A MIRACLE UNDER THE SKY OF KHIVA: THE COLORS AND PATTERNS OF THE KALTA MINOR AS AN OUTSTANDING EXAMPLE OF ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract. This article analyzes the architectural excellence of the Kalta Minor through its distinctive colors and ornamental patterns. Particular attention is paid to the expressiveness of its color palette, decorative motifs, and artistic elements, which reflect the high level of architectural and artistic culture of Khiva. The study also considers the significance of decorative patterns and blue-toned ornaments in expressing the aesthetic and cultural identity of the monument.
Keywords: Khiva, ornament, Ichan-Kala, Kalta Minor, calligraphic inscriptions, blue patterns.

Introduction. Architectural monuments are artistic expressions that embody a people's worldview, spirituality, cultural values, and understanding of human existence. The ancient city of Khiva, which has preserved its grandeur and historical appearance over centuries, is home to numerous architectural structures that continue to retain their unique beauty and appeal.

The architectural monuments of Khiva demonstrate the high level of craftsmanship and sophisticated architectural principles employed in their construction. Each historical period has produced its own distinctive examples of art and architecture. The monuments of Khiva—including minarets, mosques, madrasahs, mausoleums, fortresses, and palaces—represent important examples of the cultural heritage characteristic of their respective periods.

There are also numerous legends associated with the architectural monuments of Khiva. Although these stories are considered legends, some of them contain elements that are closely connected with historical traditions and local cultural memory. According to one legend concerning the origin of Khiva, the city is considered one of the oldest settlements in the world and its foundation is associated with the prophet Shem (Sam).

Another legend connects the origin of the name Khiva with water. According to this tradition, when people dug into the ground and reached a source of water, they lowered a bucket tied to a rope into the well. After the bucket was filled with water, it was slowly pulled back up. According to the legend, after drinking the water following a long and tiring journey, people exclaimed "Hee-vah!" or "Oh, what a relief!", and this expression eventually became associated with the name Khiva.

Analyses. Khiva is particularly noteworthy because many of its historical buildings have survived to the present day. The city's gates, wooden columns, elaborately decorated doors, and intricately ornamented portals demonstrate a distinctive aesthetic beauty and reflect the rich architectural traditions of Khiva.

Kalta Minor is a distinctive minaret known for its massive dimensions and its unfinished construction. It was commissioned by Muhammad Amin Khan and built next to the Muhammad Amin Khan Madrasah, on the right side of the entrance to the Ata Darvaza gate. The ancient city of Khiva, like many historical cities, developed its own distinctive architectural style, which reflected the artistic and cultural characteristics of its period.

Throughout history, human beings have aspired to greatness and height. Buildings have often been perceived as an integral part of nature and the surrounding environment. In Khiva's architecture,

images of trees, pomegranates, islīmī patterns, domes, and tall minarets served not only practical purposes but also conveyed symbolic meanings. Such concepts were reflected both in urban planning and in individual buildings, as well as in the interior spaces of architectural monuments. Therefore, vertically oriented structures have traditionally been associated with divine and spiritual concepts.

Similar architectural structures can be found in various parts of the world. For example, the ziggurats of ancient Babylon were monumental tower-like structures, while in Peru there were the 18-meter-high Pyramid of the Sun and Pyramid of the Moon along the Moche River. Such buildings can be interpreted as symbolic structures connecting human beings with the divine. The higher people aspired to reach, the more they associated height with greatness and spiritual significance. For this reason, temples in many countries were constructed at elevated and prominent locations.

In Central Asia, the development of Islamic culture also influenced architectural traditions. Minarets gradually became an integral part of mosque complexes. One of their primary functions was to provide a high place from which the adhan (call to prayer) could be proclaimed, calling Muslims to prayer. The height of the minaret also provided a broad view over the surrounding city and could therefore serve observational and monitoring purposes.

Minarets were constructed in many countries, and rulers of different periods often sought to demonstrate the power and grandeur of their states through monumental buildings and imposing structures. According to legends concerning the Blue Tower, the ruler of Khiva intended to construct a minaret that would be the tallest in the world and unparalleled in height.

Many of Khiva's architectural monuments are decorated predominantly in blue, green, and white. These colors are traditionally associated with peace, Islam, purity, and spiritual cleanliness. Thus, the colors used in architectural decoration also carry symbolic meanings.

Poetic lines attributed to Ogahiy were reportedly inscribed on the upper part of the minaret. According to historical traditions, after the construction of important buildings had been completed, the Khivan ruler would organize a feast attended by poets, scholars, and writers, where literary gatherings and poetic contests (mushaira) were held. Some of the most impressive poetic lines presented during such gatherings were subsequently incorporated into the decoration of architectural façades.

The calligraphic inscriptions were written in Arabic script, particularly in nasta'liq and ta'liq styles. A person unfamiliar with the Arabic alphabet might find it difficult to distinguish these inscriptions from ornamental patterns because the letters were artistically stylized and arranged in a decorative manner. In this way, Arabic script itself became an important element of architectural ornamentation.

The Blue Tower is approximately 28 meters high and has a circumference of 14.5 meters. Several legends are associated with the monument. According to one legend, the minaret was completed and its exceptional height became a source of great pride for both the people and the ruler of Khiva. However, one day, when a muezzin was climbing the minaret to call Muslims to the dawn prayer (Fajr), the structure collapsed. According to the legend, after this incident, no muezzin dared to climb the minaret again.

According to historical information, the Blue Tower was completed in 1853. The architectural monuments of Khiva are important sources for studying the history of the city. Inscriptions found on the portals and gates of these monuments sometimes provide information about when and by whom particular structures were built. Some of these inscriptions were recorded using the Arabic abjad numerical system and therefore serve as valuable evidence for historical research.

History is a discipline that requires reliable evidence and verification. Therefore, studying the past objectively and transmitting accurate historical knowledge to future generations is an important responsibility. Legal and regulatory documents have also been adopted to protect, preserve, and further improve architectural monuments and cultural heritage sites [1][2].

Minarets have performed several functions throughout history. In the urban composition, they served as architectural dominants, helping to subordinate different parts of the city to a central structure and thereby creating an integrated architectural composition. They also provided an opportunity to observe the surrounding areas. In addition, on Fridays and during Eid prayers, minarets served as places from which the call to prayer (adhan) was proclaimed to summon the inhabitants of the city to prayer.

It should be noted, however, that although minarets were generally incorporated into mosque complexes, they did not always serve as places for the call to prayer. As mentioned above, the muezzin, the person responsible for calling Muslims to prayer, would have faced considerable difficulty climbing up and down the narrow and steep staircases inside minarets that could reach 30–50 meters in height five times a day. Therefore, minarets were often used primarily for calling people to Friday and Eid prayers [3, p. 59].

Minarets were constructed not only in Khiva but also in many other countries. In addition to their practical functions, they also carried symbolic meanings. For example, the 13th-century Qutb Minar in India resembles the tower-like structure of the Gonbad-e Qabus in Iran and the minarets of Ghazni and Ghur in Afghanistan. Like these structures, it represented much more than simply a place from which the adhan was proclaimed. It symbolized the glory of Islam and its ability to protect Muslims. The name Qutb al-Din ("Pillar of Religion") also expressed a prestigious title and symbolized the "axis of the world," an axis connecting the earth with the cosmos [4, pp. 275–276].

Religious beliefs also influenced the construction of buildings in Central Asia. Alongside city mosques, minarets began to be constructed as integral architectural elements. For example, the minaret in Old Urgench is approximately 61 meters high, the Kalyan Minaret in Bukhara is 46.5 meters high, and the Islam Khoja Minaret in Khiva reaches 44.5 meters. These monuments provide clear evidence of the importance attached to monumental vertical architecture in the region.

Ogahiy described the grandeur of a minaret in the following words: "At the entrance of the madrasah, he ordered the construction of a lofty minaret, which was like a column reaching toward the heavenly veranda and, like a pillar supporting the celestial vault, seemed to rise as high as the sky" [5, p. 88].

Several legends have emerged concerning the unfinished construction of the Kalta Minor. According to one legend, the Khan of Khiva ordered a master builder to construct the tallest minaret in the world. The construction continued for two years, and the minaret gradually grew higher. News of the remarkable structure eventually reached the Emir of Bukhara. The Emir secretly made an agreement with the master builder that, after completing the minaret in Khiva, he would construct an even taller and more beautiful minaret in Bukhara.

When the Khan of Khiva learned about this agreement, he reportedly declared that he would have the master builder killed once the minaret was completed. Having learned of the Khan's intention, the master builder planned to escape. Meanwhile, the Khan ordered him to continue working without descending from the minaret. The master builder therefore asked his apprentice to bring paper, reeds, poles, and rope needed to construct wings. Gradually, he constructed wings from these materials at the top of the minaret and, one morning at dawn, flew southward. According to the legend, the minaret remained unfinished after his departure [6, pp. 42–43].

N. Zargarova studied the architectural monuments of Khiva in her research and catalogued the calligraphic inscriptions found on Khiva's historical and architectural monuments. Her studies revealed the content and meaning of Arabic inscriptions found on the city's architectural monuments [7, p. 92].

K. Khudayberganov also conducted research on the architectural culture of Khiva and provided extensive information about the monuments of Ichan-Kala. His research covers mosques, madrasahs, mausoleums, and minarets, as well as the legends associated with them. These monuments were also

interpreted from an ethnographic perspective. K. Khudayberganov deciphered and translated the Arabic inscriptions and ornamental signs found on Khiva's architectural monuments. He also read and translated the inscriptions on gravestones in the mausoleums into Uzbek [6, p. 348].

According to elderly master craftsmen, the art of ornamental painting was so highly developed in ancient times that craftsmen could communicate with one another silently through the patterns they drew or painted. In order to understand the language of ornament, it was necessary to know the symbolic alphabet represented by each element and color of the pattern [8, p. 3].

The art of calligraphy has been highly developed in Eastern countries, including Khiva, since ancient times. The work of calligraphers reached a high artistic level and served as a form of ornamentation and decoration for historical monuments and monumental buildings. Our ancestors did not limit the use of calligraphy to decoration; they also used inscriptions as numerical expressions and concealed historical dates through words using the traditional "muammo" method [6, p. 26].

The inscriptions on the minaret are written in Persian using the nasta'liq script. Their translation is as follows:

A blessed and lofty minaret has been built, The heavens had never seen its equal. It was completed by the command of the King of the World, Made pure from every fault and imperfection. When viewed with the eye of reason, beside it, Even the cypress tree appears like a mere straw. It is more beautiful than the Tuba tree, The tree of Paradise; its beauty resembles Paradise. Since this pillar has reached the summit of the heavens, The human mind cannot fully describe its magnificence. Therefore, Ogahiy recorded the date of its construction With the phrase "The Pillar of the Palace of Heaven."

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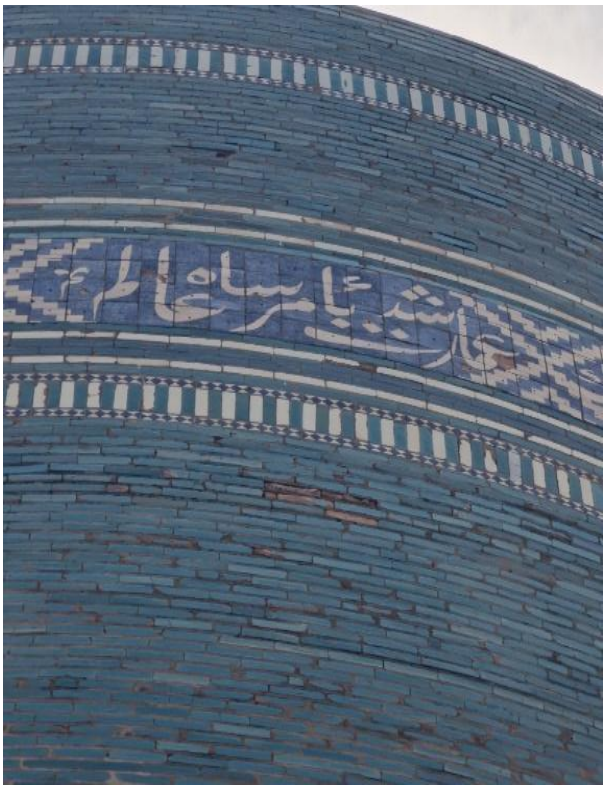
20+1+30+80+1+600+1+20+50+6+400+60=1269 (1853)

Thus, the construction of the minaret was completed in **1853** [6, pp. 44–45].

Khiva. Blue Minaret. Photograph taken by Djabborova Adolatkhon Kazakbayevna during





field research, 2026.

The idea that poetry and music possess divine power has existed in popular thought since ancient times. The connection between these sacred forms of art and architecture demonstrates that architectural monuments elevated to the level of art were also perceived as possessing a sacred and spiritual character. The similarities between them can be observed not only in decoration and architectural elements but also in spatial planning. This is evident, for example, in the transition from a corridor to the main hall, the sequential connection of rooms in an enfilade arrangement, and the rhythmic repetition of spatial environments within the rooms [3, p. 61].

There are several reasons why some aspects of our country's history have been lost over the centuries. Nevertheless, thanks to independence, our national history has been restored, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that our scholars have successfully fulfilled the important task of preserving and transmitting this historical heritage to future generations.

A poetic chronogram by Ogahiy was once inscribed at the top of the Blue Minaret. These inscriptions were destroyed during the early period of Soviet rule. Master Baltabay Ata, who witnessed these events himself, recalled:

"On May 1, 1932, everyone was carrying slogans written on red banners. Suddenly, it began to rain, and the rain washed the slogans away. Then religious people and clerics standing nearby said to the Communists: 'Do you see? Your slogans could not withstand even a single rain. Your government will be the same. Look at the inscriptions on our minaret—they have stood there for hundreds of years.' Angered by these words, government officials fired at the inscriptions on the Blue Minaret with rifles and destroyed them."

The inscriptions were subsequently restored on the eve of the 2,500th anniversary celebrations of the city of Khiva [6, p. 44].

The turquoise-blue color was traditionally believed to repel envy and return the negative intentions of those who looked upon it with ill will [3, p. 145]. The use of turquoise colors in the architecture of Khiva's historical monuments therefore reflects a distinctive symbolic meaning.

Conclusion. Throughout world civilization, tall towers and monumental structures can be found in many parts of the world. The construction of such buildings has undoubtedly been closely connected with religious beliefs. Buildings were regarded not merely as places for living or practical use, but also as symbolic means of connecting humanity with the universe. Therefore, their architectural forms were often conceived and expressed in relation to the cosmos and the divine.

Minarets represent outstanding examples of architectural art, distinguished by their decorative colors, ornamental patterns, calligraphic inscriptions, and symbolic meanings. The architectural heritage of Khiva demonstrates how artistic decoration, religious beliefs, and architectural design were integrated into a unified cultural system.

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