

The Restoration of a Wood-Frame House in Anatolia, The Yakup Ağa Mansion

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Abstract A significant part of traditional dwellings in Turkey consists of houses built with wood-frame technique. The building of wood-frame houses continued until the 1950s. Up to the 1990s, the preferred method of restoration in Turkey of wooden buildings, which have been disappearing very quickly due to many reasons, had been to demolish and to rebuild them in reinforced concrete maintaining their outside appearance. Restoration experts have constantly explained that producing copies devoid of all their original values is contrary to the spirit of “preservation” and nowadays the obligation to restore wooden buildings by using the method of wood-frame building has been introduced; however, despite the introduction of the wood-frame method the demolition and reconstruction of wooden buildings have continued.

The Yakup Ağa Mansion was built in 1911 in Gerze/ Sinop The building, which was set on stone cellar walls, in three storeys with a wooden frame, is made up of two quarters. As time went by, the supporting frame weakened, leading to a partial collapse of the mansion, with the result that a project for the reconstruction of the mansion in reinforced concrete was approved, but never carried out. The mansion was expropriated in 2000 and restored in 2006. The restoration was done by paying attention to the preservation of original architectural elements, and the wood-frame was reinforced with partial renovations.

In this paper, the consolidation, completion and reconstruction interventions carried out to preserve the wooden mansion will be analysed, with the aim of determining the degree of conservation of the aesthetic, historical evidence and authenticity values of the building.

Keywords: Turkey, wooden house, wood frame technique, consolidation, reconstruction

Introduction

A great part of traditional dwellings in Turkey comprises of houses built via timber framing. The earliest examples of timber frame houses built commonly in Anatolia and Balkans located within the borders of Ottoman Empire in the past belong to 17th century. Construction of timber frame houses built through perfusing the wooden bearers by the help of thin laths or covering them with woods by filling the gaps of them or leaving them empty was continued until 1950s. Generally, reconstruction method was preferred in “restoration” works until 2000s in reparation of frame houses rapidly falling into ruin due to reasons such as fires, neglect, intentional destruction and unearned income. Reconstruction of frame houses “in accordance with the former facade characteristics” in a different plan scheme through reinforced construction system by destroying frame houses generally included in 2nd group construction scope or considered as inclined to be ruined for being in state of unrepair led to the destruction of traditional environments. In addition to these implementations, buildings known to exist in the past were rebuilt though there was not sufficient information and document. At the present day, reparations of wooden buildings are allowed just on condition that original plan scheme, material and construction technique are kept, as a result of constant mention of inconveniences of reconstruction method by restoration experts (The resolution no. 660 dated 05.11.1999).

Location and Short History of Gerze Settlement

Gerze is a coastal town of Sinop City on a peninsula in the coastline of Black Sea. It is thought that the name of Gerze - a city settled from early Hittite period on- in the ancient period was Carusa (Kalyoncu 2008) meaning “protruding city/peninsula” (Umar 1993). Traditional texture of the city -called as Gerze from Ottoman period on- made up of wooden buildings (Fig. 1, Fig. 2) was destroyed completely due to fires breaking out in 1885, 1948 and 1956. 830 houses and many stores were burnt due to the fire breaking out in 1956, and just 60 houses survived the fire (Kalyoncu 2008). A new development plan was prepared for the city experiencing a great immigration and housing problem after the fire, and 900 houses were built in Gerze between 1956 and 1959 (Fig. 3). Traditional settlement with organic texture was replaced by a grid plan modern city made up of one or two storey, double and row houses with a garden (Yerebasmaz 2006). At the present day, 24 wooden houses in the settlement are in the scope of cultural assets to be protected.



Figure 1: Gerze, before 1956 Figure2: Yakup Ağa, before 1956 Figure 3: Gerze, after 1956

Yakup Ağa Mansion

Yakup Ağa Mansion is one of the few wooden houses ensuring the link of settlement with the past. It was built by the person known as Yakup Ağa in the place called as Taksim Square in the city center in the beginning of 20th century (1911). This building coming to forefront more compared to other buildings surviving the fire thanks to its location, greatness, the number of storeys and internal – external decorations was registered in 1978. Its survey and restoration project suggesting building to be reconstructed via reinforced system and to be used as a boarding house was approved in 1989, but it could not be implemented. The mansion wanted to be destroyed by local authorities for many times as it “created danger” was disappropriated by Ministry of Culture in 2000; projects relating to it were prepared again in 2004, and it was repaired without destruction in 2006 under the responsibility of the architect (Ali Kemal Yalçın) and under the control of Municipality of Gerze (The Board of Samsun’s decision no. 23, dated 07.10.2004). The building was allocated to Sinop Special Provincial Administration in 2007. Just the ground floor of the building thought to be functionalized as cultural center / ethnographic museum is used, but its upper floors cannot be used since their decoration reparations have not been completed yet.

Architectural Features of the Mansion Basement floor of the mansion was allocated to service, production and trade activities while upper floors were allocated to living spaces. In the basement floor, there are stores on the side of the street, and woodshed, stable and kitchen places on the side of garden. It is thought that the mansion is made up of two interrelated different quarters could have been built for use of two married siblings or for *harem* and *selamlık* (for women and men) (Fig. 4). Each quarter in 1st and 2nd storeys of the building having external and covered hall plan scheme comprises of two rooms facing to the street and a hall facing to the garden; and there are stairs and toilets in short edges of the halls facing to the outside. Relationship between the quarters is established through halls (Fig. 5). In addition, in the ground floor, there is a room emplaced between halls providing the transition to the quarters via one distinct entrance hall for each section.

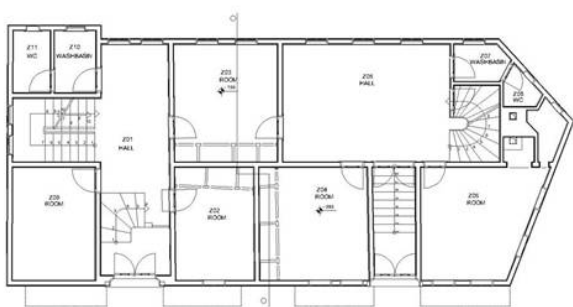


Figure 4: Ground-floor plan

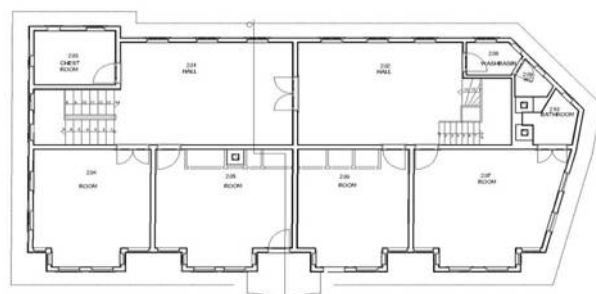


Figure 5: 2nd floor plan

The most magnificent front of the building is the north front facing to the street (Fig. 6, Fig. 8). In this front perceived as three storied due to the land slope, each room overhangs to the street through bay windows in 1st and 2nd storey levels, and there is a balcony with wrought iron guardrails between bay windows in the front axle in 2nd storey level. Roof of the balcony with triangular pediments carried by wooden posts is located on headed studs. Windows have three parts and sliding wing. In this front, top and bottom ledges of 1st and 2nd storey windows are decorated, and keystone motif is seen in the middle of top window ledges. There are decorations made on the plaster between the bay windows in the north façade and in the balcony. Entrance doors of the building have two wings and skylight. Also, there are wooden mouldings between the floors and corner borders on the corners. Other fronts of the building are more simple and plain (Fig. 7, Fig. 9).



Figure 6: Northern façade survey of Yakup Ağa

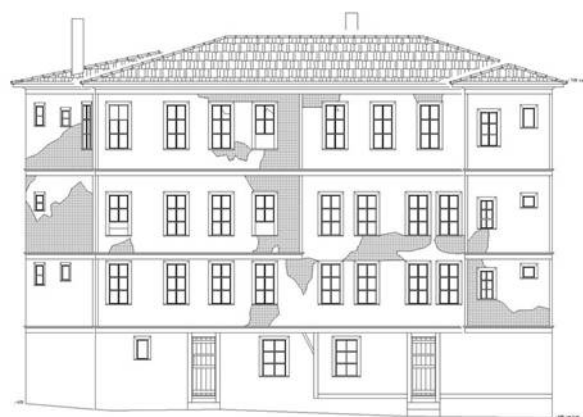


Figure 7: Southern façade survey of Yakup Ağa

Building based on stone foundations was built as four storeys by means of timber framing method. There are also stone walls in patches as bearers between timber frame walls. All walls of basement, 1st and 2nd storeys were built in the form of timber frame; and interior and exterior surfaces of bearer studs put at certain intervals were plastered with lime plaster by the help of plaster laths hammered horizontally. Floor coverings and ceilings were formed with wooden boards hammered on timber stringers. 1st and 2nd storey walls of the building were ornamented with engraving decorations (Fig. 10). There are vegetable and geometric patterned decorations in ceilings of corner rooms of the 2nd storey, and also there are landscape pictures in corner room in the west.



Figure 8: North Façade



Figure 9: West Façade



Figure 10: Ceiling (207)

Situation of the Mansion before Reparation Periodic maintenance and simple reparations of the building left by losing its social and cultural status in 1980s could not be made since it had many owners and these owners could not come to an agreement (Fig. 11). Destruction of the building increased more in the period when it was not used; and partly collapses occurred. The balcony and its roof existing until 1988 and some parts of the rooms behind the balcony were destroyed in 2000s (Fig. 12, Fig. 13) South front of the mansion fell into ruin from basement floor level to roof level; wooden roof material decayed; and it was fortified from various places to prevent it from being demolished. Before the reparation, a great part of the plasters in the west front taking prevailing wind and rain peeled off; a great part of bearer studs and plaster laths holding the plaster decayed; and cracks and collapses emerged from place to place due to the decay of wooden material in internal parts. For that reason, local government applied to the related preservation board, mentioned that it created danger against the public health and so it must be destroyed. In this way, local government was taken a decision that Yakup Ağa Mansion must pull down because of insecure building.



Figure 11: Mansion, 1940



Figure 12: Mansion, 1988



Figure 13: Mansion, 2005

Restoration Phase Restoration of the building was started in 2006. West exterior wall, a great part of south exterior wall and northwest part of north exterior wall including also the balcony which were all in a structurally bad situation were rebuilt in a timber framing way by suspending original ceiling and floor coverings. As a way of intervention, consolidation action was preferred in the west part and interior walls of the building; healthy sections were preserved (Fig. 14, Fig. 15); and part replacement was made in decaying elements (Fig. 16). Floor beams were strengthened with new beams put to them; window woodworks were renewed in compliance with original window type; doors were preserved (Fig. 17) and wooden roof was rebuilt completely. During the reparation process, decorated walls and ceilings were covered and taken under protection, and partly destroyed and rebuilt sections due to reparation were plastered in a way forming base to the decoration (Fig. 18). Architect taking responsibility of reparation mentioned that reparation and completion of the decoration referred to a different area of expertise, and preferred not to make reparation in engraving /hand-carved decorations (Fig. 18, Fig. 19).



Figure 14: During the restoration

Figure 15: After restoration

Figure 16: During the restoration



Figure 17: After restoration

Figure 18: After restoration

Figure 19: After restoration

Restoration Evaluation In restoration of Yakup Ağa Mansion, primary target was preserving the building without destructing it wholly, and this target was achieved, though partly. However, preservation of more original materials did not become possible due to the deficiencies starting in the phase of project designing. It is seen that before the reparation, analytical building survey involving period, structure, material and deterioration analyses of the building was not made, decorations were not documented via photograph and stamping method, and parts to be rebuilt, parts to be preserved and ways of intervention were not mentioned in the restoration project. Due to these deficiencies, the parts experiencing greatest destruction in the reparation made at the discretion of the masters came to be decorated walls. Even though it was possible to separate parts which had to be structurally renewed but which had their decorated plasters on them from timber frame and to preserve them in a different place and then to put them on renewed wall, decorations were considered as unimportant elements which could be formed again (Fig. 20, Fig. 21, Fig. 23, Fig. 24). Original color tone was not paid attention in painting the ceilings (Fig. 22, Fig. 25), and also original covering dimensions were not paid attention in floor covering.

Historical buildings' sustaining their lives together with their original features depends on their being equipped with proper functions. Therefore, the function of cultural center/ethnographic museum given to Yakup Ağa Mansion is a proper decision in the sense that it is not too hard for the building and it does not deteriorate its spatial integrity. However, during the reparation, no arrangement was made with regard to the illumination, heating fire installations and display elements required by this function.

Conclusion

At the present day, there is a problem regarding preserving the wooden buildings with their original features in many regions of Turkey. This is because the consciousness that wooden buildings are indispensable components of historical environments as much as monumental buildings was not formed completely in the society. Even though wooden building reparations appropriate for modern preservation criteria are made in big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara, wooden buildings widespread in small settlements in Anatolia are ignored due to desire for modernization, and their reparations are not attached necessary importance.

In this sense, an important step was taken with restoration of Yakup Ağa Mansion to indicate that a wooden building can be preserved without being pulled down. To evaluate this restoration in terms of

general preservation principles, integrity principle was ensured in the restoration through the reconstruction of destructed balcony, but no clear difference could be formed between new material and old material. The principle of the preservation of period supplements was not of discussion since there were not supplements relating to different periods in the building, originality value of the building was preserved in terms of plan scheme, material and construction technique, but the workmanship value has faded in rebuilt sections and in some places of the decorated surfaces. It is seen that aesthetical anxiety regarded in reparation of exterior fronts was not paid attention in interior spaces, particularly in ceiling coloring and placement of illumination elements. Economic value of the building which is the most attractive factor in preservation of cultural heritage was preserved, and the building was wanted to be used for the benefit of local residents and for a function which will enrich the lives of these people.

All in all, reparation of Yakup Ağa Mansion indicated that a wooden structured building is durable and enduring in spite of the verdict of demolition. From now on, reparation of the decoration will be completed, the maintenance will be made periodically, the building will be used with the given function, and its life time will be prolonged.



Figure 20: Before restoration



Figure 21: Before restoration



Figure 22: Before restoration



Figure 23: After restoration



Figure 24: After restoration



Figure 25: After restoration

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