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Nakhchivan: Its Splendid Architecture Reflected in Bridges and Fortresses

The Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, the western most territory of Azerbaijan, is a gold mine of ancient archeological monuments, fortresses, religious architecture and a living testimony of ancient city formations. The remnants of the Stone Age are reflected today in a number of caves in Nakhchivan, such as: Gazma, Ashabi-kahf and Kilit. On the other hand, this historic region of Azerbaijan has a significant number of Bridges and Castles that were built during the time period between the X and XVII centuries. Nakhchivan is undoubtedly the only territory in Eurasia for having such a large number of ancient bridges crammed in a region that is barely 5,500 km².

The Gilanchay River is surrounded by majestic ancient bridges, archeological sites that are extremely important for the study of ancient world's history and is home of many ancient battles. The Aza Bridge is an ancient monument, located in the village of Aza, in Ordubad region, crossing the Gilanchay river. Aza Bridge connects the village of Aza with Darkandi village. This bridge has a width of 3.5 meters, 46 meters in length, has five arches constructed with red stone that is a typical material found locally in the surrounding mountains. Four of the arches are built with wave cutters; this bridge was heavily used by trade caravans moving from East to West during the time of Silk Routes. The Aza Bridge was constructed

during the period of Shah Ismayil (1587-1629), the Safavid leader promoted trade caravan and commercial affairs between India, China with the Black Sea countries, his visionary policies were considered to be a great benefit by the European Countries during the XVII century and beyond. The Aza Bridge has been the main route of exported goods from the Far East towards Europe, some of the main products that have passed by are: dry fruits, grains, silk, handicraft products as well as high quality locally made products of Azerbaijan. As a result of violent historical events and natural disasters, such as the flooding of 1977, the bridge has been partially destroyed. Immediately thereafter the bridge was completely restored with assistance from the Government of Azerbaijan. At the present the local people and vehicles continue to use the Aza Bridge, of the XVII century, every time they travel from Nakhchivan and Ordubad region to the Aza Village.

Another remarkable historic landmark in Nakhchivan is the Bilav Bridge, which is also located over the Gilanchay River, to the south of Bilav Village as part of the Ordubad Region. This Bridge consisted of five roman arches, however today there are found only parts of this architectural masterpiece. The distance between the arches was different, the columns had a square shape; it had a width of 3.3 meters and had a length of 55 meters. The Bilav Bridge was constructed of big stones and rock pieces with lime mixture, and covered with hewed rocks. This bridge was built in the XVIII century.

In the village of Bist, over the Alahi River, are located two bridges that have unique shapes and embody a tremendous historic value for the whole region of Nakhchivan, those are: Bist Bridge I and Bist Bridge II. Bist Bridge I, a historical monument with impressive archeological values, connects the west of Bist Village in Ordubad region. It was built of stone and brick and it has a different width on both sides. The western Span is big and the Eastern span is relatively smaller, it has a length of about 21 meters, a height of 10 meters and the width is 3.8 meters. Both of the sides of the bridge have metal lattices. The objective of this structure was to facilitate the commercial routs in ancient and medieval Nakhchivan as well as provide connectivity between the Village of Bist and the rest of the world. According to local stories, the bridge was constructed during the rule of Shah Abbas the First; this Bridge is related to XVII century architecture.

Bist Bridge II is located over the Nasirvaz River, in the south east side of Bist Village, region of Ordubad. This structure was built with stones and bricks and has only one span. Its length is about 23 meters, a height of ten meters and width of four meters. Both sides of the Bridge are latticed with metal bars. Bist Bridge II has contributed in the local trade and has been vital for visiting the outskirts of Ordubad region. In the southern walls of the Bridge is carved the year 1869, however the architecture used in this stone structure is testimony of a late XIX century construction practice.

In the northern parts of Havush village in Shahrur region, is located the sanctuary of Choban Sacred Place. In the central part of this place there is a creek and rose bushes, it is surrounded by small rocks. There are many tourists who visit this location which belongs to the early middle ages, approximately to the VII century.

Nakhchivan is also the sanctuary of an important fortress in the history of Azerbaijan; the Dana Fortress, located south of Havush Village, on the high hills in the north of Akhura village in Sharur region. According to archeological research done by A. I. Novruzlu, Dana Fortress is related to Tanan, a Saljug leader, ancient big-stone walls have also been discovered in this location. There were also found unglazed earth ware, glazed table ware pieces, metal items. All these artifacts belong to various time periods between the XI and XVII centuries. For over seven centuries the armed forces of Azerbaijan have been stationed in the Dana Fortress in order to defend the territorial integrity of their homeland.

A treasure in Nakhchivan's ancient history is Danyeri Fortress, located near the Danyeri village in Sharur region; it consists of two parts-Big Fortress and Small Fortress. The Danyeri Fortress dates back in the VIII century, the walls of the Fortress were built by large rock pieces and enforced with clay solution and some parts were constructed by hewed stones. Its principal walls were strengthened by means of half round towers and counter force walls. Today's visitors will experience the impressive architecture style implemented in the square angled buildings which are near to the fortress walls and inside the fortress. In this location archeologists of Nakhchivan have discovered ceramic pieces, table ware items burned in pink and grey colors, glazed table ware and other important archeological data.

The Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan and the Government of Azerbaijan remain at the forefront while leading proactive initiatives that are destined to maintain, restore and recover the rich cultural and historical sites that deeply reflect an important aspect of the ancient and medieval history of Azerbaijan and the World. The Fortresses and Bridges located in Nakhchivan region are an important asset for the history of Azerbaijan and clearly demonstrate to the world that Azeri nation has a millenary culture that ought to be known and acknowledged throughout Eurasia and beyond.

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