



Western Caspian University

E-ISSN: 3106-1044

P- ISSN:3106-1036

**The Research Journal of Mountains: Biodiversity,
Landscapes and Cultures
Vol 1, № 1, 2026**

DOI: 10.54414/KLIW8888

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Application of Remote Sensing and Gis Tools in Mountainous Region for Delineation and Prioritization of Watershed Characteristics of Balia Nala in Nainital District in Indian Himalayan Region for Water Resources Development and Management for Food Security

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Abstract. Availability of data for hydrological and water management analyses is a point of concern, especially in Mountainous Regions. Remote sensing is being used successfully as an alternative that provides spatially and temporally consistent information required for efficient water resources management. An effort is made to highlight remote sensing (RS) and geographic information system (GIS) and their applicability in data scarce mountainous regions for water resources development and management. The usefulness of RS and GIS for delineation and prioritization of watershed characteristics for development and management of water resources for food security. A watershed is the area of land where all of the water that falls in it and drains off of it goes into the same place or common outlet. Watershed analysis is carried out for quantitative evaluation of drainage basin and for planning and management of water resources.

Keywords: *Delineation, prioritization, characterization, watershed, food security*

Received: 14.10.2025 Accepted: 26.11.2025 Published: 28.01.2026

<https://doi.org/10.54414/ZRN7362>

1. Introduction

BALIA nala is a tributary of GOLA river which originates as an outlet of Nainital lake and outfalls into GOLA river near RANIBAGH in INDIAN HIMALAYAN REGION.

2. Objective: To delineate the watershed boundary and drains within the watershed of BALIA NALA for the study of the characteristics of watershed and to analyse the various drainage components like;

1-FORM FACTOR/FORM RATIO (FR):

2-ELONGATION RATIO (ER):

3-COMPACTION COEFFICIENT (CC):

4-CIRCULATORY RATIO (CR):

5-DRAINAGE FREQUENCY(DF):

6-DRAINAGE DENSITY (DD):

7-INFILTRATION NUMBER (IF):

8-RELIEF AND SLOPE OF BASIN:

9-RUGGEDNESS NUMBER:



10- BIFURCATION RATIO:

11- STREAM SLOPE:

12- AREA & PERIMETER:

3. Hypothesis: A watershed analysis is used for the management and planning of natural resources.

- To provide necessary inputs for hydrological modelling.
- Flood prediction modelling and snowmelt runoff models etc.
- Watershed analysis provides catchment boundaries but also hydrological parameters useful for management programs.
- Erosion and sedimentation control.
- Agricultural runoff control.
- Rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharging.

4. Material and Method

QGIS has been used in analysis the following task;

Task-1, Download the DEM of BALIANALA basin.

Task-2, Projected DEM of BALIANALA basin.

Task-3, Fill the projected DEM of BALIANALA.

Task-4, Strahler order (stream order).

Task-5, Creating channels.

Task-6, Channel network and drainage basin.

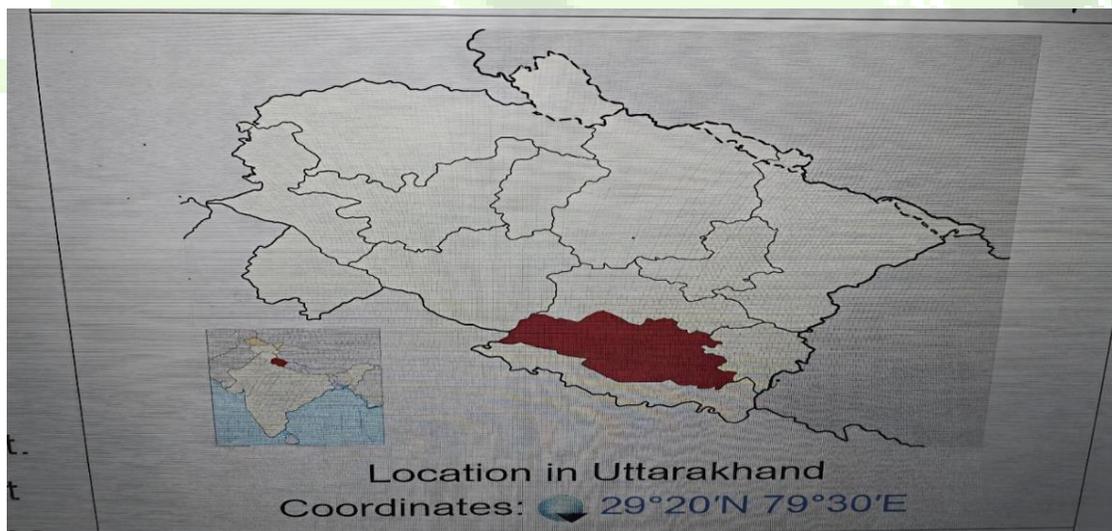
Task-7, Export basin (selected basin).

Task-8, Extracting channels within study basin.

Task-9, Check the area and perimeter of basin.

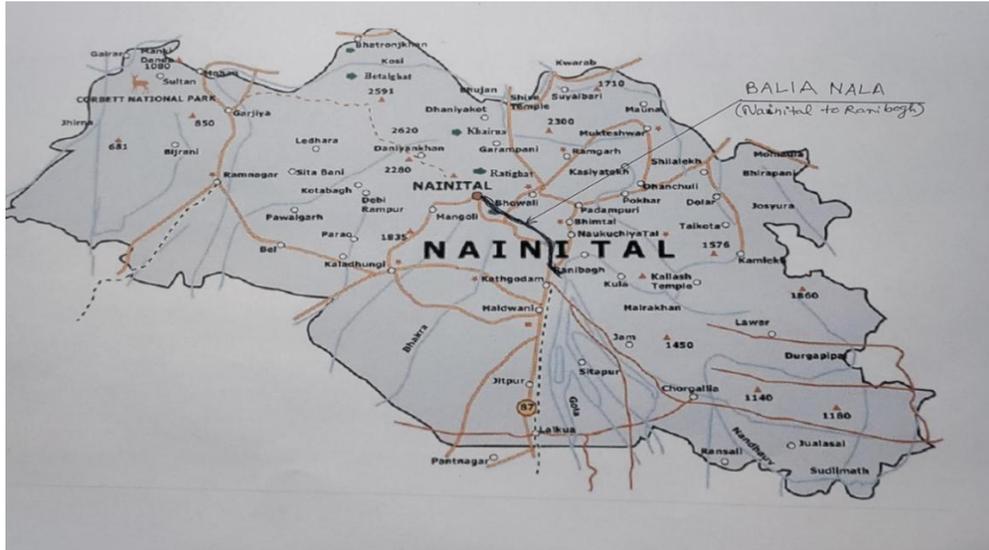
Task-10, Stream order and labelling.

1- Location of Nainital District:

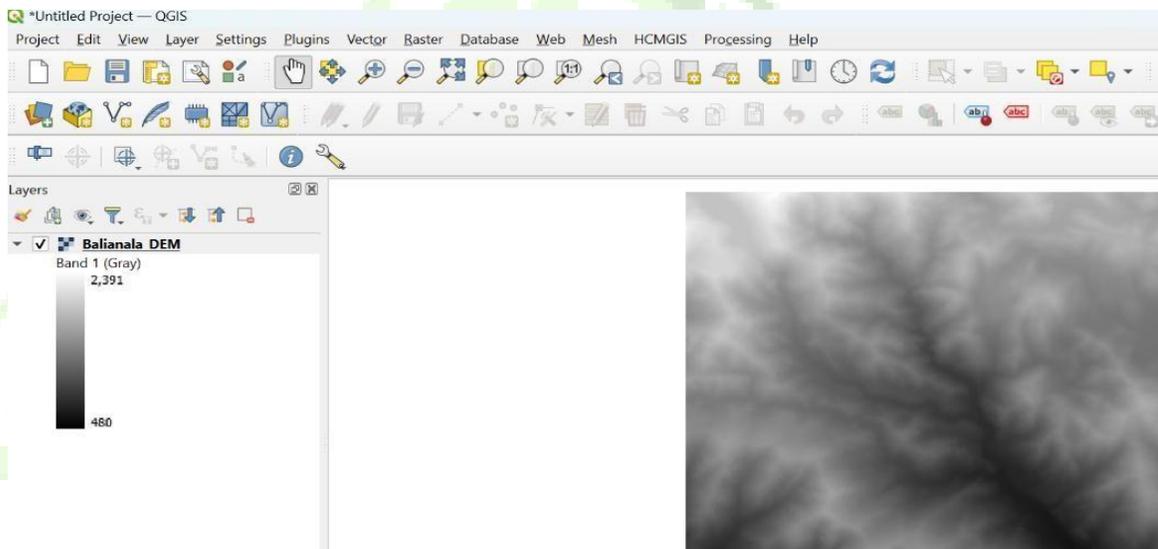




2-Location of Balia Nala in Nainital District:



3-Dem of Balia Nala Basin:

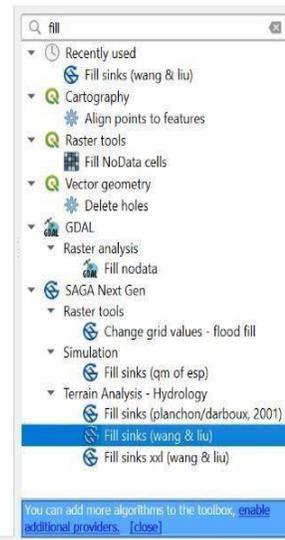
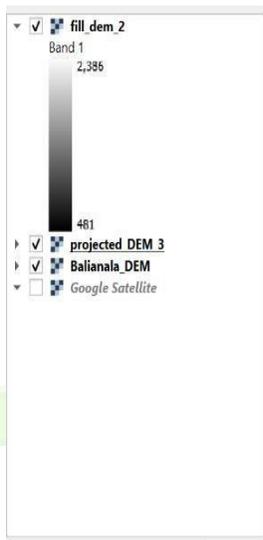




4- Projected Dem of Balia Nala Basin:

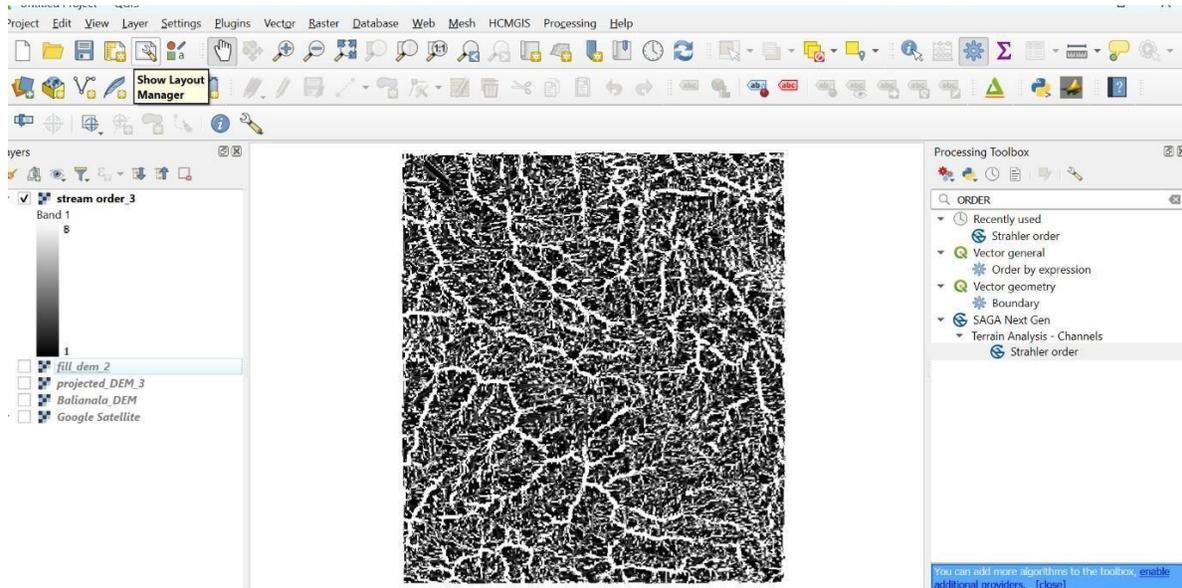


5-Filled Dem of Balai Nala Basin:

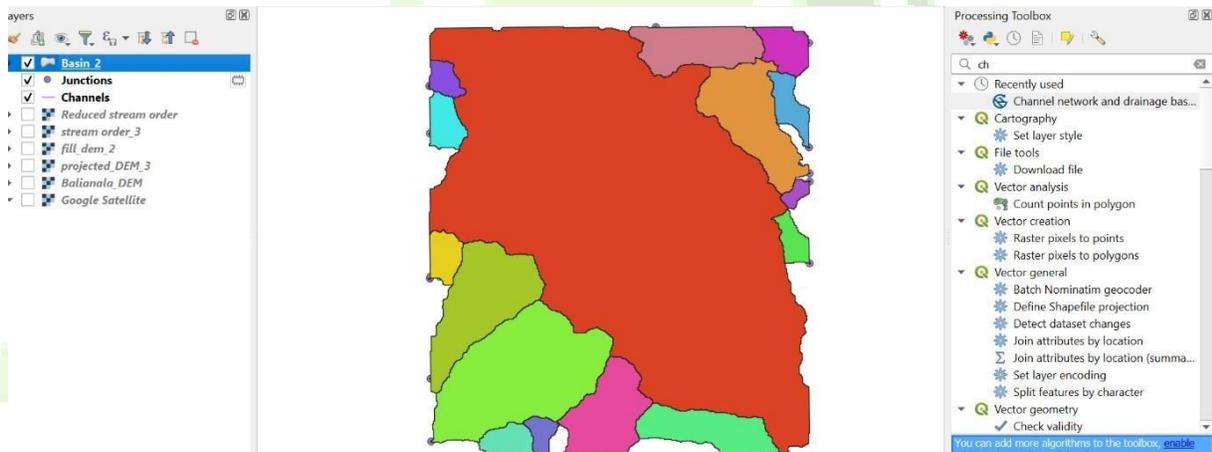




6-Strahler Stream Order:

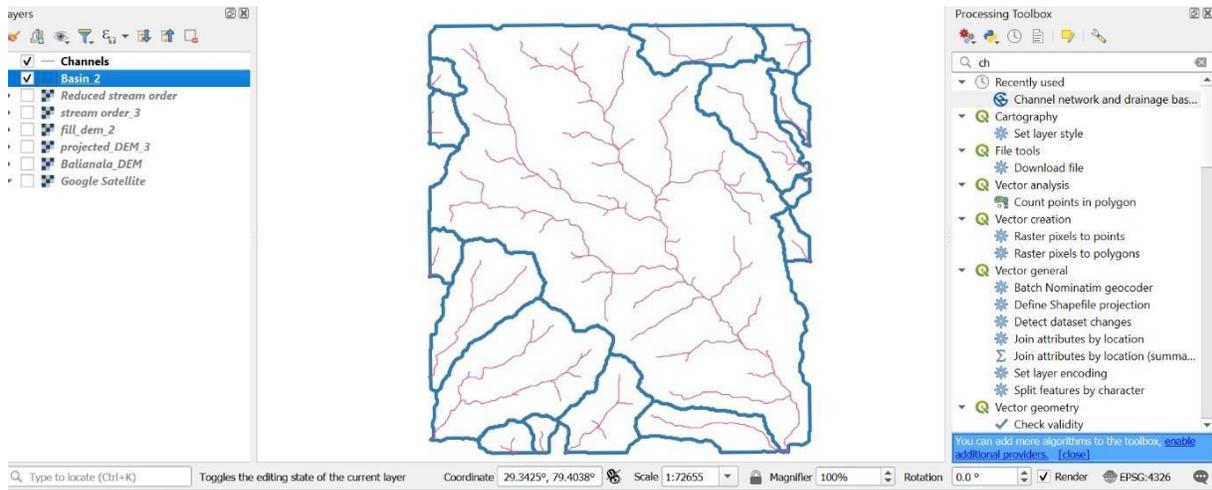


7-Basins in Dem:

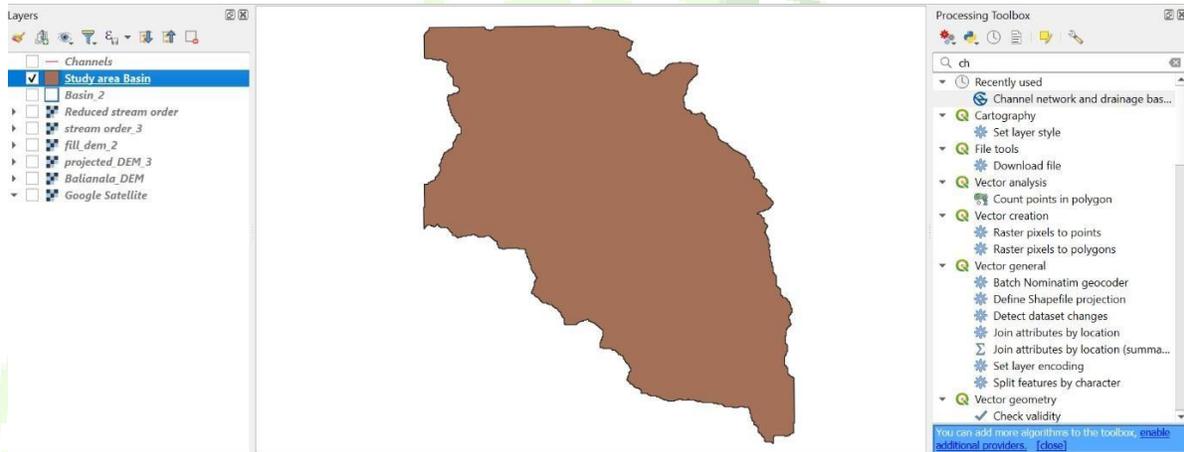




8- Drains Within Basins:

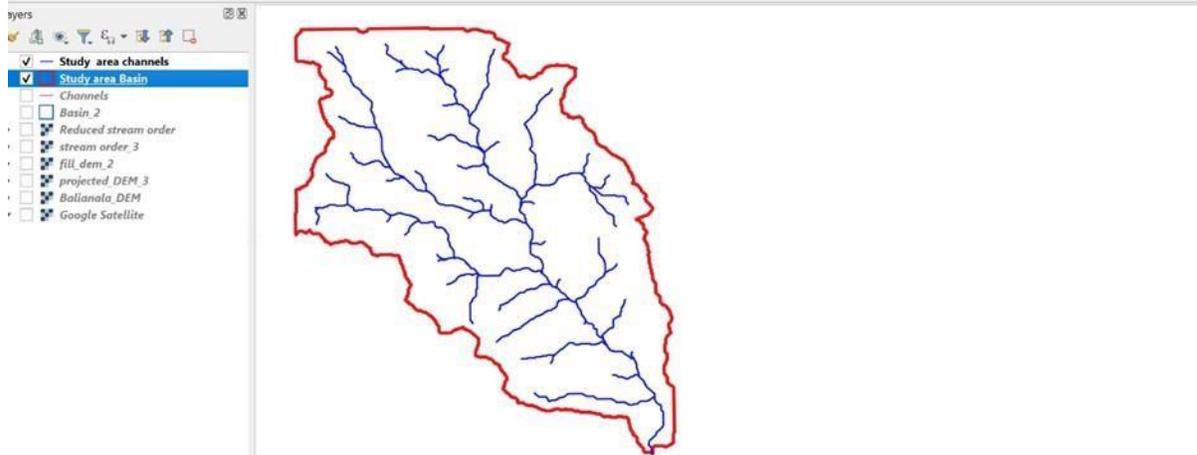


9-Study Area Basin of Balianala

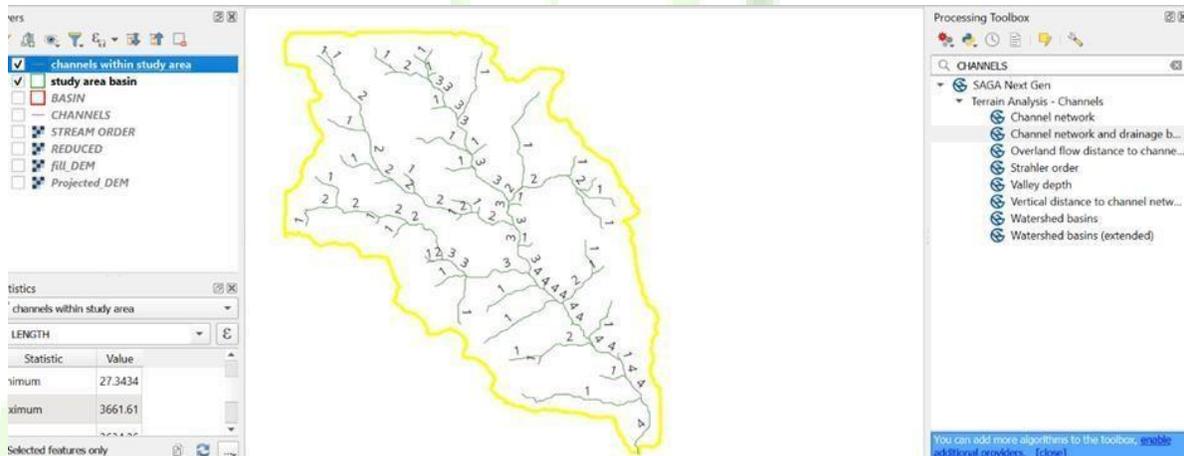




10-Streams Within Study Area:

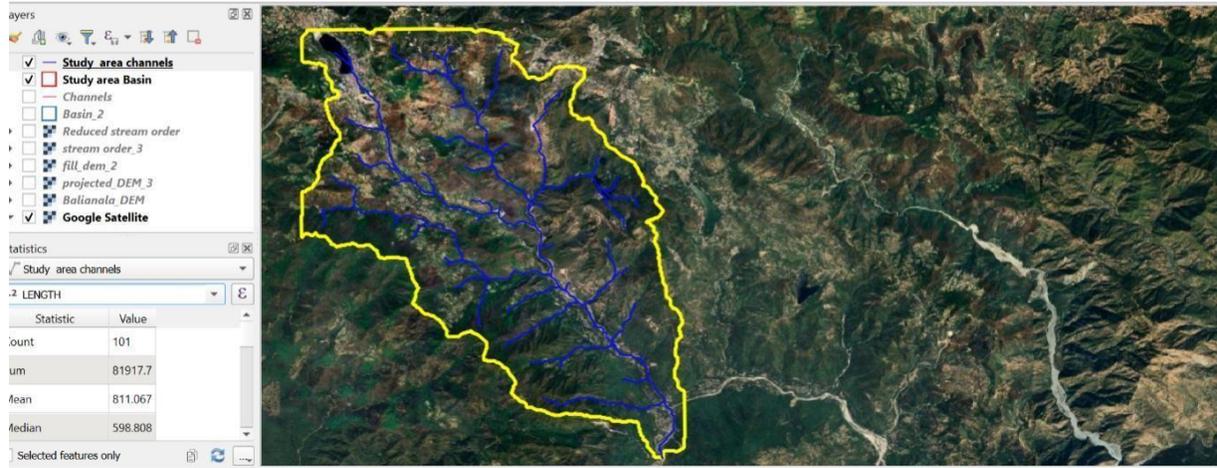


11-Stream Order of Balianala:

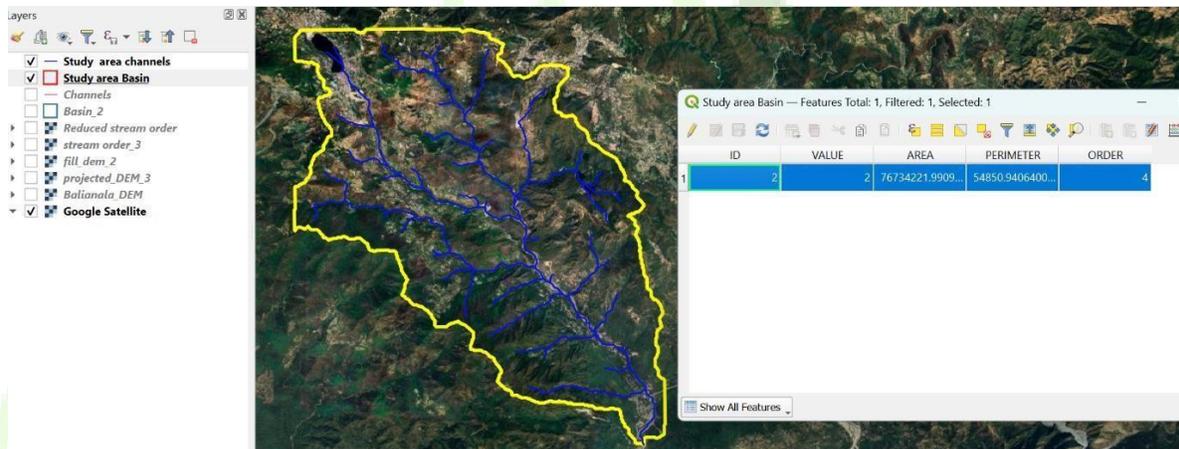




12-Study Area Channels Statistics:

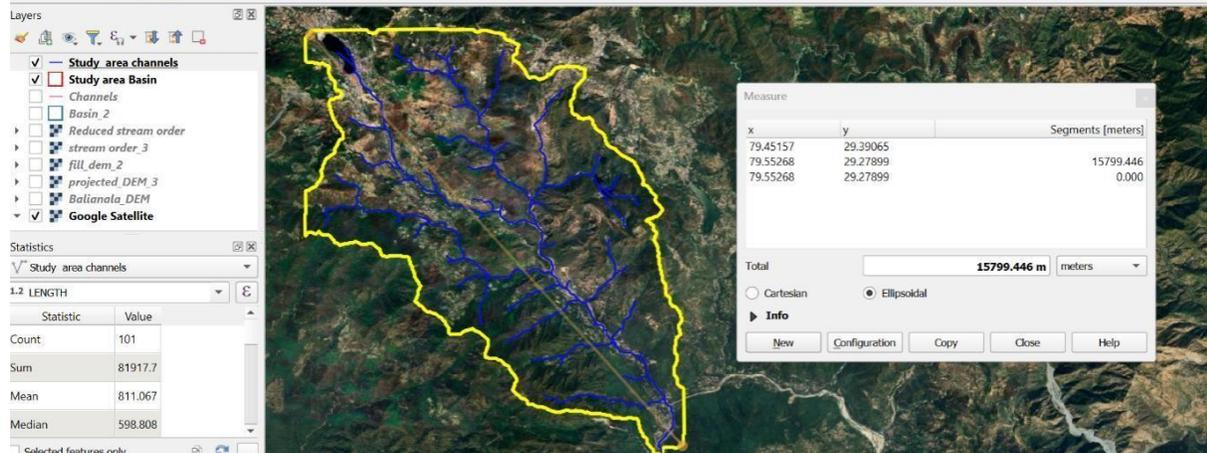


13-Area and Perimeter of Basin in Square Km:





14-Basin Length in Km:



From the above tasks of QGIS, we get the following information:

- 1-Area of basin = 76.73 square km.
- 2-Perimeter of basin =54.85 km.
- 3- Maximum length of basin =15.80 km.
- 4- Number on streams =101 no.
- 5- Length of all streams =81.92 km.
- 6- Mean length of stream =0.81
- 7- Stream Order = 4
- 8- Drainage Pattern = Dendrite Type

1-Form Factor: (Cheema & Bastiaanssen, 2017; Singh et al., 2023)

FORM FACTOR= AREA OF BASIN/LENGTH SQUIRE

$$= A/L * L$$

$$=76.73/15.8*15.8$$

$$=76.73/249.64$$

$$=0.30$$

The value of FORM FACTOR is close to zero. This indicates that basin is elongated in shape.

2-Elongation Ratio (Er): (Cheema & Bastiaanssen, 2017; Singh et al., 2023)

It is the ratio between the diameters of the circle of the same area as the drainage basin and the maximum length of the basin.

i- Area of basin. A = 76.73 square km.

ii- Length of basin, L=15.80 km



iii- Radius of circle, $R = A/II$

$$= 76.73/3.14$$

$$= 24.43$$

$$= 4.94 \text{ km}$$

iv- Diameter of circle $= 2 * R$

$$= 2 * 4.94$$

$$= 9.88 \text{ km}$$

v- Elongation Ratio (ER) = Diameter of circle/Length of basin

$$= D/L$$

$$= 9.88/15.80$$

$$= 0.63$$

$$ER = 0.63 < 0.7$$

It indicates it is an elongated shaped basin.

3- Compaction Coefficient (Cc): (Cheema & Bastiaanssen, 2017; Singh et al., 2023)

Compaction Coefficient = Perimeter of basin/Circumference of circle

$$= P / 2\pi R$$

$$= 54.85 / 2 * 3.14 * 4.94$$

$$= 54.85 / 31.02$$

$$= 1.76$$

$$> 1.0$$

It is elongated shaped basin because CC is more than 1.0

4- Circulatory Ratio (Rc): (Cheema & Bastiaanssen, 2017; Singh et al., 2023)

It is ratio of the area of basin to the area of the circle having the same circumference as the perimeter of the basin.

I- Area of basin, $A = 76.73$ square km.

II- Perimeter of basin, $P = 54.85$ km

$$III- P = 2 \pi R$$

$$IV- R = P / 2\pi$$

$$R = 54.85 / 2 * 3.14$$

$$R = 54.85 / 6.28$$

$$R = 8.73 \text{ km}$$

V- Therefore, area of required circle as perimeter of basin = πR^2 A =

$$3.14 * 8.73 * 8.73$$

$$= 3.14 * 76.21$$



=239.299

VI- CIRCULATORY RATIO (RC)= area of basin/ area of circle

=76.73/239.299

=0.32

Low circulatory ratio is indicative of elongated shape of watersheds. This parameter is helpful in assessment of flood hazards. Low the circulatory ratio lowers the flood hazards at a peak time at the outlet point because in elongated shaped watersheds, water drains from almost all direction in different time and meet near the outlet in different intervals, as a result less water is accumulated through all the streams.

5- Drainage Frequency (Df): (Assessing Water Management Strategies in Data-Scarce Mountain Regions, n.d.; The Importance of Sustainable Water Management in Mountain Regions, n.d.)

Drainage Frequency = Total number of drains/basin area

=101/76.73

=1.32

It is more than 1.0

It indicates more runoff, more discharge, more floods.

6- Drainage Density (Dd): (Assessing Water Management Strategies in Data-Scarce Mountain Regions, n.d.; The Importance of Sustainable Water Management in Mountain Regions, n.d.)

Drainage Density = Total length of drains/basin area

=81.92/76.73

=1.07

It is more than 1.0

It indicates more drains, more runoff, less infiltration, less recharge of ground water, poor vegetation, rocky soil, steep slope.

7- Infiltration Number (If): (Assessing Water Management Strategies in Data-Scarce Mountain Regions, n.d.; The Importance of Sustainable Water Management in Mountain Regions, n.d.)

Infiltration Number = Drainage Density*Drainage Frequency

=1.07*1.32

=1.41

It is more than 1.0

It indicates high relief, hilly area, poor infiltration, deep water table.

8. Relief and Slope of Basin: (Geospatial World, n.d.; Wiley Online Library, n.d.)

1- Highest Elevation = 2391M

2- Lowest Elevation = 480M

3- Relief = (2391-480) M=1911M

4- Slope = 1911/15.8=120.95M/KM

This is a high steep slope. It indicates as a hilly terrain.

High runoff, high erosion and less infiltration.

9- Ruggedness Number: (Geospatial World, n.d.; Wiley Online Library, n.d.)

RUGGEDNESS NUMBER = (MAX RL – MIN RL) *Dd

= (2391-480) *1.07

=1911*1.07

=2044.77



This is high value. It indicates that it is a hilly basin.
High runoff, high erosion and less infiltration.

10- Bifurcation Ratio: (Geospatial World, n.d.; Wiley Online Library, n.d.)

1- no. of first order drains = 30

2- no. of second order drains = 15

3- no. of third order drains = 5

4- no. of fourth order drains = 2

Hence,

1- bifurcation ratio of first order = $30/15 = 2$

2- bifurcation ratio of second order = $15/5 = 3$

3- bifurcation ratio of third order = $5/2 = 2.5$

Therefore,

MEAN BIFURCATION RATIO = $(2+3+2.5)/3 = 2.5$

It indicates that large no. of drains is in basin, means, more runoff and more erosion, less infiltration.

What Information We Get from the Watershed Characteristics of This Basin:

1- AREA: Area is high, more runoff volume.

2- SHAPE: Shape is elongated type/ fern shaped, flood forecasting, low flood peak, flood management is easy.

3- SLOPE: Slope is steep, more runoff, more soil erosion, less infiltration, poor vegetation.

4- NO OF STREAMS: Number of streams are more, more structural disturbance, more erosion, more soil loss.

5- DRAINAGE FREQUENCY(Df): It is more than 1.0, It indicates more runoff, more discharge, more floods.

6- DRAINAGE DENSITY (Dd): It is more than 1.0, It indicates high relief, hilly area, poor infiltration, deep water table. High drainage density, more runoff, more soil erosion, poor infiltration, less recharge, deep water table, negative impact on agricultural productivity.

7- ELONGATION RATIO (ER): Its value is less than 0.7, It indicates it is an elongated shaped basin.

8- COMPACTION COEFFICIENT (CC): It is elongated shaped basin because CC is more than 1.0

9- INFILTRATION NUMBER (IF): It is more than 1.0, It indicates high relief, hilly area, poor infiltration, deep water table.

10- CIRCULATORY RATIO (CR): Low circulatory ratio is indicative of elongated shape of watersheds.

11- RELIEF AND SLOPE OF BASIN:

This is a high steep slope. It indicates as a hilly terrain.

High runoff, high erosion and less infiltration.

12- RUGGEDNESS NUMBER = 2044.77

This is high value. It indicates that it is a hilly basin.

High runoff, high erosion and less infiltration.



13-BIFURCATION RATIO =2.5

It indicates that large no. of drains is in basin, means, more runoff and more erosion, less infiltration.

5.Conclusion

1-FORM FACTOR = 0.30, It indicates elongated shape.

2-ELONGATION RATIO (ER)= 0.63< 0.7, It indicates it is an elongated shaped basin.

3-COMPACTION COEFFICIENT (CC)=1.76 >1.0, It is elongated shaped basin (CC is more than 1.0).

4-CIRCULATORY RATIO (RC)= 0.32 Low circulatory ratio is indicative of elongated shape.

5-DRAINAGE FREQUENCY(DF)= 1.32, It is more than 1.0, It indicates more runoff, more discharge, more floods.

6-DRAINAGE DENSITY (Dd)=1.07, It is more than 1.0, It indicates more drains, more runoff, less infiltration.

7-INFILTRATION NUMBER (IF)=1.41, It is more than 1.0, It indicates high relief, hilly area, poor infiltration.

8-Relief and Slope is very high, indicates hilly terrain.

9-Ruggedness no. is also very high, indicates hilly and slopy terrain.

10-Bifurcation Ratio is high, indicates more no. of drains, means more runoff, more erosion, more slides, less infiltration.

MORE DRAINS, MORE RUNOFF, MORE DISCHARGE, MORE FLOODS, MORE EROSION,
MORE LANDSLIDES,
LESS INFILTRATION, LESS GROUNDRECHARGE, LESS SOIL-MOISTURE, LESS
VEGETATIONS, HILLY TERRAIN.

Recommendations

Watershed management planning is a method of generating a plan or blueprint for protecting and improving the water quality and other natural resources in a watershed.

1-Water conservation measures are necessary to check the runoff for safety of soil erosion.

2-Check dams for water collection to increase the infiltration to recharge the ground water.

3-Forestation to check the velocity of rainfall and percolation of water to recharge the ground water by retention and detention of rainfall water.

4-Development of contour irrigation channel in the command area of BALIA NALA basin.

5-Development and Management of run off river (ROR) type micro hydro-power projects.

6-Adoptation of flood protection works in erosion and scouring areas.

7-Landslide mitigation works in debris flow and sliding zones.

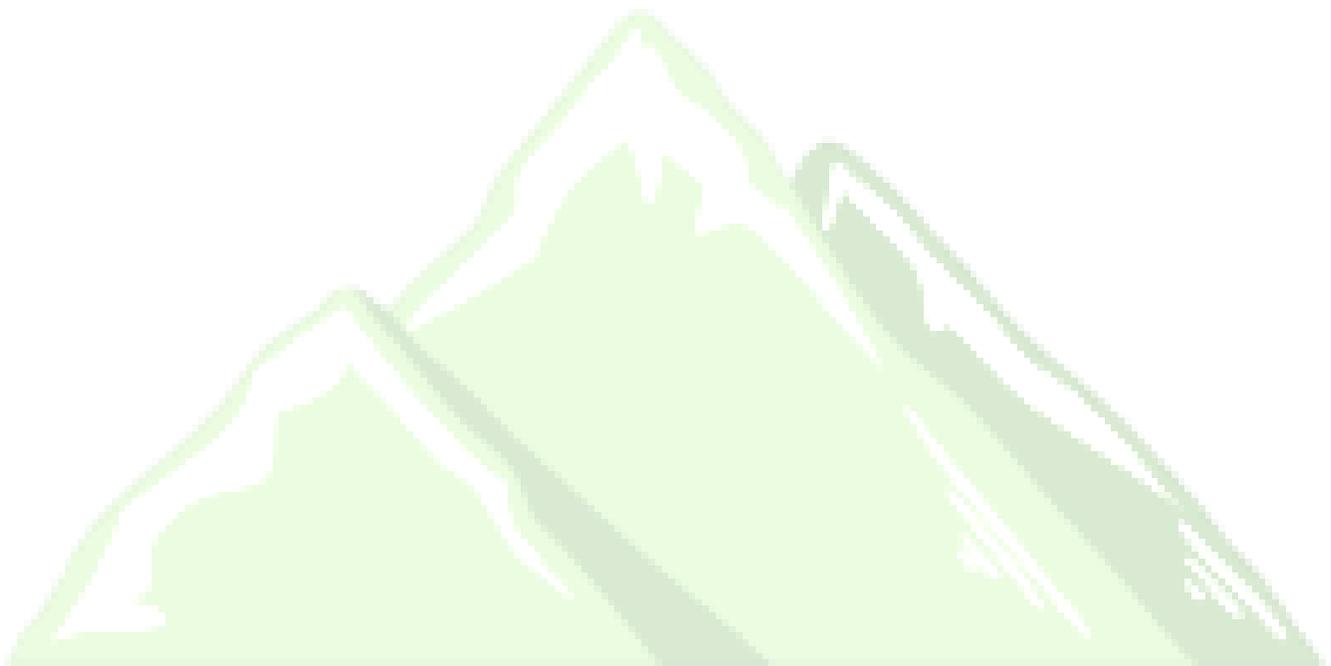
8-Applying all necessary biological and engineering methods for land and water development and management of watershed area.

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Ancient Architectural Structures of The Karabakh Tribes as Precursors of Early Proto-Towns (3rd–2nd Millennia Bc)

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Abstract. In the 2nd millennium BC, in many regions of Azerbaijan, fortified settlements, that is, settlements with defensive walls emerged in addition to undefended settlements. These include so-called cyclopean structures. They were built along nomadic routes, in lowland regions, and on high-altitude pastures. Such structures first appeared in the Early (Garakopek- Tepe) and Middle (Uzerlik-Tepe, Chinar-Tepe) Bronze Ages (3rd-2nd millennia). The largest number of these structures is located in the lowlands and foothills of Karabakh, as well as in the alpine meadows of the Gedabey and Dashkesen districts, and partially in Kalbajar. Incidentally, Karabakh pastoralists have historically chosen the beautiful alpine meadows of Kelbajar for summer grazing. At the same time, in the second half of the 2nd millennium, the emergence of large settlements with defensive walls reached a more advanced stage. An example of such a large settlement is the Gara-Tepe settlement, located near the Shikhabaly village in Aghdam district. The settlement, covering an area of over 5 hectares, was located on a high, elongated hill on the right bank of the Gargarchay River. A second settlement of this type (Misir Gishlagy) was recorded near the village of Papravend in Aghdam district. In connection with this question, I would like to stop on another architectural structure discovered near the village of Khojaly. This complex, labyrinthine structure, known as a stone fence, begins near a large standing menhir, 40 meters from the grand Khacha-Tepe kurgan, and extends for a considerable distance. Thus, despite the limited number of fortified points, based on the available data, we can nevertheless estimate the degree of fortification development in the studied area during the Bronze Age.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Karabakh, history, archaeology, fortification, settlements, artifacts

Received: 01.12.2025

Accepted: 26.12.2025

Published: 28.01.2026

<https://doi.org/10.54414/TNGL6724>

1. Introduction

The lack of written sources hinders a comprehensive study of military affairs. However, available material evidence and comparative materials from adjacent regions make possible to reconstruct the general state of military affairs among the tribes of ancient Karabakh.

Analysis of archaeological data proves that, beginning from the Early Bronze Age, the development of transhumance necessitated the protection of increased numbers of livestock and pastures. Along the entire route of livestock to and from the mountain meadows for the winter, forces for security had to be increased. In this connection, the number of not only herdsmen but also armed guards increased. Fortified settlements appeared in the foothills and later in the high-mountain alpine meadows. Examples include the Early Bronze Age settlement in Garakopek-Tepe (Ismailov, 1983, p. 9) (foothills) and the fortified structures in the high- mountain pasture of Kalbajar (Ismailov, 1983, p 7).

In this regard, the multi-layered settlement of Garakopek-Tepe, located on the outskirts of the Fizuli Mountains, deserves special attention. Here, Professor K. Ismailov studied a seven-meter-thick Early Bronze Age layer containing two types of building remains. The lower cultural layers revealed



circular dwellings, while the upper layers revealed quadrangular dwellings.

2. Architectural examples of the Early Bronze Age

The discovery of defensive walls in the Early Bronze Age layer of Garakopek-Tepe is of significant interest from the perspective of studying early fortification in ancient Karabakh. The defensive walls were constructed from large stone blocks (Ismailov, 1983, p 7). To the point, similar structures from this period were recorded in the settlements of Daire (Gobustan (Muradova, 1999, pp. 12-15, p. 5), Goy-Tepe, and Yanig-Tepe (in Southern Azerbaijan (Kushnareva & Chubinishvili, 1970, p. 9). The width of the walls at Garakopek-Tepe reached 2 m.

The construction of such structures at the earliest stage of the Bronze Age indicates a disruption to the initially orderly life of ancient society, an increase in the frequency of military incursions, and the emergence of the need to protect the lives and property of the population.

3. Fortified settlements of the Middle Bronze Age

The construction of such structures reaches a significant development in the Middle Bronze Age. Among the archaeologically studied Middle Bronze Age settlements of Karabakh, the remains of a defensive wall have been cleared in Uzerlik-Tepe. The defensive walls, built of large-sized, 2 m wide mud bricks (38 x 38 x 8 cm, 40 x 40 x 8 cm), have been traced over a length of 35 m (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 130; 1965, p. 7, 77). The preserved height is up to 1 m. Not far from Uzerlik-Tepe there is a similar settlement, Chinartepe, with an area of over 5 hectares (Jafarov, 2020, pp. 99–101). A prospect-hole dug in the lower outskirts of the settlement revealed the remains of walls (possibly fragments of a defensive wall).

It is known that settlements with defensive walls, as well as fortresses from this period, have been registered in great number of places in Nakhchivan.

This includes the well-known, clearly stratified settlement of Kul-Tepe II (Middle Bronze Age), where strong defensive walls have been cleared, as well as Galajig, Oghlan-gala (Aliyev, 1991, pp. 25–28, 31–32, 35, 127–128, 139), and others. According to researchers, such settlements laid the foundations for the early urban culture of Azerbaijan (Aliyev, 1991, p. 23).

Well-defended centers simultaneously served as the socio-economic and political centers of a particular tribal union. In such centers, separate quarters emerged, inhabited by the tribal elite and ordinary residents, and handicraft quarters emerged, such as in Kul-Tepe II of Nakhchivan.

All this and other examples (Galajig, Chalkhan-gala, Oghlan-gala, etc.) prove that at the indicated time the emergence of such fortified settlements was associated with the growing threat of military operations.

4. Architectural examples of the Late Bronze Age

In the second half of the 2nd millennium, transhumance became widespread. During this period, along with permanent settlements so-called cyclopean structures emerged in many regions of Azerbaijan. They were built both along the nomads' routes and in high-mountain pastures. Constructed of large rocks, mostly unhewn stones, they were located on peaks inaccessible to enemies.

The largest number of these structures is located in the alpine meadows of Gedabey and Dashkesen districts, and partially in Kalbajar. Besides, Karabakh cattle-breeders have historically chosen the beautiful alpine meadows of Kalbajar for summer grazing.

A number of fundamental works by Russian and Azerbaijani scholars are devoted to cyclopean structures.

In different years, individual researchers expressed different opinions regarding the purpose and



function, as well as the construction techniques of cyclopean structures. These include Academician I.I. Meshchaninov (Meshchaninov, 1937) and I.M. Jafarzadeh (Jafarzade, 1938), who stood at the origins of the study of monuments of this type, as well as H.P. Kesemenly (Kesamanli, 1999, pp. 30–41, 152), who discovered many cyclopean structures in the territories of the Dashkesen and Gedabey districts. Following them, J.A. Khalilov, G.A. Abilova, V.G. Aliyev, V.G. Kerimov, T.R. Aliyev (Aliyev, 1993, pp. 3, 6–8, 16, 144) and others made a significant contribution to the study of the defensive structures of Azerbaijan in their works. In fact, it was the above-mentioned authors who, in various years, were closely involved in the study of these, in many ways, still mysterious structures of our distant ancestors. Despite some differences of opinion among these researchers regarding typology, purpose, and the use of technical methods, their opinions clearly reveal a nearly unanimous conclusion regarding the primary function of these structures. This opinion is that these structures provided shelter for residents and livestock during enemy incursions. In this regard, the statement of V. Kerimov (Kerimov, 1998, pp. 34–35) is noteworthy; as a specialist in defensive structures, he provides a clearer interpretation of these monuments.

It is regrettable to note that, with the exception of the still-disputed structure in Khojaly, no cyclopean structures of the classical type (as in Dashkesen, Gedabey, etc.) have yet been discovered in the region under study.

It is logically impossible that, existed in the similar natural environment with the neighboring Nakhchivan and Gedabey-Dashkesen districts, similar structures would not have been built in ancient times in Karabakh. After all, Urartian written sources frequently report invasions of the northern regions, the capture and destruction of fortified settlements, and the driving away of people and animals. These settlements were possibly not like the fortresses in Nakhchivan.

An inscription made in the name of the Urartian king of Rusa I (730-714 BC) (Melikishvili, 1950, p. 266) notes that he defeated a coalition of four large, powerful tribes – the Adakhuni, Uelipuhi, Luerukhi, and Arkupini and nineteen kings of countries (followed by a list of regions) who came to their aid from the other side, from the high mountains.

Even in his time, I.I. Meshchaninov (Meshchaninov, 1937, pp. 66–67) noted that these tribes lived east of Lake Sevan (Goycha) in the Lesser Caucasus Mountains and partly on the territory of Soviet Azerbaijan (present Republic of Azerbaijan). B.B. Piotrovsky (Piotrovsky, 1944, p. 10), G.A. Melikishvili (Melikishvili, 1954, p. 68), and even the Armenian author N.V. Harutyunyan (61, 282) shared this opinion. B.B. Piotrovsky believed that after this battle, Urartian troops freely advanced into these lands, unprotected by natural obstacles, all the way to Karabakh. S.A. Yesayan (Esayan, 1976, p. 215) localized these lands as the modern Krasnoselsky, Ijevan and Shamshaddin districts of Armenia, as well as the Dashkesen, Gedabey, and other neighboring districts of Azerbaijan.

There are also other written data regarding Urartu's campaigns in the northern regions (meaning Transcaucasia, especially its eastern part). For example, the inscription of Sarduri II (760-730 BC) on the Van rock indicates that as a result of the campaigns in Transcaucasia, Urartu took 110 thousand cattle and 200 thousand small cattle, 2 thousand horses, and 115 camels from the country of Eriahi (Piotrovsky, 1949, pp. 77, 100; 1955, p. 9). Besides, other data regarding the payment of contributions in the form of horses is also of interest. Thus, the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser 1st (early 9th- century BC), after defeating the kings of the Nairi countries, forced them to give 1.200 heads of horses as a contribution, and Salmaneser III (860-825 BC) received horses from the Lake Urmia region (Piotrovsky, 1959, p. 151).

Perhaps the second episode, related to the relations of Assyria with the Urartian kings, has no direct relevance to our topic. However, the very fact that the property seized by the Urartians during their military campaigns in Transcaucasia was, in turn, expropriated by the Assyrians, is interesting.



Despite repeated assertions of scholars regarding the presence of Urartians in the territory of Karabakh, this fact has not yet been archaeologically (or actually) documented.

However, this does not mean that it is impossible to find future arguments in favor of the Urartians' unconditional presence in Karabakh. Perhaps these campaigns were so flash-like and fleeting that the Urartian kings, like all ancient Eastern rulers who always ordered their military successes to be immortalized on rocks, tablets, and all manner of laudatory odes in their honor, did not have time to leave behind any written records in Karabakh or other regions of Azerbaijan. Although, if we are to believe the report of S.V. Ter-Avetisyan (Ter-Avetisyan, 1934, pp. 5, 11), cuneiform inscriptions were once discovered near the villages of Qushchu and Kchokhut in Mardakert district (present-day Aghdere) of Azerbaijan. This information was then verified by J. Gummel, as well as by emissary scientists (Esayan, 1976, p. 215) from Yerevan, but no traces of the inscription were found. It seems to us that those scientists are right who believe (Jafarov, 2023, p. 18) that at the specified time all regions of Transcaucasia were at approximately the same level of socio-economic development, natural conditions were also identical, as a result of which the information from the Urartian inscriptions can to a certain extent be attributed to Azerbaijan, in particular to Karabakh. That is, the local tribes had something to protect, and with what to protect it.

Don't get the impression that local tribes waged war only against the Urartians and other eastern countries (for example, the Assyrians). They also had to defend themselves against their neighbors (within the territory of Azerbaijan itself) and also against more distant neighbors (the rest of the South Caucasus). We have no doubt that military operations became regular during this period. This is based on the numerous factual arguments discussed above. Moreover, while in some cases these were defensive battles aimed at protecting lives and property, in others they were attacks on neighboring territories for the same purpose.

The absence of monumental cyclopean structures in the studied area does not mean that there were no settlements with defensive walls, i.e., no fortified settlements.

It was noted above that in the Late Bronze Age, due to changes in the economic structure, especially the increase in the number of small cattle, the transhumance form of cattle breeding occupies a leading position. This is probably why the number of exclusively Late Bronze Age settlements on the territory of Karabakh sharply decreases. Scientists have repeatedly noted that the layer relating to this period in multi-layered settlements is generally insignificant (for example, Rasul-Tepe, Namazaly Tepesi, Beyuk-Tepe, Bashir-Tepe, Goy-Tepe in Aghdam district; Su Tepesi, Janavhar-Tepesi, Binnet-Tepe, Uch-Tepe in Aghjabedi district; Tokhmag-Tepe in Terter district; Shor-tepe in Barda district) (Jafarov, 2020, pp. 125–130).

The decrease in the number of settlements is explained in various ways: climate change, the drying up of reservoirs, transhumance, and the unification of individual tribes into large tribal unions. These tribal unions lived in larger settlements than in previous periods.

An example of the existence of such a large human settlement is Gara-Tepe, located near the village of Shikhabaly in Aghdam district (Jafarov, 2020, pp. 130-134). The settlement, with an area of over 5 hectares, was located on a high, elongated hill on the right bank of the Gargarchay River. The height of the hill, including cultural deposits, reached up to 25 m in the southwestern part and up to 10 m in the northern part. The settlement was protected on the northern side by the natural steep bank of the Gargarchay River. In 1987, prospecting shafts were dug in the northeastern part of the settlement. As a result, the settlement's chronological dates were established: the 12th–9th centuries BC (The first layer dates back to the 12th–11th centuries BC; the second layer – to the 10th–9th centuries BC).

The clearing of the remains of a defensive structure is noteworthy. Archaeologists managed to clear 20 meters of walls (the remainder was buried under unexcavated layers). The walls are constructed of large mud bricks on a stone plinth. The plinth's height has been preserved to a height of 1 meter and its width to 4 meters. The dimensions of the mud bricks are as follows: length from 43 cm to 53 cm, width



18-20 cm, height 15 cm.

Along with the wall, the remains of a rectangular-oval tower were cleared (Jafarov, 2020, pp. 130- 134). The mud bricks were laid with clay mortar, the color of which differs sharply from the brick material. Remains of buildings of various purposes were also discovered in the inner part of the settlement. The construction techniques and materials are identical to those of the defensive wall.

A second settlement of this type (Misir Gishlagy) was recorded near the village of Papravend in Aghdam district (Jafarov, 2020, pp. 134-135). Here, too, in an area destroyed by farm work, the remains of a defensive wall were cleared. It was constructed of roughly hewn limestone and large river pebbles. Gypsum mortar was used as a bonding material. The surviving width of the wall reaches approximately 1 m. Remains of rectangular stone structures were also discovered there. Thus, unlike the settlements of lowland Karabakh, where the layers of the corresponding period are insignificant and, probably, they were of a seasonal nature (an example is the settlement of Uch-Tepe (Iessen, 1965, pp. 103–126), near the village of Salmanbeyli in Agjabedi district), the aforementioned settlements (Gara-Tepe and Misir Gishlagy) represented the center of a large cultural and ethnic massif. Perhaps those scholars (Aliyev, 1991, p. 23; Valiyev, 1992, pp. 24–28) who saw in such large settlements the beginnings of an “early urban culture” are right.

Undoubtedly, such settlements were inhabited by a population large in number, which led a primarily sedentary lifestyle, engaged in various sectors of the economy (agriculture, cattle breeding and handicrafts). Incidentally, ethnographic observations show the proximity of these settlements to roads leading to and from the mountain pastures. Among other things, settlements such as Gara-Tepe and Misir Gishlagy allow us to study the state of fortification in Azerbaijan at the end of the 2nd – beginning of the 1st millennia BC.

5. An architectural “masterpiece” - a labyrinth in the Khojaly complex

In connection with this issue, I would like to dwell on another structure discovered near the village of Khojaly. The structure is located near the famous largest earthen kurgan, Khacha-Tepe. Menhirs were also located there at one time. Numerous stone cists, composed of large rocky blocks, have been found nearby and around them. These monuments were the objects of study at various times by I.I. Meshchaninov (Meshchaninov, 1926, p. 220), K.Kh. Kushnareva (Kushnareva, 1957, pp. 372–376, 6), and H.F. Jafarov (Jafarov, 1997, pp. 153–162).

This complex, labyrinthine structure, known as a stone wall, begins near a large standing menhir, 40 meters from the Khacha-Tepe kurgan, and extends for a considerable distance. The wall is a continuous ridge of stones, rising 1 meter, and in some areas up to 1.5–2 meters. Rough, unhewn, elongated limestone blocks typically line the sides, while the center is filled with smaller stones. The walls were up to 4 meters wide. At the base of the walls are large limestone blocks, laid flatwise on top of each other in 2–3 rows.

The entire structure is located on a flat, slightly sloping eastward part of the field and has a highly elongated plan, covering an area of approximately 9 hectares. In the western part, a structure extends inward from the main outer wall: a series of walls forming various configurations. In the center is a fence of irregular elliptical shape (Kushnareva, 1957, pp. 5–6, 372).

A corridor-like entrance leads to this enormous structure from the southwest side. The entrance is 40- 45 m long and up to 6 m wide.

Stone fences also exist outside the described structure. One of them runs parallel to its northern wall, separated by a depression resembling a flooded ditch. This parallel masonry, at its eastern end, encircles a square elevation, also surrounded by a stone fence, and extends, winding, to the right bank of the Khojalychay River (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 374; Jafarov, 1997, pp. 153–162). In some places of the large structure, vertically standing stones – menhirs are clearly visible. However, they are smaller than the large menhirs standing near the Khacha-Tepe kurgan.



There are a number of theories regarding the purpose of this grandiose structure. For example, considering its construction to be contemporaneous with the kurgans and stone cists, N. Kushnareva (173, 376) believed that it was a religious building. But as she herself admits, even during the discussion of her report at the plenary session of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of History of Material Culture, B.B. Piotrovsky and A.A. Iessen suggested that this structure could have been a cattle pen. The hypothesis of H.F. Jafarov; Jafarov, 1997, pp. 153–162), who believes that this structure, destroyed by the passage of time, served as a refuge for people and livestock during enemy attacks, is closer to the truth. In other words, it served the same function as the cyclopean structures.

Indeed, the very location of this structure on the high right bank of the Khojalychay River, next to a necropolis containing various monuments (kurgans, dolmens, menhirs, stone cists), suggests its practical nature. The plan of the structure is ingenious. Besides the impressive walls, which could once have withstood lengthy sieges, it also features a number of features (such as labyrinths on the outer wall, a long corridor-like entrance, separate buildings within, etc.) that could have misled the enemy during their attacks, they could have been ambushed. Certainly, caught off guard, the enemy would have had to fight back desperately. Unfortunately, other than small prospecting pits, no excavations have been conducted here. Incidentally, with the exception of some cyclopean structures, large-scale excavations have not been conducted in Azerbaijan.

To the point, in almost all cyclopean fortresses, the builders paid particular attention to the construction of the entrance. Typically, towers were erected directly next to the entrance, or the entrance was constructed at the junction of two walls, the corners of which also formed similar towers. Along with this technique, there were others, such as the construction of two, sometimes three, semicircular walls in front of the entrance, a kind of spiral entrance, between which the enemy would enter a stone corridor (Esayan, 1976, pp. 221–222). In many fortresses, as in Khojaly, narrow corridors several dozen meters long were constructed in front of the gates, giving the enemy no room to maneuver. These were the so-called “stone sacks”.

The description of the Khojaly stone structure shows that the aforementioned details characteristic of other cyclopean structures were also present here: large stone blocks used in construction, intricate planning, the construction of labyrinths, the entrance in the form of a long (40 m) corridor, etc.

We believe that this grandiose and complicated complex was built over a long period of time. Perhaps it originally had a smaller site, but later, with population growth and increased enemy incursions, it became necessary to expand the area of the structure to shelter numerous tribesmen and livestock.

6. Conclusion

The construction of a large-scale and complex structure during the period under study required a significant amount of manpower, skilled builders (and perhaps even architects), and the institution of coercion. An authoritative figure must have overseen this work. This individual (or perhaps several) likely occupied a very high social position. This same leader or leaders likely oversaw the construction of the grand kurgans and other monuments located around and near the stone structure.

It has been repeatedly noted that fortified settlements such as Uzerlik-Tepe, Chinar-Tepe (Middle Bronze Age), Gara-Tepe, Misir Gishlagy (Late Bronze Age), the unique Khojaly structure, as well as kurgans (stone and grand earthen kurgans, dolmens, stone cists, etc.) fit entirely into the final stage of the collapse of the primitive communal system. As scientists (H. Jafarov, D. Jafarova) noted in their research, this was a period of “military democracy”.

Thus, despite the quantitative limitation of fortified points, based on the available data, we can nevertheless judge to some extent the degree of development of fortification in the studied area during the Late Bronze Age.

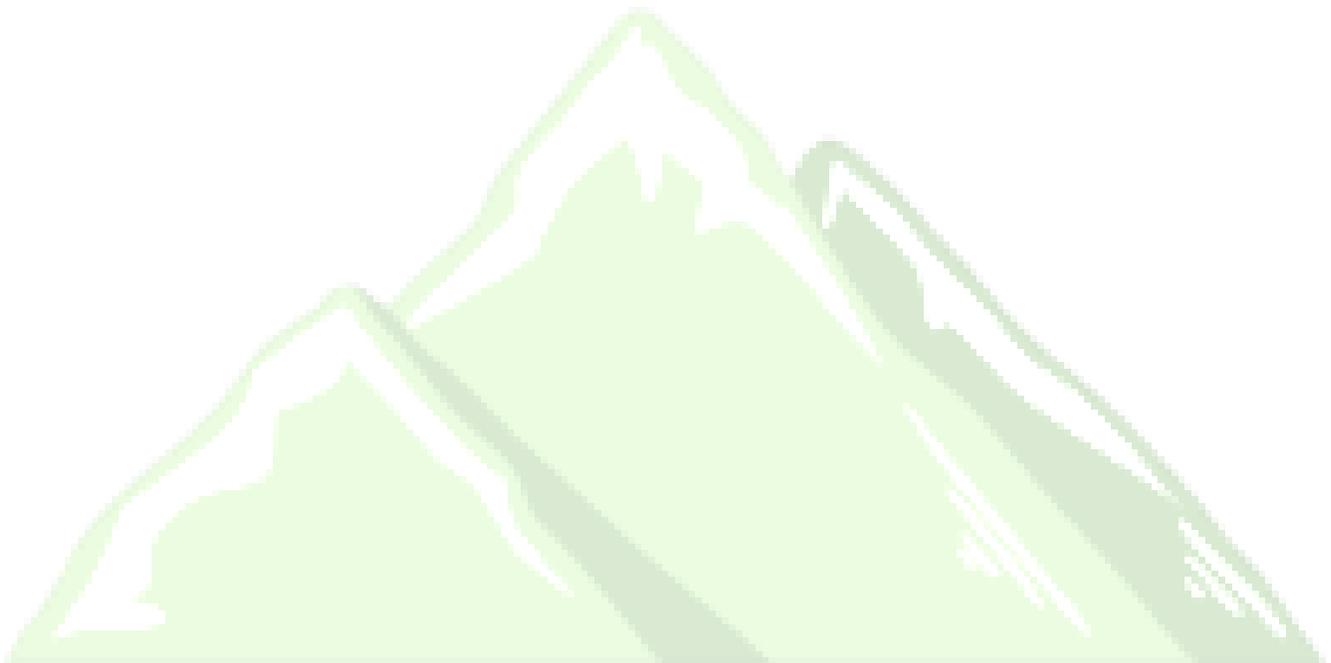


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Memory of The Mountains: Centuries-Old Cultural Heritage in the North Caucasus

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Abstract. In the contemporary period, instability is observed in the ethno-political situation of the peoples of the North Caucasus, which is characterized not only by the region's socio-economic conditions but also by socio-cultural processes. Recently, the issue of historical memory has gained relevance in the socio-cultural life of the region, and the cultural heritage that local communities have formed over centuries has become the subject of numerous studies. The main aim of this article is to examine the cultural heritage created by the Ossetians living in the mountainous areas of the North Caucasus throughout history, to determine whether cultural or historical memory predominates for them, and to assess the impact of these memory mechanisms on socio-cultural and ethno-political processes in the contemporary period. Additionally, the study addresses the reactivation of ethnic identity in the era of digital transformation, as well as traditions and their preservation mechanisms. The research indicates that historical memory plays a significant role in the dynamics of socio-cultural processes. This situation compels each ethnic group in the North Caucasus to protect its national identity and historical memory, which increases ethno-political risks in the region. The study shows that strengthening unity and peace among the ethnic and religious groups of the North Caucasus, including the Ossetians, as well as activating cooperation mechanisms, is essential. Directing the historical consciousness of the region's inhabitants from historical memory toward cultural memory can help achieve these objectives. The article employs historical, descriptive, analytical, observational, and comparative qualitative methods.

Keywords: North Caucasus peoples, Ossetians, cultural heritage, historical memory, cultural memory, ethno-political situation, socio-cultural experience

Received: 08.12.2025 Accepted: 06.01.2025 Published: 28.01.2026

<https://doi.org/10.54414/GWFV4633>

1. Introduction

In addition to the rationally managed material resources of mountain-dwelling peoples, there exist intangible assets of exceptional significance, their cultural heritage. Without the intensive use of this heritage, it is impossible to confidently speak about the sustainable development of local communities. The intangible cultural heritage of each mountain people forms the foundation of their national identity as well as the spiritual connection between generations and eras. Undoubtedly, in the present day, intangible cultural heritage continues to play a key role in shaping the cultures of all ethnic groups.

Customs, rituals, ceremonial practices, performing arts, and knowledge and skills related to traditional crafts recognized as part of the cultural heritage by both communities and individuals are closely linked to tangible and natural heritage, transmitted from one generation to the next, and help foster a sense of identity and continuity among members of an ethnic group. Periods of stagnation, followed by notorious reconstruction, the collapse of the USSR, shifts in the sociopolitical landscape, and the transition to a market economy, all of which inevitably negatively impacted the social and moral environment. People's moral standards significantly declined, and interpersonal relationships deteriorated. Many cultural values and



customs, developed and refined over centuries and millennia, were distorted or deformed, while a culture of money and consumerism literally engulfed society.

It is necessary to attempt the revival of moral values embedded in folk customs that, for various reasons, were forgotten at certain stages and are no longer transmitted from generation to generation, but can be effectively utilized by the current generation. Many values formed in the depths of community life align with ethical demands and are worthy not only of revival but also of further development. It is certainly mistaken to assume that everything forgotten is bad, and that only what survives the passage of time is good.

There is a pressing need to revive traditional family and household rituals, restore moral values, and re-establish traditional etiquette governing relationships between elders and youth, men and women. This is because the element that makes a nation a nation and determines an individual's belonging to a particular people is primarily their national identity and language. Today, it is no longer sufficient for any ethnic group to rely solely on the national heritage inherited from the past. It is important to recognize that preserving heritage does not mean limiting ourselves to it. Skillfully and creatively learning from the best practices of other people and drawing lessons from one another is a reliable path toward progress and moral enrichment.

It is vital to protect and cultivate qualities that define humanity: compassion, nobility, generosity, selflessness, honesty, patriotism, humility, and courtesy, as well as the customs that shape them. These values have always played a key role in the upbringing of generations and serve as useful regulators of human relations.

When considering sustainable development in mountainous regions, one cannot overlook the unique aspect of the intangible heritage of mountain peoples as an ecological culture. This aspect can and should serve as an important tool in forming a new ecological ideal. In particular, elements of the traditional ecological culture of the Ossetians, shaped over centuries under the conditions of forced isolation in harsh mountain valleys, serve as an exemplary case in this regard.

2. The National and Ecological Culture of the Ossetians in Mountainous Areas

The historically established way of life of the Ossetians fostered sustainable behavioral patterns aimed at maintaining a balance between human activities and nature. Throughout the lives of Ossetian communities, all efforts within the communal model were directed toward preserving both natural and economic equilibrium. This model ensured the harmonious coexistence of natural and ethno-social systems.

Like many other mountain peoples, the Ossetians' national culture developed on the basis of human nature interaction. The extreme conditions of the mountainous Caucasus taught communities to live in accordance with the laws of the environment. Accordingly, the national culture was primarily built on fundamental principles such as labor, a caring attitude toward nature, rational use of natural resources, morality, and respect for individuals as carriers of popular wisdom.

Ossetian folk wisdom reflects immutable universal values, including moral norms and principles of coexistence with nature. Ossetians have a deep and ancient history of human connection with nature. Because their ancestors served nature as a second home; they recognized its value and treated it with care. At the same time, nature acted as both instructor and guardian, developing diligence and vigilance while helping them survive in adverse conditions.

The specific climatic and geographical conditions in which the national identity of mountain communities developed have had a great impact on their traditional lifestyles. The uniqueness of the environment has influenced many areas of daily life, culture, and psychology.

Agronomic, meteorological, and astronomical information, as well as everyday philosophy and ethics, were all strongly related to folk wisdom. The Ossetians created their own ecological knowledge



systems by developing a deeper perception of objective reality through an understanding of the essence of natural events and processes. (Tsogoeva, 2007, p.97).

Therefore, harmony with nature became a sign of personal perfection through the diligent actions of adults. People were able to observe and interpret nature, as well as intentionally change it. By internalizing folk taboos and ecological rules, mountain dwellers became carriers of ethical life principles.

In agricultural production, knowledge and skills in performing various labor tasks, which depended on the “caprices” of nature, were vital. Accordingly, the process of acquiring knowledge developed a specific approach aimed at understanding the diversity of nature and explaining natural phenomena. Studying soil relief and familiarizing themselves with flora and fauna were closely linked to farming practices, which in turn stimulated the development of traditional mountain medicine.

The harsh climatic conditions of the mountains also contributed to the emergence of various superstitions in Ossetian thought; these were characterized more by mystical uncertainty than by systematic logic. Among those who migrated to the lowlands, these superstitions were preserved to a lesser degree.

2.1. Nature Cults: Religious and Mystical Reverence for Natural Objects

One distinctive feature of the Ossetians’ national culture is the existence of nature conservation traditions formed on the basis of religious and mystical reverence for certain natural objects. Like other peoples, the religious worldview of the Ossetians developed over centuries, incorporating several beliefs that emerged in different periods and ethnic contexts. The most significant of these are purely local beliefs that originated in the Caucasus and share similarities with the faiths of neighboring peoples.

In later periods, Christianity and Islam clearly absorbed elements of these earlier nature cults, which were integrated into the new religious systems in an acceptable form. Natural objects chosen as tribal totems were excluded from economic use: if it was an animal, hunting it was partially or completely prohibited, and approaching its habitat was considered taboo.

Another important aspect of Ossetian nature preservation culture is the tradition of worshiping natural objects known as dzuars. The shared reverence for these objects among both Muslims and Christians was the result of long-term peaceful coexistence and interreligious interaction. The Ossetians use the word dzuar to mean a sacred place, deity, or protective spirit, and the same term is also applied to the specific locations of religious veneration. This dual meaning is explained by the belief that a particular spirit resides in the place. These sites are usually located outside village boundaries, often in highland areas.

Deities associated with human economic activity agriculture and animal husbandry were of particular importance. Based on origin and distribution, Ossetian dzuars are classified into pan Ossetian, community, and family types. Among the pan-Ossetian dzuars, the oldest cults combine Iranian and ancient Caucasian elements, widely reflected in mythology and religious songs. One of the most famous agricultural dzuars is Uatsilla, the god of grain and fertility, who was also considered the protector of lightning. Annual sacrifices of oxen and rams and ceremonial feasts known as kuvd were held at temples dedicated to Uatsilla. In many locations, especially in the lowlands, Uatsilla’s festival was celebrated before plowing began and was called Xori-bon (“Day of the Harvest”) (Gostiev, 2010, p.123). In the Ossetian pantheon, Uastirci holds a special place. Believed to reside in the sky, this deity observes and hears earthly events and serves as the protector of the poor and oppressed. Women did not directly name him, instead referring to him metaphorically as lagti dzuar (“protector of men”).

Falvara is another significant divinity who protects tiny animals, primarily sheep. The statement "May your flocks increase" expresses one of the cherished wishes of Ossetians. Every village had a kuvd to celebrate Falvara's day near his shrine every spring, during which each home brought three pies, araka (spirits), dzykka (cheese dishes), or beer. Animal sacrifice was prohibited on this day.



Afsati, the god of hunting and protector of deer, oxen, goats, boars, and others, along with Donbett, the ruler of the water realm, are also ancient and widely worshiped deities. Only men participated in the autumn ceremony honoring Donbett, where the village elder offered prayers for abundant water, favorable weather, and plentiful fish.

One of the oldest cults is the mother goddess cult, later sanctified by Christian clergy in the Middle Ages as Mady Maryam (Mother Mary). The widespread presence of shrines dedicated to her in almost every village attests to the cult's extensive reach.

The supreme entity in the Ossetian pantheon is Xutsau, to whom all major and minor gods, saints, and spirits are subordinate. Prayers generally begin with his name, and he is invoked in aspirations. The religious beliefs of the Ossetians place a strong emphasis on pastoral and agricultural cults.

Several local religious traditions have helped preserve mountain ecosystems. The veneration of sacred hills, trees, woods, stones, and water sources, along with restrictions on their commercial use, has facilitated the preservation of certain natural places in North Ossetia to the present day.

Recently, terms such as "efficient use of nature", "nature conservation zones", and "ecological thinking" have been widely used. Initially, these may seem to be modern topics. The origins of wildlife conservation trace back to history.

Throughout history, many societies have designated certain areas, such as mountains, forests, caves, and springs, where economic activity is prohibited, and access is restricted. Often, these places are protected by selected guardians.

The establishment of these "primitive reserves" was mostly motivated by beliefs in religion rather than environmental concerns. The deities' and spirits' actions and ancestor worship were tied to sacred natural sites. Because of their exceptional natural beauty or unique tranquility, several locations were declared sacred.

In addition to this, it can be argued that a fundamental function of the state is to establish conditions that safeguard and enhance the cultural identity and intangible heritage of mountain communities.

2.2. Measures for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

In 1989, Russia became a party to the "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" established by UNESCO. In accordance with this Convention, States Parties must guarantee the protection of the cultural and natural heritage on their territory, implement sound policies in this regard, establish appropriate administrative frameworks, and take administrative, financial, scientific, legal, and technical measures.

The political, socio-economic, and cultural transformations that have taken place in Russia over the past few decades have shown how significant innovative processes have become. Nevertheless, the state has partially lost its position as the main initiator of cultural heritage protection initiatives and is currently not investing enough in their implementation. (Kul'turnoe nasledie narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2009, p.66).

Effective management decisions at the regional and local levels are made more difficult by the absence of objective data on the state of cultural heritage monuments. Consequently, it is essential to establish cultural heritage preservation initiatives, primarily at the regional and municipal levels.

There are about 70 large and small communities in the mountainous regions of North Ossetia, whose population constitutes only 2-2.5% of the total population of the republic. Unfortunately, several mountain villages, each with its own unique historical and cultural environment, are in decline.



Certain cultural aspects might disappear as a result of the loss of carriers of intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, it is crucial to plan ethnographic and folklore expeditions. It is strongly advised to engage students from North Ossetian State University and other educational institutions in this endeavor.

The outcomes of these excursions should be shared with the general public rather than being kept for academic purposes. This can encourage the growth of ecological tourism and intangible cultural heritage. Involving youth in these procedures would also aid in addressing the lack of subject-matter experts in the country. Cultural memory can be strengthened by schoolchildren conducting studies and teaching about the history, culture, and folklore of their village and region; encouraging genealogy investigations; and recording family histories.

Intangible cultural legacy has social value in addition to cultural significance. It is crucial for promoting civic qualities and patriotism among young people as well as preventing harmful social occurrences. Consequently, without paying close attention to local cultural assets, rural communities cannot prosper socioeconomically.

3. The Transformation of Traditional Culture in Modern Society

The existence of traditional culture in modern society has a historical trajectory closely associated with the evolution of modernization ideology. Initially, this theory adopted the position that tradition could not survive in modern conditions, but over time, it evolved into the modernization paradigm. Its more complex form acknowledges ethnic cultures' capacity for innovation.

Historical studies now include discussions on the compatibility of tradition and innovation. Nobody denies tradition's adaptability or society's ability to accept and revive it these days.

"When traditional societies are introduced into a vast foreign cultural space, attempts to 'destroy' tradition often conflict with the principle of 'cultural integrity', which preserves customs and ensures painless adaptation to innovations." (Mironov, 2005, p.8). Concepts of traditional cultural structures that were created using the framework of the theory of cultural diffusion are significant in this respect. These structures are robust and comparatively resistant to change since they are made up of the values and living norms that uphold social identity and transmit it to subsequent generations. In the context of the North Caucasus, the core-periphery model was substantiated by S.A. Razdolsky. By identifying a stable cultural core within Adyghe culture, Razdolsky developed the core-periphery model for Adyghe culture, treating the cultural core as a central, consistent, and stable component: "this core influences the periphery, determines its cultural type, and keeps it cohesive" (Razdolsky, 2012, p.213).

The customs and traditions of the North Caucasus peoples have been validated over centuries under various external cultural influences, adapting to each new historical period. Efforts to eradicate "harmful" folk customs were accompanied by the establishment of the Russian administration, which targeted costly customs that raised concerns about the population's social conditions. Educated and influential representatives of local peoples were actively involved in the campaign to eliminate destructive practices in weddings, funerals, and other customs. K.L. Khetagurov urged reconsideration of the appropriateness of such propaganda, arguing that "public judgments cannot destroy what has been created and preserved over centuries... demanding that the Ossetians consciously eliminate 'barbaric and destructive customs' is like trying to make a Chinese man wear a European tailcoat" (Khetagurov, 2000, p.48). To reject the practice of bride abduction, it was necessary to cultivate individuals who rejected class discrimination and recognized equal rights for men and women. To abandon funeral rituals, people would have to cease believing that "every deceased person in the afterlife needs food and drink and that it is a sacred duty for the deceased's relatives to provide these in prescribed ways" (Khetagurov, 2000, p.48). Khetagurov considered fines and other punishments meaningless, as such policies "anger fanatics, force them to resort to secret rituals, and doubly punish those accused of violating the law" (Khetagurov, 2000, pp.48–49).

Not all intellectuals understood that familiarizing their people with European culture and



education required that individuals first comprehend the value of their own cultural heritage to find their proper place in a civilized society. Among those opposing traditional culture, some sincerely believed that certain customs were harmful and needed elimination as a duty to their people, while others acted to satisfy the administration and advance their careers.

Some intellectuals believed that only education and enlightenment could liberate traditional society from “harmful” customs. Experience, however, demonstrated the ambiguity of this claim: high levels of education and culture in contemporary society did not prevent the emergence of revivalist ideas and practices.

Historical and economic conditions shape tradition and cannot remain unchanged amidst the dynamics of social development. Ancient customs, such as memorial competitions for the deceased or the cutting of widows’ hair, disappeared not because they were forbidden, but because they no longer corresponded to people’s living conditions and worldview.

Tradition also evolves under external cultural influences. For instance, under the influence of the Orthodox Church, innovations appeared in funerals, memorial rites, and cemetery culture: fences were erected around graves, priests were incorporated into rituals, and so forth. These innovations also developed in the context of conflict with the Church: priests complained about locals violating fasting rules and bringing traditional drinks like “araka” instead of wine to the church. Ossetians resented priests who destroyed worship sites or interfered with ritual performance. As a result, eclectic traditions emerged, such as church candles appearing in ceremonies honoring sacred trees and bushes.

Before the revolution, the practice of bride abduction had become a tradition. This practice reemerged at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries due to economic crises following reforms and the population’s growing inability to afford wedding expenses. Its resurgence is again linked to social and economic transformations.

During the Soviet political regime, the “remnants of the past” were once more targeted in ideological struggles, obstructing the formation of a unified community, the “Soviet people.” According to V.S. Uarziati, “the pre-revolutionary officials’ fight against ‘harmful folk customs’ cannot be compared to the activities of Soviet party officials who boldly attacked the cultural heritage of the people” (Uarziati, 1995, p.8). Alongside officials, scholars, women’s and children’s organizations, and civic groups were mobilized to change the consciousness of those creating a new society. This phase of eliminating traditions was particularly severe due to its combination with strong anti-religious propaganda: the close intertwining of religious and ethnic traditions determined the effectiveness of these destructive initiatives.

However, as many ethnologists note, “the integration of the traditional culture of the Kabardin, Balkar, Ossetian, and other North Caucasus peoples into the all-Union cultural domain during the Soviet period did not lead to their disappearance; the protective mechanisms of these distinct cultures preserved many traditions alongside innovations” (Kuchmezova, 2003, p.31). Traditional culture that survived the Soviet period retained many of its positions in material, social, and spiritual domains.

Nevertheless, Soviet national policies damaged the cultural heritage of regional peoples. Many researchers associate this harm with the disruption of intergenerational connections (Volkova, 1982, pp.4–5), the replacement of traditions with surrogates that distorted the original meanings and symbols of moral culture, and the disruption of mechanisms for transmitting traditional culture to younger generations (Uarziati, 1995, pp.7–8).

Historical experience shows that the cultural inviolability validated by the social experiences of many generations of North Caucasus peoples ensured that tradition adapted to new economic and social conditions and preserved traditional culture for modern society.



3.1. The Re-actualization of Ethnic Identity in the Digital Age

In the North Caucasus, ethnic identity remains an important point of reference, especially for the younger generation. In July 2023, the North Ossetian Institute of Humanities and Social Studies named after V.I. Abayev conducted a sociological study titled “Core Values and Identities of Student Youth in the North Caucasus Federal District.” Preliminary results showed that ethnic identity is dominant within the system of personal identity-57%.

Today, ethnic identity manifests in new forms, often expressed visually online to demonstrate affiliation with a particular traditional culture. People share their participation in national holidays, old photographs of famous ancestors, stories about their native villages, relatives, and prominent figures of their ethnic group, as well as publications about various historical and cultural events. Recently, there has been a growing interest in Ossetian folk musical instruments; orchestras have been established, and children are beginning to perform traditional music.

Various apps, comics, children’s books, dictionaries, and popular cartoons are being translated into the Ossetian language. Supportive signage and advertising in the native language are also appearing. Young people achieve recognition more quickly than their predecessors by promoting online projects and public appeals that encourage love and protection of their language. As a result of this social influence, speaking Ossetian has become fashionable.

“Increasing attention to the native language as a form of presenting ethnic belonging has allowed researchers to identify it as an independent ethnic movement” (Volokitina, 2017, p.23). This manifests in various forms and at different levels. State programs are being developed to preserve and promote the native language, schools based on multilingual education principles are opening, and children are being taught Ossetian in kindergartens.

Alongside academic research, the “people’s history” is developing and increasingly occupying media space (Kanukova, 2021, p.196). Social media today is an important source of information about customs and traditions, but the quality of this information raises concerns. Young entrepreneurs and civic activists often rely on pseudo-scientific “research” filled with myths and fantasies, transmitting misleading information to the next generation.

Moreover, it must be acknowledged that historical and cultural heritage is also a focus of attention for destructive forces seeking to use it for provocations that threaten state stability. Distinguishing between provocateurs and those sincerely believing in their sufficient knowledge to publish public statements or books can be difficult (Kanukova, 2021, p.198).

The academic community must combat the falsification of history and culture, the dissemination of disinformation, and the transmission of various fabrications to younger generations instead of genuine cultural heritage. It should also promote the revival and development of historical traditions. However, numerous monographs, encyclopedias, articles, and other publications rarely reach beyond the scholarly community. Inaccessible to today’s broad “target audience,” these works fail to solve contemporary problems or popularize scientific knowledge, highlighting the need for a more rational presentation as a renewed media product.

Applied research using advanced technologies that enable the compilation of a unified information database of accumulated sources and studies becomes a critical tool in the current context.

In this vein, the project “Innovative Resources of Historical and Cultural Heritage” was developed to preserve and develop historical and cultural heritage. Drawing on monographic studies spanning generations in history, ethnology, archaeology, folklore, linguistics, and Ossetian artistic culture, as well as comprehensive encyclopedic works, archives, and field expedition materials, and audio, photo, and video collections from scientific archives, the project aims to present comprehensive, scientifically grounded, and systematized historical and cultural data about cultural heritage objects. This approach



helps to understand the meaning and essence of the original tradition, track its developmental dynamics, identify potential future prospects in contemporary society, and support the development of tourism, preservation, and promotion of folk crafts, and the implementation of social, educational, and cultural projects.

Encouraging young people with the skills and interest to creatively promote ethnic cultural assets in the context of folk culture not only supports entrepreneurship but also contributes to the moral health of modern society.

The “ethno-cultural renaissance,” the mobilization of ethnic identity, and the re-actualization of tradition in contemporary society are consequences of globalization. This process highlights the inconsistency of existing theories about the destroyed fundamental elements of traditional culture and clearly demonstrates the need to reconsider the relevance of traditional culture for modern society.

Traditional culture is a flexible and dynamic system that adapts to each historical period, forms psychologically comfortable mechanisms for its bearers, and aligns with historically conditioned social circumstances. Loyalty to tradition as a means of expressing ethnic identity retains its relevance in modern society, particularly among young people. Youth are creating new forms and mechanisms for self-realization, primarily occurring within the online cultural sphere

Modern practices of re-actualizing tradition can yield positive outcomes, but may also result in unforeseen negative consequences. For example, falsifications and pseudo-scientific or provocative interpretations presented online as “original cultural heritage” and transmitted to future generations fall into this category.

In the context of broad and unsystematic engagement with traditional culture, it is necessary to popularize scientific knowledge in an accessible manner and systematically identify the innovative potential and modernization opportunities of cultural heritage.

4. Conclusion

The cultural heritage of mountain peoples, particularly the Ossetians of the North Caucasus, represents a complex, multi-layered, and enduring cultural system that has developed over centuries under challenging historical conditions. Harsh geographical environments, community solidarity, the principle of intergenerational responsibility, and ethical behavioral norms constitute the core structural elements of this culture. Community institutions, ceremonial culture, oral traditions, heroic epics, and collective memory mechanisms have played a crucial role in maintaining social stability.

Ossetian cultural heritage is not limited to folklore and ceremonial practices; it also functions as a system for regulating social relations, strengthening the family institution, and fostering a sense of public responsibility. Despite historical trials, these cultural codes have been preserved in collective consciousness and have adapted to changing political regimes while maintaining their viability.

In this regard, the cultural heritage of mountain peoples should be viewed not as static but as a living social organism with inherent order and value systems that allow for renewal and adaptation.

The preservation of traditional culture should not be confined to nostalgia or symbolic propaganda. It must be approached as a strategic developmental direction that requires both scientifically grounded methods and institutional support. In particular, under conditions of digital transformation, the systematization of cultural heritage, the creation of reliable information platforms based on verified sources, and the active involvement of youth in this process are of critical importance.

The sustainability of cultural heritage depends on its ability to adapt to changing socio-economic environments. Tradition survives not only because it is preserved but also because it acquires new functions and aligns with the demands of contemporary life. Therefore, coordinated efforts among state policies, the academic community, and civic initiatives are essential to both the preservation and



development of traditional culture.

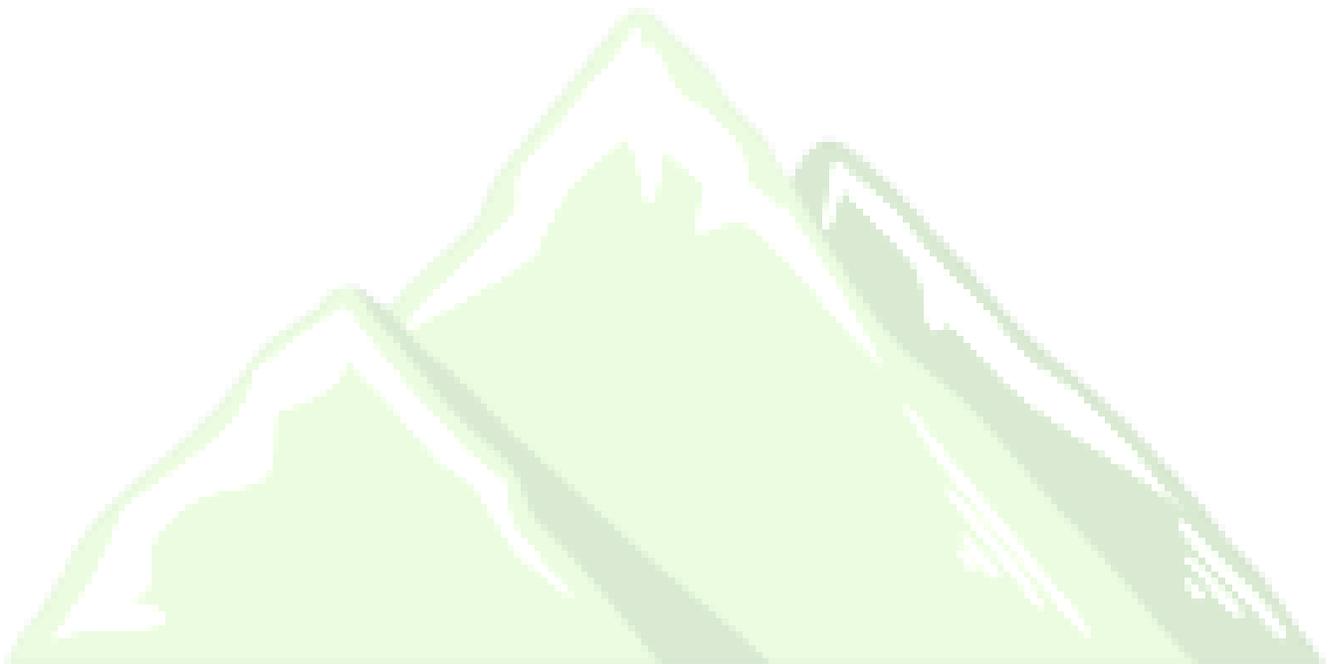
In conclusion, traditional culture is not an alternative to modern society but an integral part of it. It remains a vital resource for strengthening social cohesion, fostering a sense of identity, and preserving cultural diversity, and it must be taken into account in future development strategies.

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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.

Keywords: mountains, biodiversity, global heritage, history, Alinja Mountain

Received: 15.11.2025 **Accepted:** 25.12.2025 **Published:** 28.01.2026

<https://doi.org/10.54414/RLYW6986>

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 Atabeyts 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 (Gopicig 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 Atabeyts' 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 "kahriz" 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 Timur attacked this fortress for 14 years, but failed to capture it. It was only after 1399, after the defenders abandoned the fortress, that Timur 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-13th 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 Kalbalyev 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 “Dede 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 Alinj 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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Analysis of the Mountain Population of the Azerbaijani Mountains and Their Cultures

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Abstract. The article is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the lifestyle, ethnic composition, household characteristics and socio-economic activities of the population living in the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan. The study comprehensively examines the impact of the natural and geographical features of the mountain environment on the living culture and economic activities of the local population. The first section analyzes the natural conditions, climatic characteristics of mountainous areas, and the impact of this environment on the organization of human life. The second section examines the settlement areas, ethnic composition and demographic characteristics of the minority peoples and ethnic groups living in the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan. The third section is devoted to the traditional living culture of the mountain population, including household characteristics, the structure of settlements, architectural traditions, customs and traditions, and the system of social relations. The fourth section analyzes the economic activities of the mountain population - pasture and winter cattle breeding, mountain agriculture, horticulture, folk crafts, as well as the recently developing tourism and service sectors. At the same time, the socio-economic problems of mountain regions, migration processes and employment issues are also in the spotlight. The final section emphasizes the importance of preserving the traditional lifestyle and ethnocultural heritage of mountain populations, discusses the issues of efficient use of natural resources, preservation of ecological balance, and strengthening the potential of local communities for the sustainable socio-economic development of regions. The article notes that preserving the social stability and cultural diversity of mountain communities is one of the main conditions for the sustainable development of these territories.

Keywords: Azerbaijani mountains, mountain population, minority peoples, ethnic diversity, living culture, traditional economy, mountain villages, socio-economic development, ethnocultural heritage, sustainable development

Received: 26.12.2025 **Accepted:** 06.01.2026 **Published:** 28.01.2026

<https://doi.org/10.54414/DLAM6601>

1. Introduction

Located at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, the mountains of Azerbaijan represent a unique ecosystem with diverse flora and fauna. This geographical location, rich culture and ancient traditions of the local population make the mountainous regions of the country an object of scientific research and ecological care. In this article, we will look at the flora and fauna of the region, the characteristics of the ecosystem, the life of the mountain population and its economic aspects. Located at the crossroads of different climatic and geographical zones, the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan are distinguished by their outstanding biodiversity. Unique ecosystems formed at different altitudes create ideal conditions for the life of many plant and animal species. In this article, we will take a detailed look at the flora and fauna of the Azerbaijani mountains, highlighting the main characteristics and importance of these ecosystems. The mountainous regions of Azerbaijan are unique not only in terms of nature but also in terms of culture. The population of these regions is distinguished by its rich historical heritage, diversity of ethnic groups, and unique customs and traditions.

In this article, we will consider the daily life, culture, economic activities, problems and development prospects of the mountain population. The economy of the mountainous regions of



Azerbaijan is very diverse and specific due to the unique natural conditions and the customs and traditions of the local population. These areas have great potential for development, but face a number of challenges. This article will review the main sectors of the economy, the characteristics and prospects of the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan.

2. Ethnic composition of the mountain peoples of Azerbaijan

The peoples living in the mountainous areas of Azerbaijan belong to the Caucasian language family and are densely settled in some villages and regions. The following ethnic groups can be attributed to this population: the Shahdag peoples (Khinaliqs, Grizs, Budugs), Haputs, Jaks, etc. Along with them, the Lezgins, Avars, Sakhurs, Ingiloyts and Udins (relatively in the foothill zones) were settled. The vast majority of these peoples are considered ancient aboriginal peoples and have inhabited the mountainous regions of the Caucasus for hundreds of years. Their compact settlement has played an important role in preserving their ethnic identity. When studying the ethnic composition of Azerbaijan, the correct scientific explanation of the concepts of "nation", "people", "minority", "national minority" and "ethnic minority" is of particular importance. These concepts are socio-ethnic categories that have been formed in the process of historical development and express different histories of social unity. The mountainous areas of Azerbaijan have played an important role in preserving ethnic diversity (Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2014).

In terms of time, it was one of the earliest forms of population associations, arising as a result of the unification of kin, tribes, and clans. This process was mainly associated with the development of social division of labor, trade, and social relations. The population emerged later, during the formation of capitalist relations. The main characteristics of the nation are a common territory, literary language, culture, economic life, and spiritual unity.

The concept of national minority applies to ethnic groups that live in the territory of a state, but are numerically smaller than the main population. For example, just as our compatriots living in other countries are considered national minorities in those states, representatives of other people living in Azerbaijan also have the status of national minorities.

In contrast, minority peoples are ethnic groups that have historically been considered the indigenous population of a given territory and live mainly in compact groups. Although their numbers are small, their main characteristic is that they have settled collectively in certain regions while preserving their historical and cultural characteristics. The ethnic composition and national diversity of Azerbaijan have historically been formed in a tolerant environment (Guliyev, 2012). Ethnic minorities are special groups separated from larger ethnic groups and formed as a result of historical and ethnic processes. Although these groups preserve their own language, customs, traditions and spiritual characteristics, they can also absorb certain cultural elements from neighboring peoples under the influence of the environment in which they live. This is considered a natural result of ethnic interaction. Thus, various ethnoses living in Azerbaijan - national minorities, small peoples and ethnic groups - both preserve their ethnic characteristics and integrate into the general socio-cultural environment. This process is considered one of the main indicators of the historically formed poly-ethnic structure and ethnic diversity of the country.

3. Settlements of small peoples and ethnic minorities in the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan

Geographical conditions, especially mountainous areas, have played an important role in shaping the ethnic map of Azerbaijan. The complexity of the natural and geographical environment, difficult-to-navigate mountain ranges and isolated settlements have created conditions for a number of small peoples and ethnic groups to live for a long time, preserving their languages, customs and cultural characteristics. In general, these ethnic groups are compactly settled mainly in the northeastern and northwestern mountainous zones of the Greater Caucasus, as well as in some southern mountainous areas.



3.1. Northeastern zone of the Greater Caucasus (Guba–Gusar–Khizi region)

One of the most ethnically diverse mountainous regions of Azerbaijan is the northeastern part of the Greater Caucasus. This region is home to a particularly small number of peoples, the so-called Shahdag ethnic group. The peoples belonging to the Shahdag ethnic group are compactly settled in the northeastern part of the Greater Caucasus (ANAS, 2007). They include the following: Khinalıgılı (Khinalıg village of Guba region), Gryzlar, Buduglar, Haputlar, Ceklar). These peoples have formed in a long period of natural isolation, living in high mountainous areas, in villages located at a considerable height above sea level. Their languages belong to the Caucasian language family, and each has its own distinct ethnic characteristics. This region also constitutes the oldest and most archaic layer of Azerbaijan's ethnic diversity.

3.2. Northwestern zone of the Greater Caucasus (Zagatala–Balakan–Gakh region)

This mountainous zone is inhabited mainly by the following small peoples: Avars, Sakhurs, Ingiloyts. These ethnic groups live compactly on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus, in foothill and mid-mountainous villages. Their economy is mainly based on mountain agriculture, cattle breeding and gardening. Geographical conditions have influenced the preservation of their traditional way of life and community relations.

3.3. Southern slopes and northern regions of the Greater Caucasus

One of the most widespread ethnic groups in these areas is the Lezgins. They live mainly in the mountainous and foothill zones in the direction of Gusar, Guba, and partly in the direction of Shamakhi. The Lezgins belong to the Caucasian language family and are considered one of the largest minorities in the region.

3.4. Southern mountainous zone (Talysh Mountains)

The Talysh Mountains in southern Azerbaijan are home to the Talysh people, who belong to the Iranian language group and are compactly settled in the Lerik, Yardimli, and mountainous Lankaran regions. The mountainous and forested terrain of this region has allowed the Talysh people to preserve their unique lifestyle and cultural characteristics. The living culture of the Talysh and other mountain peoples has developed in accordance with the natural and geographical conditions (National Atlas of Azerbaijan, 2014).

4. Historical-ethnographic significance

Many of the minority peoples living in mountainous areas exist only in Azerbaijan on the world's ethnic map. Their compact and isolated existence gives reason to characterize these ethnoses as a kind of “living ethnographic museum.” These peoples have both preserved their local ethnic characteristics and, over time, have integrated into the general socio-cultural system of Azerbaijani society.

5. The culture of life adapted to the mountain life of the minority peoples living in the mountainous areas of Azerbaijan

The lifestyle of the small peoples living in the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan was shaped by the natural and geographical environment they lived in. Harsh climatic conditions, complex relief, limited land resources, and isolated settlements determined the economic activities, architecture, lifestyle, and social relations of these peoples. Each ethnic group has developed a unique living culture suited to the mountain environment.

The Khinalıg people live in the village of Khinalıg, located in the high mountainous zone of the Greater Caucasus, at an altitude of more than 2,000 meters above sea level. The main feature of their living culture is adaptation to the harsh climate. The houses are built of stone, their roofs are flat, and the roof of one house serves as a courtyard for another. The main occupation is sheep and cattle breeding.



Preparing food and fuel reserves for the winter is an important part of the lifestyle. Community relations and traditions of mutual assistance are strongly preserved.

6. Griz, Budug and other Shahdag Peoples

The peoples of the Shahdag ethnic group, such as the Gryz, Budug, Haput, and Cek, are compactly settled in the northeastern part of the Greater Caucasus, mainly in the high and medium-mountainous areas of the Guba region. Their settlements are located at a considerable height above sea level, and the complex relief, harsh climatic conditions, and long winter season have had a significant impact on the formation of the lifestyle of these peoples. As a result of geographical isolation, they were able to preserve their language, traditions, and ethnic characteristics for a long time.

The basis of the traditional economic activity of the Shahdag peoples is semi-nomadic cattle breeding. Sheep breeding and partly cattle breeding occupy a leading place in their economic life. In the summer months, the herds are taken to high mountain pastures, and in the autumn and winter they are returned to lower areas. This seasonal movement system was formed in accordance with their division of labor, family life and household traditions. Along with this, mountain farming has also developed on limited land areas. In order to prevent soil erosion on mountain slopes and to use the fields efficiently, terrace farming is carried out. Mainly grain, potato and vegetable growing are widespread.

The mountainous environment has also influenced the architecture and structure of these peoples' settlements. Villages are usually located in a stepped pattern on mountain slopes, and houses are built of local stone. Thick walls and small windows serve to preserve heat in cold climates. Houses and outbuildings are placed close to each other, making efficient use of land and ensuring comfortable living in winter conditions.

Home crafts occupy an important place in the daily and cultural life of the Shahdag people. Wool processing, spinning, weaving, carpet and palazzo making are widespread. These products are made both for daily use and decorated with traditional patterns and ornaments reflecting the aesthetic taste of the people. Preparing food and fuel reserves in advance for the winter season is one of the important features of their living culture.

In terms of social relations, family and community ties are very strong among these people. Collective labor, mutual assistance, joint economic activity, and community solidarity have formed as important social mechanisms for living in mountain conditions. Hospitality, respect for elders, and preservation of traditional values are the main features of their spiritual culture. Thus, the living culture of the Shahdag peoples was formed as a result of adaptation to the natural-geographical environment and has preserved its unique ethnic characteristics to this day.

The Lezgins are one of the largest minorities in Azerbaijan, settled mainly in the northeastern part of the Greater Caucasus - in the mountainous and foothill areas of the Gusar, Guba, Khachmaz regions, as well as partially in the direction of Shamakhi and Ismayilli. Their habitat mainly covers mountain slopes, river valleys and foothill zones. This natural and geographical environment has had a significant impact on the formation of the Lezgins' economic activities, livelihoods, and overall lifestyle.

A multi-sectoral economic system has been formed in the traditional mountain culture of the Lezgins. Agriculture has been one of the main occupations, and the land on the mountain slopes and river valleys has been used efficiently. Grain, potato and vegetable growing were widespread. In addition, horticulture and fruit growing played an important role, especially the cultivation of apples, pears, walnuts and other fruit trees. Livestock breeding, especially sheep and cattle breeding, was an integral part of agriculture, and high mountain pastures were used in the summer months.

Irrigation systems were created in settlements located near mountain rivers, and water was delivered to agricultural fields through ditches and canals. This was one of the important factors ensuring



the sustainability of agriculture in mountainous conditions. Lezgins formed an economic model adapted to the mountain environment by efficiently using natural resources.

Architecturally, Lezgin houses are built from local materials - stone and wood. Villages located on mountain slopes are built in a stepped manner according to the relief. The thick stone walls of the houses serve to protect against the cold of winter, and special areas are allocated in the courtyards for farm buildings and livestock. The planning of the villages was in accordance with the principles of both defense and efficient land use.

Family and kinship relations play an important role in the social life of the Lezgins. The large family model, respect for elders, traditions of hospitality and mutual assistance are the main elements of their spiritual culture. Collective labor, especially joint activity in sowing, harvesting and construction, has strengthened community solidarity. Folk crafts, including weaving, wool processing and the manufacture of various household items, are also an integral part of the material culture of the Lezgins.

Thus, the mountain culture of the Lezgins was formed as a result of adaptation to natural and geographical conditions, characterized by diversified economic activity, unique architectural traditions, and a strong system of social relations. These features play an important role in preserving their ethnic identity and enriching the overall ethnocultural diversity of Azerbaijan.

The Avars are mainly settled in the mountainous areas of the Zagatala and Balakan regions. Their economy is based on mountain farming, cattle breeding and gardening. Terraces have been created on the mountain slopes to make efficient use of the land. Avar villages are usually densely populated and consist of stone houses. Community solidarity, respect for elders and traditional family values play an important role in their socio-cultural life.

The Sahurs are one of the few peoples compactly settled on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus, mainly in the mountainous and foothill areas of the Gakh and Zagatala regions. Their habitat mainly covers high and medium-mountainous zones with complex relief, cool climate and rich summer pastures. These natural and geographical conditions have had a direct impact on the formation of the economic activities and lifestyle of the Sahurs in general. The basis of the traditional culture of the Sahurs was semi-nomadic cattle breeding. The majority of the population was engaged in sheep and cattle breeding, during the warm months of the year some families moved with their herds to high mountain pastures, and in the autumn and winter they returned to lower and milder winter pastures. The pasture-winter system was not only a form of economy, but also played an important role in the formation of social relations, family division of labor and household traditions.

The mountainous conditions also influenced the planning and architectural features of the Sahur settlements. The villages were mainly built on mountain slopes, taking into account the danger of landslides and floods, in a stepped form in accordance with the relief. The houses are built of stone, a local building material, with thick walls and small windows to help retain heat. Since courtyard areas are limited, farm buildings and residential buildings are placed close together.

In addition to cattle breeding, the traditional economy of the Sahurs also included limited mountain farming. Mainly grain, potato and vegetable growing were developed, and the land was effectively used on the mountain slopes by terrace method. Preparing food reserves in advance for the winter season was one of the important elements of their domestic culture.

Household crafts and folk crafts occupy a special place in the material culture of the Sakhur people. Wool processing, yarn spinning, carpet and palazzo weaving, and felt making are widespread. These products both meet household needs and are rich in national ornaments and patterns reflecting aesthetic taste. The manufacture of simple household tools on wood and stone is also included in traditional art forms. In terms of socio-cultural life, community relations, mutual assistance and collective labor traditions occupy an important place among the Sakhurs. Respect for elders, hospitality and the strength



of family ties form the basis of their system of moral values. Thus, the living culture of the Sakhurs was formed as a result of adaptation to the mountain environment and has been preserved to this day through the interaction of natural conditions, economic activity and ethnic traditions.

The Ingiloy live in the foothills and mid-mountain zones of the Greater Caucasus. Their main occupation is agriculture, viticulture, and gardening. The efficient use of mountain and forest resources is an important feature of their economic system. Family and religious traditions, as well as social solidarity within the village community, occupy a special place in their culture. The Talysh live in the mountainous areas of the Talysh Mountains with a forested and humid climate. Their living culture has been formed in accordance with the subtropical climatic conditions. The main occupations are tea growing, vegetable growing, gardening and cattle breeding. The living culture of the Talysh and other mountain peoples has developed in accordance with the natural and geographical conditions (National Atlas of Azerbaijan, 2014). Houses made of wood and stone are built in a special structure to protect against moisture. Forestry and the use of natural resources play an important role in the life of the Talysh. The mountainous environment has had a direct impact on the economic activities and living culture of the minority peoples (Mustafayev, 2010).

7. Conclusion

The analysis shows that the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan have played an important role in preserving the country's ethnic and cultural diversity. The northeastern and northwestern parts of the Greater Caucasus, as well as the Talysh Mountains, were the main areas of compact settlement of small peoples and ethnic groups. The complex relief, natural-geographic isolation and harsh climatic conditions created conditions for these peoples to preserve their languages, customs, everyday life features and system of social relations for a long time.

The mountain environment had a direct impact on the formation of the living culture of these ethnoses. Stone architectural traditions, terrace farming, semi-nomadic or sedentary cattle breeding, winter stock-raising habits, collective labor and strong community relations constitute the main features of the lifestyle of these peoples. These features are an indicator of their adaptation to the natural environment and their ability to live in ecological balance.

At the same time, small peoples and ethnic groups, while preserving their unique cultural identity, have become integrated into the general Azerbaijani socio-cultural environment and have become an integral part of the country's unified socio-cultural system. This process can be assessed as an important indicator of the historically formed traditions of tolerance and poly-ethnic structure of Azerbaijan. Thus, the mountain peoples of Azerbaijan are of particular importance not only from an ethnographic point of view, but also in terms of enriching the national and cultural heritage. The study, preservation and transmission of their material and spiritual culture to future generations is considered one of the important scientific and social tasks for the sustainable development of the country's multicultural values.

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<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0090599200041167>





The Mountains of Azerbaijan Through the Eyes of Modern Artists

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Abstract. The artistic interpretation of Azerbaijani mountains in modern fine art was explained in this article. This work attaches a great importance, since the mountain landscape is a part of a cultural and historical code of national identity. The aim of the study is to analyze the transformation of mountain imagery in the works of several 19th- and 20th-century artists. The study utilizes art history, comparative history, and compositional stylistic analysis. Using works by Vasily Vereshchagin, Tahir Salakhov, Bahruz Kengerli, Mikayil Abdullayev, Sattar Bahlulzade, and Baba Aliyev as examples, the author identifies distinctive features of artistic interpretation of mountain landscapes, ranging from ethnographic authenticity to philosophical and symbolic interpretation. It is established that the image of mountains acts not only as a natural motif but also as an expression of historical memory, spiritual resilience, and national self-awareness. A conclusion is drawn about the key role of mountain landscapes in shaping the artistic language of 20th-century Azerbaijani painting.

Keywords: *artistic interpretation, national identity, style, mountain landscape, natural motif, mountain landscape*

Received: 26.11.2025 Accepted: 16.12.2025 Published: 28.01.2026

<https://doi.org/10.54414/NUJZ6798>

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, mountains have been perceived by humans not only as a natural phenomenon but also as a space for spiritual experience, a symbol of strength, resilience, and memory. Artists and travelers of various eras have turned to mountain landscapes in search of new meanings, forms, and states of mind. While for Renaissance masters, travel beyond their native land was a rare event, beginning in the 18th century, artistic expeditions became an integral part of exploring the world.

2. Mountain landscape as an artistic image in the painting of Azerbaijan in the 19th–20th centuries

During this period, the artist increasingly acted not only as a creator of images but also as an observer, researcher, and ethnographer. One striking example of this approach is the work of Vasily Vasilyevich Vereshchagin, for whom the Caucasus became an important point in his artistic and personal development (Fig. 1).

His impressions of Karabakh, Shushi, and the region's mountainous landscapes reflect not only the visual beauty of the area but also the complex, multilayered lives of people closely connected to nature. One of the most famous biographies of V.V. Vereshchagin is called "Easel on the Globe." This manuscript also mentions that the Caucasian theme was present in the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, and many Russian artists and composers.



Figure. 1. Religious procession on Moharrem in Shusha. From a trip to the Caucasus. V.V. Vereshchagin. 1865.

“I arrived in Shusha late in the evening: through the darkness, only the dark silhouette of the city wall, built on the top of a high, steep mountain, could be seen... Shusha, the provincial capital of the Shusha district, was formerly the residence of the Karabakh khans. This place is quite well fortified, as it is protected on two sides by a sheer cliff, and on the other sides by a wall with very well-built towers. The climb up the mountain is very difficult; the poor road, roughly paved with large stones, is so steep that five horses could barely pull my cart. Even before reaching the mountain, I saw a bright light appear above the city and heard the roar of some kind of shouting; as I approached, the light grew ever stronger and finally turned into the glow of a large fire, and the roar turned into a chaotic roar of apparently many thousands of voices.”

This is how Vasily Vasilyevich begins his first Caucasian essay.

Upon entering the city, the artist witnessed a dazzling spectacle he had never seen before. By the light of night lights and torches, a teeming crowd filled the city square. Shiite Muslims, lined up in a line about a hundred strong, were jumping with loud shouts. Each held his neighbor with his left hand, and in his right, a thick stick, which he shook in the air as he leaped. Boys dressed in various rags and skins turned inside out galloped and beat drums to the general shouting and dancing. The mullahs, the stewards, pushed the crowd aside and cursed. The neighing of horses mingled with the chatter and noise of the gawking crowd. All this was illuminated by oil flares... Beginning with a colorful, emotional description of the holiday, Vereshchagin went on to explain its essence. Every year, during the first nine days of the month of Maharrem, Shia Azerbaijanis celebrate such festivities in memory of the suffering and martyrdom of imams revered by adherents of the Shia branch of Islam. These days are days of sorrow and mourning (Demin, Lev.).

Vereshchagin's Caucasus essays do not reflect all of his impressions. The geography of his travels in Azerbaijan was vast: from Nakhchivan to remote mountain villages. Vasily Vasilyevich was not limited to the role of a detached observer—he studied with equal attention both the opulent homes of the local nobility and the humble lives of the poor, immersing himself in the atmosphere of Eastern markets and exploring remote trails. The impressions of his second trip to the Caucasus were embodied in a large series of drawings and sketches, including portraits of representatives of the various peoples inhabiting the region, as well as genre scenes and urban and rural landscapes. In them, the artist captured the ethnographic diversity of the region: colorful portraits of local residents, dynamic genre sketches, and panoramas of towns and villages. Vereshchagin's works from this period are distinguished by a higher level of mastery than those produced during his first Caucasian trip in 1863. This applies to the technique, compositional



approach, meticulous drawing, and psychological depth of the images. This information is also detailed in literature devoted to the cultural heritage of the region. In particular, visual and historical parallels with these studies can be found in the materials (Demin, Lev. With an Easel Around the Globe: The World through the Eyes of V.V. Vereshchagin. 374 pages; 1991).

In the mid-20th century, a powerful cohort of young painters of various nationalities emerged and emerged, indebted in large part to the Russian school of art, which introduced them to the realistic tradition and to a deep understanding of the spiritual life of man.

Tahir Salahov is recognized as the main founder of the hard realism movement in Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijani fine arts, Soltan Mahammad was the founder of the Tabriz school of miniature painting, Bahruz Kangarli was the founder of the school of realistic painting, Azim Azimzade was a skilled master of caricature and graphics, Togrul Narimanbeyov was a great composition artist, Sattar Bahlulzade was a poet of painting, Mikayil Abdullayev, Ogtay Sadikzade was a master of portraiture, Baba Aliyev was a leading creator of socialist realism, Maral Rahmanzade was a landscape painter, Elmira Shakhtakhtinskaya was a poster artist, Farhad Khalilov was the head of the avant-garde school, Arif Huseynov was a talented graphic artist, Sakit Mammadov was the founder of opalism, and Ulviya Khanzayeva was a talented artist with mythological motifs and many other creators. All of them paved their way in great art and achieved great success. Recognition and fame. The strict realism pioneered by People's Artist Tahir Salahov in painting is completely original, renewing and modernizing Azerbaijani fine art. It is proud-inducing that the name of this outstanding artist stands alongside Van Gogh, Picasso, Claude Monet, Hachishika Hakusai, Salvador Dali, Zurab Tsereteli, Aivazovsky, Repin, Surikov, and other world-renowned artists for his originality and remarkable achievements (Isa Habibbayli, Vice President of ANAS, Member of the Milli Majlis, Academician. Azerbaijan. 2021, May 23).

In Tahir Salahov's creativity, particularly in "Nakhchivan Mountains," "mountains", depict grandness, integrity, and national strength with sharp lines and localized colors. They describe the power of the Caucasus ranges emphasizing their monumental nature, making this work one of the most notable examples of how Salahov transforms landscape into a profound philosophical statement. In this unique work, the canvas captures the distinctive silhouette of the Nakhchivan Mountain Range. The artist avoids from excessive detail in preference to large forms and rhythmic lines, which create the impression of ancient titans. The structure of the composition allows the viewer to perceive the scale and physical power of the mountain range. Red is the dominant color in this work, carrying a special meaning—the color of vital energy, pride, and historical memory. In folk beliefs, the red color is believed to link with the fire, liveliness, happiness, and protection from the evil eye. As is known, Azerbaijan has historically been called the "Land of Fire," and the red color is also inseparably associated with the cult of fire. Ancient Zoroastrians saw fire as a purifying force, the color of divine presence and warmth. Against deep, shadowed tones, red awakens the rugged beauty of the mountains, wrapping the landscape in a quiet majesty that feels almost alive. The painting conveys not only a superficial resemblance to the landscape but also the "spirit of the place." For comparison, I have presented his vision of the Shamakhi Mountains below (Fig. 2). For Salahov, these mountains are the embodiment of the pride of the Azerbaijani people, a symbol that the nation, like these peaks, is capable of enduring any historical conditions.

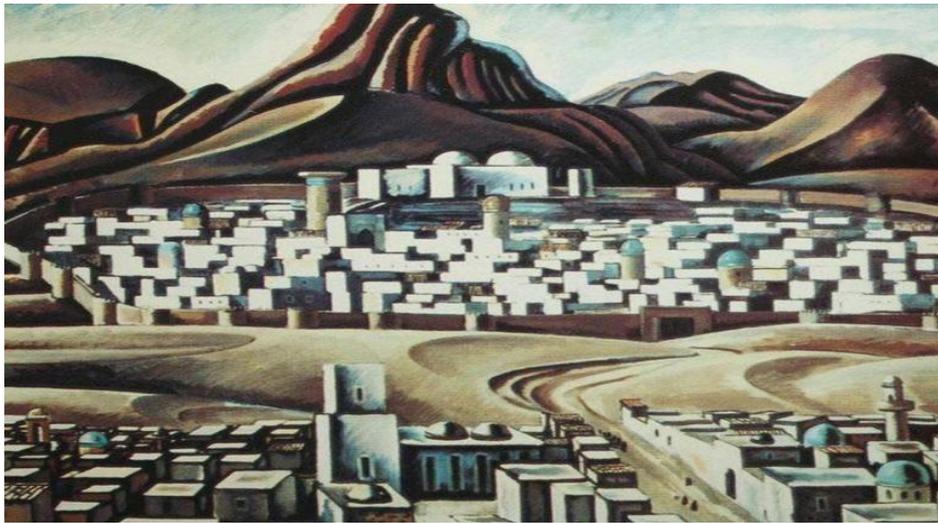


Figure 2. Old Shamakhi. Tahir Salakhov, 1973.

The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is an autonomous republic within the Republic of Azerbaijan, home to breathtaking landscapes of astonishing beauty. Nakhchivan boasts numerous historical monuments. The autonomous republic is rich in deposits of gypsum, rock salt, marble, lime, and, especially, rare mineral waters, of which there are approximately 250, such as Sirab, Badamli, Vaykhyr, Nagajyr, Giziljyr, and others. More than 30% of this territory lies at an altitude of 600 meters to 1 kilometer above sea level. The highest point in the region is Mount Gapyjyg (3,906 m). The capital of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is the city of Nakhchivan. It is located at an altitude of 1,000 meters above sea level, on the right bank of the Nakhchivanchay River (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Nakhchivan mountains. Tahir Salakhov 1970-71 (Tretyakov Gallery).

The etymology (origin) of the word "Nakhchivan" has been the subject of various interpretations at various times. Observations indicate that in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, the local cultural tradition associated with the name "Nakhchivan" is dominated by toponyms, as well as myths and legends associated with the Great Flood and the Prophet Nuh (Noah), who survived the catastrophe (Fig. 4).



Figure. 4. Nakhchivan (<https://myseldon.com/ru/news/index/183545083>).

It is believed that Noah's Ark came to rest here, and this land is a settlement for Noah's descendants. According to local legend, Noah's Ark collided several times with the Lesser Caucasus mountain peaks before landing on the mountain, and even one of the mountains, Agridag, was split by this impact into Greater and Lesser Agridag. Other mountains that the Ark collided with were Ilandag, Alagoz, and Gapyzhik. According to local legend, Noah lived and died here after the waters receded. Until recently, there were long-lived elders among the local population who claimed to know the burial place of the Prophet Noah. (Isa Habibbayli. Azerbaijan. 2014, March 26). This story became so popular among the people that the renowned artist Behruz Kengerli painted a picture called "Noah's Tomb" (Fig. 5).

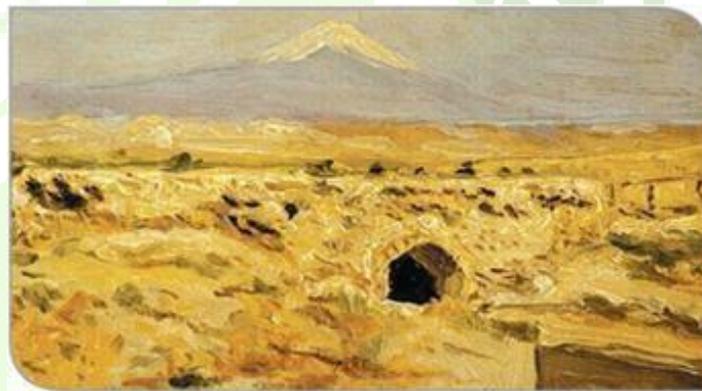


Figure. 5. Mausoleum of the Prophet Noah. B. Kangerli.

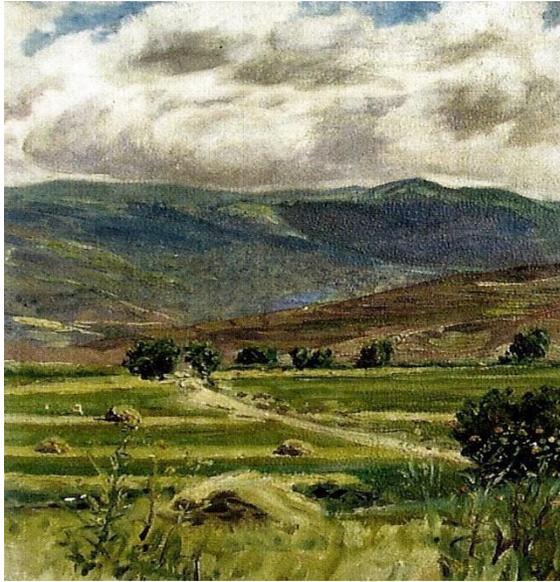
Bahruz Kangarli has gone down in history as a distinguished master who stood at the origins of Azerbaijani professional fine art. A native of Nakhchivan, he was one of the first painters to lay the foundation for the realist movement in his country's culture at the beginning of the 20th century.

While the artist lived only thirty years of, his creativity left a deep impression: Kengerli was a pioneer, engaging in almost every genre of painting and graphic art. Tbilisi School of Fine Arts played a crucial role in his professional development, where he enrolled in 1910 with the active support of literary classic Jalil Mammadguluzade. The master's creative works were mainly about the current trends of the era. Pre-revolutionary satirical publications, especially the legendary magazine "Molla Nasreddin," where Kangarli published his sharp and apt drawings, highly appreciated his talent as caricaturist and graphic artist. Today, his name represents the preservation of heritage and high professionalism in Azerbaijani art.



Bahruz Kangarli's creative legacy primarily focused on landscape painting. The artist had a special talent to subtly capture and convey the authentic atmosphere of his motherland, meticulously depicting the nuances of lighting and the color of nature. Watercolors and oil paintings belonging to his creativity, such as "Waterfall," "Agrydag," "Road to the Village of Yashkhan," and "Mount Ilanli by Moonlight," have been considered as basis for lyrical landscapes in Azerbaijani art.

In his works, the artist attaches a great importance to the harmony of natural and historical



landscapes. Kangarli described the majestic cultural monuments set against Nakhchivan's rugged and beautiful natural landscape (Figs. 6 and 7) through documentary precision and artistic awe. The Momine Khatun Mausoleum, the Tomb of the Prophet Noah, the Askhabi-Kahf shrine, and the Imamzadeh architectural complex are among those prominent artworks. These works don't merely express the antiquity but also artist's deep devotion to his homeland. The "mountain" was portrayed as an inexhaustible poetry between stone and sky in Kangarli's works. During his short life, he created a comprehensive view of his homeland, including snow-capped peaks, mountain sunsets, as well as blooming spring slopes. His landscapes are a declaration of love for his native land, imbued with every detail.

Figure 6. Mountain Landscape – Bahruz Kangarli (Azerbaijan National Museum of Art).

"His painting 'Mountain Landscape' (Fig. 6) reflects the grandeur and power of the Nakhchivan Mountains, the characteristic lines of impressions that give a person breadth of heart, tolerance and struggle," says Ramiz Kasimov, head of the department of the Nakhchivan branch of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, Doctor of Philology, Associate Professor, in his article. National Leader Heydar Aliyev always placed special emphasis on preserving and promoting the legacy of Bahruz Kangarli. At the personal initiative of the Great Leader, a memorial museum to the artist was established in Nakhchivan, and the exhibition hall of the Artists' Union of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was named after the artist. Speaking at the museum's grand opening in the summer of 2002, the distinguished son of our people, Heydar Aliyev, emphasized the exceptional significance of the artist's work with the following words: "The creative legacy of Bahruz Kangarli is one of the most striking achievements of Azerbaijani culture and fine art. We should be sincerely proud that our people gave the world such a unique talent." From an article by Turkan Huseynli.



Figure. 7. Snow-capped mountains. B. Kengerli. 1916 (Azerbaijan National Museum of Art).

A special place in the galaxy of masters who praised the greatness of Azerbaijani nature is occupied by Mikail Abdullayev. The main value of his legacy lies not only in the amazing breadth of creative range, but also in the unique gift of the artist-researcher. Abdullayev held a distinct capability to closely observe reality, flawlessly underlying the most colorful and vivid details in it.

His native land and people were inspired by his realistic canvases, instilled with deep truth and creative optimism. Abdullayev's artworks devoting to mountainous regions achieved impossible: to perceive and poeticize the ordinary walls of life, revealing the genuine aesthetic depth in them. What makes Abdullayev's works so heartfelt and accessible to viewers is his ability to dress harsh reality in a bright artistic form (Fig. 8).

Heydar Aliyev (1997): "The beauty of Azerbaijan's nature, the heroic battles of the sons of the Motherland, devotion to the land, one's native land, labor, and art constitute the core themes of your work. Each of your paintings of nature is a romantic example of art, depicting the various corners of our country. In your lovingly created portraits, you entered the spiritual world of the historical figures and ordinary people you depicted, masterfully revealing their characters." (Mikayil Abdullayev, 2022).

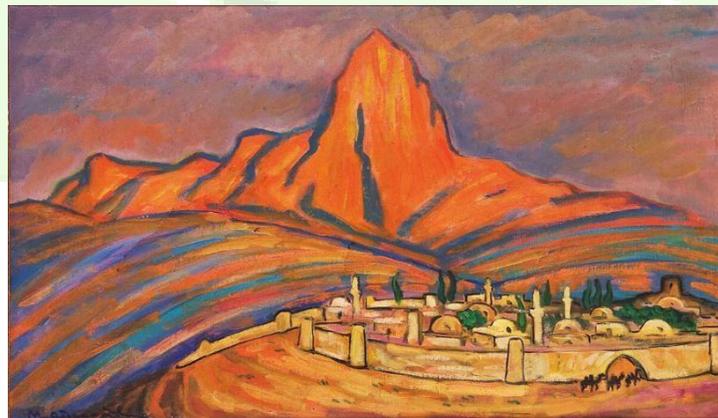


Figure. 8. Mikayil Abdullayev. Nakhchivan. 1990 (Azerbaijan National Art Museum).

Sattar Bahlulzade describes the notion of mountains from different point of view. (Fig. 9). Unlike Mikayil Abdullayev, who depicted the beauty of daily life in his works, Bahlulzade sought to capture the ever-changing side of nature. His lyrical landscapes are not restricted to views of peaks, but emotional outbursts, which raises Azerbaijan's real landscape to the level of high art.



Figure. 9. Sattar Bahlulzadeh. Nakhchivan Mountains. 1970 (Azerbaijan National Museum of Art).

His creative method is based on the desire similar to the Impressionist philosophy, which involves working exclusively outdoors, capturing the fleeting changeability of the world and the magic of a particular moment of light. Bahlulzade, a genuinely independent artist decisively rejected academic dogma. He welcomed the beauty of nature with great sincerity, trying to express external form, but the intensity and sincerity of the impression received. His unique artistic style was shaped with sincerity and refusal to follow canons; his paintings don't simply describe landscapes, but mirrors of his vast, sometimes childishly pure soul. The monumental scale of his canvases was driven by an inner necessity to convey the entire breadth of feelings (Fig. 10).

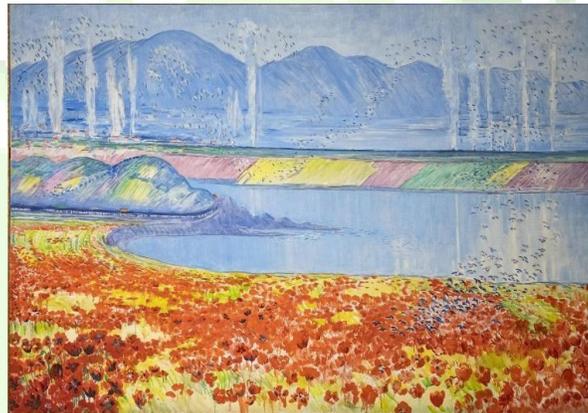


Figure. 10. The Desire of the Land. Sattar Bahlulzadeh. 1963 (Azerbaijan National Museum of Art).



Figure. 11. Sattar Bahlulzadeh. In the Gardens of Amsar. 1950 (Azerbaijan National Museum of Art).



His excellent mastery of technique was introduced in this landscape (Fig. 11). Melting horizons and lush, young greenery were masterfully conveyed by the great artist. Out here beneath flat skies, Bahlulzadeh still chases brightness - his brush picks up hues invisible to most, hidden inside dull mist. Color spills loose, arranged like fragments of something cherished, turning canvas into quiet celebration.



Figure 12. Upper Dashedly. Sattar Bahlulzade. 1957 (Azerbaijan National Museum of Art).

From my perspective, Sattar achieved perfect harmony in conveying the character of the Karabakh landscape in the painting "Yukhary Dashedly" (Fig. 12). When you look at this masterpiece, you admire the boldness and confidence of his brushwork. You are struck to see how quickly and precisely the artist solves complex coloristic problems. The rock formations here come to life: each brushstroke laid down in a single impulse, depicting the rhythm of the rushing clouds. This described interrelation between earth and sky serves to feel the pulsation of nature itself. (Mir-Bagirzade. F. A. Philosophy of Art. Collection of Articles. - 2006.)

(Fine Arts of the Azerbaijan SSR. 1957. 32 pp.)

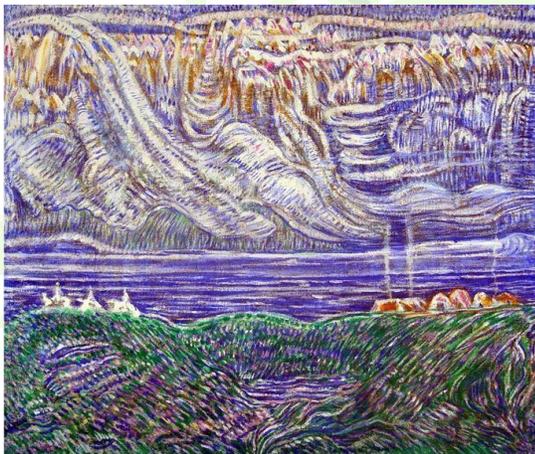


Figure 13. Sattar Bahlulzadeh Shahdag, 1971-1972.

In his later works, Sattar created the apparent style of the creator and his entire path from academicism to his own poetic manner was completely described (Fig. 13). The last art piece, which was dedicated to Shahdag was a clear manifestation of his present artistic development. The name of this peak, which is translated as "King Mountain," from Azerbaijani, perfectly aligns with the artist's personality. In Bahlulzade's interpretation, Shahdag, located in the eastern part of the Greater Caucasus, in northern Azerbaijan, is not just a geographical point, but also a symbol of spiritual heights. The region of majestic mountain ranges, always attracts

travelers and wildlife enthusiasts worldwide. The country's natural landscape is determined primarily by the gorgeous landscapes of the Greater Caucasus—a vast mountain range that passes through the territory of Azerbaijan and reflects the power and scale of natural forces. The mountain ranges add the landscape a unique expressiveness and aesthetic depth. Walkways curve through leafy valleys and lead to extreme altitudes, which offer fearless travelers' access to virtually untouched natural landscapes. Mountaineers eager to try their physical limits and experience are attracted by the challenging terrain and rugged peaks. In winter, the temperature often drops below -20°C , causing powerful waterfalls flowing down the



mountain slopes to freeze completely, which subsequently turn into massive ice buildup used for climbing.



Figure. 14. Baba Aliyev. Shahdag.1960 (personal archive).

Now, I would like to draw attention to the creativity of my great-grandfather, People's Artist of the Azerbaijan SSR, Baba Aliyev (Fig. 14). The artist prefers extended, almost panoramic format allowing the viewer to "read" the space from left to right, like a living landscape gradually unveiling its depth and breath. Brushstrokes are the proof of the artist's mastery that he used to describe a silent rural scene in the foreground: logs shattered across the ground, traces of human activity, and fragments of village life, without any bustle. Everything appears natural and seamlessly integrated into the landscape, which create a sense of human presence in nature, not as its master, but as an integral part of it. The middle ground is filled with houses and trees, painted with loose, generalized brushstrokes. The autumnal hues of the foliage—warm ochre, tawny, and muted green—create a soft contrast with the cool whiteness of the mountains. The trees seem to dissolve into the air, conveying a sense of the transparency and freshness of the mountain climate. The painting's main focus is the majestic snow-capped peaks of Shahdag in the background. They are painted in a light, almost ethereal quality, with subtle transitions of cool tones. The mountains do not overwhelm with their massiveness; on the contrary, they tower, as in the following work from 1962 (Fig. 15). Their presence lends scale and inner calm to the composition.



Figure. 15. Baba Aliyev. Shahdag.1962 (personal archive).



The artist's color scheme in these works is based on a subtle balance of warm and cool tones. The warm earth, houses, and trees below are contrasted with the cool whiteness of the peaks, creating a sense of harmony and depth. The brushwork is free, lively, and at times almost sketch-like, lending the work a sense of direct impression from nature.

Baba Aliyev shows not only the landscape of Shahdag, but also the character of this place: tranquility, simplicity, naturalness and grandeur.

Azerbaijan is a mountainous country, with approximately 60% of its territory covered by mountains. The republic boasts mountain ranges such as the Greater Caucasus, the Lesser Caucasus, and the Talysh Mountains. The mountains are a repository of global biodiversity, home to and sheltering a multitude of animals and plants.

The main place in the Greater Caucasus Mountains is occupied by the Main Caucasus Range, where the highest peak of Azerbaijan is located - Bazarduzu (4466 m), as well as some other peaks- Victory Peak (4301 m, Zəfər zirvəsi, named in honor of the victory in the Second Garabagh - Patriotic War), Tufan (4191 m), Bazar-Yurt (4126 m), Yarydag (4116 m), Chingiz Mustafayev (4063 m), Ilkam Aliyev (4048 m), Ragdan (4020 m), Heydar Aliyev (3755 m), Babadag (3629 m), Tinovroso (3374 m), Akhvay (3481 m), Gara-Burga (3471 m), Dubrar (2205 m). Parallel to the Great Caucasus Range stretch the Lateral Ridge (Shahdag Mountain - 4243 m), the Govdag Ridge, the Niyaldag and Lyantyabiz Ridges. The highest of the difficult passes of the Main Caucasus Range is the Shergi Salavat Pass (2915 m).

Within Azerbaijan, the largest geomorphological units of the Lesser Caucasus are: the Shahdag Range (Mount Gojadag 3,318 m, Mount Garagach 3,062 m), which forms the watershed between the basins of Lake Goycha and Lake Kura; the Murovdag Range (Mount Gyamysh 3,724 m, Mount Ginaldag 3,367 m, Mount Goshgar 3,361 m, Mount Kyapaz 3,066 m, and the Omar Pass 3,260 m), these mountains are bordered by the Ganja-Gazakh sloping plain in the north; the Garabag Range (Mount Boyuk Kirs 2,725 m); along the left bank of the Araz River stretch the Lower Araz sloping plains - Geyanskaya, Inja, and Harami. More than 90% of gas reserves are located at depths greater than 3000 m (Garadag, Shah Deniz, Umud and other fields).

Current climate change is having a significant impact on mountain ecosystems. Rising temperatures, shrinking glaciers, and changing precipitation patterns are shifting natural zones and increasing competition between species. Rare and local forms of flora and fauna, whose existence directly depends on environmental stability, are particularly vulnerable. From that standpoint, it is particularly important to ensure sustainable management of mountain areas, based on respect for nature and the traditional knowledge of local communities. It is proved in the experience of many countries that the involvement of local people in environmental conservation processes allow to preserve both the ecological and cultural heritage of mountain regions (National Atlas of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Baku, 2014).

Conclusion

The mountains are not merely considered as a geographical feature but also a living chronicle of Azerbaijan, connecting nature, history, and art. Azerbaijan's majestic mountains have inspired prominent artists, influenced the character of the people, and remain a source of aesthetic and spiritual experience. Their depictions reflect the power of time, the resilience of traditions, and a beauty that defies simplistic description (Figures. 16–19).



Figure. 16. Shusha. Desert fortress. Isa Ibrahimov (1986).



Figure. 17. Boyukaga Mirzazade.

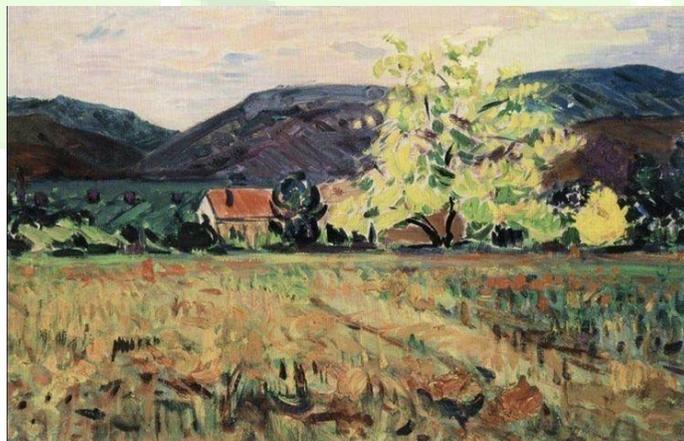


Figure. 18. Baba Aliyev. Chukhuryurd.1962.

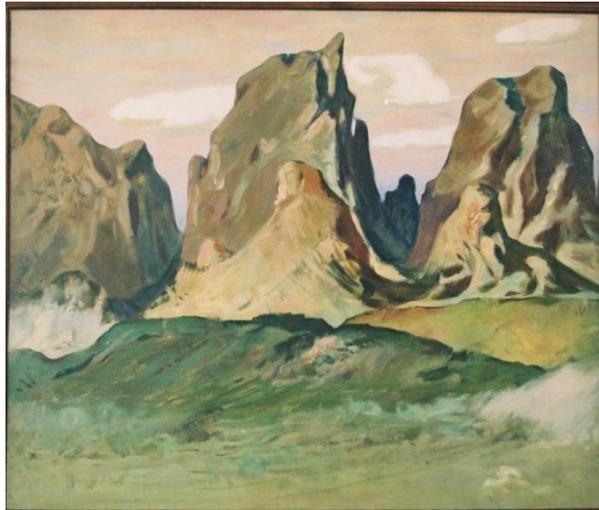


Figure. 19. Baba Aliyev. Mountains.

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WESTERN CASPIAN UNIVERSITY

The Research Journal of Mountains: Biodiversity, Landscapes and Cultures

Vol 1, № 1

January, 2026

Editorial Office Address: 17A, Ahmad Rajabli Street,

III Parallel, Baku, Azerbaijan

Phone: +994 12 565 39 77

E-mail: mountains.journal@wcu.edu.az

<https://mountains.wcu.edu.az/>

Submitted for collection:25.12.2025

Print signed:28.01.2026

Paper format:60x84 1/16 17.75 cm s.w