

SOWLE U. G.



Independent Study

Turkish Vernacular Architecture Of Safranbolu, Turkey

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Under The Direction Of Professor John Bryant

Spring Semester 1989

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Preface

Many people are not aware of the great beauty that exists in Turkey and in its people. As the author of this report I find it necessary to first tell something of myself.

My name is Umit Sowle. I am currently an undergraduate student studying architecture at Oklahoma State University. I am very proud of my culture. I am originally from Izmir Turkey. This city was known as Smyrna, during biblical times. I lived in Izmir the first six years of my life. Since then I have returned numerous times to visit my family. As an architectural student, I am interested in different people as well as different architecture. I am eager to share the Turkish culture with you in hopes that you the reader will have a greater understanding of this place so few people visit.

THE TURKISH HOUSES OF SAFRANBOLU

Introduction

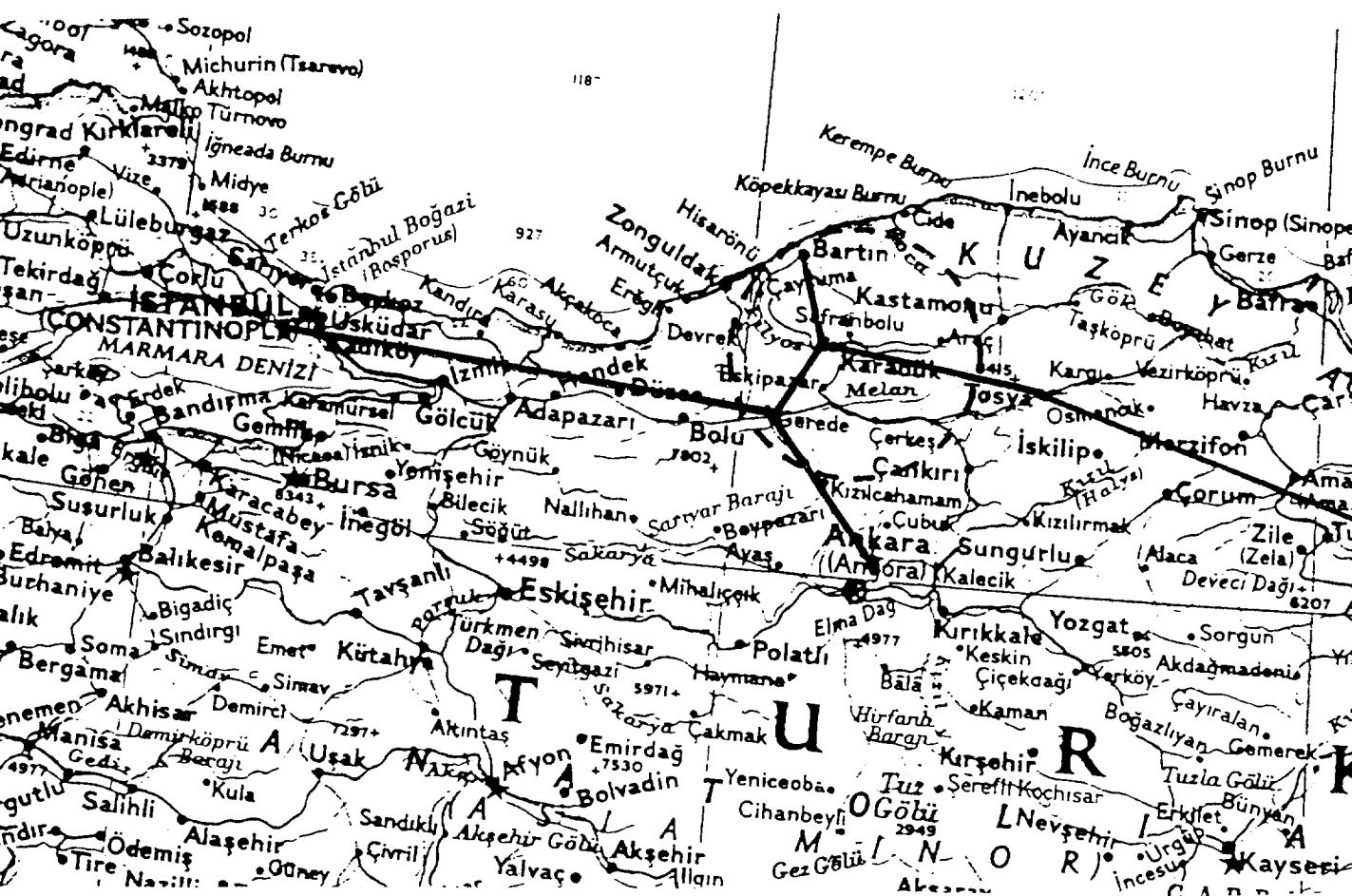
The Turkish town of Safranbolu contains some of the last remaining examples of truly Turkish vernacular architecture. In recent years, attention has been turned to this town and its architecture. This report will attempt to familiarize the reader not only with the architecture if this region, but also with its people and customs.

Safranbolu is a traditional Turkish settlement. It is located on important trade routes between the two major cities of Turkey, Istanbul and Ankara. (fig 1)

Safranbolu is much older than people realize. The town, along with its surrounding region, has been a settlement since the Paleolithic Age. Many tribes and armies have occupied Safranbolu over the eons. At the beginning of the 15th Century, the town was seized by the Danes. Later it was taken by the Byzantines, and finally in the late 1400's, by the rapidly expanding empire of the Turks.

In Roman and Byzantine times, the name of the town was "Flaviopolis." During the Ottoman Period it was called "Zafaran Boli." The name Saffron was also used during those times. With further changes the town is now known as Safranbolu.

The architecture of Safranbolu indicates that the town gained some importance during the 14th Century. It began to grow and prosper in the late 18th and 19th Century. As



(fig 1) Map showing Safranbolu on the route of a caravan road which passed from Istanbul to Gerede and Tosya through Tokat to Sivas. The port town of Bartın linked Safranbolu to Istanbul, by sea.

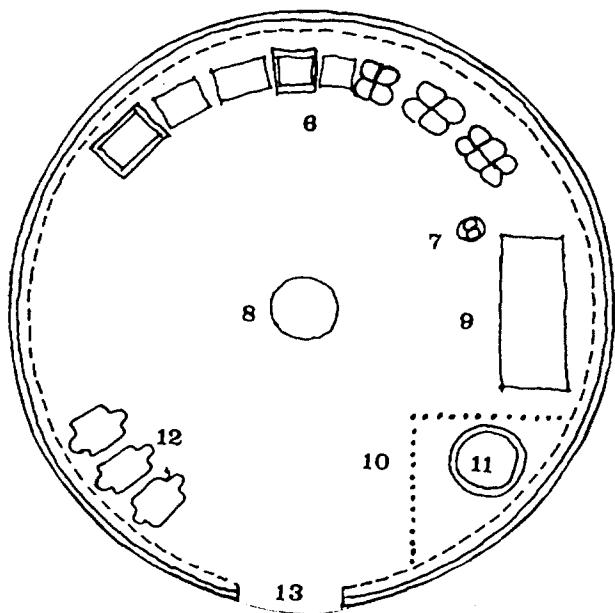
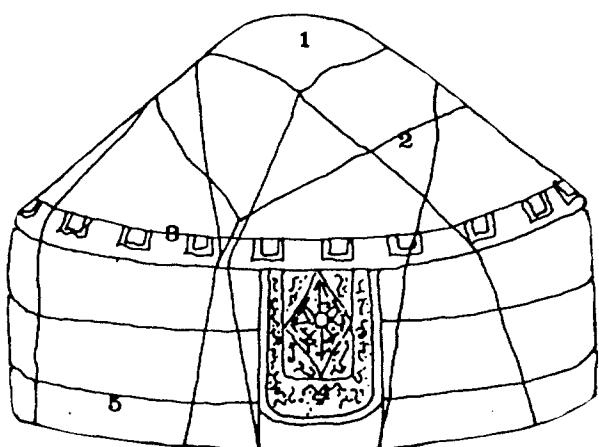
stated, Safranbolu was on the route of a caravan road which passed from Istanbul to Gerede and Tosya through Tokat to Sivas. The port town of Bartin linked Safranbolu to Istanbul, by sea.

At the end of the 19th Century, the population of Safranbolu was 7500-8000. With the growing trend toward urbanization fostered by the formation of the modern country of Turkey, it decreased to 5000-6000 between 1927 and 1955. Industry came to Safranbolu after WWII to reverse this trend. By 1970, the population had grown to 12,500. By 1975, the census reported a population of 15,000.

The Anatolian peninsula, a warm climatic zone, contains the Safranbolu district. However, some important seasonal differences of temperature and precipitation do occur in this rather large area. The differences vary between the North and South sides of the peninsula, as well as from inland to coastal regions. In general, severe winters and arid summers are uncommon. However, Safranbolu experiences excessive precipitation during the first half of the year.

The "Turkish House" : Description

The majority of Turks who originally settled in Anatolia were nomadic. These people lived in tents and tent-like dwellings remarkably similar to the well known Yurts of Mongolia. (fig 2) It is theorized that the traditional "tent" homes of the Turks directly influenced the "Turkish House." Like a tent, each room is a unit for living.



(fig 2)

General view of the interior of a Central Asian dwelling tent.

1. Chimney opening (closed)

2. Main top cover

3. Ridge

4. Felt door curtain

5. Side cover

6. Chest

7. Iron stake for hanging clothes and weapons

8. Hearth

9. Raised seating platform

10. Rush mating screen

11. Mare's milk containers

12. Frames for saddles and harness

13. Threshold

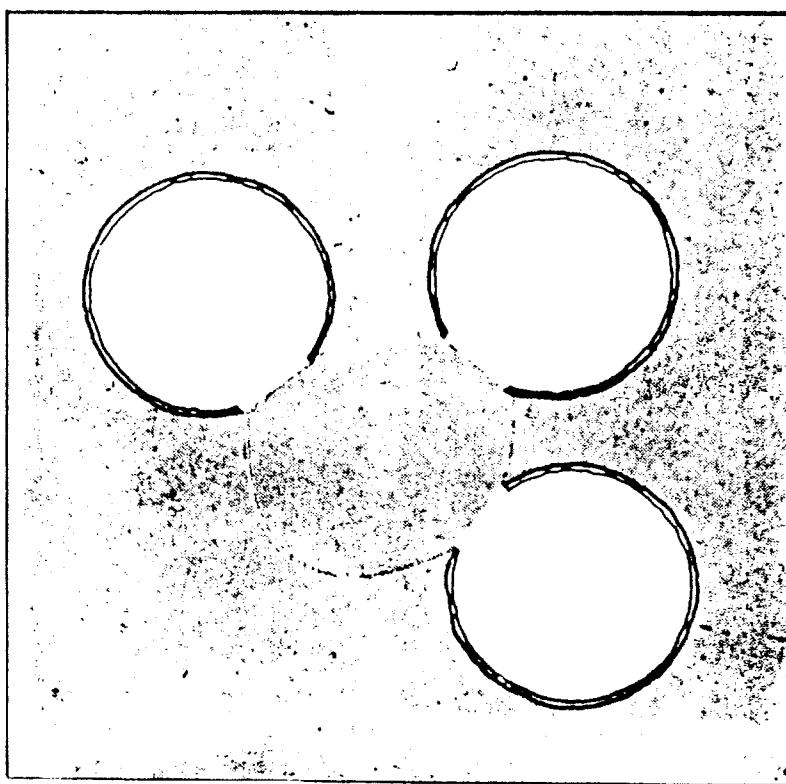
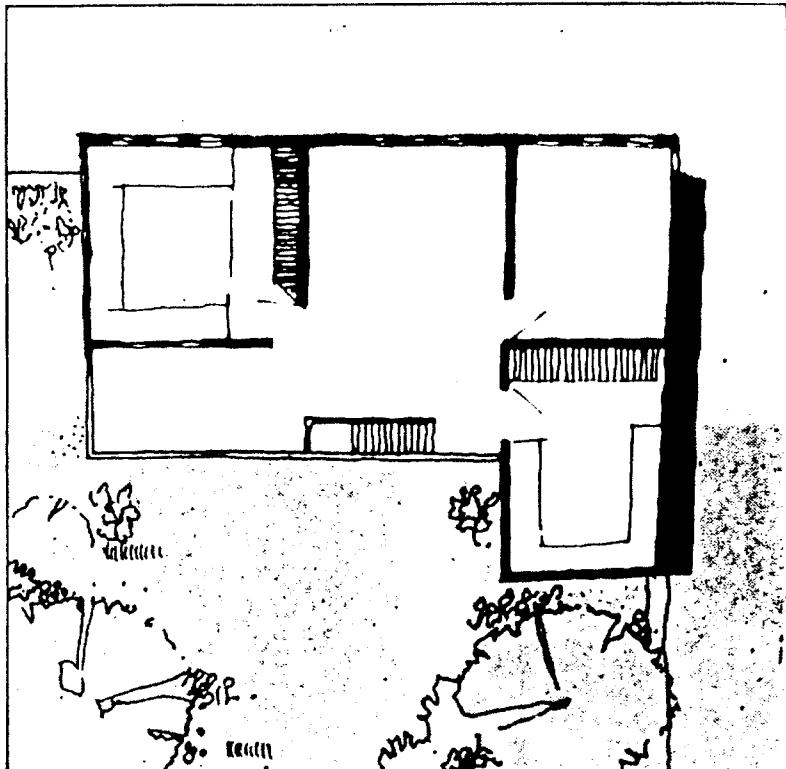
Turkish architects and archaeologists claim that the early encampment patterns have been passed on as well. These patterns were influential in the design of the traditional house through the continuation of some nomadic traditions. The space between the tents corresponds directly to the hall or sofa. The room, which is the living unit, forms the composition and defines the layout of the house. (fig 3) The outer sofa, which is an abstract space, outside the room, gives the room its independence. The sofa which opens to the outside may also correspond to the iwan. The iwan can be described as an extension of the hall located between rooms. (fig 4)

The term "Turkish House" is used for those houses that were built by the Turks after their arrival in Anatolia. The term does not refer to the houses of Central Asia and Iran.

It should be understood that within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, there was no single consistent prototypical house. Today, those studying the residential architecture of this part of the world tend to choose one example among several types of houses. They claim a particular housing type exemplifies the classical "Turkish House," because numerous examples of that type exist today.

The Users

At the beginning of the 20th Century, traditional large families were common in Turkey, as in much of the rest of the world. The family unit was run much like a modern



(fig 3) Comparison of life in a tent and a house. Both share similarities in the arrangement of living units and the common area. The relationship between the rooms and the sofa in the house is the same as that between the individual tents and their common area.



(fig 4) The iwan can be described as an extension of the hall located between rooms.

corporation. The head of the family was its eldest male member who was still physically and mentally capable. The sons of the family, even after their marriage, were still under the control of the father. Cleaning the house, producing and preserving food were all important daily tasks, as was feeding family members and the family's animals. Further, the care of the children, the sick and the elderly members of the family was vital. All of these tasks demanded manpower. Sons were kept within the household for these purposes, while the daughters were married off to other similar family groups. The traditional "extended family" was composed of the father and mother, along with sons, daughter-in-laws and their children and often unmarried or widowed uncles and aunts.

In traditional Turkish society, the family was divided into at least two separate social units. The outside world perceived men and women members of the family as two different groups. Residential architecture reflected this separation. Women lived in a harem, a part of the house reserved for them. While the men lived separately in the selamlık. Although the husband and wife were considered a single unit, they were given these separate areas of the home to fulfill their independence.

Typically, in traditional Safranbolu, married couples generally had two children. The new bride received a room on the top floor of her new in-laws' home. She could truly call this one room her own. Freedom and privacy in traditional

Safranbolu was otherwise scarce.

Relationship to Nature and the Seasons

A significant factor in the life of the Turkish people, is their closeness to nature. This probably a direct result of their nomadic heritage. The residential architecture of Safranbolu reflects the peoples' link with nature. This link with nature can be demonstrated by the open outer hall. The room, as a living unit is enclosed. However, the outer hall onto which the rooms open, is covered only at the top. The hall, open to the outside, is still protected from cool breezes. (fig 5-6)

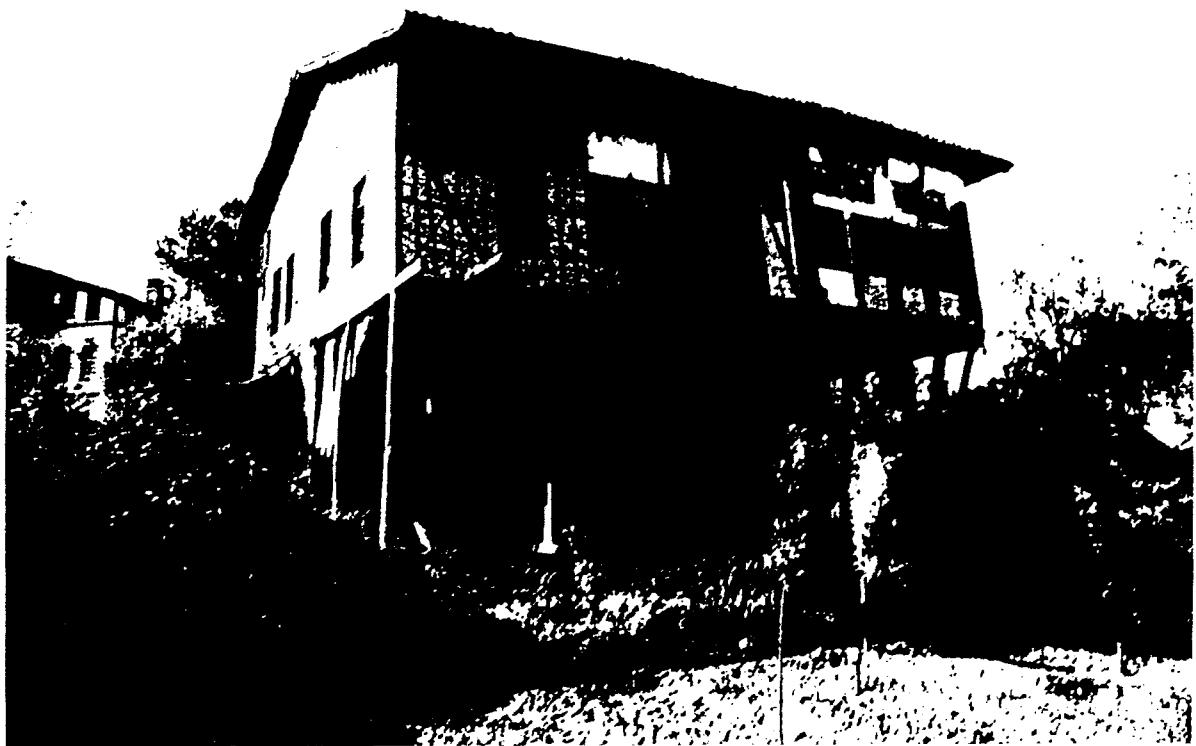
In the summer, the people of Safranbolu moved to their summer homes in a district called Baglar. Here, food production necessitated more land, and therefore, bigger houses. (fig 7) All summer vegetables and fruits are grown and prepared for winter. The food grown during the summer season was taken back to the Sehir, the wintering residence in Safranbolu itself. (fig 8) Toward the end of October, the return to the Sehir in Safranbolu starts.

The Traditional Urban Fabric

When the Turks began to arrive in Anatolia, they encountered Byzantine towns. Most of these towns were surrounded by walls. The Turks began to inhabit these towns, most of which had lost their prosperity as well as most of their Byzantine, Greek, and Roman population. The Turks



(fig 5-6) Example of an outer hall onto which rooms open. The hall, open to the outside, is protected from cool breezes.



(fig 7) Typical summer residence in Safranbolu. It is located in a district called Bagalar.

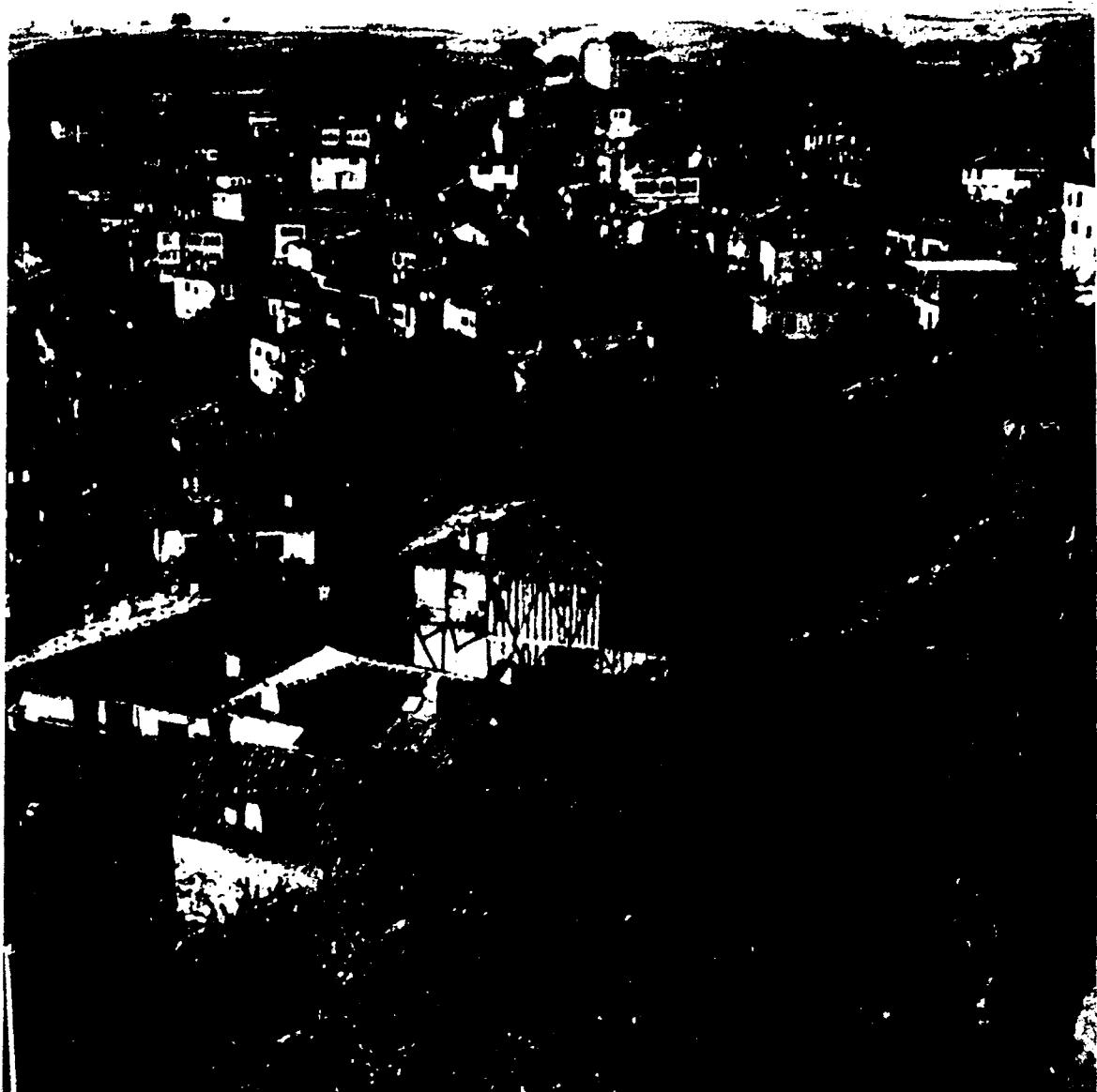


(fig 8) Typical winter residence in Safranbolu. It is located in a district called Sehir.

arrived in small groups under various religious leaders.

When they gave up the nomadic way of life, they settled and tended to stay together. They lived together under their leaders as they had done in former settlements.

As the nomadic towns began to flourish and grow, more people began to move there. These latest newcomers usually settled on the outskirts of town. (fig 9) This expansion did not take place according to any plan and the streets were organic in nature. They were not parallel nor were they of the same width. They were only wide enough for people and loaded animals. Traditionally as well as for defensive purposes, ground and garden walls were built high. (fig 10 - 11) This narrowness and height of the wall-enclosed street gives the effect of walking through a corridor. The projecting upper floors and wide eaves, with the trees protruding from the garden, served as roofs for the corridor-street. (fig 12) The roads were paved with irregular flat stones which sloped towards the central axis marked by two rows of bigger cobbles. This design allowed the rain water to flow through the middle of the street, avoiding the houses and pedestrians. Since the streets were not designed for vehicles, sidewalks were not necessary. These labyrinthine streets ran generally toward the center of town. Baazars, public baths, market places, and a Mosque were located in the center of the town.



(fig 9) Expansion did not take place according to any plan and the streets were organic in nature.



(fig 10-11) An example of ground and garden walls. These walls are built high primarily for defensive purposes.



(fig 12) The projecting upper floors and wide eaves, serve as roofs for the corridor-street.

Design and Construction Techniques

The "Turkish House" is distinguished not by its floor plan, but by its construction. Some building elements found in each type of house share similar characteristics with the whole. Wood frame construction is one such element that is shared by many different types. (fig 13)

This type of residential construction with wood structural frame is filled in with different kinds of wall material. (fig 14) This type of construction can be seen on the Anatolian coasts in the west and in Central Anatolia. It can also be seen in the Balkans, and in some of the urban centers of Rhodes and Cyprus. Most of the traditional houses of Safranbolu are constructed with this framing system. They stand amid the spectrum of Turkish house styles and geographic distribution and can be considered fairly typical.

The "Turkish House" as seen in Safranbolu, has stone walls at the ground floor which enclose it from the street. As previously mentioned, this wall is a continuation of the garden wall. It is adjacent to the street and follows the line of the road. The walls of the ground floor rise up to the middle floor, and do not contain windows. The middle floor rests on the garden walls, which are load bearing. Sometimes this floor rests on wooden pillars. (fig 15) The upper floors are built of wood frame construction. The middle floor may be a mezzanine. In certain houses, this floor can encompass the entire area above the ground floor. Its windows are small and few in number. (fig 16) Generally



(fig 13) An example of a house with wood frame construction. This type of construction is shared by many different house types.



(fig 14) Residential construction with wood structural frame is filled in with different kinds of material. It can be seen in this example. The floor is filled in with soil and aggregate.



(fig 15) An example of the middle floor resting on wooden pillars. In most cases the middle floor rests on garden walls.



(fig 16) An example of the middle floor containing smaller windows that are few in number.

the ceiling of the middle floor is lower than that of the upper floor. The top floor represents the overall theme of the house. The rooms are completed into rectangles which project over the street. (fig 17) The top floor has many windows. (fig 18-19) They stand in contrast to the plain stone walls that make up the ground floor. Window dimensions are standard and have a proportion of 1:2. (fig 20) The roofs always slope in four directions. (fig 21) These roofs are the most distinguishing feature of the "Turkish House." They are covered with semi-cylindrical clay tiles. The exterior of the house is plastered with lime and white washed. The white walls contrast to the dark color of the wooden corner boards, window architraves and shutters. (fig 22) The wooden brackets that can be found as curved elements in other parts of Anatolia are straight in Safranbolu. (fig 23) The eave-like wooden cornice called sakaf, that can be seen over windows in places such as Marmara and Trace do not exist in Safranbolu. (fig 24)

In the "Turkish House," the most important element is the room. Each room, in itself, has all of the facilities necessary for housing a married couple. A person can sit, sleep, take a bath, eat and even cook in each room. Although the sizes of the rooms do vary, certain features are always included. (fig 25)

In Safranbolu the rooms in the middle floor are used for daytime work, such as cooking. A winter room on the middle floor has a low ceiling. This allows the room to be heated



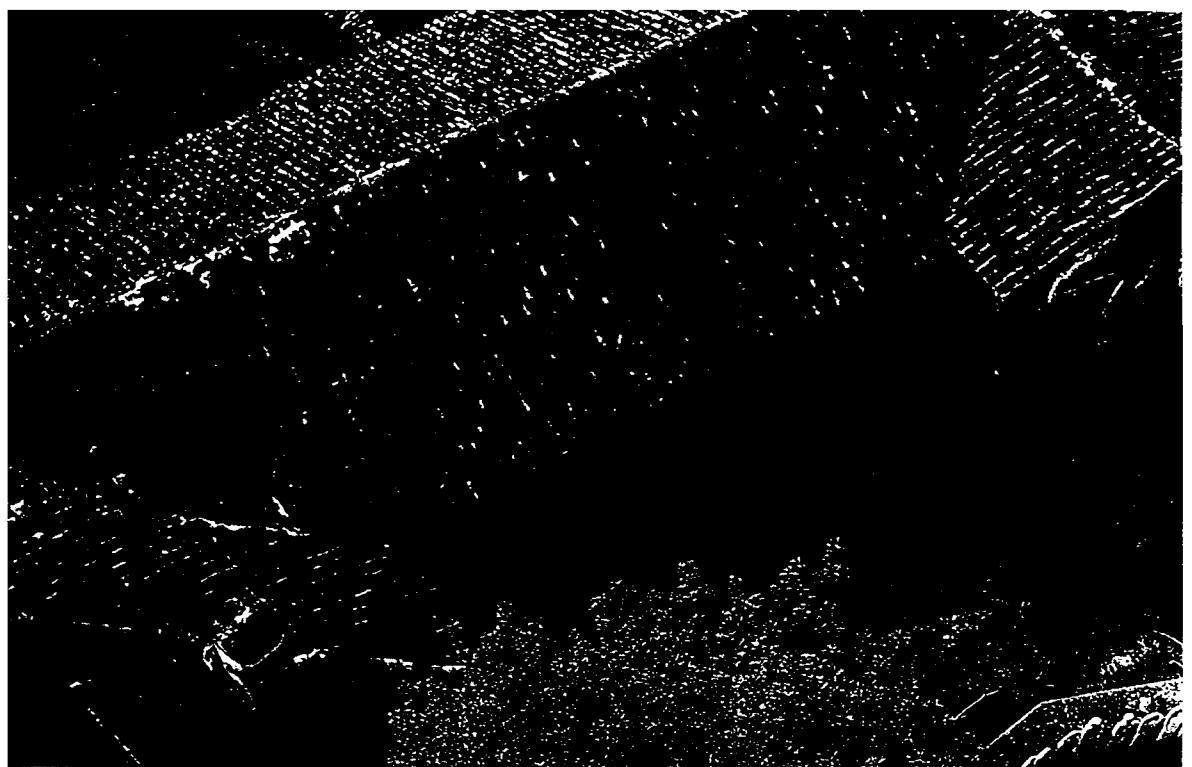
(fig 17) An example of rooms that are completed into rectangles and project over the street.



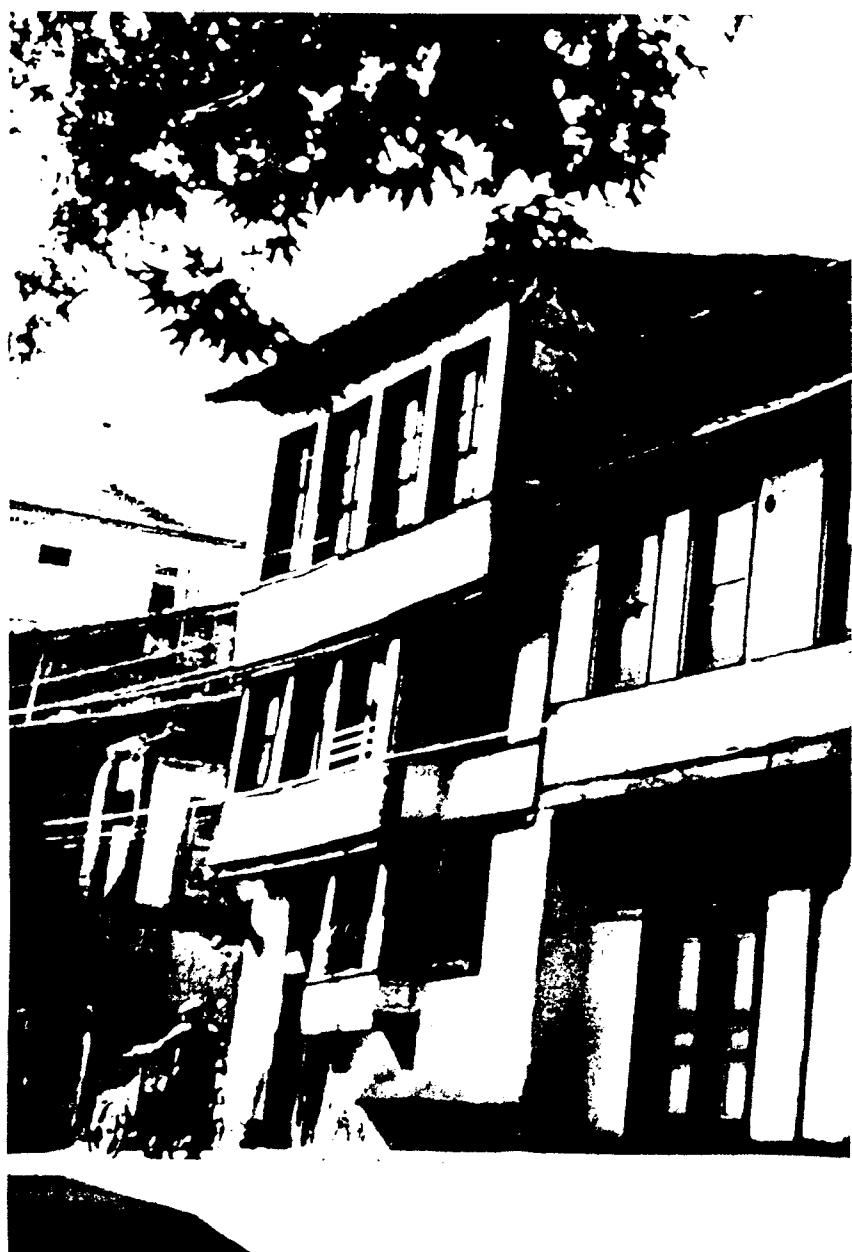
(fig 18-19) The top floor of the "Turkish House" contains many windows. Here are examples of exterior as well as interior views.



(fig 20) Window dimensions are standard and have a proportion of 1:2



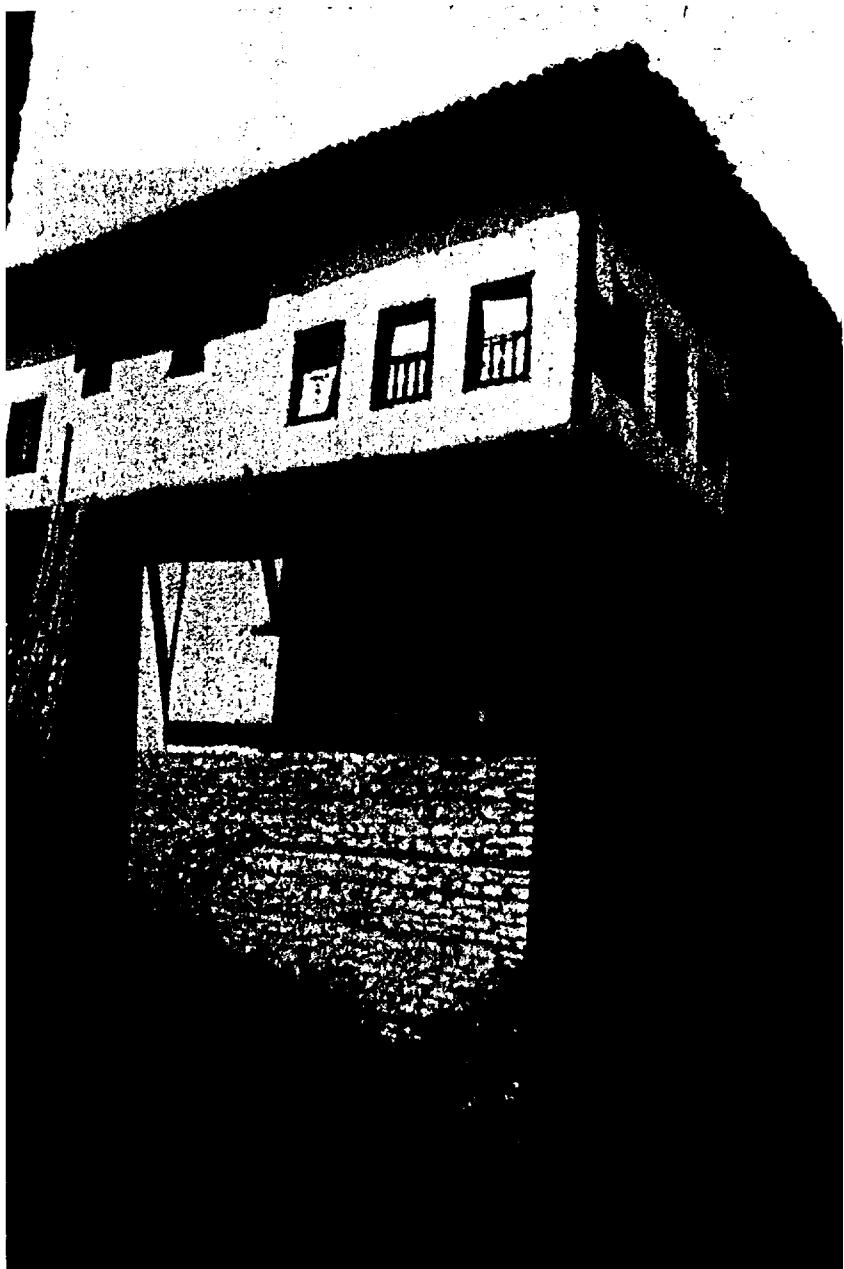
(fig 21) The roofs always slope in four directions. These roofs are the most distinguishing feature of the "Turkish House."



(fig 22) The exterior of this home is plastered with lime and white washed. The white walls contrast to the dark color of the wooden corner boards, window architraves and shutters.



(fig 23) The wooden brackets that can be found as curved elements in other parts of Anatolia are straight in Safranbolu.



(fig 24) The eave-like wooden cornice called sakaf, that can be seen over windows in places such as Marmara and Trace do not exist in Safranbolu.



(fig 25) A room in a Turkish residence. Each room, in itself has all of the facilities necessary for housing a married couple.

easily. This "winter room" exists in the summer house as well as the winter house. The room in the upper floor as previously stated, are reserved for the daughter-in-law, guests and is used generally for sleeping.

The typical room in the "Turkish House" is roughly square in shape. Entrance is usually at the corner. Thus, the entrance into the room is indirect. This usually requires two changes in direction upon entry. A wooden panel across the entrance blocks sight into the room from the hall. The complexity of this arrangement provides privacy, as well as sound and heat insulation. (fig 26-27)

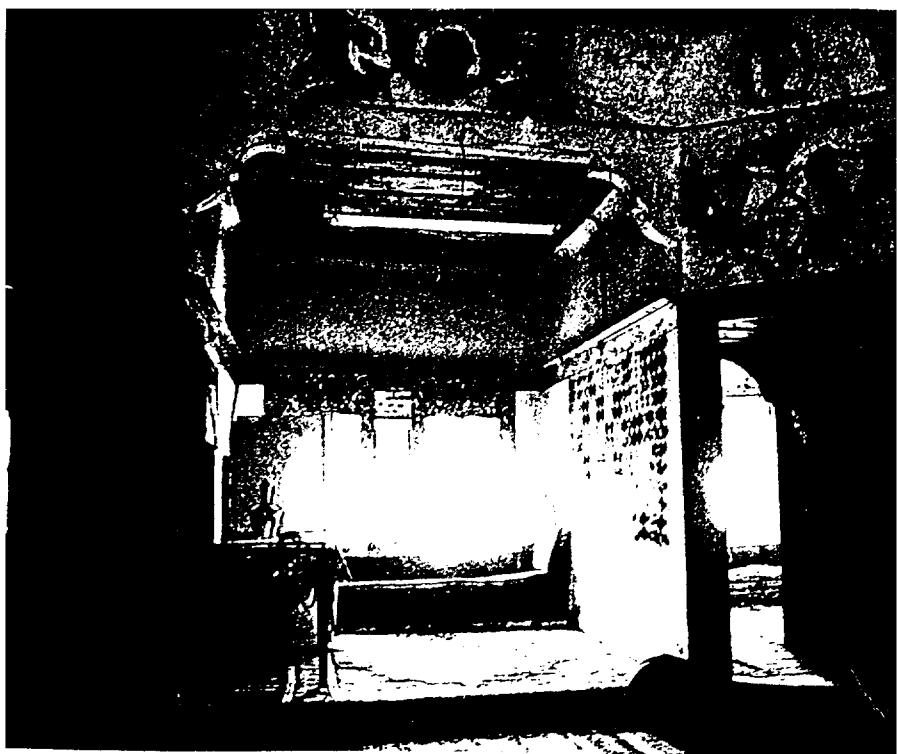
The hall shapes the plan of the Safranbolu house, collects the rooms and provides a common living and gathering area for the family. Central halls in the middle of rooms are common in Safranbolu. Extensions of the hall called iwans, take the place of the hall between rooms. As many as four iwans may exist on a floor, one on each side.

The staircase is usually placed in one end of a hall and the bathroom in the other. In houses with a central hall, the ground floor and upper floors develop together in a rectangular order. Either the iwans or the rooms project outward on upper floors. Houses with protruding rooms may be regarded as older. In these older houses, the iwans may have wooden pillars. (fig 28) In some examples, lattice work is used in place of windows.

A feature which is seen often in Safranbolu is the balcony. The balcony is generally located on the South



(fig 26-27) The complexity of the entry arrangement provides privacy, as well as sound and heat insulation.



(fig 28) The floor of the iwan is usually raised above that of the hall. In older houses, the iwan may have wooden pillars.

facade of the summer house. It is used for drying clothes and for sun drying fruit.

Artistic Trends and Decoration

The development of many trends can be seen in Safranbolu. These trends correlate directly with trends seen in Istanbul, the capital and cultural center of Turkey.

The influence of Baroque art can be seen in the homes of Safranbolu. During the early 1900's the traditional Turkish house began to undergo changes. For example, central halls which were very linear in character became round or oval. Sunken ceilings began to appear, as well as round niches in the walls. Painted decoration and interior walls also became prevalent. Exterior decoration was enhanced. Triangular pediments and pilasters were added.

The Empire Style which began to be influential during the second half of the 19th Century, brought a modesty back to the facades. The decoration underwent extreme simplification. Curved forms were given up. The characteristic facade elements of this period are rows of windows and pilasters, either in wood or plaster. (fig 29) Upper windows and shutters begin to disappear. The brackets under the projections are enclosed in wood panelling to simulate voluted consoles. A kind of niche called cicelik was built between closets. This niche was painted with depictions of landscapes.



(fig 29) The facade of this house has characteristic windows that are in rows. They are constructed of wood and are derived from the influence of the Empire Style.

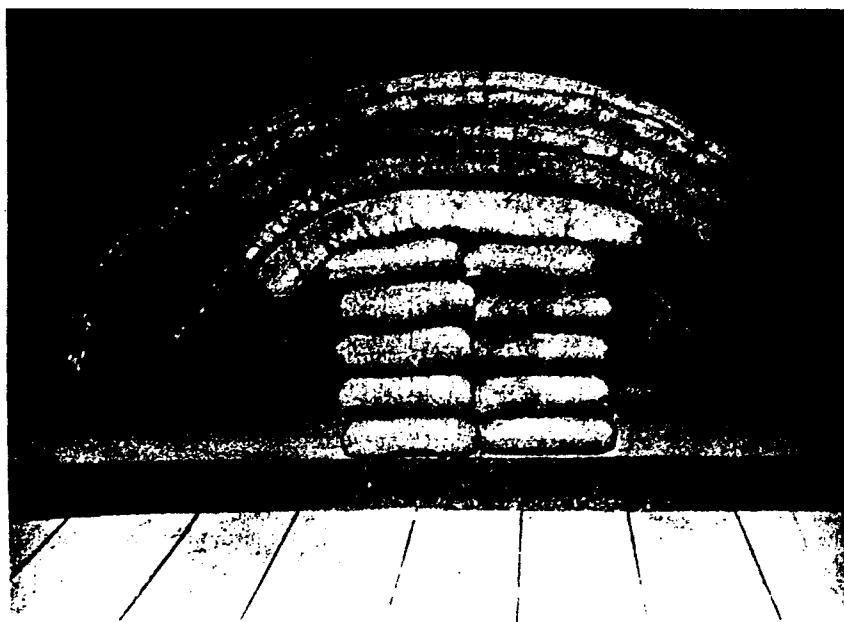
Furnishings

Adaptability to various functions is a basic requirement of a room in a Turkish house. Therefore, during the daytime certain furnishings like mattresses, pillows, blankets, etc.. are kept in closets called yuluk. (fig 30) During the night these furnishings are spread out on the floor for use. (fig 31) In the morning copper trays placed on stands or low wooden tables and table clothes provide the eating arrangement that is easily set up and removed. For these purposes the central area of the room is left empty. (fig 32)

The multi-purpose use of the typical room and the general lack of furniture in it are also features of the Japanese house. Although the Japanese adopted many features of the Chinese way of life, it is thought that nothing was received in terms of furniture. In this context, one is reminded that Central Asia is one of the two origins of the Japanese people.

Conclusion

Different factors influence the design of the "Turkish House." As we have seen, these factors combine to create a certain vernacular architecture as observed in Safranbolu. This house form was applied without major changes in a number of other regions of Turkey. Facilities adaptable for summer and winter residences in the home make it suitable for many different climates. However, the design of the "Turkish House," does not follow a single set pattern. All of the



(fig 30-31) Mattresses, pillows, blankets and other furnishings are kept in closets called yuluk. During the night these furnishings are spread out on the floor for use.



(fig 32) The central area of the room is left empty for daily activity that will take place there.

factors that have been discussed, such as the way of life of the people to the means of production, have had a great impact on the form of the house. Building material and technology has shaped the appearance of the Turkish home. Topography as well as the structure and prosperity of the family have influenced the design to a great extent. The "Turkish House" has evolved from the tent of the nomadic tribes of Asia, to the modern residences that we see today. This is an indication of the strong traditions that still exist, which relate the modern nomads of today with those of yesterday. (fig 33)



(fig 33)

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