



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Preservation initiatives for the truncated pyramid-shaped traditional houses of Siirt, Turkey



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Abstract

The traditional houses of the residential areas in and around Siirt in the southeastern region of Turkey are notable because of their interesting forms. The most successful examples are the "truncated pyramidal-shaped houses" that have existed for centuries and are unique to the locality; however, these forms are demolished rapidly. In this study, the structures of small-scale settlements in Siirt province and its environs have been evaluated to highlight the cultural aspects of the region. The subject of this research is to investigate the design principles of the rural houses constructed in vernacular style to raise international awareness of the need to preserve vernacular architecture. Surviving examples have been examined in terms of multiple case approach by their forms, spatial compositions, changes in their forms over time, their layouts in urban and rural areas, the construction techniques used to produce them from material production through implementation, the composition of the living space and its uses, their differences or similarities to other houses in the region and their aesthetic details. The research reveals that the design principles of traditional rural architecture offer the use of local material and techniques in a unique way that promote highlights to the future.

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1. Introduction

Throughout history, the evolution of habitation has been closely related to the surrounding environment. Tudoran and Dumitrescu (2013) stated that habitation, which depends on the geographical region and the available technology, moves through stages that result in certain

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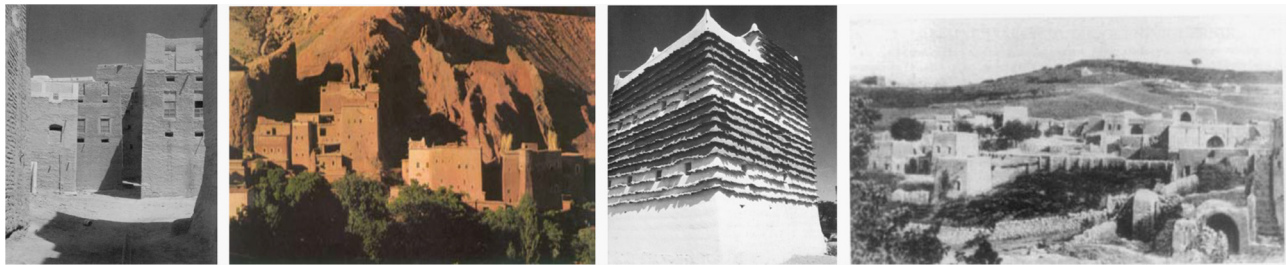


Fig. 1 Architectural form examples from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Siirt.

functional schemes, thereby generating architecture typical of these specific regions. The dwellings in Siirt and its surroundings share some formal similarities to Arabian housing forms in North Africa and the Middle East (Dethier, 1982; Ragette, 2006). However, adobe is the main construction material in these regions. The usage of gypsum mortar and gypsum plaster is widespread in Anatolia and in other regions of the world, particularly in the countries in Central Asia, such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan (Çigdem and Sedat, 2012). However, although the usage of gypsum material is similar in these regions, the buildings have different forms (Fig. 1).

Siirt, a city in southeastern Turkey, and the surrounding residential areas are characterized by traditional houses built in an interesting manner. The main structural materials of this building type, which exists solely in this region in Turkey, are stone and gypsum. The initial date when this extraordinary building type was first encountered in Siirt and in the surrounding area is unknown. However, these houses have not yet been properly investigated; previous studies on these houses in Siirt were limited in terms of both photos and plan drawings. The reasons for creating this building type were examined in the present study. These houses are greatly appreciated by local people because of their special features that keep the house warm in winter and cool throughout summer. An annex added to the building, a consequence of form changes over time, was also investigated in this study. In this study, an environmental survey was conducted in the area within the villages of Tillo, Bağtepe, Dereyamaç (Fersaf), (Tom), Çatılı (Sinep), and Çınarlısu (Hatrant) to research the construction techniques and materials of rural vernacular architecture of Siirt. These villages in the area used the same construction technique and materials. However, this study focused on Tillo because of the well-preserved construction pattern, and information could be collected from villagers, local masters, and local authorities (Fig. 2).

2. Method

This work studied the region surrounding the city of Siirt, where the truncated pyramid-shaped vernacular architecture form was dominantly implemented in 2009 and 2011. This study focused on the town of Siirt and its surroundings to determine, document, and analyze the design principles and elements of the traditional housing architecture of the 19th century.

Little information can be found in the literature because these constructions, which belong to a building tradition, are rarely used at present. The authors aim to promote the

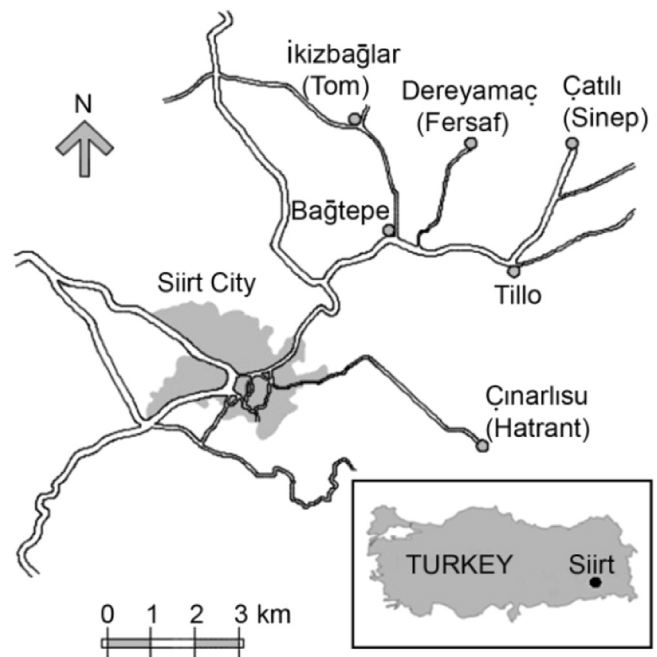


Fig. 2 A map of Siirt and the villages that were investigated.



Fig. 3 Siirt (1935), from the archive of the Governorship of Siirt.

rediscovery of a Turkish culture heritage symbol; thus, the main features of these structures were investigated, and some important research questions were answered.

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