the literary-text layer, but they help explain why intertextuality appears as a persistent feature. They also provide a more concrete explanation than generalized claims about a "psychological attraction to the East": the relevant mechanism is exposure through educational and literary networks.

Religious-Moral Motifs and Ethical Pedagogy

A second pattern concerns religious and moral vocabulary. The available descriptions of Nysanbayuly's religious termes and qissas foreground akhlaq, faith, learning, proper conduct, responsibility, and criticism of hypocrisy. In works such as Polat-Zhanat and in late didactic discussions associated with Kymyn, religion is not represented only as ritual observance. It is connected to moral purity, knowledge, behavior, and the legitimacy of authority. This combination is important because it complicates any simple classification of the poet as either conventionally religious or anti-clerical. His literary position, as represented in the surviving material, differentiates ethical-religious ideals from the conduct of particular religious figures.

The publicly accessible qissa attributed to Nysanbayuly concerning Hazret Ospan provides independent evidence of his association with Islamic narrative material (Nysanbayuly, 1914). Within the present framework, such narratives are treated as cultural texts that organize exemplary conduct and shared moral vocabulary. They do not allow the researcher to estimate the private religiosity of the author or audience. The distinction matters because literary didacticism can circulate as a genre convention even when individual reception varies.

The moral function of the corpus also intersects with education. Accounts of Nysanbayuly's students, recitation practices, correction of texts, and long journeys with zhyrau-performers suggest that instruction occurred through performance and repetition as much as through private reading. Recent research on Turkic-Kazakh poetic heritage likewise emphasizes the role of poetic culture in carrying spiritual and moral identity across periods of political disruption (Manapbayev et al., 2026). The present data support a narrower conclusion: Nysanbayuly's literary network provided a medium through which ethical and religious themes could be repeatedly performed and reformulated.

Historical Memory, Conflict, and the Moral Framing of Power

The third pattern concerns historical memory. Amir Temir the Visionary and related historical passages are used to narrate domination, taxation, warfare, political instability, and the vulnerability of ordinary people. These passages are important not because they provide a complete historical record, but because they show how political events were converted into morally structured narrative. Oppression is personified through rulers, tax collectors, military conflict, or unjust demands; communal suffering is transformed into a memorable story with ethical polarity.

This distinction between historical event and literary memory is central. Literature may preserve names, places, and social tensions while altering chronology, causality, scale, or emphasis. Cultural-memory theory is useful precisely because it directs attention to selection and framing rather than assuming literal reproduction of the past (Erll, 2011). The literary text can thus be analyzed as a memory-making form: it organizes what is worth recalling and how that past should be morally understood. Historical verification, by contrast, depends on documentary comparison and modern historiography such as work on imperial expansion in Central Asia (Morrison, 2020).

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The same principle applies to stories of Kokand taxation, Russian conquest, and regional political pressure. In the original narrative tradition, such episodes are sometimes expressed through strongly evaluative language. The present analysis treats these formulations as evidence of perspective and moral framing, not as neutral factual description. This source-critical separation improves the historical value of the literary material: instead of asking whether the poem is an objective chronicle, the analysis asks which experiences and conflicts the text selects for remembrance and what ethical interpretation it attaches to them.

Mentorship, Performance, and the Formation of a Literary Network

The fourth pattern concerns the social organization of literary production. Nysanbayuly is repeatedly portrayed not as an isolated author but as a participant in chains of apprenticeship, peer exchange, performance, copying, and teaching. Early works such as Kuyirshyk, Hanym Syry, Nazygul, and Ury men Ayar are associated with a period of learning and imitation. Later accounts describe criticism from senior poets, the acquisition of books, the refinement of qissa composition, and the training of younger performers. These accounts support a literary-network interpretation more strongly than a purely individual-genius narrative.

The reported practice of gathering poets and students, having them recite sections of dastans, listening to criticism, revising gaps, and then travelling with performers is especially revealing. Even if particular biographical details require independent archival verification, the model of production itself is consistent with an oral-manuscript ecology in which authorship, performance, and transmission overlap. Work on literary schools associated with Nysanbayuly also emphasizes the pedagogical and regional dimensions of this network (Nasirdinov et al., 2024).

This network perspective helps explain the persistence of textual variation. Works such as Kubyl and Kymyn are described as related but not identical, suggesting revision, re-narration, or recontextualization rather than a single fixed text. Oral-tradition scholarship warns that variation should not automatically be treated as corruption; it may be a normal feature of transmission and performance (Vansina, 1985). For future textual scholarship, variant comparison across manuscripts and printed volumes may therefore be more informative than attempting to identify one definitive version without stemmatic evidence.

Cultural Memory and Literary Identity: What the Texts Can and Cannot Show

The fifth theme concerns continuity and belonging. Nysanbayuly's works repeatedly place moral conduct, religious learning, historical conflict, poetic authority, and community transmission within a shared narrative world. At the level of representation, this can reasonably be described as cultural memory: past events, exemplary figures, inherited narratives, and moral vocabularies are made present through repeated textual and performative forms. Scholarship on Kazakh folklore similarly links oral narrative, symbolic patterns, and identity formation while emphasizing historical-cultural interpretation rather than psychometric inference (Abdrakhmanova et al., 2025).

What the corpus cannot establish is equally important. It cannot show that a homogeneous "Kazakh collective consciousness" possessed a measurable set of psychological traits. It cannot demonstrate causal effects of the poems on identity, emotion regulation, or behavior. It cannot determine how different audiences received the same narrative. These questions would require other designs—historical reception research, audience studies, ethnography, surveys, experiments, or mixed methods. The literary corpus instead supports claims about available cultural meanings and the narrative forms through which those meanings were represented and transmitted.

This boundary does not make psychological theory irrelevant. Cultural psychology can help specify why narrative, recognition, belonging, and continuity are theoretically important, while narrative-identity research clarifies how stories can organize meaning (Hammack, 2008; McAdams & McLean, 2013). The crucial methodological point is that theory supplies interpretive questions; the

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literary texts supply evidence about representations; neither should be mistaken for direct measurement of historical minds.

Table 3.

Main findings and evidentiary limits

Theme	Textual/transmission evidence	Legitimate inference
Eastern transmission	Named literary sources, qissa form, multilingual book/performer networks	Supports adaptation/localization, not passive "borrowing" or psychological influence
Moral-religious discourse	Akhlaq, learning, exemplary conduct, critique of hypocrisy	Supports ethical representation, not population religiosity
Historical memory	Narratives of taxation, conflict, imperial pressure, remembered suffering	Supports mnemonic framing, not independent historical verification
Literary network	Mentors, students, recitation, revision, manuscripts, travel	Supports social transmission and literary-school interpretation
Identity representation	Belonging, continuity, inherited tradition, communal moral boundaries	Supports literary-cultural identity themes, not collective psychological traits

Focused Textual Readings

Amir Temir the Visionary: Historical Narrative and Moralized Political Memory

Amir Temir the Visionary is especially useful for distinguishing historical reference from literary memory. The passages attributed to this work compress political domination, taxation, rulers, and regional conflict into a morally legible narrative. Names of places and political actors anchor the poem in remembered history, but the narrative logic is ethical rather than documentary: domination is associated with exploitation, vulnerable communities are placed at the center of attention, and political events are interpreted through a language of justice and injustice. The text therefore preserves a historically meaningful perspective without functioning as a neutral chronicle. This is precisely the kind of distinction required by cultural-memory analysis, which studies how the past is selected and framed rather than assuming that literary representation reproduces historical events without transformation (Erll, 2011).

The historical context of Russian expansion and the changing political geography of Central Asia can be independently reconstructed through modern historical research (Morrison, 2020). The poem contributes something different: it shows which elements of political experience became morally narratable within a poetic tradition. This makes the text valuable for studying historical consciousness at the level of representation while preventing a methodological slide into unsupported claims about what all Kazakhs collectively believed or psychologically experienced.

Kubyl and Kymyn: Revision, Variant Formation, and Ethical Concentration

The relationship between Kubyl and Kymyn provides one of the clearest examples of why the corpus should be studied as a transmission history rather than as a set of isolated titles. The surviving description treats Kymyn as related to Kubyl but more concise and sharper in its central idea. Such a relationship may reflect authorial revision, performance adaptation, scribal abbreviation, or later editorial intervention. Without a systematic comparison of extant manuscripts, the exact mechanism cannot be determined. What can be concluded is that textual identity in this tradition was not necessarily fixed. A dastan could exist in related versions whose differences were meaningful rather than accidental.

This observation has consequences for interpretation. If a later version intensifies ethical contrast, shortens narrative detours, or foregrounds particular religious and social concerns, then motif analysis must be version-sensitive. Future critical editions should therefore document variant readings and provenance rather than silently merging versions. Oral-tradition methodology supports this caution because transmission frequently produces structured variation rather than simple degradation (Vansina, 1985). The relationship between Kubyl and Kymyn also supports the broader image of Nysanbayuly as a poet who revised and

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re-performed narrative materials within a living literary network.

Polat-Zhanat: Religious Vocabulary as Internal Ethical Critique

Polat-Zhanat is important because the manuscript tradition associates it with criticism of religious figures while the broader corpus remains deeply saturated with Islamic moral vocabulary. This apparent tension is analytically productive. It suggests that the target of criticism is not necessarily religion itself but the discrepancy between professed authority and ethical conduct. Terms connected to Sharia, akhlaq, knowledge, sincerity, and responsibility establish the normative vocabulary by which religious actors can themselves be judged. In other words, the text uses an inherited ethical language to scrutinize those who claim to embody it.

Such passages should not be converted into a modern ideological label. They do not establish that Nysanbayuly was "secular," "anti-clerical" in a modern political sense, or psychologically conflicted about religion. The more defensible conclusion is textual: the corpus contains an internal moral differentiation between religious ideals and the conduct of particular authorities. This interpretation also helps explain why didactic qissas and social criticism can coexist within the same literary profile. A comparable emphasis on moral and spiritual identity as something negotiated through poetic heritage appears in recent work on Turkic-Kazakh cultural memory (Manapbayev et al., 2026).

The Lament for Smail: Grief, Social Recognition, and Communal Memory

The lament written in connection with Smail's death demonstrates another route through which Eastern and local motifs interact. Lament is both a genre of grief and a public social act. The poetic speaker does not merely express private sorrow; the deceased is positioned within kinship, reputation, moral status, and communal recognition. Formulaic images and inherited religious-moral language allow an individual death to be narrated in a form that can be shared by a wider audience. The significance of the text therefore lies in the conversion of loss into socially recognizable language.

At the same time, the lament cannot tell us how every listener emotionally responded. It can show which signs of honor, belonging, grief, and continuity were available within the genre. This is a useful example of the boundary between literary and psychological evidence. Narrative-identity theory can help explain why stories of loss and continuity are meaningful categories (McAdams & McLean, 2013), but the poem itself remains evidence of represented meaning, not a measurement of bereavement, self-concept, or collective emotion. The same caution should govern any attempt to describe "collective psychological meanings" in historical literature.

Discussion and Conclusion

The revised analysis changes the emphasis from psychocultural inference to historically grounded literary interpretation. The strongest evidence concerns textual transmission, moral discourse, historical memory, and the formation of a regional literary network. These findings are consistent with direct scholarship on Nysanbayuly's place in Kazynaly Ontustik, which identifies Eastern plots, religious qissa-dastans, and manuscript heritage as central features of his surviving work (Tadzhiyev & Kortabayeva, 2020). They also accord with broader research on Kazakh oral and epic traditions, where literary meaning is produced through the interaction of text, performance, genre, and social context (McGuire, 2021; Narymbet & Baibosynova, 2023).

The concept of cultural memory helps explain why these texts matter beyond biography. A literary work can become a mnemonic medium when it selects episodes, symbols, moral categories, and historical conflicts for preservation and recirculation (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011). Nysanbayuly's qissa-dastan heritage appears to perform this function through several channels: the localization of inherited Eastern narratives, the moral framing of historical experience, the repeated circulation of religious-didactic themes, and the training of performers who carried texts into new settings. In this sense, cultural memory is observable as

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a textual and institutional process rather than inferred as a hidden mental substance.

The analysis also clarifies the relationship between Eastern motifs and local cultural identity. Eastern literary sources do not erase Kazakh specificity; their significance lies in how they are revoiced through Kazakh poetic forms, historical concerns, and performance networks. This is compatible with recent work on Turkic-Kazakh poetic culture, which describes spiritual identity as something reconstructed through poetic heritage and historical transmission (Manapbayev et al., 2026). It is also consistent with comparative qissa scholarship showing that Islamic narratives change as they move across literary traditions (Kerimbek et al., 2026). The Nysanbayuly corpus therefore illustrates cultural translation rather than a simple opposition between "Kazakh" and "Eastern" elements.

At the same time, the study avoids a frequent methodological problem in literary-psychological writing: treating a metaphor, plot, or moral statement as if it directly reveals population-level psychology. Cultural-psychological theories of narrative and identity remain useful because they explain why discourse, master narratives, and continuity matter (Hammack, 2008). But the appropriate inference here is that the texts offer culturally available representations of moral community and belonging. Whether these representations were internalized, resisted, or differently interpreted by historical audiences remains an open empirical question.

The source-critical distinction also changes the treatment of biography. The original record contains rich stories about Nysanbayuly's poverty, early education, teachers, books, marriage, travels, exchanges with poets, and students. These narratives are valuable for reconstructing a literary milieu, yet they vary in provenance and were often transmitted through collectors or later manuscripts. Rather than discarding them, the present study uses them according to evidentiary level. A biographical anecdote can support a hypothesis about a transmission network or prompt comparison with a literary text; it cannot by itself establish the exact chronology or psychological motive of the poet. This principle follows classic guidance on oral tradition as historical evidence (Vansina, 1985).

A further contribution is methodological. By defining the corpus, specifying source layers, and providing a code-to-evidence matrix, the article becomes more reproducible without pretending that interpretive research can be made identical to experimental measurement. Another researcher can now identify which texts were included, apply the same code families, dispute a passage-to-theme assignment, or expand the corpus with additional manuscripts. This is preferable to a broad label such as "qualitative textual, comparative, historical-cultural, and interpretative methods" without operational detail. Transparent thematic procedures are particularly useful when heterogeneous documentary materials must be organized without collapsing them into a single type of evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

Finally, the findings suggest a concrete agenda for future research. First, the published Kazynaly Ontustik volumes should be converted into a stable digital text corpus with bibliographic identifiers and variant mapping. Second, manuscript versions should be compared with printed editions to determine where editorial normalization altered vocabulary, narrative order, or religious references. Third, the poet's transmission network could be reconstructed through prosopographic work on teachers, students, collectors, and performers. Fourth, reception studies could investigate how contemporary readers interpret moral and identity themes in the texts. Such projects would strengthen the link between philology, folklore studies, memory studies, and cultural psychology without confusing their evidentiary standards.

Limitations

Several limitations remain. The corpus is bounded by texts and passages that could be identified from the available manuscript record and publicly verifiable sources; it is not a complete critical edition of Nysanbayuly's surviving works. Some archival holdings mentioned in local research are not digitally accessible, which prevents independent verification of every biographical or bibliographic detail. The study does

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not include direct comparison of all manuscript variants, and it does not conduct linguistic corpus analysis across the full published multi-volume collection. The thematic procedure is interpretive and does not include a retrospectively invented intercoder-reliability statistic. Most importantly, no participants, psychological measures, behavioral data, or reception data are included. Accordingly, the study cannot establish psychological mechanisms or population-level features of cultural consciousness. Its contribution is literary-cultural: it identifies how selected texts represent and transmit memory, morality, historical experience, and belonging.

Conclusion

Nuraly Nysanbayuly's literary heritage is best understood as part of a dynamic oral-manuscript environment in which Eastern narrative repertoires, Islamic moral discourse, local history, and Kazakh performance traditions interacted. The selected corpus shows that Eastern motifs were not merely ornamental references. They provided narrative and ethical resources that could be adapted to local concerns: the legitimacy of authority, moral responsibility, historical suffering, education, religious conduct, and the continuity of literary tradition.

The study also demonstrates why methodological boundaries matter. Literary texts can be analyzed as media of cultural memory and as representations of identity, but they are not substitutes for psychological data. The strongest conclusion is therefore not that the works reveal a measurable "collective consciousness," but that they participate in constructing and circulating culturally meaningful accounts of the past, moral order, and communal continuity. By separating primary text, transmission history, and later interpretation, the analysis offers a clearer basis for future research on Nysanbayuly and on the broader Kazakh qissa-dastan tradition.

Future scholarship should extend the corpus, compare variants, document manuscript provenance, and investigate reception among historical or contemporary audiences. Such work would allow the literary heritage to be connected more rigorously with questions of cultural memory and identity while preserving the distinction between textual meaning and empirical psychology.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the institutions, scholars, manuscript custodians, and heritage collectors whose work has contributed to the preservation and scholarly accessibility of southern Kazakh literary materials.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

No external funding was reported for this study.

Data and Materials Availability

The analysis is based on published literary materials, publicly accessible scholarly sources, and archival descriptions cited in the article. Materials held in non-digitized local collections remain subject to the access conditions of the relevant repositories.

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