

СЕМИОТИКА ГОРОДА | SEMIOTICS OF THE CITY

[https://doi.org/10.34680/urbis-2025-5\(1\)-8-23](https://doi.org/10.34680/urbis-2025-5(1)-8-23)**The World Tree as a symbol of the new capital:
A semiotic analysis of the architectural image****Dinara Saikeneva** 

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of traditional symbols in the architecture of Kazakhstan's new capital, viewed through the prism of a semiotic approach. The study focuses on the Baiterek monument, which embodies the image of the World Tree, a key element in the mythological and cultural heritage of the Kazakh nomadic civilization. The importance of studying this symbol lies in its ability to convey the worldview of nomadic culture in a modern urban environment. The relocation of the capital provided a unique opportunity to create an architectural and cultural image that combines traditions with contemporary ideas. Baiterek became the central element of this concept, embodying cultural meanings and political ideas related to forming a new national identity. This monument, symbolizing the axis of the world and the unity of the earthly and the heavenly, serves both a decorative and a semantic function, becoming an iconic element of the urban environment. The article examines how traditional symbols are reinterpreted and incorporated into architectural forms and their significance in creating a holistic image of the capital. The symbolic reinterpretation of ancient motifs within contemporary design illustrates the dynamic interaction between memory and innovation, shaping a narrative that resonates with historical consciousness and future aspirations. The study emphasizes the importance of a semiotic approach to understanding architectural space as a communication system in which visual elements shape the collective perception of the city. In this context, Baiterek functions not only as a landmark but also as a robust cultural code that helps to strengthen national identity and communicate traditional values through architecture.

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Introduction

Modern cities are developing rapidly and becoming economic, social, and political centers. However, amid growing urbanization and globalization, modern megacities often lose their cultural identity and connection with tradition. In sustainable urban development programs, much attention is given to ecological and economic aspects, but the cultural dimension is equally significant. Culture plays a crucial role in shaping a city's identity, attractiveness to residents and tourists, and reinforcing the connection between past and present. A key element of this cultural presence is the city's architectural image, which includes iconic monuments and symbolic structures (Kourtiti & Nijkamp, 2022, p. 200). These objects become landmarks and carriers of historical memory, transmitting cultural codes across generations.

In this context, traditional symbols, folklore, and cultural heritage breathe life into the urban environment and help build a deep sense of identity and generational continuity. Culture is the foundation of every society: it shapes values, customs, and social interactions. As a space where many lives intersect, the city inevitably becomes a stage for expressing this culture. However, in many modern cities, cultural heritage is giving way to standardized solutions and anonymous architecture lacking local character. As a result, cities begin to resemble each other, losing their unique features and severing ties with their regional history and culture.

Symbolism can take many forms: architectural elements, monuments, ornaments, images on facades, rituals, and festivals. For instance, in the traditional architecture of Eastern societies, one finds calligraphic designs, geometric motifs, and representations of mythological beings and legendary heroes. These are not only expressions of identity but also tools of aesthetic education and patriotic inspiration.

What does the city of a people with nomadic heritage look like? Kazakh culture is usually associated with the steppe, the yurt, horses and camels, and vast open spaces. Against the backdrop of rapid urbanization and the rise of modern megacities, an important question emerges: How can the nomadic spirit be expressed in an urban setting? What should a city look like that embodies the values of a people with no settled urban tradition yet a rich cultural legacy rooted in harmony with nature, mobility, and collectivism? Kazakhstan has a complex history of urbanization. Traditionally nomadic or semi-nomadic, Kazakhs historically used cities mainly as centers of trade or administration. The twentieth century, however, brought dramatic shifts. Soviet industrialization and urban policy resulted in mass settlement, functional city planning, and the erosion of the traditional lifestyle. Following independence, Kazakhstan faced the challenge of fostering economic growth while shaping a new national and cultural image for its cities. How to reinterpret the nomadic heritage within the realities of contemporary urban space became a vital task.

Various projects worldwide successfully integrate cultural heritage into modern urban environments. In Tehran, for example, the Persian Garden project adapts traditional landscape principles to contemporary city planning, creating public spaces that are both functional and symbolically rich. Traditionally placed at the heart of Persian buildings, these gardens are reimagined in a modern context (Ramyar, 2020, p. 238).

In Tokyo and Kyoto, preserving temples and gardens, alongside Japan's architectural metabolism movement, sustains intergenerational continuity and reinforces national identity. In cities, it is not enough to create visually pleasing or comfortable areas – it is essential to create spaces within many modern cities with deep historical and emotional

resonance, places that nurture collective memory, foster identification with local heritage, and affirm one's belonging in a shared urban narrative (Fedotova, 2024).

In Kazakhstan, the relocation of the capital and the construction of a new administrative center gave rise to a significant symbolic project – the Baiterek Monument (Ill. 1).



Ill. 1. Baiterek Monument.
Source: photo by Dinara Saikeneva

This structure embodies the mythic World Tree and fuses traditional nomadic symbolism with contemporary architectural language. The image of the World Tree is central to nomadic cultures' mythological, spiritual, and artistic systems. It encodes cosmological concepts and links the physical, metaphysical, and spiritual realms. Depicted in ritual acts, folk art, oral traditions, and crafts, it reflects the core ideal of harmony between humans, nature, and higher powers.

This symbolism continues in modern representations of cultural identity, including national emblems and popular culture. Akmaral Yussupova highlights floral symbolism in landscape architecture as a metaphor for prosperity and lineage. She references myths where the tree becomes the tribal ancestor and symbol of clan unity: "According to ethnic beliefs, the tree symbol expresses wishes for generational growth and success. For instance, the Baiterek tree – literally 'mighty poplar' – was the tribal sign of the Kangly (Kankali) people, key contributors to the ethnogenesis of Turks, Kazakhs, and Uzbeks" (Yussupova et al., 2017, p. 197).

Marianna Satanar studies the tree as a cultural code whose ancient roots formed the basis of traditional cosmology (Satanar, 2020). Tatyana Sharaeva explores how

the World Tree is transformed into the *serge*, the nomadic hitching post, and its place in ritual. The yurt was a miniature cosmos for nomads; each household object held symbolic meaning. Among the Kalmyks, special poles marked the boundaries of future homes, serving both practical and sacred functions. The design, placement, and ritual use of these posts reveal parallels with the symbolic function of the *serge* in Turkic-Mongolian traditions (Sharaeva, 2020).

Not only symbolic images but also real trees and groves shape urban cultural perceptions. Urban green zones often preserve their sacred aura, embodying ancestral beliefs about continuity, nature, and protection. Thembelihle Ngulani and Charlie Shackleton stress the importance of conserving sacred groves amidst urbanization to maintain ritual and cultural practices (Ngulani & Shackleton, 2019).

From a mythopoetic perspective, the tree represents cosmic order, life, and continuity. Across Eastern and global traditions, this archetype appears in ornaments, mosaics, frescoes, and architecture, embedding cosmologies and collective memory in visual forms. Baiterek and the architectural landscape of Astana even became part of the “Astana Challenge” puzzle, as described by Frank Albo in *Astana: Architecture, Myth and Destiny* (Albo, 2017). Albo reveals how architectural forms serve as containers of myth and cultural memory. Through architecture, myths become spatial realities, preserving historical narratives and worldviews within the urban fabric.

This study explores how the Baiterek monument represents the World Tree and how its sacred status is adapted within a modern urban context.

While the semiotic approach to architecture has faced criticism, especially the idea of architecture as a formal sign language, it remains a valuable lens.

Key criticisms include:

- The relativism of symbols: Architectural signs may not translate across cultures.
- The impossibility of a universal language: local meanings often conflict with global ones.
- Excessive abstraction: Symbolic systems may oversimplify complex cultural dynamics.
- The risk of symbolic overemphasis at the cost of functionality.
- Evolving meanings: Architectural signs may lose significance over time.

Semiotic language in architecture often presupposes the stability of meanings, but architectural signs evolve. What was perceived as a symbol of modernity may become outdated and lose meaning. Signs and symbols embedded in architecture may cease to be relevant due to social and technological changes.

Giorgiy Figurniy discusses the methodological dubiousness of the semiotics of architecture (Figurniy, 2019, p. 64). Yuliya Yankovskaya analyzes the applications of semiotics in architecture, evaluating its achievements and identifying existing problems in this area; he believes that considering architecture as a sign system with certain formal properties was not particularly productive since it proved the mobility and variability of syntactic rules and their meanings and, consequently, the impossibility of modeling an architectural language from the point of view of a full-fledged sign communication system (Yankovskaya, 2004). However, a semantic approach to understanding architecture can be applied to such a concept as “composition.” The influence of transpersonal psychology has expanded approaches to composition theory, showing the importance of architectural space as a significant place for human existence. And especially its role in sacred architecture. Japanese architect Kenzo Tange also focuses on space as an opportunity for communication:

“The condition for structuring space is communication in the broadest sense. Even in cases where there is no movement as such, we can talk about visual communication. <...> Although until now, we have abstractly considered a place intended for household or work needs to be space, we cannot limit the concept of space to this static model only. Along the way, we encounter cases where we give space a form that has a symbolic meaning. <...> We are convinced of the need to reconsider our views and introduce the concept of space as a communication field” (Tange, 1976, pp. 132–133). Thus, using a semiotic approach in the study of architecture, it is possible to analyze the space and the possibilities of architectural objects to transmit and store information about a particular structure.

Relocation of the capital: in search of a new traditional identity

The architecture of the capital’s administrative center serves as a functional space and a powerful symbol of statehood and national identity. The relocation of Kazakhstan’s capital from Almaty to Akmola marked a turning point in the country’s urban and symbolic development. On October 20, 1997, the decree “On the declaration of the city of Akmola as the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan” was issued, and in 1998, Akmola was renamed Astana.

This relocation had several motivations, chief among them Almaty’s limitations, whose geographical and infrastructural capacity had been largely exhausted. Astana, by contrast, was located in the country’s geographic center and provided a relatively blank slate for architectural experimentation and the realization of symbolic urban forms.

In this context, an international competition was held to develop a master plan for the new capital that would integrate traditional cultural values with modern innovation. The winner, Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, proposed a concept rooted in the philosophies of “metabolism” and “symbiosis.” His vision emphasized continuity between the traditional and the modern, between technological innovation and natural harmony. This approach guided the creation of key architectural landmarks and established the visual and symbolic identity of the new city.

A central element of this identity became the **Baiterek Tower**, envisioned as a modern embodiment of the ancient Turkic myth of the *world tree*. This axis mundi connects the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. This monument, situated in the newly developed administrative and economic zone on the left bank of the Yesil River, physically and symbolically demarcated a new center for Kazakhstan. Separated from the old city by the river, Astana’s new center signified not just urban expansion but the beginning of a new historical and cultural chapter.

Karpievich notes that ancient cities were often formed around sacred centers – temples, altars, or other ritual spaces (Karpievich, 2022, pp. 73–93). For nomadic cultures such as the Kazakhs, these sacred centers took non-architectural forms, such as ancestral mountains or sacred trees. In this tradition, **Baiterek** functions as a sacral center. Its form and symbolism resonate with nomadic practices surrounding the sacred poplar (*baiterek*), a territorial and spiritual presence marker. In Kazakh ritual life, derivatives of this sacred tree – such as the *bakan* (support post for a yurt), the *ak-tayak* (white staff used in mourning), and the hitching post – held central roles in life-cycle rites and symbolized clan identity and continuity (Saikeneva et al., 2022, pp. 10–11).

As Toporov argues, the hitching post tethered to horses can be read as a literal and symbolic iteration of the world tree (Toporov, 2010, p. 33). For nomads, it marked the temporary center of the world, grounding their mobility in continuity and sacred

space. Even when left behind during migrations, the hitching post retained a connection to ancestral land, with some particularly valuable or decorated posts – sometimes inlaid with silver – being taken along (Toktabay, 2004, p. 49).

In this way, the **Baiterek Tower** serves not merely as a modern monument but as a re-articulation of ancient mythopoetic symbols in contemporary urban language. As Yuri Lotman (1992, p. 192) suggests, the symbolic image draws on deep temporal layers and archaic memory. Symbols, he argues, carry echoes of ancient meanings that transcend historical periods and are reactivated in new cultural contexts. In this sense, Baiterek becomes a generative center of Kazakhstan's "new world," linking the mythic past to the political and imagined future.

Material design as an act of sacralization

In contemporary culture, the visual image of a monument often transcends its architectural context and enters the realm of material culture, appearing on clothing, accessories, souvenirs, and currency. This process is not merely decorative. It constitutes an act of **sacralization through the everyday**, whereby sacred and symbolic meanings are embedded in ordinary objects. Once the image of a monument like Baiterek is reproduced on a T-shirt, a banknote, or a piece of jewelry, it becomes a ritualized bearer of collective memory and identity.

A clear example is the visual integration of Baiterek into the design of Kazakhstan's national currency. The second series of the Kazakh **tenge** featured the Baiterek Tower prominently, emphasizing its role not only as an urban symbol but as a representation of national renewal and aspiration (Ill. 2).



Ill. 2. Second series of tenge "1000 tenge" (2006) with image of Baiterek in the background.
Source: <https://qarmaqshy-tany.kz/ekonomika/16844-tay-br-esk-banknot-oldanystan-shyady.html>

The visual evolution in the later series – from the tower itself to the **Samruk bird** and stylized **soaring figures** in Saka-style headdresses – highlights the image's mythologization and deepening sacralization.

Interestingly, the image of Baiterek undergoes a symbolic evolution in the subsequent Tenge series, transforming first into the image of the Samruk bird and then into a soaring figure stylized with a traditional Saka headdress. This visual metamorphosis reflects both the continuity of cultural codes and the gradual sacralization of national symbols through processes of generalization, mythologization, and integration into everyday life – most notably through banknotes that pass through the hands of millions each day.

The sacred dimension of Baiterek extends far beyond its architectural origins and monetary representation, finding vivid expression in fashion – particularly in designer dresses and stage costumes. In national and international competitions, festivals, and cultural events, Baiterek frequently appears as a central design element, stylized in silhouettes, embroidery, prints, and structural details. These artistic interpretations demonstrate the technical mastery of designers and transform clothing into mobile carriers of sacred imagery. In this context, Baiterek acquires the status of a totemic symbol – a visual expression of the national spirit and cultural identity communicated through the language of fashion.

Striking examples of this phenomenon include the “Queen of Independence” costume (2016) by Angelina Shulgina, a student at the Ayyrtau boarding school for orphans, which won the Grand Prix at the Presidential Christmas Tree in 2016 and was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan’s independence (Ill. 3).



Ill. 3. “Queen of Independence” costume (2016),
dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan’s independence.

Source: <https://www.nur.kz/society/1770309-malcik-prisel-na-elku-v-kostume-cifrovoj-kazahstan-v-petropavlovske-foto/>

At the Dress of the World international design competition in Baku (2019), Kazakh model Amina Kozhanova was named Best Model of the Show, appearing in a saukele wedding headdress shaped like the Baiterek tower. The costume, created by designer

Galina Bilyak, earned third place at the competition¹). In 2024, at the Miss Universe contest, 24-year-old Madina Almukhanova represented Kazakhstan in a national costume inspired by the Baiterek tree² (Ill. 4) (Miss Universe 2024, 2024). Through such appearances, Baiterek evolves into a sacred sign embedded in performative and material culture – a visual totem of national identity, artistic imagination, and symbolic continuity.

In 2019, at the *Dress of the World* competition in Baku, Kazakh model Amina Kozhanova appeared in a **saukele** headdress modeled after the Baiterek, designed by Galina Bilyak, who won third place. More recently, at *Miss Universe 2024*, Kazakhstan was represented by **Madina Almukhanova**, whose national costume again echoed the form and symbolism of Baiterek (Ill. 4). These artistic adaptations demonstrate how Baiterek functions as a visual totem – mobilized across fashion, performance, and state iconography to express Kazakhstan's cultural identity. In this way, it transcends its architectural origins and becomes a **portable symbol of statehood and spiritual continuity**.



Ill. 4. Madina Almukhanova.
Miss Universe 2024 – Baiterek-inspired national costume.

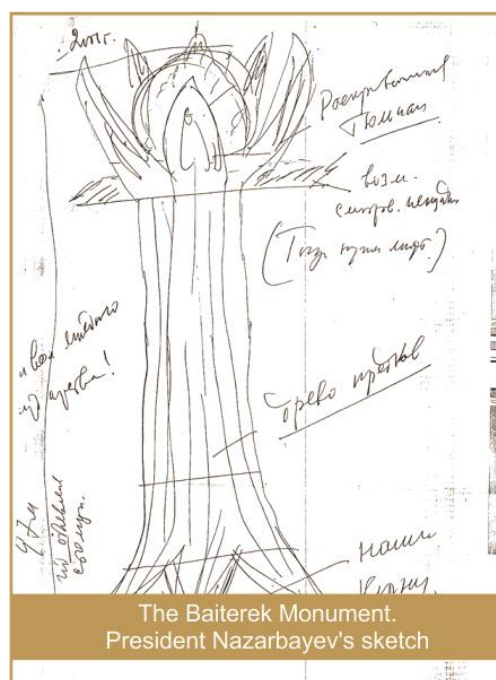
Whether materialized as a tower, a coin, or a costume, Baiterek embodies the idea of the world center of rootedness, renewal, and connection to higher powers. Its persistent reproduction across various media transforms it from a mere architectural object into a sacred symbol deeply embedded in the nation's everyday culture and visual memory. As it appears in money, clothing, stage costumes, and souvenirs, Baiterek functions as both a mnemonic and a sacral structure, affirming national identity and acting as a vessel for cultural archetypes such as the tree of life and the axis mundi. This sacralization is evident in its mythological foundations and continuous material presence, which serve as a sign of spiritual support and a marker of Kazakhstan's modern self-image.

¹ Kazakhstan model with “Baiterek” on her head became the best model in Baku. *Nur.kz*. <https://www.nur.kz/society/1778416-kazahstanka-s-bajterekom-na-golove-stala-lucsej-modelu-v-baku-foto-video/>

² Miss Universe 2024: Madina Almukhanova wears a costume inspired by Baiterek. *Inform.kz*. <https://www.inform.kz/ru/miss-vselennaya-2024-madina-almuhanova-predstala-v-obraze-ptitsi-samruk-i-bajtereka-09c465>

Pilgrimage to the sacred tree

The relocation of the capital marked a new chapter in Kazakhstan's history, and the Baiterek monument emerged as a symbolic recognition of this shift. Rising to a height of 97 meters, Baiterek alludes to the year 1997, when the capital was officially moved to Astana. The concept for the monument originated with the First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who famously sketched the initial idea for the futuristic structure on a paper napkin. That very napkin is now preserved in the Museum of the First President in Astana (Ill. 5).



Ill.5. The sketch of Baiterek by Nursultan Nazarbayev.
Source: <https://megalommatis.wordpress.com/tag/russian/>

The mythical tree described here seems to be a powerful symbol, embodying a connection between different realms – from the underground to the heavens. It also carries deep cultural and symbolic significance, primarily representing the legendary bird Samruk and the cosmic struggle between good and evil. The structure of the tree and its symbolic elements might be interpreted in several layers:

Underground Level (Root of the Tree):

1. Cafés, aquariums, and an art gallery suggest a space of cultural exchange, nurturing the roots of creativity and offering visitors an experience of tranquility and art.

This is also where the foundation of a society's heritage can be explored.

2. Earth Elevator (Trunk).
3. The panoramic glass elevators that take visitors upwards symbolize the journey of ascension and enlightenment. This could also reflect the socio-political rise of the nation, leading from the roots to a place of prominence and visibility.
4. Heavenly Level (Crown of the Tree):
 - The sphere with a bar and hall at the top represents a viewing platform and the aspiration to reach the highest, most spiritual plane. The metal poles

around the sphere reflect tree branches, symbolizing connection and unity, and represent the 101 nationalities living in the country.

- The golden egg of Samruk represents the cosmic balance and cyclical nature of time – summer and winter, life and death. This can be seen as the eternal conflict between opposing forces, like good and evil, central to many world cultures' myths and stories.

5. The symbolism of the Installations:

- The “ayaully Alaskan” (loving hand), representing Nursultan Nazarbayev’s handprint, could be interpreted as a personal connection to the nation’s foundation, reflecting leadership, protection, and a guiding hand in the country’s journey.
- The wooden globe with the signatures of representatives from 17 religions is particularly significant. This symbolizes national unity and global inclusiveness, fostering a multi-faith, multicultural dialogue. The installation could reflect a message of peace and unity in diversity, in line with the broader narrative of the mythical tree as a symbol of connection between realms and peoples.

This structure, with its deeply symbolic layers, is an architectural marvel and an expression of cultural identity, national unity, and spiritual heritage. It embodies the nation’s journey, its roots in history, its growth towards progress, and its aspirations for harmony in the world. The interplay of architecture and myth in this concept ties modern identity to ancient symbols, creating a space that connects the past, present, and future (Ill. 6).



Ill. 6. Wooden globe with the signatures of representatives of 17 religions.

Source: photo by Dinara Saikeneva.

This installation embodies the principles of unity and coexistence within diversity. The wooden globe, adorned with the signatures of 17 religions, symbolizes a collective, shared space of spiritual and cultural respect. It serves as a reminder that despite

differences in belief, there is common ground in pursuing peace and understanding. Positioned within the mythical tree's heavenly sphere, this globe aligns with the theme of connection, linking different cultures and faiths in a single, symbolic gesture. Including 17 religions is particularly meaningful, highlighting the local and global significance of religious harmony. It reflects the inclusive spirit of the mythical tree, where each branch, though distinct, contributes to the whole, offering a platform for dialogue and mutual respect among different faith communities.

This installation commemorates the First Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in Astana in 2003, on the initiative of Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev (Ill. 7). The event took place in the aftermath of the tragic terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, a moment when the world was on the brink of division and war, marked by religious intolerance. The congress participants visited the Baiterek Monument, where services and prayers of all major world religions were held. The wooden globe with the signatures of representatives from 17 religions was erected here to symbolize interfaith unity, peace-loving politics, and social harmony based on inter-ethnic tolerance. This installation is a lasting reminder of the spirit of cooperation and understanding that emerged from a time of conflict and division.



Ill. 7. "Taykazan" pedestal.
Source: photo by Dinara Saikeneva.

The installation of "Ayauly alakan" is positioned on a silver amulet (tumar) standing in the shape of a triangle, placed atop the "Taykazan" pedestal. The Taykazan, commissioned by Amir Temur and cast in honor of Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, symbolizes mercy and the generosity of spirits. Now located in the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmad Yasawi in Turkistan, the cauldron represents the hospitality and generosity of the Kazakh people.

(Ill. 7). The cauldron is adorned with a symbolic golden belt, whose decoration is inspired by the Saka animal style and features the central element of the Kazakh “koshkar muiz” pattern – the “ram’s horn,” a symbol of well-being and health. The cauldron stands on three pillars representing independence, creative work, and prosperity. The composition is crafted from silver, gold, and green malachite, a stone known for its protective properties against the evil eye and harmful energy. Its selection for this amulet, symbolizing the young capital of Astana, emphasizes its role as a guardian of positive forces, absorbing negative energies and embodying the spirit of protection and prosperity.

Many visitors place their palms on the Ayaully Alakan installation (Ill. 8) to evoke the image of pilgrims visiting sacred trees throughout Kazakhstan. This practice is among the oldest and is still preserved worldwide. In the past, in the steppes, any solitary tree or one with an unusual appearance could be considered sacred. Chokan Valikhanov wrote: “A tree growing alone in the steppe, or an ugly plant with unusually crooked branches, serves as an object of worship and overnight stay. Everyone who passes by puts pieces of clothing and rags on this tree, throws cups next to it, sacrifices animals, or puts the manes of horses on it” (Valikhanov, 1986, p. 227). Such rituals sought ancestors’ support in resolving particular issues or fulfilling desires; for example, childless women often visited such trees and offered sacrifices to conceive.



Ill. 8. Installation “Ayaully alakan”.
Source: photo by Dinara Saikeneva.

Today, Baiterek has become a new “place of pilgrimage.” Not only tourists but virtually every citizen who has visited Astana considers it a duty to see the Baiterek monument. It has become a tradition for newlyweds and graduates to visit Baiterek and seek the “support of the ancestors” to fulfill their wishes.

The modern reinterpretation of the “sacred tree” is expressed harmoniously in the Baiterek monument (Ill. 9). Viewed through ritual practices, its location becomes even more significant. The surrounding area is a central space during public celebrations, particularly Nauryz (the spring renewal festival, held on the vernal equinox, March 21–22). The square fills with vibrant crowds, symbolically reconstructing the world through festive activity. In the spirit of Kenzo Tange’s concept, Baiterek transforms urban space from a static environment into a symbolic communicative field. As a point of visual and ritual communication, Baiterek has become not merely an architectural landmark but also an iconic system organizing the space around it.



Ill. 9. Astana, Art Fest, 2017.

Source: <https://www.trend.az/life/culture/2775780.html>

This is precisely the phenomenon Kenzo Tange described: even without physical movement, the object’s symbolic charge establishes a dialogue between space and human beings. The square’s spatial composition, framed by equally significant architectural landmarks – Ak Orda (the presidential administration headquarters) and Khan Shatyr (a shopping and entertainment center) – amplifies Baiterek’s symbolic meaning.

Ak Orda lies directly east of Baiterek along a central axis. Khan Shatyr, designed by Norman Foster as a modern yurt, is located to the west. This tripartite composition carries profound symbolic resonance. Traditionally, the hitching post was placed in front of the yurt, which faced east. In this metaphorical framework, Baiterek stands “before” Khan Shatyr, which is associated with home and people. However, Baiterek is also equidistant from the presidential administration and Khan Shatyr, positioned between power and the people (Ill. 10).



III. 10. Nurzhol Boulevard.

Source: <https://www.tourister.ru/world/asia/kazakhstan/city/astana/map>

Indeed, Khan Shatyr represents family, everyday life, and leisure. Like Baiterek, it revitalized the new administrative center and facilitated a dialogue between the citizens and the state. While Baiterek attracts visitors and hosts major public events, Khan Shatyr maintains a continuous flow of people, sustaining the space's dynamism. Thus, Baiterek is a tourist attraction and a vital element of urban ritual space, where tradition and modernity converge.

Positioned on the same axis as Ak Orda, Baiterek underscores political symbolism tied to the unity of the state, the stability of governance, and Kazakhstan's strategic vision for the future. This axial composition expresses a spatial hierarchy: the presidential residence symbolizes the decision-making center, while Baiterek becomes a metaphor for sustainability, continuity, and growth. The alignment affirms a balance between the government (Ak Orda) and the people (the public space around Baiterek), depicting their symbolic interaction.

The form and concept of Baiterek evoke political transformation and national revival. As a reinterpretation of the ancient myth of the world tree, the monument links Kazakhstan's past, present, and future. The streets surrounding Baiterek form a meaningful syntagmatic chain: each name functions as a cultural sign drawn from a distinct paradigm of historical memory. Streets named after ancient and medieval cities – Otrar, Taraz, Sygnak – construct a paradigm of civilizational heritage. Mangilik El Street symbolizes the eternal unity of the Kazakh people; Dostyk Street represents interethnic harmony and multinational identity. Turan Street invokes the myth of Great Turan, embedding Turkic civilizational unity in the city's semantic structure. Kunaev Street refers to Kazakhstan's Soviet legacy, anchoring modern identity in historical continuity.

Thus, Baiterek becomes a semiotic center that integrates the vertical axis of time, from antiquity to the future, and narrates national formation through syntactically arranged cultural codes. In this context, Baiterek symbolizes the nation's progressive trajectory, affirming independence and national identity. It is a site of political communication, especially during public holidays when the square serves as a venue for mass

gatherings. More than a decorative object, Baiterek facilitates social consolidation, strengthens patriotic sentiment, and embodies national unity. Its sacred and political symbolism manifests both architecturally and in public life.

Conclusion

For a secular society with deep-rooted traditions and a nomadic past, envisioning an ideal city, especially one with symbolic centrality, is complex. Historically, Nomadic Kazakh culture avoided fixed urban forms, favoring mobility, open steppes, and sacred sites acting as communal centers. In this context, relocating the capital and constructing a new administrative hub represented a step toward modernization and an attempt to symbolically unify the nation and merge traditional values with a contemporary state structure.

A key element in this symbolic project was the construction of the Baiterek monument – a central architectural and sacred axis in the new capital. The concept of the World Tree is seamlessly integrated into the city's symbolic fabric: its roots symbolize cultural heritage, the trunk dynamic progress, and the golden egg of Samruk at its apex, the promise of a bright future. Baiterek also plays a crucial role in shaping national identity. It fuses nomadic and settled elements, drawing tourists and citizens as a symbol of unity, continuity, and sovereignty. Its position along the axis connecting Ak Orda (the seat of power) and Khan Shatyr (a metaphor for the people and everyday life) speaks volumes. This symbolic triangulation balances state, society, and tradition. Essentially, Baiterek is not merely an architectural structure but a powerful national symbol. It synthesizes tradition and modernity and provides a shared symbolic space in which every Kazakh citizen can find a reflection of their history, identity, and hope for the future.

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