

Mystery Surrounds "Fairy Castle"



by Ronnie Gallagher



1. Parigala (Fairy Castle), is a mysterious monument at least several centuries old. It is located in the Caucasus Mountains in northwestern Azerbaijan near Zagatala. No one knows who built it, when, what its purpose was, or when and why it was abandoned. Only legends exist in oral traditions about Parigala.

Even 14 years after gaining independence from the Soviet Union, tourism has still not developed very much in Azerbaijan, especially throughout the countryside. Ronnie Gallagher, who worked in Baku for a number of years and who still maintains close ties, suggests there are still many delightful places to explore, including Parigala, a castle-like structure built into the side of a rock cliff in western Azerbaijan. Hardly anything is known about this monument except the legend that has grown up around its name "Fairy Castle". Here's what Gallagher discovered when he attempted the ascent this past summer.

Tucked away in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains in northwest Azerbaijan is an amazing structure known as Parigala—Fairy Castle [pronounced pa-ri-gah-LAH]. Mark Elliott, writing in the Trailblazer Guide about Azerbaijan, describes Parigala as a "remarkable structure sealing the entrance to a cave dwelling, high on an inaccessible cliff overlooking the upper end of Chardaghtar village." Parigala is located east of Zagatala in the northwestern part of the country. It seems, however, that very few people have actually dared the difficult and dangerous ascent to study the monument up close. What a pity!

Not so long ago while visiting the region, I went in search of the Castle and was amazed by the extraordinary sight. Carved into the face of the

rock cliff, some 300 meters high, the castle stares out over the valley below. Parigala is clearly an archaeological jewel. If only it could speak to us and reveal its secrets.

I was able to find a guide—a young fellow, Muhuma Davudov, whose father Mammad was probably the last person to scale this barely accessible monument. That was in the 1970s. Mammad is the regional community chairman and twice-proclaimed Azerbaijani wrestling champion.

Both father and son confirmed that very little is known about the castle except that people believe it was built during the Albanian Caucasian period, which would date it sometime between the 4th and 8th centuries.

PARIGALA LEGEND

Even its name—Parigala—is shrouded in mystery. The word combination of "Pari" and "Gala" literally means "Fairy Castle". However, "Pari" is also a female name and may be linked to a folk tale, perhaps of a later period. The legend that is told about Parigala dates back to the days of Chingiz Khan, (1155-1227, and sometimes spelled Ghengiz or Genghis Khan).

The story goes that he chose one of the daughters of a local ruler for his bride. When she was asked if there was anyone more beautiful, she named her sister Pari. However, when Pari heard that the Mongol warlord



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2. Close-up photo of Parigala. The site is quite inaccessible even for the most intrepid of mountain climbers. The main structure contains three rooms each with a window.

Note the doors carved into the rock cliff to the right and a bit lower than the monument. This is a separate structure with two additional rooms that connect to the castle via a walled walkway, which is very difficult to see from photos.

3. Map showing location of Parigala in relationship to the nearest major town Zaqatala in northwestern Azerbaijan in the Caucasus Mountains. This map is from Mark Elliott's Trailblazer Guide, "Azerbaijan". His book provides a short statement about Parigala, possibly the only other reference in English to this monument.

was interested in taking her into his harem, she organized for a castle to be built in the side of the mountain cliff.

However—as the story goes—with Chingiz camping at the foot of the mountain and the prospect of her capture imminent, Pari threw herself down from the castle, falling to her death on the rocks below. In that sense, this story resembles the legend often told about Baku's Maiden Tower. Although this tale is an interesting bit of folklore; sadly, no one knows whether there is any truth to it. This is the only information known about this castle. Everything about its history seems to have been lost over time.



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