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## **Buran Minaret as a symbol of the Chui Valley of Kyrgyzstan**

**Abstract.** The research relevance is determined by the study of the architectural features of the Buran Minaret and its role in preserving the region's identity is key to the preservation of historical and cultural heritage in today's global cultural dynamics. The study aims to analyse the architectural significance of the Buran Minaret in the context of the cultural heritage of the Chui Valley and its influence on the formation of the region's history. The research involved a comprehensive methodological approach combining archaeological, historical, cultural and sociological methods. The results obtained have shown the uniqueness of the architectural solutions used in the construction of the Buran Minaret. The ornamental relief belts that adorn the minaret's trunk are technically complex structures of a high level of craftsmanship. The meticulous attention to detail and sophistication of the ornamental motifs emphasise that each element of the minaret's architecture was created with refinement and care for detail, reflecting the high level of skill and dedication of the ancient builders. The arched niches of the octagonal plinth, decorated with relief brick ornamentation, are also a visual expression of the minaret's artistic beauty. The preservation of the ornaments on the three belts demonstrates their significance as a historical and cultural heritage. The use of a variety of materials and masonry techniques, including

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ordinary building bricks, adds authenticity and uniqueness to this architectural monument. The findings also confirmed that the Buran Minaret plays a key role in the Chui Valley on the historical, cultural, religious and tourist levels. Its historical significance is expressed through its connection to different periods of the region, as well as its symbolic significance for culture and religion, attracting thousands of tourists for its historical and architectural significance. The findings have important practical implications for the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of the region. They broaden the understanding of the architectural and technical achievements of ancient masters, emphasising the need to preserve and restore unique architectural structures such as the Buran Minaret

**Keywords:** cultural heritage; architectural structures; historical site; Islamic identity; Muslim monument

## INTRODUCTION

In an environment where cultural diversity and interaction play an increasingly important role, there is a growing need to understand and preserve cultural heritage. The Buran Minaret, with its rich history and symbolic significance, acts as a key element of this heritage for Kyrgyzstan. Its ancient walls and architectural details are a testimony to the past and cultural traditions that have developed over many centuries. However, in a changing world, when globalisation and technological breakthroughs lead to rapid changes in the socio-cultural environment, the preservation and study of cultural monuments such as the Minaret of Buran becomes more relevant. This site is a source of historical information and serves as a “key” to understanding the cultural evolution and collective identity of the people living in each region. Considering these changes, it is important to conduct more in-depth research to uncover all aspects of the significance of the Buran Minaret for the cultural heritage of the Chui Valley.

Research on the symbolic significance of the minaret can help to improve the quality of understanding and preservation of cultural heritage. It can shed light on the historical and cultural contexts in which the monument emerged and developed. Uncovering these aspects will create a more complete picture of the cultural wealth of the Chui Valley and its contribution to the overall history of the region. It may also help to identify the changes that have occurred over time in the perception and use of the Buran Minaret and allow an assessment of its contemporary role and significance in the cultural and social life of the community. Understanding how these changes have affected the perception of the minaret and its role in people’s minds can offer valuable lessons for the future conservation and utilisation of cultural heritage.

Architectural structures, in particular minarets, are key elements in shaping the cultural and historical image of the region. The study by A. Hadrovic (2024) notes that such structures not only preserve the heritage of the past but also become symbols of identity and pride for the local population. They attract the attention of tourists, which contributes to the development of cultural tourism and enhances the attractiveness of the region as a historical and cultural centre. S. Amrane & B. Khalfallah (2023) noted that minarets serve as a testimony of architectural excellence and an important symbol of cultural wealth and heritage. Y. ALMagraby & R. El Attar (2021) emphasise that they also represent the spiritual and religious aspects of

society, maintaining a link with historical traditions and religious practices. However, despite the significance of such architectural structures, many questions regarding their social role and impact on contemporary society remain open and require further research.

M.A. Kamal (2021) emphasises that minarets play an important role as architectural symbols as well as essential elements of urban space. N. Kulözü (2021) points out that they can define the image of a city, giving it a unique style and atmosphere. At the same time, A. İbrahimgil & L. Kudumovic (2023) showed that these structures act as an important element of the urban landscape, becoming its characteristic features, which often become key architectural objects and landmarks for locals and visitors. The interaction of minarets with the surrounding buildings, natural environment and socio-cultural environment creates a unique space, which is a relevant factor in attracting tourists and strengthening the cultural image of the city and may require further study and standardisation of architectural solutions.

Moreover, minarets become an integral part of public space where not only believers but also representatives of different socio-cultural groups converge. E.M. Farrag (2023) analyses in detail the socio-cultural significance of minarets, highlighting their role as symbols of religious identity, as well as centres of social and cultural life. S. Nasim (2021) also notes that they serve as venues for social activities, ceremonies, cultural festivals and other events, facilitating communication and interaction between different segments of society. Furthermore, the study by H. Abo-Egila (2021) emphasises that the structures play an active role in shaping the public environment by inspiring social and cultural initiatives as well as strengthening ties within the community. This renders minarets important architectural and religious symbols, as well as socio-cultural nodes that contribute to enriching the region’s cultural heritage and strengthening its social fabric. However, issues relating to the preservation of minarets as public spaces, as well as their accessibility to different groups of people, require the development of appropriate strategies.

The study aimed to identify the architectural significance of the Buran Minaret for the people of Kyrgyzstan and its role in shaping the general cultural identity of the region. The main objectives of the study included: analysing the architectural features of the Buran Minaret to identify the methods and context of its construction,





studying the cultural and religious aspects of the minaret and assessing measures for the preservation and restoration of this historical site.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

At the beginning of the research, an extensive study of the available data on the history of the minaret's construction and existence was carried out. For this purpose, sources concerning the Buran Minaret and its role in the history of the region were studied (Archaeological-architectural complex..., n.d.). This enabled the identification of the main themes and areas of research, which included its cultural significance, religious and symbolic role, as well as its impact on the life of the local population and the tourism potential of the region.

To investigate the construction technology of the Buran Minaret, the archives of archaeological finds at the site of the construction, available in the National Historical Museum of the Kyrgyz Republic, were studied. The study examined the remains of the building structures, paying special attention to the construction materials used and the methods of their processing. Fragments of architectural details such as brickwork, decorations and brick carvings were analysed to understand the techniques used in the construction of the minaret. To gain a deeper understanding of the construction process and the engineering solutions used, the surviving documents, drawings and blueprints, as well as historical descriptions available in the Central State Archive of the Kyrgyz Republic (CSA KR) were studied. This made it possible to reconstruct an idea of how the various stages of the minaret's construction could have been carried out.

Archaeological information was also used to analyse the cultural contexts associated with the Minaret of Buran, allowing the history of the minaret to be reconstructed based on the artefacts and architectural features found. This made it possible to trace the history of the minaret since its construction and to assess its significance in the culture and history of the region. The analysis of cultural aspects was aimed at identifying the symbolic significance of the minaret for the local population and its religious role in society. The analysis was based on mythological perceptions, customs and traditions associated with the minaret, as well as its influence on the cultural life of the region.

An important aspect of the study of the Buran Minaret was the study of similar architectural structures and the comparison of their construction techniques. This made it possible to identify typical techniques and methods of construction of minarets of that time. By analysing comparable objects of architectural heritage, such as the Kalyan Minaret in Bukhara and the Surkh Minar Minaret in Termez, the study was able to identify common features and peculiarities characteristic of the construction of minarets in Central Asia in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. By comparing the design solutions, materials, masonry, decoration and other elements of the Buran Minaret with similar elements of other minarets, conclusions were drawn about similarities

and differences, as well as the degree of uniqueness and innovation of solutions used in its construction. Also, the comparison of the Buran Minaret with dated minarets of similar architecture allowed to clarify its dating and context of construction. The study of similar minarets in different regions of Central Asia made it possible to identify regional peculiarities of construction characteristics of this or that area. Employment of these materials and methods has thus resulted in an extensive collection of data that has served as a basis for analysing and drawing conclusions about the role of the Buran Minaret in the history, culture, religion and tourism of the region.

## RESULTS

The Chui Valley of Kyrgyzstan, located in the northern part of the republic at an altitude of 800 to 1200 m above sea level, is a unique corner of Central Asia. This valley is the most developed and populated region in Kyrgyzstan and carries a rich heritage of ancient eras. In the Middle Ages, especially in the period from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Chui Valley played a strategic role not only in Kyrgyzstan but also in the whole of Central Asia. Its importance was closely linked to the Great Silk Road that ran through the region, leaving its imprint in the form of prosperity and urbanisation (The statesman's yearbook..., 2020). However, the valley's even older past, dating back to much earlier times, testifies to its pivotal role due to its geographical location, unique climate, and wealth of water and other natural resources. The region has been a crossroads of various cultural and trade flows, making it an integral part of humanity's historical heritage. The traces of the Great Silk Road, permeating the history of this valley, have established its status as one of the most significant urbanised areas in Central Asia.

During the period of prosperity, the Chui Valley acted as an important centre on the trade route stretching from the Boom Gorge to the western tip of the region, on which the cities were located. Medieval sources provide extensive data on the demographic composition, urban infrastructure, trade and cultural interactions in the valley. These sources enabled researchers to analyse the historical names of towns and villages, establishing a link between ancient settlements and their modern counterparts (Zhy-lankozova, 2018; Chotaeva, 2021). The Buran Minaret becomes a unique bridge linking two epochal periods in the history of Kyrgyzstan, which are separated by millennia and belong to different economic formations. This architectural masterpiece materially embodies the historical layers and symbolically transfers this from the past time to the present, emphasising the continuity of cultural, historical and spiritual values of the state. Bearing the traces of thousands of years of art and building culture, the Minaret of Buran is the oldest monument of Islamic architecture in Central Asia. Its architectural appearance reflects the aesthetic and technical achievements of the past, embodying the symbolism and spirit of the time in which it was erected. This minaret has become an important architectural structure and a model of cult typology that is an icon of



religious and cultural identity in the open space of Muslim countries. Its symbolic significance extends beyond time, recalling the richness and versatility of the Islamic and cultural tradition (Engvall, 2020).

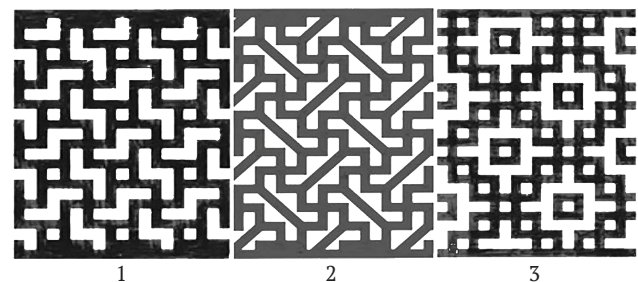
The Buran Minaret bears a rich historical heritage that encompasses various aspects of cultural and religious significance. First, it is the first example of Islamic architecture in the expanse of modern Kyrgyzstan, which emerged in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. This indicates a key stage in the evolution of religious architecture in the region. Being the oldest surviving minaret in Central Asia, it is a unique artefact of antiquity, revealing the distant past and the lessons of history. The minaret's architectural style and structural features reflect the Karakhanid typology of minarets in the region, leaving a legacy of the culture and religious traditions of that era. The Buran Minaret has become a sacred place of worship for the people of Kyrgyzstan, fitting into their spiritual and cultural identity. It is also surrounded by numerous legends and tales, giving it a mystical aura and attracting the attention of explorers and travellers. The minaret has become an object of pride for Kyrgyzstan, attracting the attention of many tourists wishing to experience its uniqueness and grandeur. It has also become a venue for various festive and celebratory events for residents, strengthening ties in the community. In 2014, the inscription of the minaret on the UNESCO World Heritage List of Cultural Monuments emphasised its uniqueness and importance for all humanity (Archaeological-architectural complex..., n.d.).

Together, all the mentioned factors of the significance of the Buran Minaret have created an image and symbol of a particularly famous and respected object of antiquity, turning it into a legendary symbol extending far beyond the borders of Kyrgyzstan. The name "Buran" has become not only a designation for this historic structure but has also become established in the names of the neighbouring village, local authorities and even the river. It is present in the names of various companies, commercial establishments and hotels, creating close links between these objects and the rich history of the minaret. The public memory and society have established a deep connection with the ancient structure, which has become a symbol of the unity of different sociocultural social and economic formations in the history of Kyrgyzstan. Considering the architecture of the monument in more detail, it should be noted that at the time of its inception, the earliest minarets in Central Asia were made of raw material and crowned with wooden arbours. However, by the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the crude structures began to be covered with burnt bricks on the outside (Massoud, 2020). The Buran Minaret inherits these traditions, noticeably imitating its predecessors built of raw material. It has radial arched timbers at its base, to reinforce the raw masonry plinth under the weight of the shaft. Although this technique has lost its relevance in brick architecture, its use in the Minaret of Buran indicates that it was one of the first experiments with the use of burnt bricks in construction, and builders

had not yet completely abandoned earlier methods.

The Buran Minaret has unique structural features that reveal its uniqueness. The monument's foundation, made of large cobblestones on loess mortar, is deeply embedded in the excavation, providing a solid base for the entire structure. A 4.3 metre-high "buttress" adjoined the southern side of the foundation, providing additional support and stability. The Minaret's podium, which has a square shape with steps and an octagonal plinth, is an architectural element that emphasises its grandeur. The lower ledge of the podium was 10 cm and the upper one was 69 cm, which gave the structure a harmonious ratio of proportions. The facets of the minaret's plinth, designed as arched niches and framed with rectangular ornamental frames, are decorated with masterfully executed patterns based on a diagonal square grid. These ornaments, including the openwork frame of the plinth, form a tympanum which, encircled by a thin band of brick ends, gives the structure an aesthetic grace and appeal. Moreover, the Buran Minaret is distinguished not only by its unique foundation but also by its perfectly preserved architectural details, which give it a special character. The arched niches of the octagonal plinth are decorated with relief brick ornamentation, which has been partially preserved, testifying to the skill of the ancient builders.

The trunk of the minaret, which has a conical shape, inspires majesty and power: at the level of the plinth its diameter is 8.85 m and at the top it is 5.9 m. The entire height of the minaret is covered with 11 entire belts and one fragmentary belt at the top, which alternate smooth brick surfaces with ornamental motifs. Despite the time trials leading to the destruction of some parts, at the time of restoration, the ornaments on three belts were preserved, continuing to amaze and inspire with their refinement. It is especially important to pay attention to the unique details of the ornamental relief belts of the minaret (Fig. 1). An interesting fact is the use of ordinary building bricks in the laying out of ornamental motifs, which gives these details a special character and authenticity. This technique, which distinguishes the early minarets from their later analogues, such as the Uzgen and Kalyan minarets, where special patterned and polished bricks are used for ornaments, allows to better understand the technical and artistic skills of the ancient masters, as well as their creative approach to creating unique architectural works.



**Figure 1.** Ornamental relief belts  
Source: compiled by the authors



The development of geometric ornaments of the Buran Minaret represents a significant achievement in the architecture of this era. These ornaments, created at the junction of 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, became the progenitors of more complex and refined variants of cladding, characteristic of Central Asian architecture. The method of building various motifs on the three best-preserved belts of the minaret deserves special attention. Here the ornaments are not simply built on a static square grid, as is often the case, but are created by shifting the centres and axes, which gives them a special dynamism and elegance. The result of this approach is the unique “vertushki” – rotating figures that give the Minaret of Buran a unique character and appeal to researchers and connoisseurs of ancient architecture (Hillenbrand, 2021).

At the stage above the first smooth belt of the Buran minaret, the first ornamental relief belt begins, characterised by complex compositions of intersecting brick bands. These ribbons create unique figures in the form of swastikas, arranged along the diagonals of the square grid. The background of the ornament is filled with complex cross-shaped figures with inserts in the centre consisting of square bricks measuring 4×4 cm. The next, second ornamental relief belt is represented by intersecting brick bands forming rows of figures of “vertushki” and broken crosses. In this belt, the “twirls” are placed along the diagonals of the square grid, giving the composition a special dynamic. The third ornamental belt, separated from the second one by a simple brickwork, is also represented by the motif of “twirls” on the intersecting diagonals of the square. Here each “twirl” is inserted into the frame, which makes their contour clearer and more expressive. This belt is characterised by sparser ornamentation, where the mass of the pattern is about 30% of the background, which provides ease of perception and understanding of the ornamental motifs. The fourth ornamental belt, separated from the third by 21 rows of simple brickwork, has a particularly complex and interesting relief ornament. In this belt, the brick bands intersect to form endless swastikas with displaced axes of construction. Across the entire width of this belt, which is 190 cm, there are five rows of intersecting ribbons, 38 cm high, connected by 4×4 cm bricks. This ornamentation gives the impression of joined swastikas on a diagonal grid of squares. The fifth ornamental relief belt is narrow and is only 54 cm wide. The ornamental pattern of this belt, consisting of two rows of zigzag pairs of bricks, stands out with its large division against the background of a freer space. Perhaps this belt carries some symbolic meaning that divides the conical body of the minaret according to some principle. Nevertheless, it represents a contrasting element that probably interacted with the narrow belt of the epigraphic inscription or with the lantern cornices in the form of stalactites in the upper part of the minaret, which are lost. The sixth ornamental belt, the simplest in pattern, consists of five rows of figures in the form of squares, connected horizontally by 12×4 cm bricks on the front side and vertically by 4×4 cm bricks. This belt adds textural variety

to the overall design of the minaret, presenting a calmer and more orderly pattern compared to the more complex ornaments on the previous belts.

The construction of the minaret was carried out using loess and ganache mortar for masonry. The ornamental layer of the outer masonry was created exclusively on ganache mortar, providing additional stability and aesthetic design. The bricks used for the construction of the minaret are not uniform in size, with sides varying between 23.5-25 cm. The brick has a square shape, and its thickness is 4-4.5 cm. This variety of bricks and the differences in size may have presented some challenges during the construction process but were successfully accommodated in the creation of this architectural composition. The architectural heritage of Central Asia, infiltrated by Islam, became one of the most important aspects of Islamic architecture, ranked among the world’s achievements (Prychepii, 2022). From that time, beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Islam took firm root in the region, becoming the dominant religion and global ideology. Magnificent examples of Muslim architecture, including the Minaret of Buran, rise among the architectural masterpieces of Central Asia. Minarets, along with mosques, have become an integral part of urban and rural settlements, reflecting the greatness of Islamic culture and spirituality. In the modern context, with the growing interest and mass construction of minarets around the world, the study of ancient minarets of Central Asia and other countries becomes an urgent task. Answers to questions about the genesis of architecture, semantics of motifs and symbolic meanings of these structures are inextricably linked to the historical context of their creation and development.

The Buran Minaret occupies a special place in the architectural history of Central Asia. While Islam was spreading to the western areas of the region before reaching Semirechye under the Karakhanids, other minarets were encountered. One such case refers to the discovery of the remains of a 10<sup>th</sup>-century minaret at the site of Afrasiab in Samarkand. Historical sources also mention a minaret in Gireng, in Turkmenistan (Arslan, 2022). However, the Minaret of Buran deserves special attention and recognition because of several factors. Firstly, it is the only surviving late 10<sup>th</sup>-century minaret in the region. Secondly, it represents the first example of a new typology of conical minarets with an overhanging brick lantern, which became characteristic of the Karakhanid Kaganate. Together with minarets such as the Burani, Uzgen, Kalyan in Bukhara and Vabkent minarets, it became a model for imitation, standing out for its shape, architectural decoration and unique proportional relationships. As a symbol of Islamic architecture, minarets represent a diversity of styles and forms, depending on the historical and cultural context in which they were built. Despite their common functions and importance in urban planning, they differ in their origins and influences. Types of minarets such as Arab, Iranian, Turkish, Central Asian, Indian, Moorish and others are characterised by their unique architecture, decoration and location in space. All these architectural monuments attract



the attention of modern architects who strive to creatively exploit this rich heritage. The study of various forms and styles of minarets inspires architects to create new projects that embody historical heritage and modern trends.

The architecture of minarets is going through a period of creative research, where the main endeavour is to reconsider the form, image and urban planning significance of these structures. The location of the minaret in urban space is becoming increasingly important as the symbolic significance of minarets in modern architecture increases, taking precedence over their original function of proclaiming the azan (Kerimkhulle *et al.*, 2023). There is also disagreement among architects about the loss of relevance and unnecessary of minarets in modern mosques. The study of Central Asian minaret building traditions becomes particularly relevant both in architectural practice and in cultural aspects. A deep understanding of the historical roots and evolution of these structures becomes a necessity for contemporary practitioners. Therefore, the architecture of the Buran Minaret, as the oldest object of Islamic architecture, acquires special significance for both theoretical analysis and practical application in modern minaret construction (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2.** View of the minaret before the reconstruction (1927)

**Source:** Buran Tower minaret (2019)

From a practical point of view, the minaret plays an important role in transmitting the call to prayer, as the voice of the muezzin can be heard further and more clearly from its height. However, from a spiritual point of view, the minister of the mosque seeks not only to communicate with the believers but also to establish a close connection with God. In the Christian tradition, high bell towers were built for this purpose, and the ringing of bells was heard over considerable distances (Bardik, 2023). In medieval cities and towns with low houses, minarets made a strong impression and served as a symbol of the greatness of God. Nevertheless, the minaret is not only a symbol of divine power but also a reflection of the power and wealth of earthly rulers.

History testifies to the aspiration of rulers of Muslim states to erect majestic mosques and impressive minarets in their possessions. This tendency was vividly manifested during the Karakhanid era, who particularly valued spiritual significance and patronised the development of the religious sphere. Therefore, every dimension of divinity and sacredness of the Minaret of Buran, which has its roots in the Karakhanid era, continues to live on (Rashid, 2020).

Modern cultural and mass events, as well as family and social gatherings, are often accompanied by prayer rituals in the square near the minaret. This demonstrates the deep embeddedness of this architectural masterpiece in the cultural heritage and religious practices of contemporary society. The inhabitants of the Chui Valley perceive the Buran Minaret as something much deeper than just an architectural structure. It is a kind of symbol of historical memory associated with the ancestors and traditions of the region. Each of its contours and brickwork reminds of a long past, of the days when this land was the centre of cultural and religious development. With the national independence, interest in Islam became much more prominent and many mosques were erected in a short period. However, this quest for spirituality and religious practice often misses an important aspect – the quality of architectural solutions. Many new constructions do not meet modern safety standards and aesthetic requirements. That is why it became necessary to introduce Construction norms and rules of the Kyrgyz Republic (2017). These norms regulate the architectural aspects as well as the safety of structures so that new mosques not only serve as places of worship but also meet modern requirements and become the pride of the region. It is worth noting that, considered in comparison with the Kalyan Minaret in Bukhara, the Buran Minaret is a more modest architectural structure. The height of Buran Minaret is about 24 m, which is several times lower than the height of Kalyan Minaret, which exceeds 45 m. Likewise, the Minaret of Buran is characterised by a simpler form and minimal decoration, indicating the modesty of its design compared to the more elaborate and luxurious decoration of Kalyan (Roshdy, 2018).

While the Kalyan Minaret served not only as a call to prayer but also as a symbol of the power and authority of the Islamic state, the Buran Minaret fulfilled a more modest function within its historical context. Its simplicity and modesty may have reflected the less developed socio-political environment in which it was built, compared to the more monumental and majestic Kalyan Minaret. Nevertheless, both sites are important architectural monuments reflecting the cultural and religious heritage of their regions. The Buran Minaret, in comparison to the Surkh Minar Minaret in Termez, also has a more restrained appearance and smaller dimensions. While the Minaret of Buran is about 24 m high, the Minaret of Surkh Minar stands more than 50 m high. The Surkh Minar Minaret was erected using more sophisticated engineering techniques to create a taller and tiered structure (Xasan, 2023). The overall composition of the Buran Minaret, while bearing some similarities to the





Termez Minaret, stands out for its unique architectural sophistication. In particular, the similarity in the vertical structure, including the podium, octagonal plinth and shaft, emphasises the general direction in architectural design. However, in the Buran Minaret, the ornamental relief belts use the same brick used for the masonry of the minaret's body, creating a harmonious unity in the visual experience. While the Termez minaret also demonstrates a similar use of bricks for ornamental belts, including Kufic inscriptions on the cylindrical body, its architectural style is characterised by specific details, such as narrow belts made of end-stacked bricks, creating a spectacular "dandana". Thus, although similarities can be traced, each of these minarets has its own unique character and architectural identity.

Minarets in the East are not just architectural structures; they are symbolic monuments intertwined with ancient myths, cosmogonic visions and historical events (Osievska, 2022). One outstanding example of this is the tall minaret at Jama in northern Afghanistan. This minaret, erected on an important mountain pass, far from populated areas and without a mosque, symbolised the victory of Sultan Ghiyas al-Din's warriors over the Ghaznavids in 1192. Its presence commemorates this historical event and also embodies the spirit of victory and grandeur associated with that time (Lali & Arefi, 2020). Since the beginning of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Minaret of Buran has taken on a new dimension, becoming part of an open-air museum. Excavations carried out in the early 1970s as part of the restoration works led to the discovery of many new archaeological findings confirming the cultic and sacred significance of the central part of the capital city of Balasagyn. The three impressive monumental mausoleums uncovered by the excavations near the minaret provided clear examples of the portal-dome and tower type of mausoleum architecture. These architectural findings shed light on the rich history and cultural heritage of the region, making the Buran Minaret even more significant for the study and understanding of Kyrgyz history and culture (Benjamin, 2018).

On the eastern slope of the hill located towards the centre of the settlement, the ruins of a one-chamber mosque were discovered in 1981, which is an important archaeological discovery. Earlier, as early as 1971, the remains of a monumental bathhouse, as well as traces of a water pipe and sewage system from it, were discovered in the south-eastern corner of the settlement. These artefacts are valuable finds awaiting conservation and museumization. The minaret and the ruins of other discovered monuments, including the central ramparts around the centre of Balasagyn, are the main exhibits of the open-air museum, important testimonies of the rich history and culture of the region. The particular importance and popularity of the minaret are revealed in the context of tourist use. Tourist travelling routes in northern Kyrgyzstan invariably include a visit to the Burani settlement and the Historical and Architectural Museum-Reserve. These places have become an integral part of the cultural heritage of the region, attracting the attention of tourists from all over the world.

With the inclusion of the Buran site in the UNESCO Cultural Heritage List in 2014, the flow of tourists has increased significantly. This event has attracted increased attention from both residents and foreign visitors. Visiting the minaret has become a tourist route and an opportunity to immerse oneself in the history and culture of the Kyrgyz people. Foreign tourists visiting the minaret admire its ancient architecture and symbolic significance, feeling a deep respect for this historical monument. For them, the site is a cultural heritage site where they can touch the rich history and culture of Kyrgyzstan (Wang, 2021). The preservation and restoration of minarets also have social significance as they are important symbols for the local population. They have a deep and symbolic meaning for the inhabitants, being the site of various rituals, ceremonies and traditional festivals. Moreover, minarets often play a religious role, serving as places for prayer and spiritual education. They are sacred sites for Muslims and other religious communities, the preservation of which maintains spiritual and cultural traditions. Historical structures such as minarets attract a large number of tourists, which contributes to the development of the tourism industry and the economy of the region. The tourist potential of the Buran Minaret attracts international attention and raises the prestige of the region. For this reason, preserving minarets, including the Buran Minaret, is integral to preserving cultural heritage, developing the tourism industry, enhancing social stability and continuing religious traditions (Lee & Jayakumar, 2021).

The Buran Minaret and similar structures play an important role in urban development, even though their original purpose may seem to have been lost. These structures are key elements of the architectural landscape, giving the city a unique and distinctive appearance. Their elevated forms serve as landmarks in the urban space and create recognisable silhouettes that can become symbols of the city. Moreover, historical structures, including minarets, play a significant role in maintaining a link with the city's past and cultural heritage. They embody the architectural excellence of past eras and are important symbols of the history and culture of the people. The towering shapes of the minarets recall the grandeur and glory of past times, and their sturdy walls preserve the many historical events and figures associated with the place. As architectural artefacts, they carry valuable information about the traditions and customs of previous generations, helping people today to better understand their history and identity. Thus, the Buran Minaret is an important historical and architectural artefact, as well as a living symbol of Kyrgyzstan's rich cultural and religious history. Its significance goes far beyond architectural heritage, encompassing cultural, religious and social spheres. The minaret stands as a reminder of the richness and diversity of cultural heritage, as well as the importance of preserving and transmitting this heritage to future generations. The preservation and protection of such structures support historical memory and cultural heritage and contribute to the identity and pride of a people.



## DISCUSSION

Architectural symbols like the Minaret of Buran carry great historical and cultural significance for the region. They are not just pillars of the past but also represent important aspects of cultural identity and heritage. The study of such architectural symbols allows for a deeper understanding of their role in shaping the collective memory of a society, including through strong cultural ties and traditions. Such architectural symbols are “living witnesses” of the past, which embody historical events and cultural traditions, carrying them through time and space. Their study becomes an important step in understanding the social life and cultural development of the region. Such structures are firmly embedded in the cultural landscape of the region, adorning it with their presence and defining its uniqueness and character. They become a visual expression of the rich history and cultural heritage of the area. Studies focusing on these structures play a key role in enhancing knowledge of the past. They act as an important source of information about the cultural and historical context of a society, helping to better understand and appreciate the value of these architectural symbols. The results of such studies provide unique insights into the traditions, customs and beliefs that have shaped the cultural essence of a region. They provide a deeper insight into the essence of the local society and a better appreciation of its contribution to world culture and history.

This study of the Buran Minaret emphasised its unique architectural designs and its multifaceted significance for the local population and tourists. Alternately, M. Alajmi & Y. Al-Haroun (2022), conducting an architectural analytical study of modern minaret design, emphasised the importance of aesthetic and functional aspects in the creation of such architectural structures. M. Bakri & M. Rahmi (2023) also analysed not only the external appearance of minarets but also their practical application, relationship with the environment and impact on the socio-cultural life of society. Evaluating the results of the mentioned works, it should be emphasised that they could complement this study by enriching the analysis of architectural structures. The mentioned works, which analyse modern minarets, could complement the study of the Buran Minaret by providing new information regarding innovative design approaches and technologies that could be applied to the preservation and restoration of this historic site. Furthermore, the use of innovative approaches in design and materials would help to preserve its historical authenticity while providing a more durable and sustainable structure. Thus, this research could mutually inspire and enrich methodologies and practical approaches to the conservation and development of architectural heritage.

The study of ornamental relief belts, as on the Minaret of Buran, was also addressed in a study by A. Al-Omari & S.I.A. Khattab (2020), in which the subject of analysis was the Minaret of Al-Hadba, a famous architectural landmark. The focus of the work was the contribution of this minaret to the development of the architectural style and the

technology of the bricks used in its construction. The study by K. Al-Ghazali & S. Al-Wazni (2023) also conducted a detailed study of the quality of the brick used in the construction of the minaret, its structure and characteristics, and the technology used in its manufacture. The results of the study provided a further understanding of its role in the architectural culture of the region and its influence on the development of local construction. When comparing these results with those of the Buran Minaret study, it is significant that they all examine the architectural features and historical significance of minarets, but from different perspectives. This study takes a broader look at the significance of the Buran Minaret in the context of the history, culture and life of the Chui Valley population. It highlights the unique structural and design methods used in its construction and ornamental solutions and draws attention to its significance in various spheres, including religion and tourism. Thus, all these studies provide valuable information for a fuller understanding of the role and significance of minarets in the architectural and cultural history of the region.

W. Astrini *et al.* (2020) focused on analysing the preferences of the community in shaping the composition of mosque architecture, and particularly the minaret. The study investigated which features and designs of the minaret were favoured by the local community and how they relate to traditional architectural styles and cultural norms. Furthermore, H. Hagra (2023) identified, by analysing the architectural features and design elements of the minaret, the main preferences and values that determine the choice of minaret design in the context of the mosque and its role in the architectural landscape of the region. It is noted that the results of the work provided a better understanding of the relationship between architecture and culture in the context of minaret design and its perception by the community. However, unlike the results of the studies mentioned above, the results of this study on the Minaret of Buran are more focused on the technical and design aspects of the structure. This study revealed the unique construction and design methods used in the construction of the minaret, which emphasises the technical prowess and creativity of the ancient builders. The study also revealed the peculiarities of the ornamental relief belts, revealing their important role in shaping the architectural appearance of the structure and its historical value. At the same time, the approach to analysing the preferences and values of certain regions applied in the mentioned works could complement this study, enriching its understanding of the perception of the structure in the context of cultural and social significance.

Architectural and structural features of minarets, as well as methods of erecting structures like the Minaret of Buran, were partially analysed in the study of A. Aymelek *et al.* (2023). The study analysed full-scale structural evaluations of the Iskenderpaş Minaret. The findings provided important information for the preservation and restoration of the minaret, as well as for the development of measures to strengthen and protect it in the future. M. Pouramini-an (2022) also evaluated the durability of historic brick





minarets under different hazards, which allowed for a better understanding of their stability and the development of effective methods for their preservation. In comparing the mentioned works with this study, it is worth mentioning that all of them have their importance. A detailed study of the architectural and historical features of the Buran Minaret has shown its uniqueness and importance as a cultural symbol. However, at the same time, the mentioned study provides valuable information for the conservation and restoration of minarets as well as similar structures. Applying such analyses in the context of the study of the Buran Minaret could allow for a more comprehensive assessment of its current condition and the development of effective conservation and restoration measures, which in turn would contribute to the preservation of its cultural heritage and historical value for the local community and tourists.

Thus, research on architectural structures like minarets is crucial to the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of the region. Such studies not only enhance knowledge of the past but also understand the significance of these structures for contemporary society. They reveal the architectural, historical, cultural and religious aspects associated with minarets, preserving and transmitting their value to future generations. Moreover, such studies promote tourism, cultural exchange and intercultural understanding, making them essential for the preservation of cultural diversity and the heritage of humanity.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed that the Buran Minaret plays a significant role in the history, culture and life of the local population of the Chui Valley in Kyrgyzstan. The study of the architectural features of the minaret highlighted the unique construction and design methods used in its construction. Thus, the ornamental relief belts decorating the trunk of the minaret are technically complex designs of aesthetically attractive elements reflecting the high level of skill of the ancient builders. The elegance and careful elaboration of ornamental motifs testify to the fact that the creation of each element of the minaret's architecture was carried out with great care and attention to detail.

The arched niches of the octagonal plinth, decorated with relief brick ornaments, are also one of the visual

expressions of the artistic beauty of the minaret. Although time and some natural factors have led to the destruction of some of the details, the preservation of the ornaments on the three belts demonstrates their significance as historical and cultural heritage. These ornaments add to the beauty and attractiveness of the minaret and are an important source for studying the technology of ancient builders in the region. Meanwhile, the variety of materials used, including loess and ganache mortar, as well as different types of bricks, is evidence that craftsmen were skilled in a wide range of construction techniques and technologies. The use of ordinary building bricks in the ornamental masonry adds to the authenticity and uniqueness of this architectural monument, distinguishing it from its later counterparts.

From a historical perspective, the Buran Minaret is an ancient architectural structure that goes back in time and is associated with different historical periods of the region. It is not only an architectural monument, but also a symbol of spirituality, history and culture of the people of Kyrgyzstan. The minaret is associated with important historical events of the religious life of the society. It attracts thousands of tourists from different countries with its historical significance, architecture and atmosphere. The study noted the need to preserve such historical structures as an important element of cultural heritage. Their role in urban planning confirms that they symbolise the historical past, influencing the formation of urban space and its identity.

One of the limitations of the study was the limited access to some sources and archival materials, which may have affected the completeness of the analysis of architectural and historical data about the minaret. Directions for further research in this area could include a more in-depth analysis of the architectural and engineering features of the Buran Minaret and an investigation of its impact on the urban environment and cultural identity. It is also essential to explore methods of conservation and restoration of such historic structures to ensure their preservation for future generations.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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## **Мінарет Бурана як символ Чуйської долини Киргизстану**

**Анотація.** Це дослідження має актуальність, оскільки вивчення архітектурних особливостей Мінарету Бурана та його ролі у збереженні ідентичності регіону є ключовим для збереження історичної та культурної спадщини в умовах сучасної глобальної культурної динаміки. Метою даного дослідження було провести аналіз архітектурної значущості Мінарету Бурана в контексті культурної спадщини Чуйської долини та його впливу на формування історії регіону. Дослідження включало комплексний методологічний підхід, що поєднує археологічні, історичні, культурологічні та соціологічні методи. Отримані результати засвідчили унікальність архітектурних рішень, застосованих при зведенні Мінарету Бурана. Орнаментальні рельєфні пояси, що прикрашають стовбур мінарету, являють собою технічно складні конструкції, що відрізняються високим рівнем майстерності. Ретельна увага до деталей і вишуканість орнаментальних мотивів підкреслюють, що кожен елемент архітектури мінарету був створений з вишуканістю і турботою про деталі, відображаючи високий рівень навичок і відданість древніх будівельників. Арочні ніші восьмигранного цоколя, декоровані рельєфним цегляним орнаментом, також є візуальним вираженням художньої краси мінарету. Збереження орнаментів на трьох поясах демонструє їхню значущість як історичної та культурної спадщини. Використання різноманітних матеріалів і технік кладки, включно зі звичайною будівельною цеглою, надає автентичності та унікальності цій архітектурній пам'ятці. Також, отримані результати підтвердили, що Мінарет Бурана відіграє ключову роль для Чуйської долини на історичному, культурному, релігійному та туристичному рівнях. Його історичне значення виражається через зв'язок з різними періодами регіону, а також його символічну значущість для культури та релігії, приваблюючи тисячі туристів своєю історичною та архітектурною значущістю. Отримані висновки мають важливе практичне значення для збереження історичної та культурної спадщини регіону. Вони розширюють розуміння архітектурних і технічних здобутків стародавніх майстрів, наголошуючи на необхідності збереження та реставрації унікальних архітектурних споруд, таких як Мінарет Бурана

**Ключові слова:** культурна спадщина; архітектурні споруди; історичний об'єкт; ісламська ідентичність; пам'ятка мусульман