

## DECORATIVE ARTS IN TRADITIONAL TURKISH HOUSE IN THE CONTEXT OF SPACE DESIGN: AN EVALUATION

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### ABSTRACT

The traditional Turkish House is an original piece of architecture, which reflects Turkish family structure as well as their understanding of culture and art, their beliefs and social values about the spaces they live in. The structure of the physical environment, the lifestyle of the family, and social and psychological needs alike have contributed to the development of this original architectural structure and shaped its design aspects. Rooms in a Turkish house are spaces for private use and are organized such that they can cater for all activities of a family. The same room boasts a hearth to heat the space, a divan to sit on, a bathing cubicle to wash, and a closet to store sheets, blankets and other needs. The size of the rooms is planned according to the hierarchy in the family. Halls connecting the rooms are shared areas of use for all family members. Though the meticulous decorative arts and wooden craftsmanship on the ceilings, cabinets and door surfaces in a Turkish house can be thought to be based on the carpets and rugs used in the tents, traditional decorative arts such as woodcarving, künde-kârî, and Edirnekârî have developed in time and acquired originality.

**Keywords:** Traditional Turkish House, woodcarving, künde-kârî, Edirnekârî.

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional Turkish houses have evolved since Turks moved to Anatolia; their nomadic lifestyle as well as their settlements in Principalities, Seljuk and Ottoman periods shaped Turkish houses. “The Turkish House is a type of house that developed in 500 years of Turkish settlement in Anatolia, formerly called Rumeli” (Eldem, 1968: 10). In another definition, Turkish house: “is known and defined to be a kind of accommodation that has a shape and plan conforming to the lifestyle of traditional Turkish family and their customs and it has catered for the needs of Turkish people for centuries” (Kuban, 1976),(Kuban,2010:44,45). The reflection of what is inside on the outside to form an integral whole is characteristic of the Turkish house. What’s more, decorations that are applied on the interior are at times reflected on the outside through windows and these change from region to region. These decorations are complementary elements of the architectural character of the Turkish House.

### METHODOLOGY AND GENERAL EVALUATION OF THE SUBJECT

Narrative strategies are increasingly gaining importance in research on design history. Even besides or within this context, each of the following concepts are of separate importance: etymology of historical works, their features in the museums, their effects on today and future, their possible permanent or temporary qualities, their effects and changes on modern and post-modern developments in historical discourse, opposition between natural and artificial, etc. Although this paper possesses narrative qualities, it does not aim to convey various strategic features of the narrative. This is because concepts that constituted subjects on ornaments primarily required wealth, and ornaments were applied in imposing buildings such as mosques, medreses and palaces. Thus, they became traditional in imposing buildings but very few applications were found in the houses produced by ordinary people. The studies on houses mainly tackled qualities in terms of architectural structure but it can be said that they did not define decorative art and techniques of the houses sufficiently. The paper could not deal with the details about how

decorative techniques were made and the concept of craft. It did not also concern a thorough examination revealing national identity and information about how wood and dyes were used. Information about how patterns and landscapes were determined in spaces were not mentioned either. All these points are separate research topics. For this reason, the paper can be said to be a simple narrative and evaluation and remains in the scope of a literature review.

### **The Traditional Turkish House Concept**

It is known that the tradition of Turkish House has evolved from Turkish tents, which have proven to be the oldest life spaces of nomadic Turks since their settlement in Central Asia.

The most typical aspect of a traditional Turkish house is its rooms. They are at four corners of the house and each meet at the hall in the middle. Although houses may have different layouts according to location, halls are generally there. Not only in Anatolia but in former Ottoman lands do we find equivalents of Turkish Houses. In the center of Anatolia, they stand out as Karaman houses. Kahraman's (2012: 109-114) research considers the factors that play a part in the formation of the Turkish House as "historical, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental". Bektaş (2013:33-48) indicates that the principles behind the formation of the traditional Turkish House were developed by being affected from the products of land inhabited by man. These principles are:

"Conformity to nature, environmental conditions; conformity to reality and mind; looking for a solution from the inside towards the outside; At first, function is analyzed; form follows function; compatibility of the inside-outside; sincerity and simplicity, being economical, and frugality in use and ease of use, production methods are based on ease; measurements are based on people; tools and construction methods are carefully chosen; flexibility; houses could be modularly extended according to needs of the family."

There is a step by step explanation that the Turkish House is formed with these principles to reach its most original form. Accordingly, in the formation of the traditional Turkish House, all principles mentioned above are effective, including their life style, traditions, beliefs, socio-economic structure, the technology of the periods they lived, availability of material, and climatic conditions, etc.

### **Functional Sections of the Turkish House**

Having an extended family, the Turks have developed the spaces they lived and their equipment accordingly. For generations they never gave concessions in their lifestyle therefore they always lived together with their grandparents, parents and grandchildren. Nevertheless, the functionality of the Turkish House usually included one unit comprising of one son with his family, i.e. a husband and a wife. Obviously, such an extended family would need several and miscellaneous needs resulting from leading a productive life apart from spaces to use and store these things. Consequently, rooms are planned in a Turkish House according to family type and prosperity.

The Turkish House develops around a central hall, generally with surrounding rooms on the corners. Depending on the landlord's occupation and social status, the largest room on the top floor was called "chief room" and belonged to him. This room and the entire floor would be spared as *Selamlık* section for the political and official meetings of the landlord. The floor downstairs functioned as *Haremlık*, the quarters spared for the women of the house. In quadrangle plans, rooms that opened to the hall in the middle were equipped like separate mini pieces of

accommodation on their own.

“The rooms had access from an anteroom called *seki altı* or *pabuçluk*. “*Seki altı*, or *pabuçluk* comprised of a long passage in front of the closet and entry door... The part that forms the real room is called *sekilik*. The most splendid sections of the house include ceiling, carpet, flooring and built-in cupboards. Ceiling and built-in cupboard section, (door) decorations are the most beautiful specimens of wood workmanship” (Azezli, 2009: 31,32).

The equipment in the rooms of the Turkish House are of variable, flexible and frugal character depending on the usage location of the rooms. The rooms had a hearth, built in closets on the hearth wall or floral patterned painted murals.

### **The Decorative Aspects of the Functional Sections of the Turkish House**

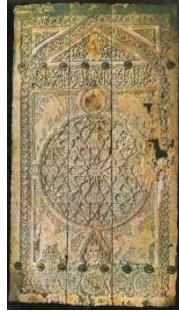
*Musandıra*, the section between the top of the closets and the ceiling, cabinet doors, the façades of the niches on the ceiling and sometimes at the two sides of the hearth, long shelves that wind around on the walls of the room near the ceiling in a width of 12-15 cm. were all ornamented with wood carvings. Doors, cabinet doors, windows or wood-carved parts were all adorned by assembling with “*kündekâri*”, dovetailing technique developed in ancient times and date back to Seljuks. The decorations in the traditional Turkish House are inspired by nature as it is in line with their lifestyle and they want to be in communion with nature in their house. Arat’s (2011:30-52) study shows that rooms in a Turkish house is comprised of spatial fittings that contribute to its shape and enrich its functionality. These parts of the space include: “the anteroom; anteroom wall and transition to the room; hearth wall; divan wall; window wall; wall spared for wall-cabinets; plant stand; the hearth is the only protrusion in the space. All fittings in the Turkish house have various decorations. Like the Turkish house itself, its decorative elements are predominantly wooden.

### **Wood carvings in the Turkish House**

Wood handcraftsmanship which holds an important place among time-honored handcrafts is significant for the decorations in the Turkish House as well.

Extensively employed in religious architecture, wood processing and wood carving also plays a significant part in the decorations in civil architecture in doors, windows sashes, ceiling embroiders as well as objects of use. Wood carving as an art has been a tradition for Turks since their nomadic times in the Central Asia. This is proven in (MEB, 2012: 26):

“Turks have deemed wood a sacred entity in their pre-Islamic Central Asian folklore and used wood in their artistic creations. Inspection in their tombs, made especially in Pazırık, show wooden finds, besides fragments of woods used in horse saddles.”



**Fig. 1:** Konya-Karaman, İbrahim Bey İmaret, 12<sup>th</sup> c. Istanbul Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum, window sash made with carving technique, the middle part of the work depicts Sun's rays (Kerametli,1961:5),(MEB,2012:7)



**Fig. 2:** Working medium of a carving master (Atalar, 2016:34)

Woodworking developed in Anatolia during the Seljuk period. In this period, woodworking and wood carved works were generally architectural units such as altars, mosque doors, and cabinet doors. It is known that woodcarving evolved and established its unique style in Anatolia between 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The best specimens of woodcarving technique in the Anatolian Seljuks period that reached our day are encountered among pulpits of Konya Alaeddin Mosque, Manisa Ulu Mosque, Birgi Ulu Mosque and Divriği Ulu Mosque. In addition to the pulpits, window sashes, ceiling decorations, window and cabinet doors, wooden items such as lecterns, bookrests, and chests are typical examples of wood carving technique.



**Fig. 3, 4, 5:** Tokat House first floor; large room wooden ceiling, ceiling core motif and corner motif; (Source: İbrahimzade, Atak, 2010: 122)

One of the most typical specimens of wood carving technique applied in the Turkish House is a Turkish house in Tokat. The material and decoration aspects of wooden ceilings alternate between flat, inverted, and boat ceiling types according to the location of the rooms in the house, the wishes of the landlord, and economic conditions; an ornamented core with nested circular motifs and botanical decorations is placed in the middle. The triangular areas between the circular

core and surrounding square frame are filled with botanical motifs. (İbrahimzade, Atak, 2010: 118,119).

### **Inlaid Decorations in the Turkish House**

It is a rich type of woodworking inherited by the early Ottomans from Seljuk Turks. The wood is inlaid with wood from trees of other colors or with mother of pearl, tortoiseshell, ivory, gold, silver and precious stones. Inlaying technique, as explained by sources of MEB (2012), is realized by placing a different material in slots opened in the surface of wood... Hollowed motifs are filled, or inlaid, with precious or semi-precious material such as mother of pearl which is made of seashells, brass plate, and silver plate, etc.



**Fig. 6:** Door core motif in inlaid mother of pearl, künde-kârî woodworking technique in Rüstem Paşa Mosque



**Fig. 7:** Precious chest inlaid mother of pearl. Made of walnut wood. Top plane and body in eight corners. Sides have mother of pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid swastika decorations defined in medallions.

(Source: Semazen Mevlana Museum: <http://muze.semazen.net/>)

Being a very expensive decoration technique, it is used only in rich and very important buildings. The Seljuk lectern in Mevlana Museum and banister panel of Sultan's Loge in Divriği Ulu Mosque are precious work of art made with this technique.

Inlay work was used more frequently in small and mobile objects in Turkish houses. It became customary to use inlay work on doors, cabinet doors, etc, as for architectural spaces, it was traditional to apply inlay work in palaces. Inlay work gains an extra value when it is applied on an object that was worked with "künde-kârî" technique.

### **Decorations in the Turkish House with Künde-kârî Technique**

Künde-kârî was imported from Persian to Turkish, its original form is "kendekârî" (Kürklü, 2011:14). Künde-kârî technique started to develop in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; it incorporates star shaped geometrical designs because it is possible to mesh these geometrical shapes into a form. Its best examples can be found in the pulpits of Siirt Ulu Mosque and Birgi Ulu Mosque, and in the altar of Ürgüp Damsaköy Taşkın Paşa Mosque. As Künde-kârî requires complicated mind work and handcraftsmanship, it is more expensive than other decoration techniques. Therefore it is used in doors, window sashes, alter and pulpit decorations of rich religious buildings and wealthy

residence such as palaces, pavilions, etc. “Walnut, boxwood, pear, cherry, and sapele (mahogany) is used in the interior, while wood that can stand hard climatic conditions are preferred on the exterior, such as oak, sapeli, iroko, teak, and ash” (Çelik, 2013: 23-29).



**Fig. 8:** Walnut cabinet doors in künde-kârî technique: Semazen Mevlana Museum.



**Fig. 9, 10:** Window sashes in künde-kârî technique: Before being framed each geometric part is interlocked without nailing, screwing and sticking.

(Sources: <http://muze.semazen.net/>)

The künde-kârî cabinet doors in Semazen Mevlâna Museum date back to 15<sup>th</sup> century Seljuk period and window sashes and sash details are from 16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman period. (<http://muze.semazen.net/>).

Today, there are hardly any examples of inlay and “künde-kârî” techniques that were applied in ordinary Turkish houses. Unfortunately examples of paintings could not be provided. The literature review revealed that examples of “künde-kârî” were found in the ceilings of Turkish houses in Kastamonu and Safranbolu, but they were not real as they were nailed, screwed and stucked.

### **Engravings in the Turkish House**

“Engraving” is made over different media such as plaster, malakârî (rough plaster), stone or wood with thin brushes.

“The origin of these engravings date back to Uighurs. Their application on wood could even be dated back to Huns. Painted wooden items found in opened Hun Tombs in Noin-Ula Region confirm this. It is known that engravings used both inside and outside of Seljuk and Ottoman architecture are made with varying materials and techniques”(Bülbül. 2008: 131-133).



**Fig. 11:** Engraving from İstanbul Rüstem Paşa Mosque.



**Fig. 12:** Engraving from Topkapı Takkeci İbrahim Çavuş Mosque  
(Sources: Bülbul. 2008: 131-133)

Engraving made over wood: in the first place, “the background is divided into geometrical shapes with thin sticks. The gaps thus formed are painted motifs; secondly, engraving on wood without dividing sticks; Beyşehir Eşrefoğlu, Kastamonu Kasaba Köyü Mahmud Bey Mosque; engraving made with colored paints on ceiling made with künde-kârî technique; Üsküdar Atik Valide, Manisa Muradiye, Eminönü Rüstem Paşa Mosques (İRdeş,1990:173-182). Bülbul’s (2008: 131-133) research indicate that “motifs employed were traditionally of peony, pomegranate blossom, hatayi, rumi, palmette, lotus and curled branches.” Karaman house is a typical example for the decorations in a Turkish House. Hacı Kadir Ağa and Tartanlar houses in Karaman are adorned with motifs such as borders with botanical decorations, naturalist flowers extending from vases, as well as motifs including the curtain, the clock, Sultan Ahmet Mosque, the palace, the pavilion, and vessels, which all reflect the qualities of Turkish house in the westernization period (Kahraman, 2012: 111).



**Fig. 13, 14, 15, 16:** Karaman-Tartanlar House; picture source: Kahraman, 2012: 112-114

Fig. 13,14,15,16 ceiling detail from staircased anteroom: organized in the form of sun’s rays and sits on an octagonal frame; in the skirts of the dome, mostly pictures of Istanbul were portrayed. In the rooms, most beautiful specimens of engravings are shown in the form of bordered engravings and flower bouquets pictured in vases in niches that act as plant stands. Since “kalem işi” is a technique applying on plaster it reaches the ornamentation level of “Edirnekârî”.

### Edirnekârî in the Turkish House

17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the abandonment of plainness in Ottoman wood carving. Wooden material was varnished, it was dried and applied a coat of gilt and varnished again. As the technique was first used in Edirne it was named Edirnekârî, a new and toilsome technique. Spaces are decorated with various designs with Edirnekârî; most extensively used designs include flower motifs and flower bouquets as inspired by nature. Edirnekârî style has a wide-ranging field of application. It was applied on cabinets, doors, window ledges, ceilings, lamp-holders, wall clock mounts, Koran repositories, writing sets, etc. The varnishing work used with Edirnekârî style is called lacquer, or Edirne lacquer.



**Fig. 17:** Edirnekârî decorated fronton; could be top of a cabinet or door.



**Fig. 18:** Edirnekârî decorated cabinet with door



**Fig. 19:** Edirnekârî decorated lamp-holder (picture source: Kökrek, 2013:77-83)

“Arriving in Edirne in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Evliya Çelebi reported in his famous Travelogue that there were a great number of flower growers in many different corners of the city, and there existed a vase with lots of different flowers inside Eski Mosque. It would be impossible not to encounter flowers in this artistic style of Edirne, the city of floriculture” (Kökrek, 2013:77-83).



## Evaluation of Traditional Turkish House Decorations and Conclusion

As the culmination point and end result of the Turkish life style, extended family structure, traditions and customs as well as culture, the Turkish House, which evolved from the nomadic Central Asian Turkish tents, has quite an original and at the same time functional identity. Since its material is wood, some were not well-preserved. Those which remained to our day in very few numbers have typical fittings and decorations that have evolved since Anatolian Seljuks.

The halls and rooms that connect the sections of the Turkish House are enriched with wood carving technique on almost all wooden fittings. As women spent most of their life inside the house, decorations were made in the form of engravings over wood or plaster to make them pleased about their home. Spaces were given extra roominess at niches on two sides of the hearth, at cabinet doors, and at ceiling borders with decorations in geometrical forms and -later with the western effect-, curved branches, flower motifs, flower bouquets, flowers in vases, etc. Varnishing on wood evolved into Edirne lacquer and edirnekâri decorations were made not only on small items but on larger fittings such as doors, cabinet wings, ceiling decorations, niches on the wall, lamp-holders, etc. Kündekârî is a special Turkish technique of its own, known to have descended from the Seljuks. It was developed as a method of connection by the Seljuk masters who separated wood into little geometrical shapes and later combined them without glue, nails and screws to fend for the deforming effect of time on wood such as shrinking, bending, etc. Different types of wood is used in indoors and outdoors. Inlaying, which mostly inserts diverse material such as mother of pearl, tortoiseshell, brass, etc. inside kündekârî, is a very special and expensive technique. It could be employed in palaces, pavilions, and on special gifts, etc. Today these decoration techniques are important elements of the Turkish culture in the context of the Turkish Home.

Consequently, it can be said that the traditional Turkish Houses are architectural structures that reached original results with their layout and organization of spaces as well as the decoration techniques such as woodcarving, engraving, kündekârî, and inlaid edirnekâri employed in their spaces. The ornamental features of traditional Turkish houses deserve more comprehensive, more strategic and argumentative research and descriptions. Research topic is suggested.

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