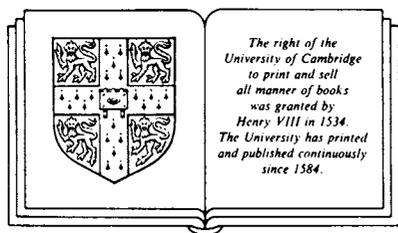


# Men of modest substance

House owners and house property in  
seventeenth-century Ankara and Kayseri

SURAIYA FAROQHI

Middle East Technical University,  
Ankara



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## Introduction

The term 'Ottoman architecture' evokes the image of stately structures, built mainly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries upon the initiative of the reigning Sultans, members of their families, and high-ranking public officials. İstanbul, Bursa and Edirne contain the most monumental specimens of this type of architecture, mainly mosques, theological schools, fountains, and structures used for commercial purposes. Outside the borders of modern Turkey, the downtown area of Aleppo still bears witness to the construction activities of Ottoman provincial administrators, and Damascus or Sarajevo also feature many buildings characteristic of an Ottoman city.<sup>1</sup> In fact, most towns which at one point in their existence formed part of the Ottoman Empire still contain at least one mosque or public bath representing the 'classical' Ottoman style of the sixteenth century. Large blocks of stone, perfectly regular in shape, a central dome covered with lead, and elaborate stalactite arrangements, may be mentioned among the most obvious characteristics of this type of architecture.<sup>2</sup>

Next to these monumental buildings, the domestic architecture of Ottoman towns has always figured as a poor relation. For the period before the nineteenth century, even palace architecture is represented only by a limited number of examples: the Topkapı, Hünkâr Kasrı, and İbrahim Paşa palaces in İstanbul, in addition to a few vestiges remaining from the Sultans' palace in Edirne.<sup>3</sup> With certain reservations, the architecture of the more important dervish lodges (*zaviyes*), such as the complex of Mevlâna Celâddin Rumî in Konya, or the hospice of Seyyid Gazi near Eskişehir, might be regarded as comparable to palace architecture; but the number of surviving major *zaviye* complexes is also quite limited.<sup>4</sup>

Nor have the dwellings inhabited by townsmen of western and central Anatolia been preserved in appreciable numbers, at least where the pre-nineteenth-century period is concerned. In many regions of Anatolia, the use of wood and sun-dried brick accounts for the relatively short life span of popular housing. Moreover, increases in the value of urban real estate during the last twenty or thirty years, as well as the construction activities of municipalities and other public institutions, have led to the rapid disap-

pearance of many old-style neighbourhoods in present-day Turkish cities.<sup>5</sup> As a result, direct documentation concerning the domestic architecture of the Ottoman sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is limited to a few more or less isolated examples.

On the other hand, the number of written documents concerning Anatolian domestic architecture is reasonably great, at least for the period after about 1600. However, this material has been utilized but very rarely. Since it is both unpublished and written in the Arabic alphabet, it is not readily accessible to architects and historians of architecture, who in consequence have limited themselves to studying the domestic architecture of Turkey as it survives today. Thus, for instance, a series of theses on old-style houses in major provincial centres of Anatolia, which was sponsored by İstanbul Technical University during the 1950s, all but ignore the existence of written documentation.<sup>6</sup>

However, ordinary urban housing of the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries has equally been neglected by social and economic historians. This may be partly due to the fact that the immense mass of documents emanating from the Ottoman central administration, upon which the attention of most historians has understandably been concentrated, does not deal with the problems posed by private construction. Even such scholars as Inalcık<sup>7</sup> and Barkan,<sup>8</sup> who have pioneered the study of private fortunes in the Ottoman realm, have tended to neglect the documentation on urban housing, and preferred to study such issues as money lent out at interest, household effects, and agricultural equipment. As a result, the study of sixteenth to eighteenth century urban housing in Anatolia is as yet only in its beginnings.

### **Research on Ottoman housing and urban society**

Among the work undertaken by architectural historians on provincial Ottoman housing, Ayda Arel's book has had a considerable impact upon the design of the present study.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, the author's more far-reaching conclusions concerning the nomad tradition and its impact upon the Ottoman-Turkish house, and her attempt to decipher the symbolic content of certain forms, remain outside the domain of the present investigation. However, Ayda Arel's discussions of the social value placed upon the upper floor, and of the discontinuity between the ground floor and the inhabited sections of the house, have been of great help in translating the descriptions of the *kadı*s registers into reality. Moreover her emphasis upon changes in the manner in which a dwelling might be used, and the possible repercussions of these changes upon the structure of the house itself, fit in very well with a social historian's view of the problem.

With respect to Syria and Egypt, a number of recent studies have addressed themselves to the problems posed by the Ottoman house, in a

manner closely parallel to the approach attempted in the present volume. In his work on Syrian cities of the Ottoman period Antoine Abdel Nour, whose untimely death in Beirut is deeply regretted, has undertaken the first systematic attempt to reconstruct the houses of an Ottoman city from data provided by the *kadı* registers.<sup>10</sup> Moreover his work on the dwellings and residential wards of Aleppo and Damascus allows us to place his findings concerning urban houses into the broader context of urban form. Abdel Nour's study shows up the very considerable differences between housing patterns prevalent in Central Anatolian towns and those of Aleppo. Apart from climatic factors, the most significant reason for this difference was apparently the fact that İstanbul fashions, lifestyles and decorative tastes touched Aleppo much less than Central Anatolia, but also less than for instance Damascus, even though Aleppo throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a major centre of interregional and international trade.

A further recent study on Aleppo has been undertaken by Abraham Marcus;<sup>11</sup> however, the full text of his dissertation being inaccessible to the present author, all comments made here are limited to his article on the people who held real property in eighteenth-century Aleppo. In this article, the author's main concern is with the extent to which women participated in the ownership of houses, shops, and gardens. However, he treats the question within a broader context, investigating to what extent Muslims, Christians and Jews, or else the wealthy and the poor, differed in their degree of access to residential, business, and agricultural property. On the other hand, Marcus does not, at least as far as can be judged from the published article, concern himself with the physical appearance of the buildings which were the subject of many of the real estate transactions he discusses. At the same time, his work on the social characteristics of urban house owners has produced results which are quite comparable to those which have been reached in the present study. To what extent these parallels are due to real similarities between Central Anatolian and Aleppine society, and to what extent the perspective offered by the *kadı* registers shows Ottoman society in the provinces as more uniform than it really was, is a problem which must be left for future researchers to decide. At this point, we are still trying to focus upon the functioning of different provincial societies within the confines of the Empire. The time for comparison and synthesis still lies in the hopefully not very remote future.

Abdel Nour and Marcus, like the present author, are social historians looking at houses mainly as a source for the study of Ottoman social structures as they existed during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, more broadly based investigations, which include architectural studies, have been undertaken for Cairo. The collective volume by Bernard Maury, André Raymond, Jacques Revault, and Mona Zakariya emphasizes architectural design and the use of building materials

at least as much as the socio-economic relations which underlay residential construction in Ottoman Cairo.<sup>12</sup> However, the Egyptian wealthy dwelling – and as Raymond has pointed out, only the dwellings of the rich survive, thus imperceptibly distorting our vision if we concentrate exclusively upon physical evidence – had taken on its basic shape in the pre-Mamluk and Mamluk periods: İstanbul influences, which entered upon the scene at a later stage, tended to affect the decoration more than the basic design. As a result, the opportunities for comparison between Cairo and Anatolia remain somewhat limited, unless one attempts to deal with possible influences of Syrian and Egyptian building traditions upon residential construction in Central Anatolia. This however is a task which the present researcher is not qualified to undertake.

A synthesis of what is known about Arab cities during the Ottoman period has recently been undertaken by André Raymond.<sup>13</sup> With respect to the housing patterns of that time, Raymond emphasizes the appreciable number of people who, in large cities like Cairo or Aleppo, lived in dwellings which did not conform to the standard patterns of the one-family house. Thus Raymond discusses in considerable detail the merchants and other transients who for often lengthy periods of time resided in urban khans. In addition, the ‘apartment buildings’ of Cairo, and the ‘*hawṣ*’, collective dwellings around a common courtyard, which rather appear to have resembled the slum dwellings of modern Mexico City, are also brought into sharper focus. Raymond does not of course deny that the vast majority of families lived in single-family dwellings. But with his emphasis on alternative residential patterns he seems to be aiming at a less ‘ideological’ view of urban houses. One may deduce this frame of mind from his criticism of Abdel Nour’s attempts to link the structure of the Aleppine house – closed off from the world, but open to the sky – with a metaphysical view of the world which supposedly was held by the people who had these houses built.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Raymond is much concerned with the question of a ‘national style’ particularly in Ottoman Egypt; that is the survival of Mamluk patterns both in publicly accessible buildings and private domestic architecture. At the risk of overstating Raymond’s intentions, one might say that his concern is with the Arab city, not with the Islamic city, and the title of his book serves as a further confirmation of this point of view.

Turning from the Arab world to the Balkans, certain investigations by Nicolai Todorov are also relevant to the present undertaking. This remains true even though Todorov discusses Ottoman domestic architecture and Ottoman urban society not as aims in themselves, but rather as the means of approaching a problem which is rather remote from the present study: his basic intent is to show to the maturing of the social forces that stood behind the Bulgarian Renaissance of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In the course of his research into the urban population of the eighteenth-century Bulgarian *vilayets*, Todorov has come to the conclusion that the townsmen of the 1700s

were becoming wealthier, and the sources of their wealth more diversified, than had been the case in the preceding two hundred years. While Todorov is concerned with house property only as one item among many, his work does include a brief study of residential properties as reflected in eighteenth and early nineteenth century *kadı* registers. However, since his main concern is with the composition of family fortunes, he is less interested in the physical appearance of these houses than in their monetary value and their relative importance among other items of capital investment.

### **From houses to people: some assumptions underlying the present study**

Even though it may not sound very scholarly – at the beginning of the present study there was an ‘uncomfortable feeling’. Todorov had written his book to explain the Bulgarian Renaissance, and his work served to point up a great many similarities between seventeenth-century Sofia, Vidin, or Ruschuk on the one hand, and contemporary Ankara or Kayseri on the other. A sizeable amount of interregional trade, towns which were inhabited not only by tax officials and ulama but which acted as lively centres of craft production, relatively significant opportunities for non-Muslims to pursue economic and cultural activities: in spite of war, the Kadızades,<sup>16</sup> and banditry, the Ottoman Empire of the seventeenth century rested upon a society with many more possibilities for ‘peaceful coexistence’ than were to be realized in the future. When did the different subgroups making up Ottoman society begin to grow apart? To what extent were the tensions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries foreshadowed in the urban society of seventeenth-century Ankara and Kayseri? After all, just as the conjunctural ups and downs of urban life in the Ottoman Balkans can be read off the entries in the *kadı* registers, similar data should be available concerning Anatolia. What picture do they give us concerning the everyday relations between Muslims and non-Muslims?

Obviously, this question could be investigated from many other angles than have been explored in the present study. However the urban societies of Ankara and Kayseri consisted essentially of house owners, while on the other hand, it would appear that people do make significant statements about their culture by the way in which they arrange their houses – if only we know how to decode these statements. Under the circumstances, a study of Ankara and Kayseri houses should give us certain clues concerning the development of Muslim–non-Muslim relations.

Another angle to be explored was the place of women in urban society. Recent studies have shown that for the period preceding the late nineteenth century, almost the only way to find out something about Ottoman women is to explore the *kadı* registers. Obviously the opportunity to hold property in

general, and access to real property in particular, is an important feature of the 'female condition' in any culture. A previous study had already dwelt upon the relative ease of access to the court which protected women's rights to their property,<sup>17</sup> an observation which has been amply confirmed while preparing the present study. One only needs to remember that down into the nineteenth or even twentieth century, married women in many European countries were considered perpetual minors and could not without the permission of their guardian sue anybody, let alone their own husbands.<sup>18</sup> With this fact in mind, the reader will appreciate the advantages which easy access to the court gave many urban women of Anatolia.

Another preoccupation that ultimately led to the present study is the concern with change in time. Many investigators have tended to treat non-European societies, and Ottoman society in particular, as entities that scarcely changed in the course of history. Only very recently have researchers become aware of changes in social mores,<sup>19</sup> and thereby come to realize the importance of not assuming, without prior investigation, that an observation made in the sixteenth century is necessarily valid for the nineteenth as well. In the present study it has been assumed that patterns of family living, use of domestic space, and relations between different groups in society changed, at least in certain respects, even during the relatively short time span of ninety to a hundred years which has been investigated here. It is our job as modern researchers to determine the speed or slowness as well as the particular direction of this change. To deny the existence of change before one has even investigated the possibility seems to be little more than a form of intellectual laziness.

Last, but not least, one might mention another reason for dissatisfaction with historiography concerning the Ottoman realm as it stands today.<sup>20</sup> When reading through the secondary literature on the 'post-classical' period, that is the Ottoman Empire after about 1600, one is time and again confronted with the notion of a 'decline' lasting through the better part of three centuries. As a response, it seemed reasonable to try and find out how Anatolian townsmen survived 'three hundred years of crisis' or alternatively, if the crisis was really of as long duration as has sometimes been maintained. One would like to know whether there were no regions or sectors of the economy in which at least a temporary recovery could be observed. In fact a recent study has brought out that at least certain regions, such as for instance Ottoman Syria, showed a net increase in population between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries – contrary to what has been maintained by most authors writing on the subject.<sup>21</sup> A closer investigation of Anatolian developments may well bring out other positive aspects of Ottoman rule, and thereby help clear away some of the intentional and unintentional misunderstandings which have accumulated due to conflicts peculiar to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and which still cloud our understanding of Ottoman society.

## Procedures

A study of written evidence concerning domestic architecture is possible only for cities whose *kadı* registers (*sicil*) survive in appreciable numbers. If one wishes to examine an early period, such as the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the choice is therefore quite limited. As far as western and central Anatolia are concerned, Bursa, Konya, Ankara, and Kayseri are the most obvious choices.<sup>22</sup> For it seems that the *kadıs* and scribes of the larger cities generally produced much more detailed descriptions than their colleagues in smaller towns. Usually, the latter thought it unnecessary to list the rooms of a given building, and considered an enumeration of the neighbours as perfectly adequate for identifying a given piece of real estate. Moreover, the registers of the larger towns were generally preserved with more care, and as a result, both go back further in time and present fewer gaps. If the registers of Ankara and Kayseri have been selected for the present undertaking, this is mainly due to the fact that they were easily accessible to the author.<sup>23</sup>

To establish possible changes in houses and house ownership in the course of the seventeenth century, two periods have been singled out for investigation. The earlier period encompasses the years around 1600; where Ankara is concerned, the earliest documents date from Şevval 1002/June 1594 and the latest from Receb 1010/December 1601–January 1602. Due to gaps in the registers, it has not been possible to select exactly the corresponding period for Kayseri. Where the latter city is concerned, the earliest document included is dated Şevval 988/November 1580; but usable material does not become at all frequent in the Kayseri *kadı* registers until 1013/1604–5. But even after this period, the number of available sources is considerably smaller than in the case of Ankara; as a result, the period under investigation had to be extended until Ramazan 1022/October–November 1613. These discrepancies may partly have been due to the fact that the inhabitants of Kayseri recorded their house sales less frequently than the townsmen of Ankara. But more importantly, the records of Kayseri present large gaps. Thus, it is probable that certain volumes have been lost entirely, or else have been preserved only in fragments, and that this situation accounts for the relative paucity of documents on Kayseri shortly before and after 1600.

For the later years of the seventeenth century, the *kadıs*' record books have survived in much better condition than for the previous period. The years around 1690 have been selected mainly because Halil Sahillioğlu's work on Ottoman monetary history contains information on the exchange rates of the various monetary units which were being used in the Ottoman Empire of that period.<sup>24</sup> As far as Ankara is concerned, the late seventeenth century period under investigation begins in Safer 1099/December 1687–January 1688, and ends in Zilkade 1103/July–August 1692. With respect to Kayseri, the relevant dates are Safer 1100/November–December 1688 and Rebi I 1107/October–November 1695 respectively.

Information given in the documents is of considerable variety and scope: in most cases, we learn the name and patronym of both buyer and seller, or if the document in question concerned litigation, we find the names of plaintiff and defendant. With respect to the house, we learn its price and location by town quarter; the document in many cases also gives a listing of the rooms contained in the dwelling. Moreover, we find an enumeration of the pieces of real estate which bordered the house in question. In addition, there is much incidental information; particularly in cases involving litigation, it was customary to summarize the case as it had evolved until the date on which the document recorded in the *kadi's* register marked a new stage in the history of the dispute.

For technical reasons, the number of documents covered for each time and place is not exactly the same. Ankara in the years before and after 1600 is documented through 342 cases, many more than are available in the remaining three instances. However, since many of these documents provide only limited information, the balance between the different places and time periods has not been significantly disturbed. For Kayseri in the years shortly before and after 1600, 236 cases have been analysed, while for Ankara and Kayseri at the end of the seventeenth century, the count is 289 and 283 respectively. In order to compensate for these fluctuations, all comparisons have been based upon percentage values. At one time, it seemed advantageous to confront the information on relatively important cities, such as Ankara or Kayseri, with data from the *kadis'* registers of smaller settlements, such as, for instance, Çorum.<sup>25</sup> However, this project had to be given up, since the *sicils* investigated did not provide the necessary information.

Obviously, one of the fundamental questions in a study like the present one is the extent to which the results obtained are valid for Ankara and Kayseri throughout the entire seventeenth century, or even for other Anatolian cities of the same period. To constitute a truly random sample is beyond our power, and we have to be content with whatever cases seventeenth-century townsmen happened to submit to the *kadi*. However, to avoid further distortion, a certain point in time has been selected, and from that point onward, all cases recorded in the *kadi's* register have been included in the present investigation, except for those instances in which the data are so deficient that they were considered to not be worth analysing. Since by no means all sales ever concluded were documented in the *kadis'* registers, it is probable that a different choice of periods investigated would have led to somewhat different results. However, if these qualifications are kept in mind, it is probable that the observations made in the present study are valid for at least the wealthier home-owners of seventeenth century Ankara and Kayseri.

That this should be so, is at least partly due to the fact that even in the largest Ottoman towns of Anatolia there was only one *kadi*, a Hanefi, and –