



# Alinja Mountain in the Context of Historical and Cultural Heritage

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**Abstract.** Mountains possess irreplaceable and highly fragile natural heritage, while also hosting exceptionally rich cultural heritage connected to world history. Nevertheless, their uniqueness faces numerous challenges, including population decline and the lack of systematic services: finding ways to value cultural heritage can serve as a strong remedy for addressing these issues. Therefore, this article provides an overview of initiatives that local and regional cultures should refer to in order to strengthen sustainable development in mountainous areas through the assessment of cultural heritage. This brief review conceptualizes mountains as global natural heritage and highlights the urgent need to protect the biodiversity of mountain environments. Mountains are recognized as cradles of biodiversity and essential providers of ecosystem services. They also constitute, after islands and beaches, the second most popular category of open-air destinations globally. However, in the current era of accelerating global ecological changes, mountain systems are experiencing unprecedented alterations in their ecological characteristics, which will directly affect millions of people dependent on mountain ecosystem services. Furthermore, increasing tourism places fragile mountain ecosystems under growing stress. This situation demands collaboration between scientists and stakeholders involved in mountain area management to protect mountains as global heritage. By emphasizing the prominent features of natural diversity in mountains and their importance in understanding global ecological change, this critical review argues that it is essential to assess both biotic and abiotic diversity to conceptualize mountains as a shared heritage of humanity. Accordingly, the development of soft infrastructure that can convey the essence of mountain directions and a committed network of scientists and tourism experts working together globally are required to protect this shared heritage.

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## 1. Introduction

This selective review aims to analyze the natural and anthropogenic threats that Alinja Mountain has faced throughout history based on the results of modern scientific literature and to justify the urgent need to conceptualize it as a complex natural-cultural heritage of Azerbaijan worthy of protection. The study emphasizes the value of the mountain's natural diversity, which includes both abiotic and biotic components, and highlights the strategic importance of mountain ecosystems in terms of global ecological stability, biodiversity conservation, and cultural memory. In this regard, although the text has the character of a "position paper" and focuses on a specific geographical object, it approaches the issue within a broader – global mountain protection discourse.

The structure of the review briefly but systematically presents the current threat scenarios, the



multifaceted nature of mountains not only as physical-geographical parameters, but also as ecological, social and cultural spaces, as well as the scientific basis for their protection as cultural heritage. It is particularly emphasized that the protection of the biophysical integrity of mountains is inextricably linked to ensuring the sustainability of the cultural diversity, historical memory and human-nature interactions formed within them. For this purpose, it is considered necessary to establish institutional cooperation between local communities, scientists, conservation experts, tourism planners and communication professionals.

The territory of Azerbaijan has been marked by numerous defensive structures and fortress systems throughout history, and these monuments have become important indicators of the country's political and military history, statehood traditions, and architectural development. In addition to their strategic military role, fortresses, particularly those located in mountainous areas, played a complex role in regional governance, economic dominance, and the organization of cultural life. The Nakhchivan region, one of the ancient fortified places in Azerbaijan, is of interest in this regard.

Nakhchivan has a fortification-style architecture due to its complex landscape, location on crucial trade routes, and geopolitical significance. Alinja Fortress is a remarkable monument due to its location at the highest point of the mountain, its long-term use for defense purposes, and its cultural significance. The castle, in addition to being a military-strategic fortification, is a complex heritage monument representing the unity of natural landscape, archaeological context, and cultural memory.

Thus, the presented introductory part justifies the protection of Mount Alinja and the fortress complex located on it not only as a local issue, but also as a relevant scientific problem in the context of the general heritage system of Azerbaijani fortresses and global mountain protection. This approach is of particular importance in terms of the formation of an integrated model of protection of natural and cultural heritage.

## **2. Objectives**

### **2.1. The modern state of Alinja Castle**

Alinja Castle, located on steep cliffs on the right bank of the Alinja River in the Julfa district of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, is considered one of the most important and symbolic monuments of the historical and architectural heritage of Azerbaijan. The monument's location in high relief is distinguished not only for its defensive purposes, but also for its landscape and aesthetic features, making it one of the most striking cultural and tourist attractions in the region.

As a result of archaeological research and restoration and conservation work carried out in the fortress since the beginning of the 21st century, a more complete scientific understanding of the structural structure of the monument, residential and defensive elements has been formed. The discovered residential buildings, farm complexes, water pools, tandoors, as well as the remains of the underground water supply system prove the existence of long-term habitation in the fortress. These findings indicate not only the military fortification function, but also the development of social and domestic life in the fortress. "In the research on the history of Azerbaijani architecture, the Nakhchivan architectural school was the first to be recognized as an architectural school." (Efendi, 2007, p. 30)

The restoration measures carried out in modern times, along with the preservation of the monument, serve to realize its scientific, educational and tourism potential. The improvement of the road infrastructure leading to the castle, the creation of a museum complex, the organization of visitor routes and the strengthening of information provision have had a positive impact on the socio-economic development of the region. Thus, the Alinja Castle at the modern stage acts not only as an archaeological site, but also as an important cultural resource for regional development.

### **2.2. History of the formation of Alinja Castle**



“The Alinja fortress, located on a steep mountaintop on the river of the same name near Nakhchivan, was considered impregnable” (History of Azerbaijan, 2009, p. 302)

The history of the Alinja Castle is associated with different periods in the scientific literature and this issue is still a subject of research. Some studies suggest that the initial foundations of the fortress date back to antiquity, while other approaches point to its formation in the early Middle Ages. This diversity indicates that the monument went through long stages of construction and reconstruction.

It should be noted that “it is no coincidence that architecture is likened to a giant stone book that preserves the distant and recent past, the concept of beauty, and the artistic and aesthetic sense of each nation in its pages.” (Aliyev & Khalilov, 2011, p. 54).

In the Middle Ages, the fortress was known as one of the strongest defensive fortifications in the region. During the reign of the Atabegs of Azerbaijan, the storage of the state treasury here increased the political and economic importance of the fortress. In the later stages, during the reign of the Hulagu and Jelairi, the fortress was used as a strategic military center. The long-term siege incident that occurred at the end of the 14th century brilliantly demonstrated the defensive potential and military architectural features of the fortress.

Although the fortress retained some importance during the reigns of the Garagoyunlu, Aggoyunlu and Safavids, it gradually entered a period of decline as a result of political conflicts and wars. Nevertheless, written sources, traveler's notes and archaeological materials confirm that the Alinja Castle played an important role in the political and military history of the region for millennia.

“The Deralayaz (Kukudag-3120 m) and Zangezur mountain ranges (Gapicig mountain - 3904 m) extend in the territory of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. At the junction of both mountain ranges is the Bichenak pass (2346 m)” (History of Azerbaijan, Vol. I, 2007, p. 44).

In Azerbaijan, the mountain peak Alinja is located in the southeastern part of the Zangezur range, in the Julfa district of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, on the right bank of the Alinjachay. Its height varies between 1810 and 1821.4 m. On the southeastern slope of the mountain is the village of Khanaga, and on the peak of the mountain is the medieval Alinjekala fortress. The mountain consists of laccoliths.

The unconquered Alinjagala fortress, located in the high mountains of Nakhchivan, amazes with its amazing beauty and power. Those who managed to climb about 2 thousand steps to reach the walls of the ancient structure claim that the fortress has a special energy. Alinjagala is called the Machu Picchu of Azerbaijan. The walls of the fortress begin on the slopes of Mount Alinjaga and rise in a stepped form, completely surrounding the peak.

The road to the castle runs along an ornate stone staircase leading up into the mountains. Inspired by the local tales of Alinjagala, we head higher. At first, the path seems simple and easy, and we even compete with each other to see who reaches the finish line first. However, the higher it gets, the harder it is to climb. As we approach the middle of the road, we realize that only the most resilient will reach the top of the mountain. We stop and take a breath. Silence reigns everywhere, the sounds of rare cars from somewhere below, the sounds of the city are not heard. At some point, it seems to us that we have entered another dimension and returned several centuries ago.

According to ancient sources, the fortress was built two thousand years ago. Other historians claim that it was built in the 3rd-4th centuries during the Sasanian state. Medieval sources mention that this fortress was one of the most powerful defensive structures of its time. The Spanish diplomat, the ambassador of King Enrique III of Castile to the Timurid state in 1403-1406, Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, described Alinjagala as follows: “Alinjagala is located on a high and steep mountain and is surrounded by towers. Inside the walls, on the lower parts of the mountain slopes, there are vineyards, orchards, fields, pastures, springs and pools. The fortress or castle is located at the top of the mountain. In folk etymology,



the fortress is called Alinjagala, which means “to give up something”. This is due to the inaccessibility of the fortress”.

There are many historical facts about this place. Thus, during the years of the existence of the Atabey's state (1136-1225), the state treasury was kept in Alinjagala. Moreover, most of the palaces and auxiliary buildings were erected during the reign of Shamseddin Eldaniz (1136-1175). In the 14th century, Alinjagala was the main fortress in the struggle of the Azerbaijani people against the army of the great commander Tamerlane. The defenders of the fortress fought against the invaders four times in 14 years. After the fall of the fortress, the famous commander came here to personally check that his troops had captured the impregnable fortress.

The unusual landscape of Alinjagala attracts many tourists from abroad. Before the pandemic, many guests from different countries came to Nakhchivan. Russians especially loved these regions. The fortress walls, starting from the very foot of the mountain, rise in rows along the slope, protecting its peak. The old bastion of the fortress was built of baked bricks and stones brought from neighboring villages. The ruins of three walls with semi-oval towers on the northern slope and eight walls on the western slope have been preserved. Guardhouses, trenches and defensive towers were built on the road from the village of Khanagah to the fortress. Alinjagala is mainly divided into three large parts - the northern, northwestern and southwestern parts. From the northern part to the northwestern and southwestern parts, people climbed stone stairs. The strong fortress walls and steep cliffs turned it into an impregnable defensive fortress. In the upper part of the fortress, the ruins and foundation stones of many palaces and residential buildings built of baked bricks, reminiscent of a small city, have been preserved. The part where the large feudal lords and fortress commanders once lived is called "shakhtakhti" or "shah takhti".

In 2014, the restoration of the monument began, and archaeologists managed to almost completely restore Alinjagala to its original state. During the excavations, residential and public areas, stables, barns, tandoors, water pools, and underground water pipes “kahriza” were discovered. The residential buildings, located close to each other, consisted of one room, heated by a small stove, and hand mills, pottery, axes, and coins were preserved in them. After the restoration work was completed, a museum was built next to the monument, which includes exhibits found during archaeological excavations.

“The defense structures and religious buildings that have survived to our time create conditions for clarifying to some extent the level of development of architecture and urban planning in the 3rd-7th centuries” (History of Azerbaijan, Volume II, 2007, p. 148).

The approximate time of its construction is the 1st-6th centuries. The name of the fortress has both Arabic and Turkish meanings. The Arabic name “Alinja” means “Ali’s place”, and in Turkish it means “after capture”. Alinjagala fortress in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. It is located in the Julfa district, on the right bank of the Alinjachay, at the top of the mountain of the same name. In ancient sources it is called Erincaq, Erincik, Alancik, Alinja, Alancik. Researchers associate the name Alinjagali with the word “alan”, which means “plain” in the ancient Turkic language. This is due to the similarity of the territory of the fortress with a small area. Inside the walls, on the lower parts of the mountain slopes, there are vineyards, orchards, fields, pastures, springs and pools. The fortress or castle is located at the top of the mountain. In folk etymology, the fortress is called Alinjak, i.e. "to give up something." This is due to the inaccessibility of the fortress. There are several versions regarding the history of the construction of the fortress. Some researchers, based on sources, attribute the history of the fortress to 2 thousand years ago. In the epic “Kitabi- Dade Gorgud”, Alinjagala is described as a powerful fortress. In medieval sources, Alinjagala is mentioned as an ordinary fortress. Historians Nasavi (13th century), Sharafeddin Ali Yezdi (15th century), Turkish traveler Evliya Çelebi (17th century) and others provide information about Alinjagala. Alinjagala is a symbol of grandeur and disobedience. The castle, first of all, fascinates people with its unusual appearance. The walls of the castle start from the slopes of Mount Alinja and rise in a stepped form, completely surrounding the peak. The ancient walls of the castle were built of large stones



and baked bricks brought from surrounding villages. On the northern slope there are ruins of three walls of semicircular towers, and on the western slope there are eight walls. Alinjagala mainly consists of three large parts: north, north-west and south-west. Stone stairs were built to climb from the north to the north-west and south-west parts. The strong walls and steep cliff of the castle turned it into an impregnable defensive fortress. In the upper part of the castle, the ruins of residential and public buildings made of baked bricks, reminiscent of a small city, attract attention. This place, which was the residence of chiefs and large feudal lords, is called “Shah Takhti” (king’s throne). Even in the literature of the 19th century. The remains of beautiful palaces and buildings belonging to the feudal lords of Alinjagala are mentioned. At one time, the fortress could accommodate 600 soldiers along with a herd of horses, cattle, horses and military equipment. The high-quality celadon porcelain tableware found attracts attention. According to researchers, celadon dishes were brought to Azerbaijan from China via the Great Silk Road. During the rule of the Azerbaijani atabegs, the Eldegazis, the importance of Alinjagala as an important military fortification increased and became a refuge for the ruling family. The residence of the ruler of Nakhchivan Zahida Khatun, the treasury of the Eldegazis was located in Alinjagala. In 1225, during the attack on Azerbaijan by the troops of the Khorezmshah Jalaladdin Mankburni, the last ruler of the Eldegazis, Uzbek, who was in the castle, was killed in one of the battles. In the 13th-14th centuries. the castle was in the possession of the Khulakids, and in the second half of the 14th century. The names of the rulers of Sultan Tahir, the commanders of the Ustamur castle (1343), Haji Jokhar (1390), Amir Altun (1390), Seyid Ali, Haji Saleh and Ahmed Ogulshay (1401) are known. In the 80s-90s of the 14th century, Alinjagala was the main fortress of the Azerbaijani people's 14-year struggle against the Timurid troops. In 1393, Timurid's forty-thousandth army approached Alinjagala. At this time, a detachment under the command of Altun secretly left the fortress, chose the right position and attacked the enemy from the rear, who had captured the gates of the fortress, defeating him. In 1397, the combined troops of Sheki and Georgia defeated the Timurid commander Sultan Sajar at Alinjagala, freed Sultan Tair from the siege and sent him to Baghdad. The defense of the fortress was once led by Seyid Ali, Haji Saleh and three Georgian aznaurs (commanders). Alinjagala was very worried about Teymur. After Teymur returned to Samarkand from India in 1399, he received information about the situation of Alinjagala from a messenger and after 4 months approached the fortress with his army. 5-6 emirs (commanders) led the attack on the fortress. As a result of disagreements, the fortress was left defenseless and surrendered. Its leader, Ahmed Ogulshay, was beheaded. Teymur visited the fortress and was amazed by its grandeur. After Teymur's death (1405), Alinjagala again came under the rule of the Jalairs, and then the Qara-Qoyunlu. The ruler Qara-Qoyunlu Iskander, who was fighting for power with his brother Jaanshah, found refuge in Alinjagala. After Iskander was killed by Gubad Mirza, Jaanshah captured Alinjagala. Alinjaqal, which was once under the control of the Aghqoyunluds and then the Safavids, was destroyed as a result of feudal disputes and wars.

“The foundation of the Nakhchivan architectural school is made up of brick monuments.” (Aliyev & Khalilov, 2011, p. 74).

### **2.3. The role of Alinja Castle in the lives of the local population**

The Alinja Castle was not only a defensive fortification, but also a complex that served as a socio-political administration and residential area. The settlement of feudal rulers, warlords and the ruling class here in various historical periods turned the fortress into a regional power center. The palace-type buildings, residential houses, economic structures and water supply system existing within the fortress indicate that sustainable life was organized here. “The emergence of fortress-city-type settlements was directly related to the high level of development of craftsmanship and its separation from other fields of occupation” (Azerbaijani Ethnography. Volume I, 2007, p. 34).

The existence of the fortress created a security guarantee for the population living in the surrounding areas and created conditions for the stability of economic activity. In times of war and danger, the fortress played the role of a refuge, and in times of peace it functioned as an administrative and economic center. Therefore, the Alinja Castle lives in the collective memory of the local population not only as an



architectural monument, but also as a symbol of resistance, statehood and national identity.

In addition, the fortress influenced the cultural and literary environment of the region, inspiring the formation of heroic and patriotic motifs. Thus, the function of the Alinja Castle was not limited to a military-strategic framework, but acquired social and cultural content.

#### **2.4. Protection, restoration, and utilization of the Alinja Castle in the future**

The main task facing the Alinca Castle in the present day is its continued preservation as an example of material and cultural heritage and its transmission to future generations. Restoration and conservation efforts must go beyond mere physical protection and include ongoing scientific research, the implementation of monitoring systems, and adherence to international heritage protection criteria.

The fortress's potential for tourism is significant. There are many chances for the growth of ecotourism, cultural tourism, and scientific and educational endeavors due to the historical landscape, archeological environment, and architectural remains. In addition to creating jobs for locals, the construction of tourism infrastructure can support the socioeconomic rebirth of the area.

At the same time, it is necessary to maintain a balance between the commercial use of the monument and the protection of cultural heritage. In this regard, a scientifically based management model, cooperation between state institutions and local communities, and educational activities play a crucial role. The future development of Alinja Castle as a diverse cultural center dedicated to the preservation of national memory, heritage, and cultural identity is strategically important.

#### **3. Historical Stages and Strategic Importance of Alinja Castle**

The analysis of the historical development stages of the Alinja Castle by periods demonstrates that this monument was formed not only as a military-strategic fortification, at the same time as a significant center of political, social and cultural processes. The geographical position of the fortress, its construction on steep cliffs and the ability to control a vast territory led to its special significance in different historical periods. From this point of view, the development of **\*\*Alinja Castle\*\*** can be considered in several main stages.

There are various studies and articles about the fortress and the mountain it is surrounded by. In almost every one of these articles, the history of the fortress and its place in Azerbaijani culture are reflected. In the July 12, 2019 issue of the Azerbaijan newspaper, there is an article about the Alinja Fortress. From that article, it is clear that the Alinja Fortress, one of the important examples of the Nakhchivan-Maraga architectural school, has been known by various names throughout history. This fortress, known as "Alinjag", "Alanciq" and "Alinja" since the 10th century, is located on the right bank of the Alinjachey River, on the side of the Nakhchivan-Julfa road, on the Yalchin Mountain.

“There are different opinions about the date of construction of Alinja Qala. Some researchers suggest that it dates back two thousand years. The description of Alinja Qala as a protected fortification in the epic "Kitabi-Dade Gorgud" emphasizes its historical importance. In the Middle Ages, the name Alinja was recorded as a mountain, a river, and a castle.” (Azerbaijan, 2019, p.11).

Serving various ruling dynasties of Azerbaijan throughout history, Alinja is best known as the residence of the Azerbaijani Atabeys. Even the great Jahangir Amir Temur was amazed by the strength of the fortress. The Spanish diplomat Rui Gonzalez Clavijo, in his journey in 1403-1406, described Alinja as a complex on a high mountain, surrounded by walls and towers. Inside it was vineyards, gardens and springs. Although the castle suffered serious damage after the Safavid period, it still functioned in the 19th century. This once again shows how important the Alinja Castle is in terms of history and architecture.

Yaseman Musayeva, in her article titled "The Enemy's Eye - Nakhchivan Fortress" written by the Azerbaijan newspaper on May 19, 2021, provided information about many monuments in Nakhchivan.



There is also information about the Alinjachay Khanate. She notes that the Alinjachay Fortress, located in the Julfa district, is a magnificent structure on the right bank of the Alinjachay River, on the top of the mountain of the same name, and has been a threat to enemies since ancient times. Built before our era, this fortress is known as "Erincag", "Alancik" and "Alinja". It is described as a protected fortress in the epic "Kitabi-Dede Gorgud"; its walls start from the foot of the mountain and rise upwards, which makes it an unshakable defensive fortress.

The fortress, which could accommodate up to 600 warriors, was a powerful defense mechanism that repelled enemies. Amir Temur attacked this fortress for 14 years, but failed to capture it. It was only after 1399, after the defenders abandoned the fortress, that Temur achieved victory here.

After Timur's death, the Alinja Castle was again under the rule of the Azerbaijani states and continued its struggle against enemies. This once again emphasizes the historical significance and warlike spirit of the fortress.

Alinjachay Khanageh, located in the Khanageh village of Julfa district, is a medieval architectural complex. This complex, called Sheikh Khorasan, contains the remains of a tomb, a mosque, and other buildings. The tomb was built by architect Khaja Jamaledin on the orders of Ulug Qutluq Lala Bey, but the exact date of construction is unknown, but it is believed to have been built around the 12th-13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

It is not known who the tomb inside the mausoleum belongs to, but according to local people, Fazlullah Naimi, the founder of the Huruf doctrine, is buried here. For this reason, the complex is known as "Sheikh Khorasan", which emphasizes his sun-like, luminous personality. The Khanegah is a place that has preserved its historical and cultural significance. Rovshan Huseynov's article titled "The Fortress of Valor - Alinja" published in the Xalq newspaper can be divided into several categories based on its subject matter.

Located in the Alinjachay Valley of Nakhchivan, Alinja Castle is known as a symbol of ancient history and cultural heritage. This castle has witnessed wars, political struggles and cultures in different periods for millennia. As the great leader Heydar Aliyev said, every stone of Nakhchivan is a living witness to our history.

The Alinja Castle was of strategic importance during various periods of the Turkish Caliphate. First of all, Alinja was an important center during the reign of Shamseddin Eldeniz, during the reign of the Atabegs of Azerbaijan. During this period, the fortress was used to ensure the security of the ruling family and to protect the treasury.

The fortress's defense system, with its strong walls and towers surrounded by mountains, provided protection from enemy attacks. The fortress's defense for 14 years during Timur's attacks further increased its strategic importance. The defenders creatively dealt with the problem of water supply and developed a water system by digging rocks.

The Alinja Castle has also preserved the building culture of our ancestors. As a result of archaeological research, residential houses, farm buildings and water pools inside the castle have survived to this day. The name of the castle is also associated with many etymologies in the historical context; it may have originated from the word "Alincik", which means "impregnable." Alinja Castle, which has been included in the list of world heritage sites since 2007, has been extensively studied by researchers. The Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic has aimed to preserve its historical heritage by collecting information about the castle.

The Spanish diplomat Rui Gonzalez Clavijo, who visited Nakhchivan, described with admiration the magnificence of the Alinja Castle. He noted that the castle was located on a high and steep mountain, surrounded by gardens, springs and pools. This confirms the strength of the castle and its defense system. All this shows that the Alinja Castle is not only a defensive fortification, but also a symbol of struggle and



pride. The castle serves as the "anthem and flag" of Nakhchivan, positioned at the gateway to the East, symbolizing the enduring history, culture, and heroism of our people. This history, which is dear to every citizen, must be passed on to future generations.

"The establishment of the "Alinjagala" Historical and Cultural Museum was also reflected in the decree of the Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic dated February 11, 2014, on the restoration of the historical monument "Alinjagala" in Julfa district. With the implementation of that decree, this monument will once again be examined with more care and scientific competence, making a brilliant contribution to revealing the secrets of the fortress, studying the construction culture left for us by our ancestors, and restoring our historical memory" (Huseynov, 2014).

Elkhan Mammadov, in his article *Modernizing Ancient Alinja*, provided detailed information about the village of Alinja and its historical past. He said that Alinja village is located 35 kilometers north of Julfa in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and has a population of about 800 people. The village has an area of 1,573 hectares, where the main occupations of the population are animal husbandry, agriculture and beekeeping. These areas, in addition to meeting the daily needs of local residents, also ensure their economic well-being.

Throughout its history, Alinja has witnessed many bloody battles and has been destroyed many times. However, the determination of the people and their desire to build and create have never faded. The inhabitants of the village have worked to restore their lives after the wars and have created today's modern village conditions. Currently, Alinja village is one of the most prestigious settlements of the autonomous republic.

The beautiful nature of the village and the abundant water of the Alinjachay River have transformed the area into a green space. This reminds the residents of the village of proverbs such as "From you comes action, from me comes prosperity" and "If the hand is one, the mountain will dance from its place." During this year, new social facilities, administrative buildings, schools, village and service centers were put into operation in the village.

A three-story administrative building is located in the center of the village. Here, a communication network, field police, veterinary and paramedic stations, a territorial organization of the New Azerbaijan Party, a library, an administrative office, a municipality and a cultural house operate. The center is equipped with a 51-seat meeting hall for holding cultural and mass events.

The 384-number electronic ATS on the 1st floor of the building serves 223 subscribers in the villages of Alinja and neighboring Khoshkeshin. The post office also offers internet and calling cards, daily newspapers, and banking services. Residents can now pay their utility bills at the post office.

It is necessary to organize the village's veterinary service at a high level. A refrigerator has been installed at the veterinary station covering the villages of Alinja and Khoshkeshin to store medicines, and exemplary working conditions have been created for veterinarians.

Four offices have been allocated in the paramedic station, and the necessary equipment and medicines for primary medical care have been provided. A separate boiler room has also been installed to heat the building.

The service center includes a barbershop, a women's beauty salon, and grocery and household goods stores to meet the daily needs of the village residents. Five people are permanently employed here.

In conversations with village elders, the importance of their comfort is emphasized. Village elder Giyas Orujov notes that the comfort of the population allows people to be creative. The improvement of village roads, the construction of schools and other social facilities are increasing the well-being of residents.



A new school building for 252 students has also been opened in the village of Alinja. This two-story school has 14 classrooms, laboratories, a computer room, a teachers' room, and a gym. The latest achievements in information technology have been implemented, and the school is provided with electronic textbooks and computers with Internet access. Retired teacher Allahverdi Kalbaliyev emphasizes that such modern conditions further revitalize the activities of teachers and students.

The historical heritage in the area where the village is located, including the Alinja Castle, increases the village's tourism potential. By order of the Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic Vasif Talibov, it is planned to restore the Alinja Castle. This restoration will be carried out in conjunction with the protection of the castle as a historical monument, as well as the establishment of the "Alinjagala" Historical and Cultural Museum. The fortress was the main treasury of the Atabey state during the reign of Shamseddin Eldeniz. These buildings contained residential houses, farm buildings, water pools and ditches.

All these developments will have a positive impact on the living standards of the residents of Alinja village, the flow of tourism and the study of the historical heritage of the region. The combination of the village's modern infrastructure, rich history and nature will create conditions for attracting more tourists in the future. This is a significant development not only for Alinja village, but also for the entire region.

The atmosphere of this mountain has inspired some people to creativity. One of them is Muzaffar Alinjali. Doctor of Philology, Professor Nizami Jafarov provided extensive information about this in his article "Alinja Poet". He notes that Muzaffar Alinjali, as he is known, this valuable poet was born in the ancient land of Nakhchivan and was chosen here for his sensitivity to the art of words. Although his first poems were published in the almanac "Nakhchivan Songs", the difficulties of the Soviet era exiled him to Kazakhstan. There, thanks to his intellect and hard work, he rose to important positions and gained his position in society. However, over time, homesickness forced him to return. As a symbol of his return to his homeland, he published his first book, "Longing", at the age of sixty. Muzaffar Alinjali is a poet who brings together the deep spirit of the Nakhchivan region and the difficulties of the modern era. His poetry carries deep meanings not only as a wordsmith, but also as a person and citizen. He becomes an example for the younger generation with his creativity, writing about love for the homeland, the value of humanity and the beauties of life. Muzaffar Alinjali, by expressing his sincere feelings in his poems, on the one hand, and the spirit of struggle against the injustices of society, on the other hand, has taken a unique place in our literature.

Standing on the top of a solid rock, the Alinja fortress, which did not bow down to the merciless son of Tamerlane, Miranshah, and watered its walls with blood in the path of war and pride, still lives in memory today as a symbol of intransigence. There is no longer the cruel Miranshah here, nor any traces of his troops. What remains in history is the Alinja fortress, which has become a symbol of courage, will and bravery. Today, Alinja is valued as a petrified chronicle of the fighting spirit not only of Nakhchivan, but of the Azerbaijani people as a whole.

As you climb to the top of the fortress, you understand more clearly why a commander who conquered vast territories from Samarkand to Baghdad could not capture this fortress for fourteen years. The reason for this is not only the inaccessible geographical location of Alinja, but also the unchanging determination and determination of the people to fight against foreigners for centuries. Climbing to the top of Alinja does not just mean standing at an altitude of about 1,500 meters above sea level. This peak is also a spiritual height where you can admire the steadfastness, will, endurance and inflexibility of those who fought against foreign armies for fourteen years. "The intermountain depressions of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and South Azerbaijan are dominated by a cold semi-desert and steppe climate with dry summers" (Archaeology of Azerbaijan. Volume I, 2008, p. 28).

The history of the Alinja fortress, a symbol of struggle, is quite ancient. Ancient sources indicate that this fortification is more than two thousand years old. Researchers associate the name of the fortress,



which is mentioned in medieval written sources as “Alincik” and “Alinja”, with the word “alan”, which means “plain” in the ancient Turkic language. In folk etymology, the name “Alinja” is explained as “Alincik”, that is, “withdraw your hand”, which reflects the idea of the impregnability of the fortress.

According to information, during the reign of Shamsaddin Eldeniz, the main treasury of the Azerbaijani Atabey state was kept in the Alinja fortress. During the reign of the Eldeniz dynasty, the strategic importance of this fortress increased even more, becoming a reliable refuge for the ruling family. The residence of the ruler of Nakhchivan, Zahida Khatun, and the treasury of the Eldaniz were also located here. In 1225, during the campaign of Jalaladdin Mangburni, the son of the Khorezmshah Muhammad, to Azerbaijan, the ruler of Eldaniz, Uzbek, took refuge in this fortress and died in one of the battles that took place here.

In the 80s–90s of the 14th century, the Alinja Castle became the main stronghold of the struggle against Amir Temur and was heroically defended for fourteen years. Hearing of Temur's approach, the Jalairi Sultan Ahmed (1382–1410) left his treasury, family members, son and close people in Alinja and retreated to Baghdad. The defense of the fortress was entrusted to Amir Altun with only 300 soldiers.

Amir Teymur marched on the Alinja Castle four times between 1386 and 1401. During the first attack, in 1386, fierce fighting took place around the fortress, the lower trenches were captured, the defenders were withdrawn to higher positions and besieged. During the siege led by Miranshah, the fortress's water supply ran out and the defenders were in danger of surrendering. However, heavy rains relieved the water shortage and the fortress did not surrender.

In 1393, Timur's 40,000-strong army again attacked Alinje. At that time, a group of defenders led by Altun accidentally remained outside the fortress. When they returned, Altun and his comrades-in-arms saw that the fortress gates were occupied by the enemy, and immediately launched an attack. Taking advantage of the favorable position, the defenders inflicted heavy losses on Timur's troops, and two generals leading his ten-thousand-strong army were destroyed in this battle. As a result, the defenders managed to re-enter the fortress.

“In 1397, Sheki and Georgian troops attacked Alinje and defeated the Timurid commander Sultan Sanjar, freeing Sultan Tahir from the siege and sending him to Baghdad. This news enraged Amir Teymur, who had defeated the most powerful military forces in the world. In 1399, he sent troops led by 5-6 emirs to Alinje. The fortress surrendered as it was left without a leader as a result of the conflict that arose within it. The fortress's kutwali (chief), Ahmed Ogulsayi, was captured (1401), taken to Teymur and killed. To clarify the reason for the fortress's such resilience, Teymur personally climbed Alinje, viewed the fortress and was amazed by its magnificence” (Guliyeva, 2016).

Ancient mosques, caravanserais and tombs located in Nakhchivan are also of historical importance. In particular, the tomb of Sheikh Fazlullah Naimi is an unforgettable example of cultural heritage here. The restoration process of monuments, while preserving their historical value, also serves the development of modern tourism. All these historical sites demonstrate Nakhchivan's culture, heroic history, and modern-day tourism potential. Each one, while keeping Nakhchivan's past alive, offers an unforgettable legacy to future generations. There is also the fact that the name Alinja is mentioned in the epic poem of Dede Gorgud. Many scholars have expressed various opinions regarding this.

“Barthold and subsequent research have also confirmed that what we said is true. The fact that the historical and cultural events taking place in the epics did indeed take place in the historical lands of Azerbaijan has been confirmed in their research by prominent Azerbaijani scientists - professors H. Arasli, A. Demirchizade, M. Shiraliyev, M. Guluzade, M. A. Tahmasib and others. The names of Ganja, Barda, Derbent, Sharur, the Alinja River and Alinja Castle, Deresham, Lake Goycha, and a number of places that existed in the lands of Ganja-Gazakh and Western Azerbaijan in the epics are also convincing confirming facts.



“Also, scholars and travelers who came to the Caucasus for various purposes have repeatedly noted that "Dade Gorgud" is more closely connected to Azerbaijan.” (Zeynalov, 2018). The name Alinja can also be found in literature and theater performances. On January 19, 2019, the Azerbaijan State Young Spectator Theater will stage a performance of the work “Alinja Castle”, written by writer Dilsuz Mustafayev based on a folk tale.

The director of the fairy tale-performance is People's Artist Jannet Salimova, and the composer is Honored Artist Aydin Azimov. The dances are composed by Honored Artist Sanan Huseynli. The performance will be attended by People's Artist Yasin Garayev, Honored Artist Guler Nabiyeva, actors Simuzar Agakishiyeva, Razzaq Mammadov, Gadirhuseyn Ismayilov and Rovshan Abbasov.

The play, which embodies the heroism and courage of Azerbaijani women in the defense of our homeland, is dedicated to educating teenagers and young people in the spirit of patriotism.” (Culture, 2019). Each of these sources has conducted research on the Alinja Castle from different aspects.

### **3.1. Early medieval period**

Research shows that the initial formation of the castle dates back to the early Middle Ages. At this stage, the castle was used more as a defensive fortification, playing an important role in ensuring the security of surrounding settlements. The unity of the defensive capabilities of the natural relief and architectural solutions created conditions for the castle to withstand long-term sieges. At the same time, the acceleration of the settlement process around the castle during this period strengthened its function as a regional administrative center. “The Juga-1 fortress was found 3 km from the Juga village (in the Nakhchivan region) on the left bank of the Araz” (Mammadova & Hajiyeva, 2013, p. 128).

### **3.2. The era of feudal states and political conflicts**

In the later stage, the fortress became a stronghold of feudal authorities, where the residences of local commanders and the ruling class were located. This period is considered the stage when the Alinja Castle was remembered for the most intense military-political events. Various campaigns, sieges and struggles for power left a significant mark on the history of the fortress, leading to the further strengthening of its defense system. The fortress acted not only as a military facility, but also as a center of administrative management and economic activity. This increased its socio-economic importance.

“The sources also provide information about the deprivation and hardships endured by the Azerbaijani people during the period of foreign invasions, about their heroic struggle against the oppression of various invaders, and about how this struggle cost the invaders a great deal of effort and the mobilization of a large number of military forces” (Bunyadov, 2007, p. 50).

### **3.3. Late Middle Ages and the Decline Phase**

Over time, the changing balance of political forces in the region, the emergence of new military technologies, and the relocation of control centers weakened the former strategic role of the fortress. During this period, the Alinja Castle gradually lost its military function and became a monument of more symbolic and historical importance. However, the fortress continued to live in the people's memory as a symbol of heroism, resistance, and freedom.

### **3.4. Modern era and cultural heritage context**

At the modern stage, the Alinja Castle is no longer a military facility, but is considered an important carrier of national history and culture. The restoration and conservation work carried out, scientific research and inclusion in tourism routes create conditions for the fortress to acquire a new functional content. Today, the fortress acts as both an object of scientific and historical research and a promising place in terms of the development of cultural tourism.



Thus, the analysis conducted over historical periods shows that although the function of the Alinja Castle has changed over time, its regional and national significance has always been preserved. This development path of the fortress from a military fortification to a cultural heritage monument reflects the continuity of Azerbaijan's historical memory and the multilayered nature of its cultural heritage.

The global mountain tourism sector is witnessing remarkable growth as it moves towards a modern tourism landscape. This is particularly evident in regions such as South Korea, where destinations such as Bomun Lake Resort attract millions of visitors each year. The development of such resorts demonstrates that mountain tourism can be a multifaceted system, connecting different sectors from hospitality to leisure, and creating significant employment opportunities.

Mountain tourism is no longer just about scenic views; it encompasses a holistic experience that combines adventure, culture and relaxation. The growing demand for diverse tourism experiences has led to the rise of integrated mountain destinations that cater to a variety of interests – from thrill seekers seeking adventure sports to those seeking a peaceful retreat immersed in nature. This evolution reflects a shift in consumer behavior, with travelers now seeking personalized experiences that resonate with their values and desires.

In this context, the concept of “cultural islands” has become increasingly popular within mountain tourism. These are places where visitors can experience local cultures, traditions and lifestyles, enhancing their travel experience. For example, experiences such as traditional Maori cultural nights in New Zealand allow visitors to immerse themselves in the rich history and customs of the indigenous people, creating a deeper connection with the land and its heritage.

As mountain tourism continues to grow, it is important to prioritize sustainability and community engagement. The following actionable tips can help stakeholders navigate this evolving landscape.

1. **Adopt Sustainable Practices:** Tourism operators should adopt environmentally friendly practices, such as using renewable energy sources and minimizing waste, to ensure that the natural environment is preserved for future generations. This aligns with the growing consumer demand for sustainable travel choices.
2. **Encourage Local Participation:** Involving local communities in tourism development not only enriches the visitor experience, but also ensures that the economic benefits of tourism are shared. This can be achieved by offering training programs for local people to become guides or artisans, thereby showcasing their culture and skills.
3. **Diversify offerings:** To meet the diverse interests of today's tourists, destinations need to expand their offerings. This could include wellness retreats, educational seminars, and adventure sports to ensure there is something for everyone, regardless of their travel preferences.

In Nakhchivan lies Alinj, a fortress steeped in history and culture, known for its courageous stand against past invasions. It is a poignant reminder of the city's rich heritage, where tales of famous heroic battles resonate across time. This historical backdrop is not only a testament to the resilience of its people, but also provides a foundation for understanding the transformative potential of tourism, especially mountain tourism, which is increasingly becoming a hub for economic growth and cultural exchange. “This city was built in ancient times by Shah Afrasiyab. Even now, the graves of his ancestors remain” (Sources on the History of Azerbaijan, 2007, p. 257).

The strategic importance of Alinja throughout history has shaped its political, military and economic landscape. The historical narrative of the fortress is characterized by resilience and courage, reflecting the sentiments expressed in the ancient poem Alinja, which speaks to the idea that greatness often comes from the trials faced by its people. This historical foundation creates a unique backdrop against which modern developments such as mountain tourism can flourish.

The intertwined stories of the mountains' historical prowess and the thriving mountain tourism



industry demonstrate the potential for cultural and economic revitalization. As destinations evolve, they must consider their heritage while innovating to meet the changing demands of travelers. By embracing sustainability, strengthening local connections, and diversifying offerings, places like Alinjë can not only honor their past but also pave the way for a thriving future in the global tourism landscape.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Alinja Fortress is an important example of Azerbaijan's historical and cultural heritage. This mountain peak, located in the southeastern Zangezur Range, attracts attention not only for its picturesque landscapes but also for its historical past. The Alinjagala Fortress, whose history dates back to the Middle Ages, was a defensive structure of strategic importance and witnessed the struggles of many military leaders at different periods of time.

The fortress, with its mighty walls and sheer cliffs, was impregnable, and the battles that took place here left an important mark on the history of Azerbaijan. The fortress is also a tourist attraction, preserving its cultural heritage, rich in local legends and historical facts.

Restoration work, which began in 2014, is crucial to the preservation of this historical monument for future generations. Alinjagala, in addition to being a site of archaeological research, provides information about ancient cultures and ways of life. This mountain peak attracts attention not only for its historical value but also for its cultural, tourist, and natural beauty.

Alinja Castle, as a symbol of the historical and cultural heritage of Nakhchivan, stands out for its rich past and warlike spirit. This castle, which served various dynasties throughout history, is also one of Azerbaijan's strategically important monuments. Its defensive mechanism and role in historical battles, as well as its combative and impregnable nature, have become a symbol of our nation's pride. Restoration and conservation work is necessary to pass on this heritage to future generations.

The modern mountain tourism sector is rapidly growing, especially in countries like South Korea. Places like the Bomun Lake resort, which attracts millions of visitors, demonstrate the importance of a multifaceted tourism system. This sector encompasses a variety of industries, from hospitality to leisure, and creates significant employment opportunities.

Mountain tourism is no longer just about scenic views, but has become an experience that combines adventure, culture and relaxation. The rise of integrated destinations that cater to the diverse interests of tourists reflects the search for individual and private experiences.

The cultural island concept offers the opportunity to experience local customs and lifestyle. For example, traditional Maori evenings held in New Zealand allow visitors to immerse themselves in the depths of local culture.

The following recommendations are important for the sustainable development of mountain tourism:

1. Implement sustainable practices: Using environmentally friendly practices is important to protect the environment.
2. Promote Local Participation: Getting more people from the area involved in tourism helps make sure that the economic gains are shared fairly.
3. Diversify Offerings: It's crucial to offer a wider range of products to appeal to a wider range of interests.

Alinja Castle in Nakhchivan is a notable example of a historical and cultural site. This fortress stands for bravery in battle and the might of the people. The growth of mountain tourism makes Alinja even



more strategically important, opening up many chances for economic growth and cultural interchange.

In this context, the fusion of mountain history and the modern tourism industry opens up new opportunities. Places like Alinja can pave the way for a prosperous future in the global tourism landscape by embracing sustainable development principles, strengthening local ties, and diversifying their offerings.

1. **Current status:** Currently, Alinja Castle is partially preserved in its physical form, but some parts of it are damaged by erosion and time. The castle's architecture and the terrain in which it is located preserve its unique strategic and aesthetic features. At the same time, the monument has tourism potential and is the focus of attention at the national and regional levels.
2. **Natural-historical stages:** The development of the castle can be traced through several periods: its formation as a defensive fortification in the early Middle Ages, its functioning as an administrative and military center in the feudal period, as well as the decline of its military significance in the late Middle Ages and its acquisition of symbolic and historical value. These stages illustrate that Alinja Castle was not just a strategic place, but also an important aspect of social, economic, and cultural life.
3. **Suggestions for the future:** Several proposals can be put forward in the area of protection and use of the fortress. Of particular importance among these are the continuation of restoration and conservation work, the implementation of ecotourism and cultural tourism projects integrated with the environment, the expansion of scientific and historical research, and the strengthening of cooperation with local communities. These measures will not only ensure the long-term protection of the fortress but also enhance its tourism and scientific potential and create conditions for promoting Azerbaijan's cultural heritage globally.

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