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MONUMENTS TO TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOMEN IN KAZAKHSTAN: HISTORICAL MEMORY AND MEMORIAL SPACE

The study examines monuments dedicated to twentieth-century women in Kazakhstan as historical sources linking memory, public space, and gendered representation. The problem is important because women are visible in Kazakhstan's post-Soviet commemorative landscape, yet their memorial representation has rarely been studied as a separate historical question. It asks how monuments to women shape, anchor, and interpret historical memory in public space. The main cases are memorial objects associated with Aliya Moldagulova, Manshuk Mametova, and Khiuaz Dospanova; monuments to Kulyash Baiseitova, Dina Nurpeisova, and Roza Baglanova serve as a comparative cultural corpus. The evidence comes from state registers of monuments, museum and municipal materials, press reports on unveiling ceremonies, photographic sources, and scholarship on memory studies, gender history, visual methodology, and post-Soviet commemoration. The method combines comparative-historical analysis, source criticism, visual-semiotic reading, discourse analysis, and the study of memorial space. The results suggest that monuments to women preserve individual biography and make national heroism, regional pride, cultural heritage, and public respect visible in shared space. The study also offers a five-level working model based on biographical memory, monumental form, memorial location, ritual practice, and public representation.

Keywords: women in history, historical memory, monument, memorial space, gender representation.

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Қазақстандағы XX ғасыр әйел тұлғаларына арналған ескерткіштер: тарихи жад және мемориалдық кеңістік

Мақалада Қазақстандағы XX ғасыр әйел тұлғаларына арналған ескерткіштер тарихи жадтың, қоғамдық кеңістіктің және гендерлік репрезентацияның өзара байланысы тұрғысынан қарастырылады. Зерттеудің өзектілігі тәуелсіздік жылдарында қалыптасқан ұлттық мемориалдық ландшафтта әйел тұлғаларының алар орны әлі де жүйелі түрде тарихи тұрғыдан талданбағанымен айқындалады. Мақаланың мақсаты – әйелдерге арналған ескерткіштердің Қазақстандағы тарихи жадты қалыптастырудағы, кеңістікте бекітудегі және ұрпақаралық сабақтастықты бейнелеудегі қызметін анықтау. Зерттеудің негізгі корпусын Әлия Молдағұлова, Мәншүк Мәметова және Хиуаз Доспановаға арналған мемориалдық нысандар құрайды; Күләш Байсейітова, Дина Нұрпейісова және Роза Бағланова ескерткіштері салыстырмалы мәдени корпус ретінде алынған. Дереккөз ретінде мемлекеттік тізімдер, музейлік және әкімшілік материалдар, ескерткіштерді ашу рәсіміне қатысты баспасөз хабарламалары, фотоматериалдар және memory studies бойынша ғылыми әдебиет пайдаланылды.

Зерттеуде тарихи-салыстырмалы, деректанулық, визуалды-семиотикалық, дискурстық талдау және мемориалдық кеңістікті талдау әдістері қолданылды. Нәтижесінде әйелдерге арналған ескерткіштер жеке өмірбаянды сақтап қоймай, ұлттық ерлік, аймақтық мақтаныш, мәдени мұра және қоғамдық құрмет категорияларын материалдық түрде жариялы кеңістікте бекітетіні анықталды. Мақалада ескерткіштерді өмірбаяндық жад, монументтік белгі, мемориалдық орын, ритуалдық қолданыс және қоғамдық репрезентация деңгейлерінде талдауға арналған бес деңгейлі модель ұсынылады.

Түйін сөздер: әйел тұлғасы, тарихи жад, ескерткіш, мемориалдық кеңістік, гендерлік репрезентация.

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**Памятники женщинам XX века в Казахстане:
историческая память и мемориальное пространство**

В статье рассматриваются памятники женщинам XX века в Казахстане через взаимосвязь исторической памяти, общественного пространства и гендерной репрезентации. Актуальность темы обусловлена тем, что в постсоветском коммеморативном ландшафте Казахстана место женских образов еще не подвергалось систематическому историческому анализу. Цель статьи – определить, каким образом памятники женщинам участвуют в формировании, пространственном закреплении и общественной интерпретации исторической памяти в Казахстане. Основной корпус исследования составляют мемориальные объекты, посвященные Алие Молдагуловой, Маншук Маметовой и Хиуаз Доспановой; памятники Куляш Байсеитовой, Дине Нурпеисовой и Розе Баглановой используются как сравнительный культурный корпус. Источниковую базу составляют государственные списки памятников, музейные и административные материалы, сообщения прессы об открытии мемориальных объектов, фотоматериалы, научная литература по memory studies, гендерной истории, визуальной методологии и постсоветской коммеморативной политике. В работе применены историко-сравнительный, источниковедческий, визуально-семиотический, дискурсивный методы, а также анализ мемориального пространства. Установлено, что памятники женщинам не только сохраняют биографическую память, но и материализуют национальный героизм, региональную гордость, культурное наследие и межпоколенческое уважение в публично доступном пространстве. Предложена пятиуровневая модель анализа памятников: биографическая память, монументальная форма, мемориальное место, ритуальное использование и общественная репрезентация.

Ключевые слова: женская историческая личность, историческая память, памятник, мемориальное пространство, гендерная репрезентация.

Introduction

Monuments make historical memory visible in everyday space. A statue in a square, park, museum precinct, or airport does not simply decorate its surroundings; it marks a chosen person, event, or value as worthy of public attention. For historians, that material choice is evidence. It shows whom a community honors, when that act of commemoration took place, where memory was placed, and which rituals later gathered around it. In this sense, a monument can be read as a historical source, an artistic object, and a socio-political text at the same time (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38; Nora, 1989, pp. 7-10; Assmann, 2011, p. 27).

Since independence, Kazakhstan's memorial landscape has changed considerably. Some symbols inherited from the Soviet period were removed from their former places, others were reinterpreted with new meanings, while a third group – wartime heroes – was incorporated into the national-patriotic memory of independent Kazakhstan (Rees, 2020, pp. 447-450; Rees, 2024, p. 88; Medeuova, 2024, p. 118). These changes were not a simple exchange of one symbolic system for another. They produced a layered memorial field in which Soviet and post-Soviet meanings continued to meet in the same

streets and squares. The Almaty monument to Aliya Moldagulova and Manshuk Mametova illustrates this process particularly well: a Soviet-era memory of female heroism was retained, but it was placed within the national-patriotic narrative of independent Kazakhstan (Rees, 2020, p. 452).

Women's presence in this memorial space deserves closer attention. Women are frequently remembered in family memory, oral history, school curricula, museum exhibitions, and artistic culture, yet their representation in monumental public space has traditionally been selective. The most recognizable public images of twentieth-century women in Kazakhstan are organized in two major registers: wartime heroism and cultural achievement. Aliya Moldagulova, Manshuk Mametova, and Khiuaz Dospanova are primarily memorialized through the discourse of courage, loyalty to the homeland, and national honor. Kulyash Baiseitova, Dina Nurpeisova, and Roza Baglanova are remembered through the language of art, performance, song, and musical heritage. These two lines are not opposed to one another; both participate in constructing women's images as symbols of service to the nation, preservation of values, and intergenerational continuity (Sarsenbekov & Orazbayeva, 2024, pp. 258-260).

For this reason, the study treats monuments as historical sources rather than as sculpture alone. The central question is direct: which meanings – heroism, regional identity, cultural heritage, national pride, public gratitude, and intergenerational continuity – are attached to women’s images through monuments in Kazakhstan? The article examines how monuments dedicated to women help form, renew, and anchor historical memory in public space. The analysis is based on a representative corpus connected with Aliya Moldagulova, Manshuk Mametova, Khiuaz Dospanova, Kulyash Baiseitova, Dina Nurpeisova, and Roza Baglanova.

The article’s contribution is twofold. First, it brings monuments to women together as a distinct field of historical-memory analysis instead of treating them as scattered cases in urban history, art history, or biography. Second, it moves beyond biography and unveiling dates by proposing a five-level model: biographical memory, monumental sign, memorial location, ritual use, and public representation. This model helps recover parts of memorial meaning that are often left out of public descriptions, including spatial position, social practice, official rhetoric, and connections with museum, educational, media, and local-memory work.

The article first reviews literature on memory, place, and gender history, and then describes the sources and method. The analytical sections examine monuments to Aliya Moldagulova, Manshuk Mametova, and Khiuaz Dospanova as a wartime memory corpus and then turn to monuments to cultural figures as a comparative field. The final sections develop the five-level model, summarize the results, and outline further research.

Literature review

The analysis begins with scholarship on collective and cultural memory. Maurice Halbwachs showed that collective memory is formed through social frameworks, while Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* explains how a place, sign, or ritual can stabilize historical meaning (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38; Nora, 1989, pp. 7-10). Jan Assmann treats cultural memory as a symbolic system transmitted across generations, and Paul Connerton emphasizes ritual, embodied practice, and repeated action in social remembering (Assmann, 2011, p. 27; Connerton, 1989, pp. 4-5). Taken together, these approaches make it possible to study monuments as public mechanisms through which historical consciousness is organized.

Studies of memorial space show that location changes the meaning of a monument. The works of James Young, Jay Winter, Andreas Huyssen, and Kenneth Foote connect memorials and sites of remembrance with historical trauma, public emotion, national identity, and political choice in urban space (Young, 1993; Winter, 1995, pp. 78-80; Huyssen, 2003, p. 7; Foote, 2003, p. 5). This is important for Kazakhstan, where Soviet symbols did not disappear completely after independence; some were reinterpreted through new national-patriotic and regional meanings. Post-Soviet memorial space should therefore be approached as a field in which rupture and continuity operate together.

Gender history helps explain how women’s images are selected in public memory and what meanings are attached to them. Joan Scott proposed gender as a useful category of historical analysis, while Anna Krylova and Reina Pennington showed the need to examine Soviet women’s wartime experience as real military, professional, and political experience rather than as passive sacrifice or symbolic image (Scott, 1986, pp. 1053-1075; Krylova, 2010; Pennington, 2001). These works allow the study to analyze the monuments to Aliya Moldagulova, Manshuk Mametova, and Khiuaz Dospanova as public recognition of women’s historical agency rather than only as idealizations of female heroism.

For Kazakhstan, the works of Krista Rees, Kamila Medeuova, Nurlan Sarsenbekov, and Dina Orazbayeva provide the main scholarly basis for discussing wartime memory and post-Soviet commemoration. Rees shows how Heroes of the Soviet Union were reinterpreted in independent Kazakhstan as symbols of Kazakhstani patriotism (Rees, 2020, pp. 445-462; Rees, 2024, pp. 83-110). Medeuova analyzes transformations in Kazakhstan’s culture of remembrance from the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century (Medeuova, 2024, pp. 111-139). Sarsenbekov and Orazbayeva examine monuments to heroes of the Second World War and the commemorative practices associated with honoring them on the basis of concrete historical material (Sarsenbekov & Orazbayeva, 2024, pp. 251-269; Orazbayeva & Sarsenbekov, 2025, pp. 234-242). Together, these studies place the present corpus at the intersection of Kazakhstan’s history, memory studies, and gendered representation.

Visual method is necessary because monuments speak through image, posture, scale, location, inscription, and surrounding space. Roland Barthes, Erwin Panofsky, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, and Gillian Rose show that visual forms can

be read as meaning-making systems (Barthes, 1977; Panofsky, 1955, p. 26; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 42-47; Rose, 2016, pp. 65-72). The discussion therefore considers unveiling dates and biography together with visual structure, spatial setting, ritual use, and public interpretation.

Materials and methods

This is a qualitative historical article. Its corpus consists of monuments and memorial objects dedicated to twentieth-century women in Kazakhstan. The main group includes memorial objects related to Aliya Moldagulova, Manshuk Mametova, and Khiuaz Dospanova. These figures occupy a central place in public memory of women's heroism in Kazakhstan, and their memorialization appears at national, regional, urban, rural, museum-based, and media-centered levels. The comparative group includes monuments to Kulyash Baiseitova, Dina Nurpeisova, and Roza Baglanova, which makes it possible to compare heroic memory with cultural and artistic memory.

The cases were selected according to four criteria. First, the monument had to be dedicated to a woman whose public image is connected with the twentieth century. Second, the memorial object had to be visible in public space, a museum environment, or a stable site of commemoration. Third, the case had to have an accessible source base, including state lists, municipal information, museum materials, press reports, photographic evidence, or scholarly literature. Fourth, the corpus had to show spatial and semantic diversity: central urban monuments, regional complexes, village monuments, capital-city monuments, an airport-adjacent site, and cultural-artistic memorials. The corpus is not a complete inventory of women's monuments in Kazakhstan. It was selected to show the main patterns through which women's historical memory is represented in public space.

The evidence comes from several kinds of material. Official and administrative sources were used to collect systematic information about the status, location, and basic details of the monuments; the list of local historical and cultural monuments of Aktope Region is especially relevant in this category (Adilet, 2020). Museum and heritage materials helped connect the monuments with archival, biographical, and exhibition-based memory. Press reports and public news items were used to analyze the language of unveiling ceremonies and anniversary commemoration, including reports on the monuments to Kulyash Baiseitova in Almaty (Kazinform, 2011), the "three

heroic women" composition in Oral (Kazinform, 2017), Khiuaz Dospanova in Atyrau (Aikyn, 2019), Manshuk Mametova in Astana (Kazinform, 2018), Roza Baglanova in Kyzylorda (Kazinform, 2022; Aikyn, 2022), and the monument to the two heroic women in Almaty (Tengrinews Guide, n.d.). Photographic materials and available visual evidence were used for visual-semiotic analysis. Scholarly literature situated the cases within memory studies (Halbwachs, 1992; Nora, 1989; Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011; Ricoeur, 2004), gender history (Scott, 1986; Krylova, 2010; Pennington, 2001), Soviet and post-Soviet commemorative politics (Rees, 2020; Rees, 2024; Medeuova, 2024; Sarsenbekov & Orazbayeva, 2024; Orazbayeva & Sarsenbekov, 2025), and visual methodology (Barthes, 1977; Panofsky, 1955; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Rose, 2016).

Five related procedures guide the analysis. Comparative-historical analysis identifies similarities and differences between monuments erected in different periods and spaces. Source criticism separates official information, journalistic description, museum interpretation, and secondary scholarly opinion. Visual-semiotic analysis examines sculptural posture, composition, symbolic attributes, and the relationship between the monument and its surroundings. Discourse analysis focuses on recurring words and themes in public interpretation: heroism, homeland, generation, gratitude, cultural heritage, and national pride. Analysis of memorial space considers the historical significance of location: central square, park, museum environment, village, regional center, airport, and capital city.

For comparison, the article uses a five-level model. The first level is biographical memory: the historical life and public significance of the person. The second is the monumental sign: the transformation of biography into sculpture, bust, relief, pedestal, inscription, or composition. The third is memorial location: the position of the monument within a city, village, park, museum, airport, educational environment, or capital. The fourth is ritual use: flower-laying ceremonies, anniversaries, school excursions, museum lessons, and local acts of remembrance. The fifth is public representation: media news, official speech, educational narratives, tourist maps, and social media. Read together, these levels show the monument as a historical text rather than only as an artistic object.

The study has several limits. It relies mainly on publicly accessible sources and published scholarship. A fuller project would require field observation, interviews with museum workers and local residents, archival materials on commissioning and

design, and comparative analysis of inscriptions and urban-planning documents. The present article should therefore be read as a source-based interpretive framework and synthesis, not as a complete empirical inventory.

Results and discussion

The selected cases point to two overlapping modes of women's commemoration: heroic memory and cultural memory. The first mode is built around Aliya Moldagulova, Manshuk Mametova, and Khiuaz Dospanova. It represents women through war-time courage, national honor, public gratitude, and patriotic education. The second mode is built around Kulyash Baiseitova, Dina Nurpeisova, and Roza Baglanova. It represents women through opera, traditional music, song, stage culture, and cultural continuity. Although these modes differ thematically, they share a public function: each monument turns an individual woman's life into a reference point for collective identity.

Women's war memorials usually carry two layers of meaning. They refer to concrete biographies – names, birthplaces, families, and histories of state recognition – while also turning those biographies into public symbols. Aliya is read not only as an individual sniper, but as youth, courage, and Kazakhstan's experience of the Second World War. Manshuk is more than an individual machine gunner; she becomes an example of endurance and sacrifice. Khiuaz is more than a pilot; she becomes a symbol of flight and technical modernity. A similar transformation occurs in the case of cultural figures: Kulyash becomes a sign of opera and modernization, Dina a sign of the dombra and traditional musical continuity, and Roza a sign of song and stage memory (Krylova, 2010, pp. 24-29; Pennington, 2001, p. 12).

The heroic corpus is historically important because it links Soviet and post-Soviet memory. The memory of Aliya and Manshuk took shape within Soviet heroic culture, but after independence it was not erased. It was re-signified as part of Kazakhstan's national history. Rees describes this process as the transformation of Soviet Heroes of the Soviet Union into symbols of Kazakhstani patriotism (Rees, 2020, pp. 448-453). This observation challenges the simplified view that post-Soviet memory is only a rejection of Soviet memory. Monuments show a more layered process: Soviet titles, the war-time narrative, local pride, national history, and the patriotic discourse of independent Kazakhstan co-

exist within a single memorial field (Rees, 2024, p. 95).

The Almaty Monument: Paired Female Heroism

The Almaty monument to Aliya Moldagulova and Manshuk Mametova offers a clear example of paired female heroic memory. Unveiled in 1997 and located in a central urban environment, it represents the two women together rather than separately (Tengrinews Guide, n.d.). The paired composition shifts attention from individual biography to a shared symbolic category: the nation's "two heroic daughters." Its location in central urban space reinforces that meaning. The monument is not addressed only to relatives, local residents, or museum visitors; it addresses the city as a whole and turns women's heroism into a visible element of national public space (Rees, 2020, pp. 452-454).

The Almaty case also shows how a monument can reorganize post-Soviet symbolic geography. As Rees notes, the monument is associated with the transformation of a former Soviet political space into a site of Kazakhstani patriotic remembrance (Rees, 2020, p. 452). From the perspective of memory studies, this is an urban palimpsest: when an old symbol is removed, the place does not become empty; a new layer is written over it, while traces of earlier symbolic orders remain part of the historical meaning of the site (Huyssen, 2003, p. 7). Thus, the image of female heroism commemorates more than the Second World War. It also marks a post-Soviet transition in the politics of urban memory.

The Aktobe Complex and Regional Memorialization

The Aktobe memorial complex dedicated to Aliya Moldagulova opens the next level of this memory. If the Almaty monument represents central national visibility, the Aktobe complex connects national heroism with regional identity. Its location in Aktobe has a concrete historical basis, since Aliya's name is closely associated with this region. Regional memorialization has an emotional and historical tone different from that of a central city or capital-city monument: it emphasizes origin, belonging, and the relationship between local community and national history. The complex can be read as a bridge between the heroine's biography, regional pride, and official recognition of her place in Kazakhstan's historical memory (Sarsenbekov & Orazbayeva, 2024, pp. 260-262; Adilet, 2020).

The monument in Aliya village in Aktobe Region demonstrates the importance of rural and birthplace memory. Although village memorials do not usually possess the same symbolic scale as central urban monuments, they often have a deeper connection with everyday local remembrance. Here the monument is not simply an object fixed by the state; it becomes part of the community's landscape and identity map. School activities, local ceremonies, museum connections, and stories told by residents give it a living social function. Medeuova notes that urban and rural memory formats differ significantly (Medeuova, 2024, pp. 122-125). The case of Aliya village confirms this point: rural memory is organized less through monumental centrality and more through rootedness, origin, and local continuity.

Manshuk Mametova's Monument in the Capital

Manshuk Mametova's memorialization shows a similar movement between local, regional, and national space. Her name is associated with West Kazakhstan Region and museum practices in Oral, yet her image is also visible in other cities and in the national capital. The monument in a park space in Astana introduces a regional heroine into the symbolic geography of the capital (Kazinform, 2018). Such transfer is not accidental: the capital gathers selected figures from different regions and presents them as part of a shared national narrative. In this way, the monument does not erase regional memory; it relocates it within a broader public frame.

The Three Heroic Women Composition in Oral

The three-figure composition dedicated to Manshuk Mametova, Aliya Moldagulova, and Khiuaz Dospanova, unveiled in Oral in 2017, is especially important because it fixes the transition from individual memory to collective female heroism (Kazinform, 2017). A three-figure composition produces a meaning different from that of a single statue or bust. It suggests that women's wartime contribution can be represented not as an exception, but as a recognizable category within national historical memory. Public descriptions note the positioning of Manshuk in the center, with Aliya and Khiuaz on either side, producing a visual grammar of solidarity and shared symbolic status. The monument therefore forms the concept of "heroic women" as a collective image.

The Monument to Khiuaz Dospanova near Atyrau Airport

Khiuaz Dospanova's memorialization expands the visual language of women's heroism. Whereas

the public memory of Aliya and Manshuk is usually associated with battlefield courage, Khiuaz's memory is connected with aviation, movement, technical modernity, and the image of the sky. The monument placed near the Atyrau airport inserts her memory into a space of mobility and infrastructure (Aikyn, 2019). The location carries a strong symbolic charge. An airport is not a traditional place for mourning or local communal gathering; it is a modern transit space, a point of departure and return. By placing the memory of the first Kazakh woman pilot in this space, the monument connects historical heroism with movement, flight, and modern public visibility.

The comparison between Aliya, Manshuk, and Khiuaz shows that women's heroic memory in Kazakhstan is not uniform. Aliya's memory often foregrounds youth, courage, and the relationship between birthplace and national recognition. Manshuk's memory emphasizes endurance, sacrifice, and the transfer of regional remembrance into national public space. Khiuaz's memory adds the themes of aviation, professional skill, survival, and modern infrastructure. Together, these three figures allow Kazakhstan's memorial landscape to present women not as passive signs of mourning, but as active historical subjects whose lives are connected with military service, movement, decision, and public recognition (Pennington, 2001, pp. 25-34).

Cultural Register: Kulyash, Dina, Roza

The cultural cases shift the register of analysis. Monuments to Kulyash Baiseitova, Dina Nurpeisova, and Roza Baglanova show that women's public memory in Kazakhstan is not limited to war. The monument to Kulyash Baiseitova in Almaty is associated with opera, stage culture, and the modernization of Kazakh art (Kazinform, 2011). The monument to Dina Nurpeisova in Astana/Nur-Sultan is connected with the *dombra*, *kui*, and the transmission of traditional musical heritage. Monuments to Roza Baglanova, including the monument in Kyzylorda, represent song, performance, and national cultural pride (Aikyn, 2022; Kazinform, 2022). These cases show that cultural achievement can be monumentalized with an intensity comparable to heroic achievement.

Cultural monuments also complicate the gendered language of public memory. Women artists are often represented through beauty, voice, tradition, and inspiration, while women heroes are represented through courage, youth, and sacrifice. Historical analysis should not treat these categories as

natural or fixed, but as historically constructed representations. The image of Dina Nurpeisova is not simply a “feminine” cultural image; it is a national historical image, because the *dombra* and *kui* are central to Kazakh cultural memory. Kulyash’s opera career is part of the formation of professional stage culture and national modernization rather than only a personal artistic talent. The memory of Roza Baglanova links performance with wartime and post-war cultural experience, public recognition, and the emotional continuity of song.

The difference between heroic and cultural memory is therefore analytical, not hierarchical. Both forms serve public history. The monuments to Aliya, Manshuk, and Khiuaz show how women’s heroism is made visible in national-patriotic space, while the monuments to Kulyash, Dina, and Roza show how women’s creative labor is made visible in cultural space. The result is a public memory in which women appear as carriers of several forms of national value: defense, sacrifice, art, tradition, voice, and continuity.

Table 1

Selected corpus and analytical focus

Memorial object	Location and year	Analytical focus
Aliya Moldagulova and Manshuk Mametova monument	Almaty, 1997	Central urban memory; paired representation of women’s heroism; re-signification of post-Soviet symbolic space
Aliya Moldagulova memorial complex	Aktobe, 2005	Regional memory; connection between homeland region, museum work, and national heroic discourse
Aliya Moldagulova monument in Aliya village	Aktobe Region, 1995	Local and rural memory; community attachment to the heroine’s birthplace
“Three heroic Kazakh women” / “Batyr arular” composition	Oral, 2017	Joint representation of Aliya, Manshuk, and Khiuaz; transition from individual image to collective-symbolic female heroism
Khiuaz Dospanova monument	Atyrau, 2019	Aviation, mobility, modern infrastructure; memory of the first Kazakh woman pilot
Manshuk Mametova monument	Astana, 2018	Transfer of regional memory into the symbolic space of the capital; national-patriotic visibility
Monuments to Kulyash Baiseitova, Dina Nurpeisova, and Roza Baglanova	Almaty, Astana, Kyzylorda; 2011-2022	Comparative cultural memory; women as transmitters of music, performance, and national artistic heritage

Note – compiled by the author on the basis of research sources

Five-Level Model of Analysis

The five-level model prevents the analysis from stopping at biography. The first level is biographical memory. Every monument is based on a historical person, but public memory does not preserve biography in its full complexity. It selects particular features: heroism, art, regional belonging, moral courage, national significance, or cultural achievement. Historical analysis should therefore compare the broader biographical field with the selected public image. This is especially important for women, because public memory sometimes reduces complex lives to narrow symbolic qualities (Scott, 1986, pp. 1055-1060).

The second level is the monumental sign. At this level, the researcher examines sculptural form, material, size, posture, gesture, clothing, inscription, pedestal, and composition. A bust emphasizes dig-

nity, portrait resemblance, and official recognition; a full-length statue can communicate movement, action, and public presence. A group composition, such as the Oral monument to the three heroic women, forms a collective category. A memorial complex creates a multi-layered text because it may combine sculpture, relief, open space, inscriptions, and ritual pathways. Visual-semiotic analysis therefore becomes central to historical interpretation (Panofsky, 1955, p. 26; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 42-47; Rose, 2016, pp. 65-72).

The third level is memorial location. The meaning of a monument changes depending on whether it stands in a central square, a park, a village, a museum courtyard, a school environment, an airport, or the capital. Central squares usually indicate public recognition and political importance. Villages and birthplaces signify origin and local belonging. Mu-

seums connect monuments with archives and interpreted biography. Airports link memory with movement, technology, and modernity. Parks generate more informal forms of everyday encounter. Thus, the image of one historical figure may acquire different meanings in different spaces (Nora, 1989, p. 22; Foote, 2003, p. 5).

The fourth level is ritual use. A monument becomes socially active when people gather around it, lay flowers, organize school excursions, conduct museum lessons, deliver anniversary speeches, take photographs, and circulate them through social media. Ritual practice turns the monument from a static object into a repeated act of memory. Connerton's emphasis on embodied and ceremonial remembrance is important in this regard (Connerton, 1989, pp. 4-5). The historian should ask what a monument means and what people do with it. A monument included in educational and commemorative practice plays a stronger role in shaping historical consciousness than one that is merely visible but socially unused.

The fifth level is public representation. Monuments circulate through media reports, official speeches, tourist guides, school textbooks, museum websites, social media, and local narratives. Public representation determines how a monument is interpreted by those who have not encountered it directly. For example, a press report on an unveiling ceremony may foreground national pride, gratitude to ancestors, youth education, regional identity, or cultural heritage. Such language is not an external ornament; it is part of the monument's meaning because it directs public interpretation. Discourse analysis therefore complements visual analysis (Gillis, 1994, pp. 5-7; Erll, 2011, p. 63).

Applied to the Kazakhstani cases, the model shows that monuments to women are multi-layered historical sources. The Almaty monument to Aliya and Manshuk works at the levels of paired biography, central urban form, post-Soviet spatial re-signification, public ritual, and national media representation. The Aktobe complex works through biography, regional space, local pride, museum connection, and educational use. The Oral composition of three heroic women works through group symbolism, urban visibility, and the construction of collective female heroism. The Khiuaz Dospanova monument near the airport works through biography, modern infrastructure, aviation symbolism, and the public memory of women's technical and military competence. Cultural monuments work through artistic biography, cultural space, anniversary commemoration, and the public representation of women as transmitters of heritage.

Discussion: Post-Soviet Memory and Gendered Representation

The cases suggest that Kazakhstan's post-Soviet memorial culture is marked by rupture as well as selective continuity. The memory of the Second World War remained important after independence, but its interpretive framework changed. In the Soviet period, the heroism of Aliya and Manshuk belonged to the Soviet narrative of victory and sacrifice. In independent Kazakhstan, their memory was explicitly connected with national history, Kazakhstani patriotism, regional pride, and the education of young citizens. This does not mean that the Soviet layer disappeared; it was reorganized within a new national framework (Rees, 2020, pp. 456-459; Orazbayeva & Sarsenbekov, 2025, pp. 237-239).

This process is clearly visible in monuments erected or reinterpreted after 1991. The 1997 Almaty monument belongs to the first decade of independence, a period of active rewriting of the symbolic map. The 2017 Oral composition and the 2019 Khiuaz Dospanova monument belong to a later period, in which the memory of women heroes is represented through group symbolism and modern infrastructure. Cultural monuments and anniversary commemorations from 2021-2022 show that the expansion of women's memorial visibility also includes artistic and musical heritage. Across these cases, women's memory is not marginal; it becomes part of how the nation speaks about heroism, continuity, and culture.

At the same time, gendered representation remains selective. Women's images in monuments often foreground socially approved values: courage, sacrifice, loyalty, dignity, talent, beauty, inspiration, and cultural service. These values are important, but they may also simplify historical lives. A fully developed gender history of monuments should therefore examine what is included and what is excluded. Do monuments present women as active agents or mainly as symbols? Do they represent professional skill, decision-making, and historical complexity, or only moral virtue? Do they invite reflection on the complexity of women's wartime and cultural experiences, or turn them into purely celebratory narratives? These questions do not reduce the value of monuments; they are necessary for understanding them as historical sources (Scott, 1986, pp. 1067-1072; Doss, 2010, pp. 152-158).

The Kazakhstani material suggests that monuments become strongest when they connect individual biography with a wider historical framework. A monument that merely says "this person existed" remains limited. A monument that connects the figure

with a region, a national narrative, a public ritual, and a cultural or ethical value becomes a strong site of memory. Accordingly, the monuments analyzed here are significant for historical scholarship: they are artistic objects and documents of historical consciousness in independent Kazakhstan.

The comparison also shows why different forms of women's memory should be studied together. Wartime monuments and cultural monuments are often treated as separate objects of study. Yet their comparison reveals a common structure: the female figure becomes a symbolic mediator between individual life and collective value. In wartime memory, that mediator is heroism; in cultural memory, it is artistic continuity. In both cases, the female image connects the past and the present and offers society a visible form of national identity. This does not mean that all monuments say the same thing; rather, they belong to a shared field of memorial representation.

Finally, the monuments remind us that public space itself is an archive. Unlike a written archive, it is open, visual, and encountered in everyday movement. People pass monuments on their way to work, school, the airport, a museum, a park, or a public ceremony. Some stop and read; others pass without noticing; still others encounter the monument through media images. Even this uneven encounter has historical significance. Public monuments create the possibility of memory, while ritual, education, media, and local storytelling determine whether that possibility becomes active memory (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, pp. 4-6; Winter, 1995, pp. 78-80; Anderson, 2006, pp. 24-25).

Conclusion

Monuments to twentieth-century women form a visible but still understudied part of Kazakhstan's historical-memory landscape. The cases analyzed here show that women's public commemoration is organized through two major registers: heroic memory and cultural memory. Aliya Moldagulova, Manshuk Mametova, and Khiuaz Dospanova are represented through courage, wartime service, regional pride, and national-patriotic discourse. Kulyash Baiseitova, Dina Nurpeisova, and Roza Baglanova are represented through artistic achievement, musical heritage, stage culture, and cultural continuity. Viewed together, these monuments show that the historical memory of women in Kazakhstan is not limited to a single symbolic function.

The central result is that monuments to women preserve more than the names of historical figures. They materialize selected values in public space:

heroism, sacrifice, talent, regional belonging, national pride, and intergenerational respect. Their meaning is produced through the interaction of biography, sculptural form, location, ritual practice, and public discourse. A monument should therefore be read as a historical source that reflects the commemorated person and the society that commemorates her.

The proposed five-level model – biographical memory, monumental sign, memorial location, ritual use, and public representation – keeps the study of monuments analytical rather than merely descriptive. It allows central urban monuments, regional memorial complexes, village monuments, airport-adjacent monuments, capital-city monuments, and cultural memorials to be compared within a single framework. It also helps identify the gendered meanings associated with women's images.

Taken together, the cases support the view that post-Soviet memory in Kazakhstan develops through selective continuity and re-signification. Heroic figures from the Soviet period, such as Aliya and Manshuk, remain visible, but their memory has been reinterpreted within the national history of independent Kazakhstan. Later monuments – the Oral composition of three heroic women and the Khiuaz Dospanova monument near Atyrau airport – expand this memory into collective and modern symbolic forms. Cultural monuments, in turn, show that women are remembered both for wartime heroism and for creating and transmitting national culture.

Further research should expand the corpus, verify information about local monuments through archival and municipal sources, conduct field observation, document inscriptions and surrounding spaces, and include interviews with museum workers, teachers, local residents, and visitors. Such work would make it possible to understand more precisely how monuments function as official symbols and as living elements of public historical consciousness.

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