

Community Culture and its Reflection on Vernacular Architecture - Three Case Studies: Turkish, Greek and Levantine Housing in Anatolia

Feyyaz Erpi
Middle East Technical University
Department of Architecture
Ankara - Turkey

Summary

The relation between domestic architecture and socio-cultural variables has been the subject of many studies. This article presents types of housing marked by three different cultural settings within the same area of Turkey. Firstly, we present a house type that evolved in Anatolia in the 19th century, mainly under the influence of Moslem religion. Secondly, we describe the housing found in a Western Anatolia town with an Orthodox Christian population. Thirdly, the housing architecture of the so-called Levantine community of Western Anatolia is discussed and compared to the first two cases. This set of data clearly shows that housing form is closely related to specific cultural views and this remains the case even when communities are close geographically or interact socially.

Résumé

La relation entre architecture domestique et variables socio-culturelles a fait l'objet de nombres d'études. Cet article présente des habitations marquées par trois contextes culturels différents dans la même région de Turquie. Tout d'abord, un type de maison est présenté qui a été développé en Anatolie au XIXe siècle sous l'influence, en particulier, de la religion musulmane. Ensuite, l'article illustre les habitations d'une ville située en Anatolie occidentale et dont la population est chrétienne-orientale. Puis est évoquée l'architecture domestique d'une communauté levantine d'Anatolie occidentale. Les trois architectures sont comparées. Les données montrent clairement que la forme des maisons est étroitement liée à des priorités culturelles, ceci malgré la proximité géographique et l'interaction sociale liant les trois communautés.

1. Introduction

Vernacular architecture is shaped under local constraints developed through long periods of time. With progress in the means of communication, the term "local" widens and local characters become less distinguishable.

Residential architecture's form and organization are greatly influenced by the cultural milieu to which it belongs and here is where the link between form and life patterns is most obvious. Both physical and socio-cultural aspects need to be considered, but the latter need primary stress (Rapoport, 1969, 46). In some cases while similar

building material and technology are available to people of different cultural background that live close to each other, sharing the same climatic conditions, their houses show startling varieties.

It is implicitly accepted that there is a link between behaviour and form in two senses: first, in the sense that an understanding of behaviour patterns, including desires, motivations and feelings, is essential to the understanding of built form, since built form is the physical embodiment of these patterns, and second, in the sense that forms, once built, affect behaviour and the way of life (Rapoport, 1969, 16).

This calls to mind, Winston Churchill's words: "We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us" (Doxiadis, 1968, 25). It must be remembered that in most traditional cultures, novelty is not sought after, but rather regarded as undesirable (Rapoport, 1969, 7). In such cultures there is no place for the interference of artistically self-conscious designers. To illustrate the strong ties between community culture and vernacular residential architecture, as discussed above, three case studies are to be presented.

The first case is the analysis of the house form that we name the Turkish House, the design concept of which developed during the reign of the Ottoman Empire under strong influence of customs imposed by the Moslem religion. History of the existing examples extends about a century and a half back. Domestic architecture produced by ethnic groups of peoples (other than Turks) sharing the same religious culture also share the same "style".

The second case is named the Greek House. Orthodox Greeks and Moslem Turks living together for centuries shared each others' customs and house forms at varying degrees at various localities. However, the Western Anatolian town chosen as the study area is unique because it was founded and occupied primarily by Greeks. Its isolated location away from main traveling routes helped to keep its Greek identity. This is reflected in the character of the domestic architecture of the town compared to the Moslem oriented communities' houses.

The third case deals with yet another kind of community and its houses in the same town. The so-called Levantine families' existence in the town goes back to early 1700's, yet the buildings now available mostly belong to a period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The socio-economic status of this community as reflected in their domestic architecture leads us to place the case in a different category, the first two cases being rather middle class communities.

This is an attempt to illustrate the parallelism between cultural and architectural characters of each community's domestic architecture and to identify their individual differences.

2. First Case Study: the Turkish House

For this study a collection of Moslem houses from various areas of Central and Western Anatolia and Thrace have been selected. Although their localities differ to some extent, their users share the same ethnic, religious, and social characteristics and similarly the houses exhibit common concepts of form and organization.

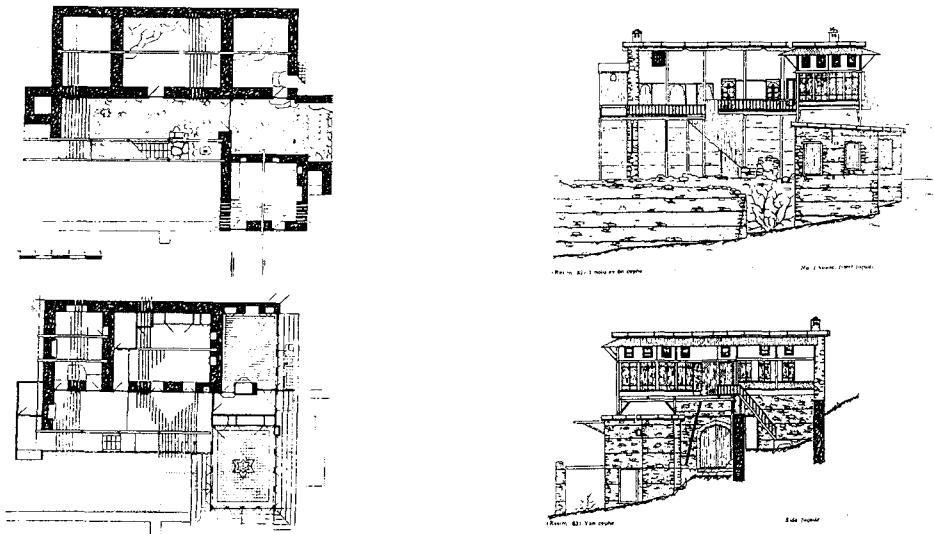


Fig. 1 The Turkish House, Alanya, Southern Anatolia.
La maison turque, Alanya, Anatolie du sud.

The Turkish house has some 500 years of historical background. It is the outcome of a tradition, developed during the reign of the Ottoman Empire covering an area extending from Anatolia to South Eastern Europe. The influence of this tradition can also be traced to Crimea, Rhodes, Cyprus and Egypt. South East of Anatolia and beyond, under the influence of Arab culture, do not seem to be affected much by this tradition (Eldem, 1968, 11).

This house type can generally be classified into two categories. One is the man-in-the-street's house, in other words it belongs to the middle class, without much distinction whether it is in the town or in the country. The other is the "residence" inhabited by the affluent class.

The house type presented in this study is of the first, i.e. ordinary citizen's house type.

Two of the main characteristics shared by these houses should be noted. First, an organic expression in their design is apparent. Each house is shaped to requirements such as site topography, orientation, owner's taste etc. They fit very well into the description of Walter Curt Behrendt:

The laws of organic planning find their continuation and completion in external structure; and the manifold arrangement of the parts are to be viewed as the result of the inner logic of design, not as a brilliant show-piece of a deliberately picturesque composition. As to these buildings, one had better

avoid speaking of 'composition' at all, 'the organs do not compose themselves as if already previously finished', Goethe said 'they develop themselves together and out of one another, to an existence which necessarily takes part in the whole' (Behrendt, 1957, 130).

The ordinary Turkish House can hardly be classified into categories, as each house has its own identity. Construction details used as façade elements are all different from each other.

Another characteristic of these houses is their "introvert" planning organization. They are shut off from the street on which they are aligned. Houses have an uninviting expression when viewed from the street. Doorways on blank walls of the ground floors lead to either a courtyard from where one can get access to the house beyond, or in case of direct access to the house, the ground floor is only a gloomy space used for functions like storage or a kind of garage for carts. A flight of stairs leads the visitor to the upper floor which is the house proper that contains rooms for living and sleeping. This indirect access to the house is common to nearly all Moslem houses in the area. While the ground floor is irregular, the upper floor plan has always a geometric order. As a result, rectangular shaped upstairs rooms jut out as consoles with obliquely placed timber supports. Upstairs rooms do not have specific functions, they are used either for living, dining or sleeping purposes, depending on which is suitable for the time. Orientation of the house is determined according to the climatic factors or view or topography. All façades have different compositions.

The latter characteristic of the house, i.e. the introvert setting, can be attributed to the constraints imposed by the Moslem religion. Islam is a men's world. Women in Moslem societies are segregated from daily life. Their direct contact with the outer world beyond the home is frowned upon. Women are kept under their outfit and veil and behind window grills. Consequently, the house where women live, does not expose itself to outside traffic, but shuts itself in, in an introvert setting.

The positive way of Renaissance thinking remained for long alien to the Moslem world. Turkey became acquainted with Auguste Comte's positivist philosophy only during the late 19th century and more effectively with the advent of Atatürk's reforms after 1923 when the new Republic was founded. While positive thinking became the driving force of the Western progress, East, including the Moslem World, under the influence of religious dogmas did not keep pace with the West. Grid-iron pattern of Priene was rediscovered and while geometry was shaping industrial towns of Europe, Moslem towns kept their organic subdivision with irregular geometry. For mostly irregular sites, and owners with unsystematic state of mind, organic architecture based on logic and traditional craftsmanship seem to be the natural outcome.

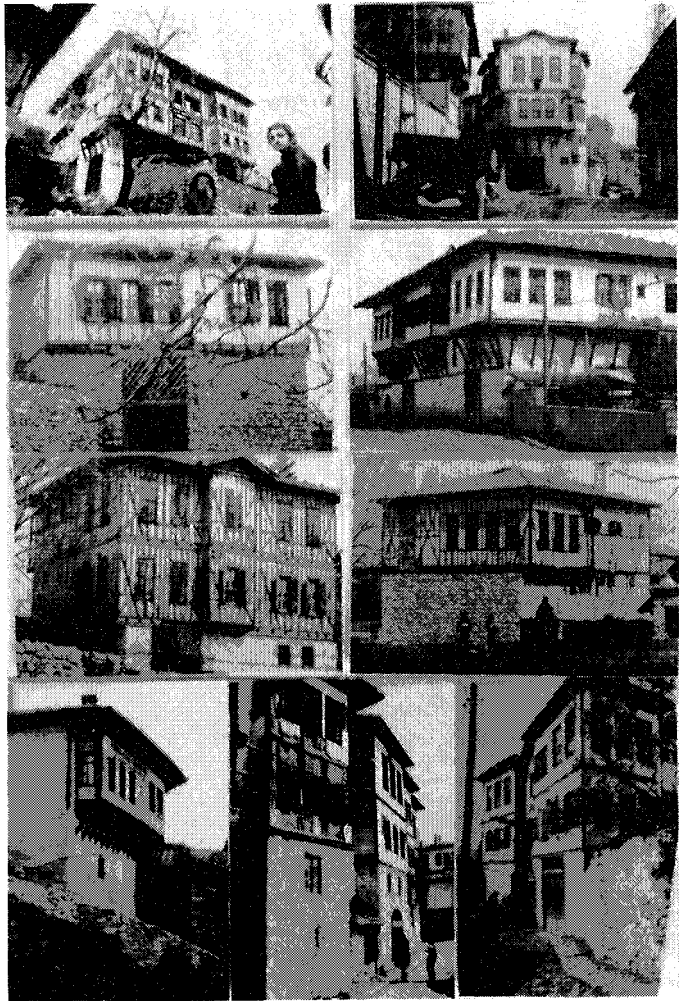
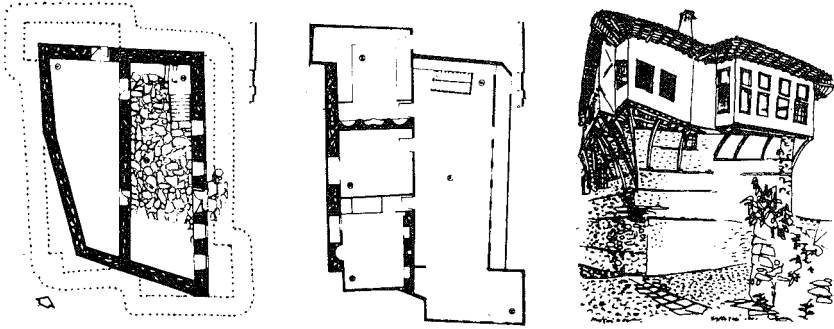


Fig. 2 The Turkish House, Western Thrace (top) and Safranbolu, Midlands Anatolia.
La maison turque, Thrace occidentale (en haut) et Safranbolu, Anatolie moyenne.

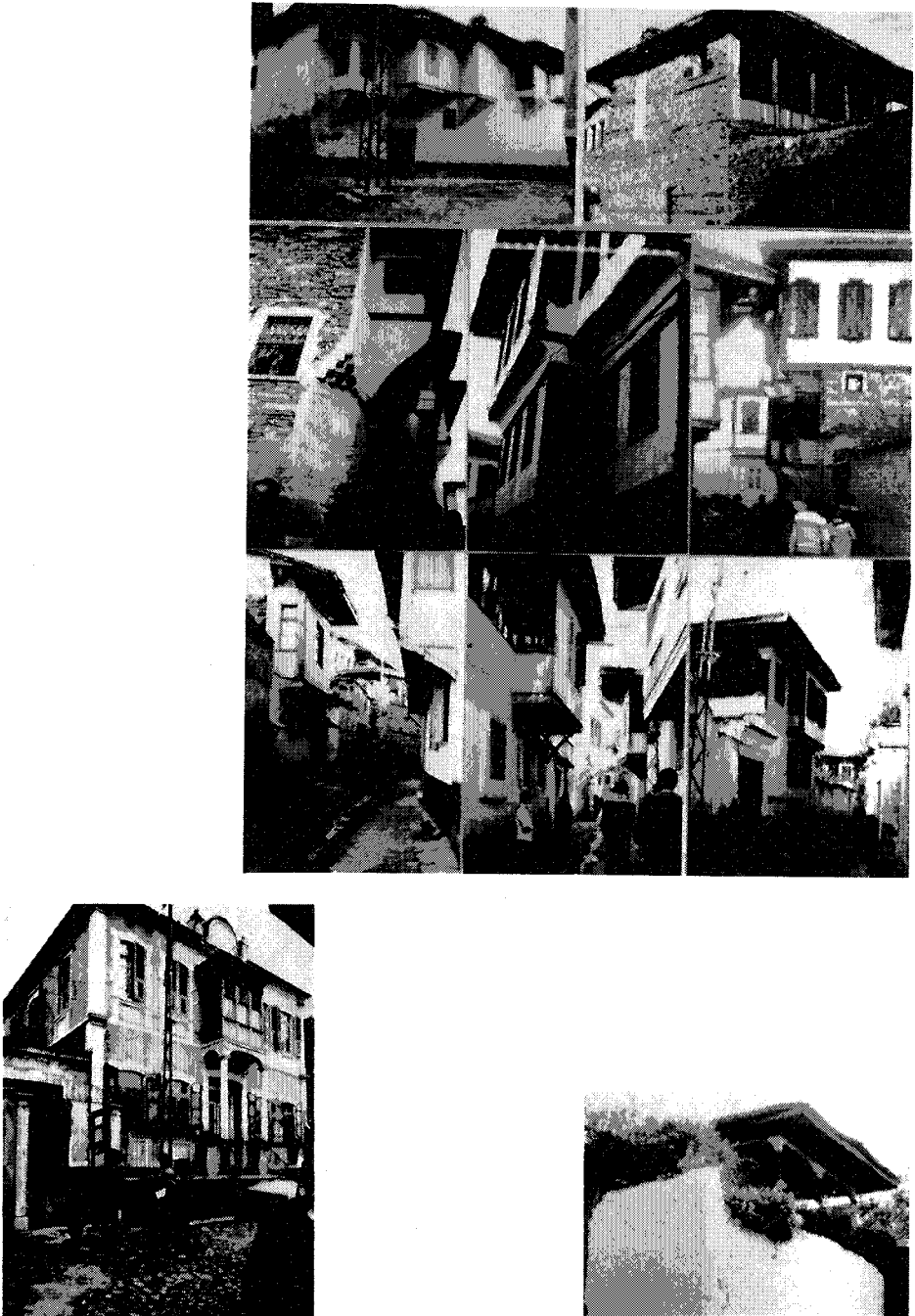


Fig. 3 The Turkish House: Houses and Streets at Kula, Western Anatolia (top) - a Greek House of a different concept at Kula (bottom left). Another Turkish House at Mugla, South Western Anatolia (bottom right).

La maison turque: maisons et rues de Kula, Anatolie occidentale (en haut) - une maison grecque d'une conception différente, à Kula (en bas à gauche). Une autre maison turque à Mugla, Anatolie du sud-ouest (en bas à droite).

3. Second Case Study: the Greek House

Nine kilometres East of the Western Anatolian city of Izmir (Smyrna) is the town called Buca (Boudja), founders and occupants of which were the Greek minority of the Ottoman Empire. The core of the town still exists, and its houses built by this minority between 1860's and early decades of the 20th century, keep their architectural identity.

Greek settlements alongside the Aegean coastland of Anatolia share certain architectural characteristics, although they may show some local differences.

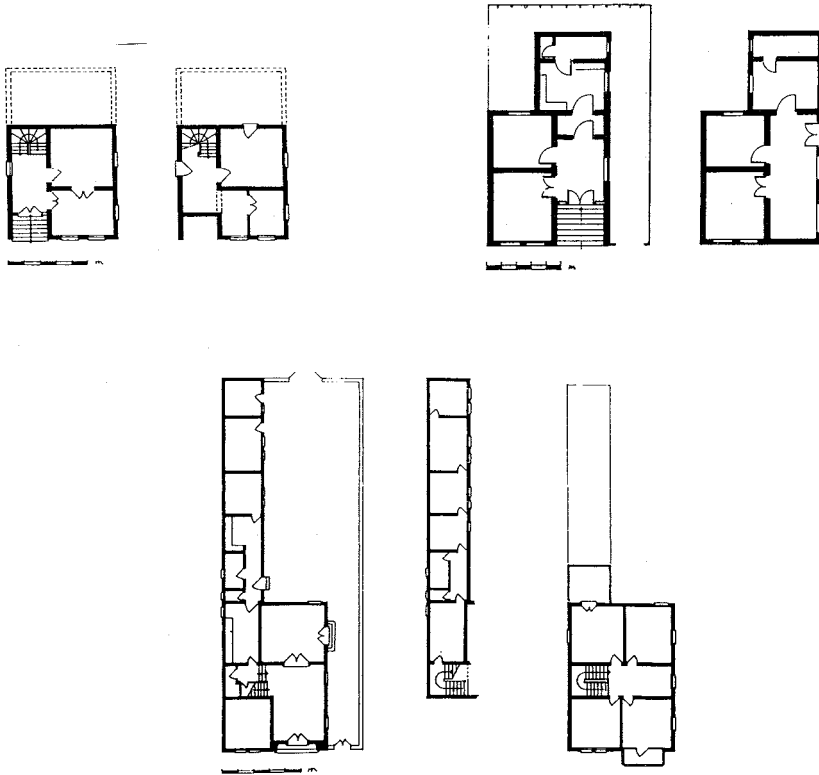


Fig. 4 The Greek house: Houses of Buca. Typical plans of houses with basement floor (top), typical plan of two-storey house with balcony (bottom).

La maison grecque: des maisons à Buca. Plan typique de maisons avec un sous-sol (en haut), et de maisons à deux étages avec un balcon (en bas).

Different from the organic character of the Turkish House, the Greek House as illustrated in the houses of Buca can be summarized as having a "Miesian" rational design. Instead of following the functional constraints, these seem to rule the design. Manierism, individual identity is rejected. Simplicity of forms suggests that "they are not designed to be interesting, but to be good". Once the decision is made on what is good, it is repeatedly used. Houses can almost be categorized into a few typological

groups, each sharing common features of planning and façade treatment. Nearly all houses of the settlement give the impression that they were selected from a catalogue. Façade elements such as doors, windows, balconies are somehow standardized with minor variations. One or two storey houses are either detached singles, or grouped to make attached twins or terrace blocks. "Front façades" are either flush with the street line or set back a few metres with a front garden. Façades of the rectangular prism that make the house can hardly be distinguished from each other in character. Climatic factors affecting the orientation of the house are ignored. Openings are small and equally distributed on all façades, and construction material is stone which has a high coefficient of insulation. Doors, windows, balconies always appear symmetrical on vertical axes. In summary, this formal appearance is a dominant feature of the Greek House.

Another dominant feature which sharply contrasts with that of the Turkish House is its extrovert character. Unlike the Turkish House, the Greek House is organically and directly linked to the street. Segregation of sexes in the Greek community can hardly be compared to the Moslem community. The street itself is the communal meeting place which extends itself into the house at ground floor level. The main door opens directly into a hall, which together with the adjacent rooms, forms the daily living areas of the house. Rooms of the upper floor which normally has the same layout in most two-storey houses, function as bedrooms.

The town of Buca has a grid-iron pattern. Blocks are subdivided into regular rectangular sites with few exceptions in parallel with the Western towns of the time. Traditional houses of Greek settlements alongside the Aegean coastland of Anatolia, like Buca houses, are mostly rectangular blocks of stone construction with small openings. This may be one way of controlling climatic factors. Furthermore Christian Greeks seem to be more apt to adopt the Christian European way of thinking than Moslem Turks. Consequently housing architecture of Buca may be considered as a more developed version of Western Anatolian vernacular Greek housing tradition under the influence of European culture (Erpi, F., 1987).

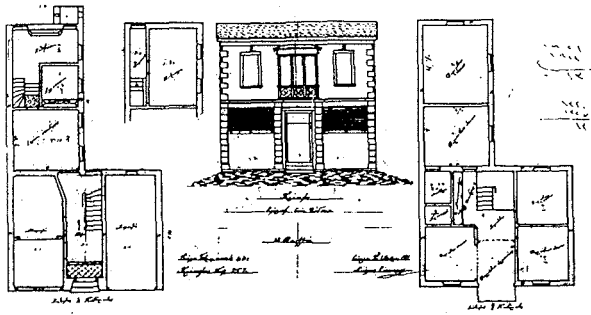


Fig. 5a Original working drawing of a Buca house, dated 1911.

Next page : Standardization of façade elements: balconies, timber construction, prefabricated cast iron supports (top). Doors (middle).

Dessin original d'une maison de Buca, datant de 1911.

Page suivante : Standardisation des éléments de la façade: balcons, construction de bois, supports de fer-forgé préfabriqué (en haut). Portes (au milieu).

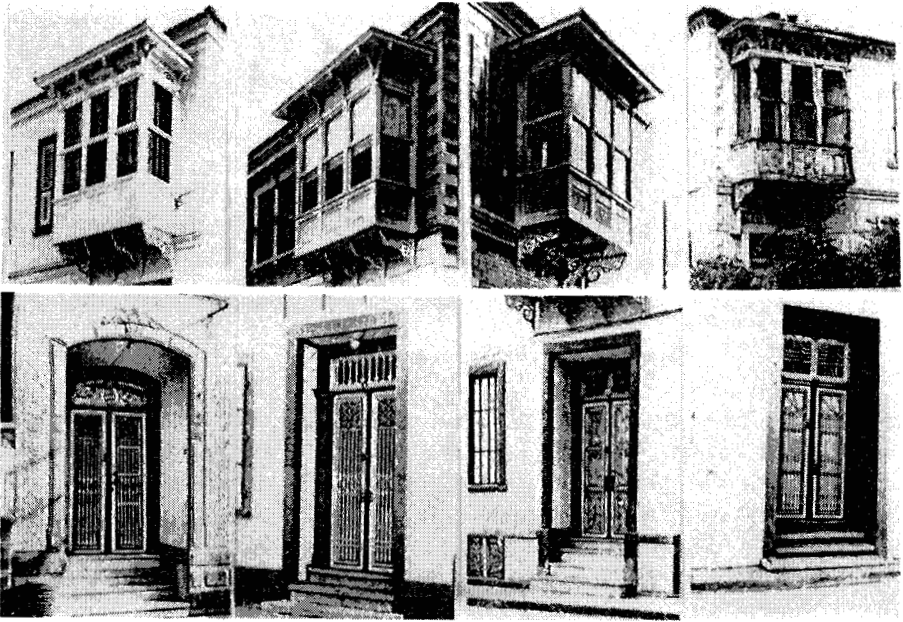


Fig 5b

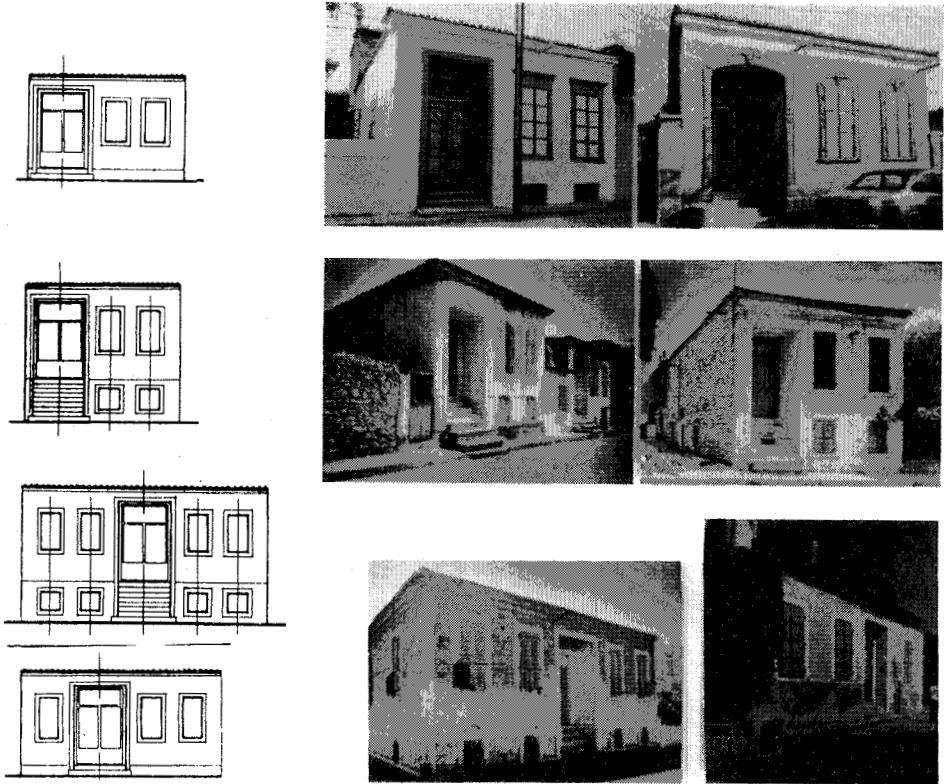


Fig. 6 Houses with basement floor.
Maisons avec un sous-sol.

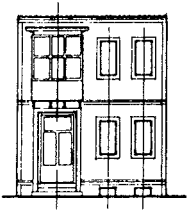
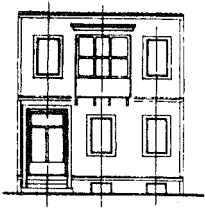


Fig. 7 Two-storey houses with balcony. Bottom: a street in Izmir with terrace houses sharing the same façade organization.

Maisons à deux étages avec un balcon. En bas: une rue d'Izmir dont les maisons à terrasse ont toutes une façade organisée de la même manière.

4. Third Case Study: the Levantine Residences

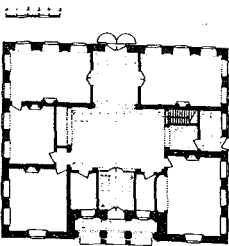
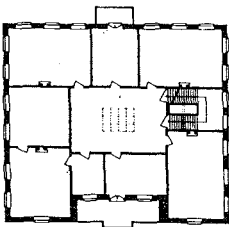
Levant is a general name (from French "lever" = to rise, sunrise, meaning East) for the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean. It is also used for Asia Minor. A group of traders and their families, subjects of so-called "Big Powers" of Europe (such as Britain, France, Italy or Holland) that settled in Western Anatolia during the 19th century, dominating as a powerful economic group under Ottoman rule, are known as Levantines. History of these Levantines goes back to the 16th century when Ottoman Empire was a political, economic and military power over the Middle East, Northern Africa and nearly half of Europe. Economic privileges offered to some European states at that time, with the decline of the Empire and strengthening of the European states, reversed its balance, and these privileges known as "capitulations" in the hands of the "Big Powers" of Europe did have adverse effects to accelerate the Empire's collapse. Levantines played an important role in manipulating these economic activities, and in the meantime making considerable profits (Erpi, 1975).

The word Levantine is also attributed to another minority group of Anatolia, known as the "fresh water Franks". (Men of European origin used to be called "Franks" by Turks.) George E. Kirk describes this group as:

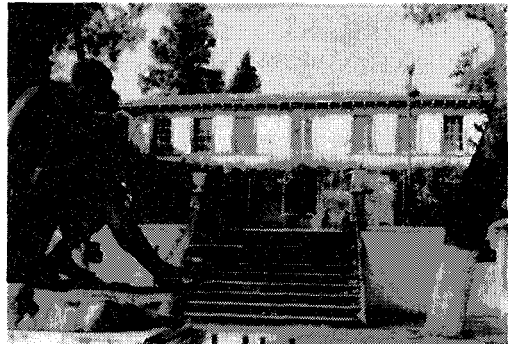
A number of Christian Arabs and a few Moslem modernists were seduced from their cultural tradition by the European education provided by the French mission schools and became "Levantines", living in two worlds or more at once, without belonging to either; ... no longer having a standard of values of their own, unable to create but able only to imitate; and so not even to imitate correctly, since that also needs a certain originality in the penetrating diagnosis of Albert Hourani (Kirk, 1948, 104-105).

These words fit very well to describe this group of Levantines except that those who lived in Western Anatolia were not exactly Christian Arabs nor Moslem modernists, but rather Roman Catholic Europeans of Latin origin, settled and lived for many generations in this region. They made their living as good collaborators of the other group of Levantine families.

In the same town of Buca, Levantine families of both kinds, and their domestic architecture are the subject of this study. The word "residence" suits better to describe these buildings as they are more than just "houses". Mostly British, the Levantine sector of Buca apparently lived a "high society" life. 19th century Europe's grandiose images reflect in these residences with eclectic façade compositions, ornamented staircase halls, parlours, galleries, servants' quarters and specially large, tastefully designed gardens isolated from outside life with high walls.



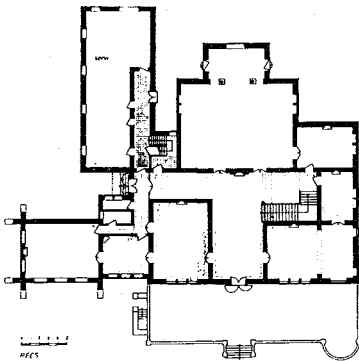
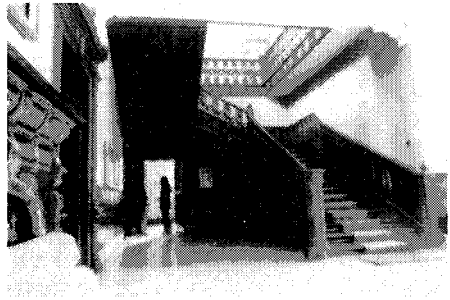
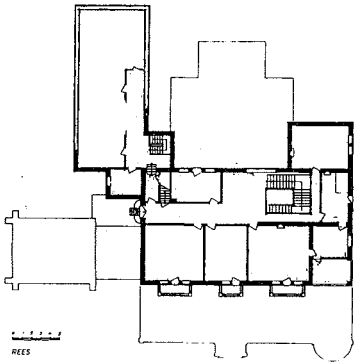
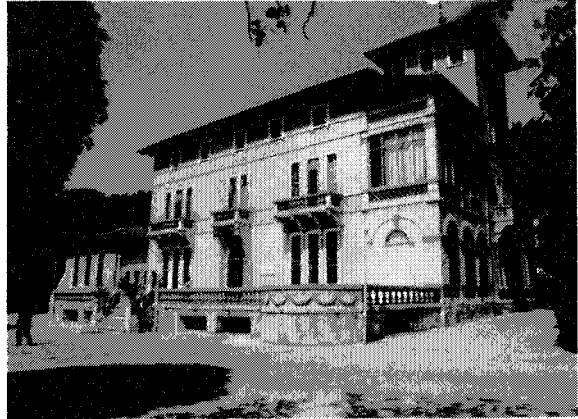
BALTACI



Top: Front and back façades with different expressions. A view from the artistically organized garden .
 Estimated date of construction: 1850's. The first owner Baltaci, possibly an Orthodox Greek and highly cultivated man participated in attempts to found the first archaeological museum in Turkey. In 1863 - according to one record - the sultan of the time (Abdülaziz) was entertained here, from a trip to Egypt in his stay in Izmir. The second owner after 1890's was an art loving Armenian, Ispartaliyan who decorated the garden with landscape elements and sculptures.

En haut: les façades avant et arrière et leurs différences. Vue prise à partir d'un jardin décoré artistiquement.
 Date estimée de construction: années 1850. Le premier propriétaire, Baltaci, était sans doute un Grec orthodoxe et une personne très cultivée. Il participa aux efforts faits pour fonder le premier musée archéologique de Turquie. Selon un document, en 1863 le sultan de l'époque (Abdülaziz) fut reçu ici, alors qu'il séjournait à Izmir au retour d'un voyage en Egypte. Après 1890, le second propriétaire de la résidence fut un Arménien amateur d'art, Ispartaliyan; il décora le jardin en le structurant et en y plaçant des sculptures.

Fig. 8 Levantine Residences: Baltaci (later Ispartaliyan) residence.
 Résidences levantines: résidence Baltaci (plus tard Ispartaliyan).

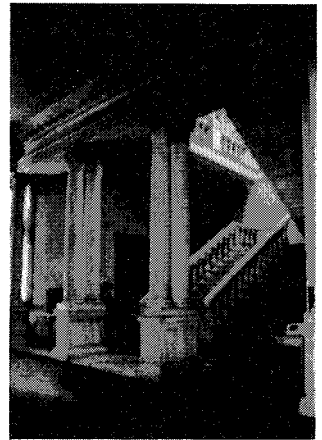
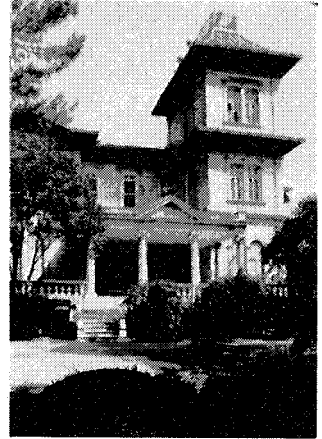
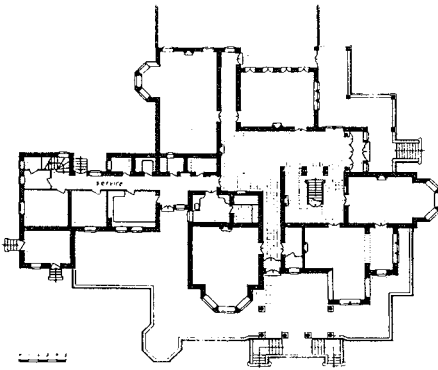
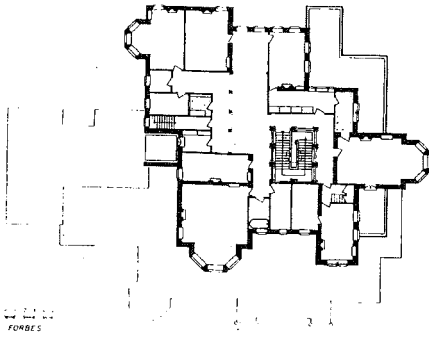


Estimated date: late 1890's. Residence of an influential British family of Izmir until late 1930's. Façade treatment and interior decoration reflect an orderly taste.

Date estimée de construction: années 1890. Résidence d'une importante famille britannique d'Izmir jusque dans les années 1930. La façade et la décoration intérieure reflète un certain goût de l'ordre.

Fig. 9 Rees residence: main hall (centre), library (bottom).

Résidence Rees: hall principal (au milieu), bibliothèque (en bas).

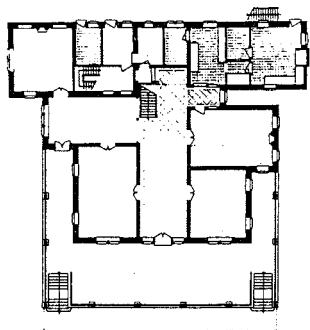
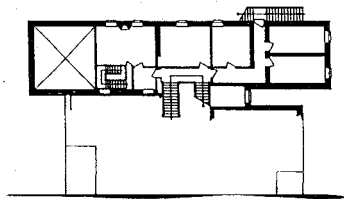
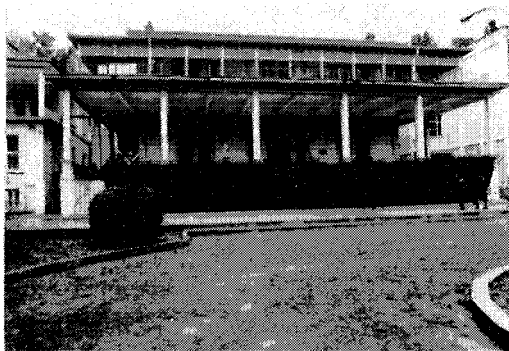
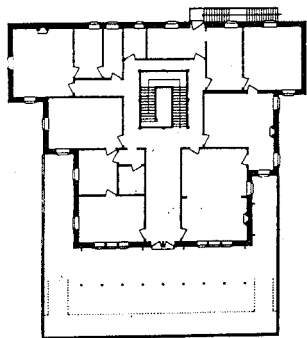


Forbes was a British trader. The building set on a hilltop has a pretentious character. Apart from eclectic composition of the main façade in particular, the planning organization displays some illogical settings.

Forbes était un commerçant anglais. Le bâtiment, situé au sommet d'une colline, a un caractère prétentieux. La façade principale a une composition éclectique et l'organisation des pièces n'est pas particulièrement logique.

Fig. 10 Forbes residence, dated 1911.

Résidence Forbes, datant de 1911.

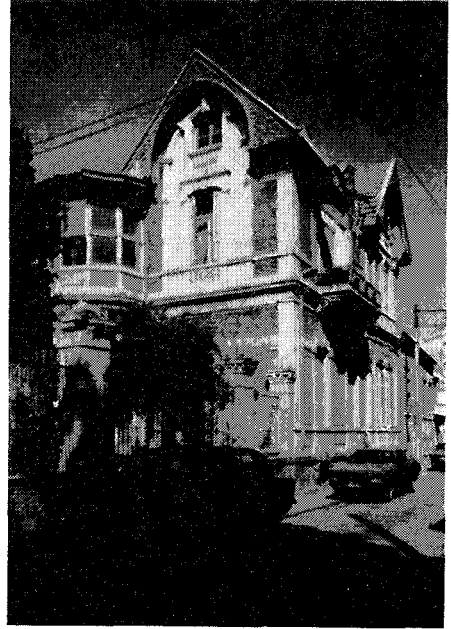


De Jongh is another British family. The date of construction of the residence is not known. The colonaded front veranda (top) is presumably a late addition.

Les de Jongh étaient une famille anglaise. On ne connaît pas la date de construction de la résidence. On pense que la véranda à colonnes (en haut) a été ajoutée plus tard.

Fig. 11 De Jongh residence.

La résidence de Jongh.



Although the building is known with this name, it is not clear that the Russo family was the original owner. Yet there is evidence that it belonged to a family of Latin origin. Elements ranging from Baroque to Art Nouveau decorate the façades.

En dépit de son nom, il n'est pas certain que le premier propriétaire de ce bâtiment ait été la famille Russo. Il semble pourtant que la famille qui le possédait devait être d'origine latine. Des éléments allant du Baroque à l'Art nouveau ornent les façades.

Fig. 12 Russo (or Rousseau?) residence.

La résidence Russo (ou Rousseau?).

Ottoman rule presented an amalgamation of various cultures under the same administrative organization. People of the conquered lands were left to preserve their ethnic, religious, linguistic and social identity. In general while Moslem Turks took up jobs as officers in the army and civil service or occupied the farming sector, trade was left into the hands of Christian and Jewish ethnic groups. Amongst them Greeks and Armenians dominated as builders. Many royal palaces even mosques of Istanbul, for instance, were designed by the members of an Armenian family of architects officially appointed by the sultans during the second half of the 19th century.

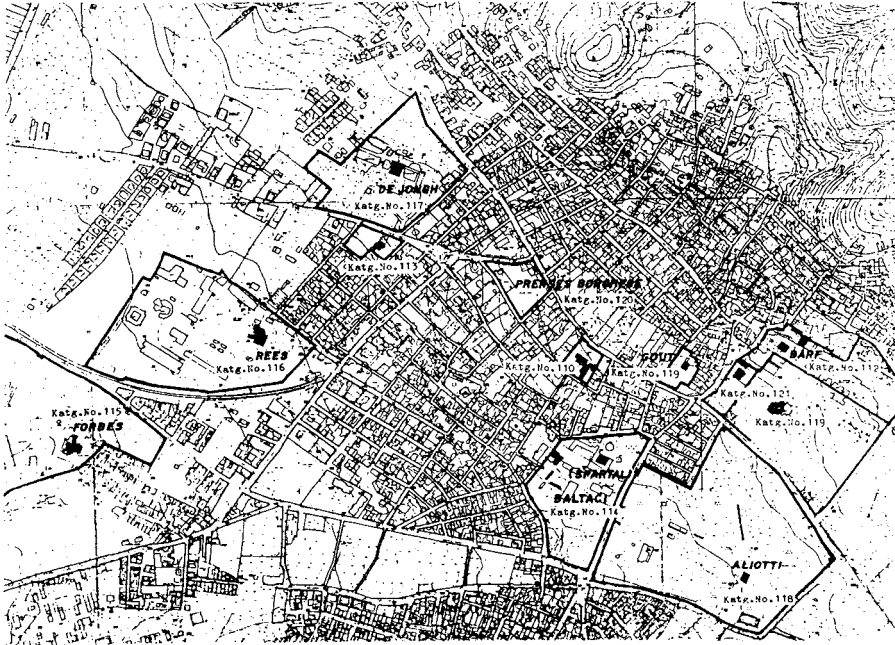


Fig. 13 Plan of the town of Buca. Levantine residences placed in large gardens are alien to the order of the town.

Plan de la ville de Buca. Les résidences levantines situées dans de grands jardins s'intègrent mal à l'ordre urbain.

In the Balkans, a Builders' Guild was formed by the Greek builders and their work extended over an area from Albania to Anatolia, setting traditions that lasted until the collapse of the Empire (Walkley, 1990, 113-114). Although it is widely accepted that the building activity was mostly handled by the Greek members of the Guild yet we have evidence that they did not always follow traditions leading to a certain style but also produced houses with different concepts of architecture to satisfy the varying demands of the clients. In many towns, houses can be readily detected whether they belonged to a Moslem or Christian family, through their planning organization and façade treatment. (See: Greek house at Kula, Western Anatolia.) In the case of Greek houses of Buca a uniform style is dominant as the population of the town was composed by Greek families.

Levantine residences on the other hand exhibit individual tastes rather than communal traditions as the Levantine community, unlike the Greek population of the town was composed, of Christian families whose nationalities, religious sects, social customs and languages varied from each other. They segregated themselves from the local community as the town plan suggests.

5. Conclusion

While the architectural style characteristic of the first two cases presented is consistent within each group - 'Turkish' and 'Greek' - and reflects communities with more homogeneous cultures, Levantine residences exhibit an inconsistent variety of

styles. This is in fact their specificity and perhaps even their style. They reflect the heterogeneity of their owners, despite the fact that the residences are in the same town and were built within the same span of time. Obviously, as the Levantine residences examined here are more lavishly built than the 'Turkish' and 'Greek' houses, this may have contributed to their being a more personal expression of their owners' taste. Yet, it is rather interesting to note the remarkable variety of architectural style within the same area. Thus, it can be said that the term 'local', in this context and from the mid-19th century, refers to three different cultural backgrounds that are all established in the region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BARFF, H.V. (1951-1952), Boudja, Past and Present. *Candlesticks*, 1 (1951-52), No.6 (Izmir).
- BEHRENDT, W.C. (1957), "Modern Building" (Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York).
- BEYRU, R. (1973), "18. ve 19. Yuzyllarda Izmir" (Izmir).
- CEZAR, M. (1971), "Sanatta Batiya Açilis ve Osman Hamdi" (Türkiye Is Bank., Istanbul).
- DAVIS, W.S. (1922), "A Short History of the Near East" (MacMillan Co., New York).
- DOXIADIS, C.A. (1968, 1st edition 1963), "Architecture in Transition" (Hutchinson of London, London).
- ELDEM, S.H. (1968), "Türk Evi Plan Tipleri" (İTÜ, Istanbul).
- Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 5, Vol.13.
- ERPI, F. (1987), "Buca'da Konut Mimarisi" (O.D.T.Ü. Ankara).
- ERPI, F. (1975), Izmir'de Levanten Mimarisi, *Mimarlık*, (January 1975) (Ankara).
- KARARAS, N. (1955), "Bornova" (Athens) (in Greek).
- KARARAS, N. (1962), "Boudja" (Athens) (in Greek).
- KIRK, G.E. (1948), "A Short History of the Middle East" (Methuen and Co. Ltd., London).
- KUBAN, D. (1982), "Türk ve İslam Sanati Üzerine Denemeler" (Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayinlari, Istanbul).
- RAPOPORT, A. (1969), "House Form and Culture" (Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.).
- SLAARS, B.F. (1868), "Etude sur Smyrne" (Smyrne). Turkish Translation: Arapzade Cevdet (1908), "Izmir Hakkinda Tetkikat" (Izmir).
- SOLOMONIDIS, H.S. (1957), "Smyrna" (Athens) (in Greek).
- TURNER, W. (1920, 1st edition 1816), "Journal of a Tour in the Levant" (London).
- WALKLEY, R.B. (1990), Life-Making in the Balkans: The Legacy of the Builders Guild. *IAPS 11, Culture, Space and History*, 4 (July 1990) (Ankara).
- WITTMAN, W. (1971, 1st edition 1803), "Travels in Turkey, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, 1799-1801" (Amos Press, New York).