

great Master with the incense of ridiculous flattery, there were others who did not hesitate to criticise with severity not only the acts of the Ministers, but even those of the Monarch himself.

"The Armenian massacres and other troubles in the Empire combined to cause the greatest distress, and occupied the minds of many of the highest persons attached to the service of the Sultan; and I must say, Abd-ul-Hamid permitted observations and criticisms to be made to him, even in a disagreeable manner, that few Sovereigns or Ministers of Liberal countries would have allowed."

During these years, Ismail Kemal, like several other senior Ottoman officials, was quietly in touch with a growing tide of Albanian sentiment. He turned to journalism, launching a paper, *Mecra-i Efkar*, which was printed in Bulgaria and could circulate only clandestinely in Turkey. Abdülhamit became increasingly agitated, and on May 1, 1900, Ismail Kemal, in theory about to go to Libya as governor of Tripoli, fled Turkey under British naval escort after seeking asylum on the British embassy stationnaire yacht in the Bosphorus.

He visited Athens, where he was received by the king and flirted fairly openly with Turkey's enemies such as the *Times* journalist JD Bouchier and the archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans – and, it would seem, engaged in periodic secret contacts with the Greeks over Albania until 1912. As a potential leader of an alternative regime in Turkey, he got some interest (though rather less than he implies in his memoirs) from the British government, and spent the next eight years publishing newspapers from Brussels. He was also sentenced to death in absentia (though his son was a member of the palace guard) and trailed by shadowy figures.

His dealings with the Young Turk movement in exile quickly exposed an insoluble difference: he wanted decentralisation and strong local government; they wanted the opposite. He was an Albanian patriot (and by now suspected of trying to establish a principality in Albania). The Young Turks were Turkish nationalists.

These antagonisms began in exile and continued after November 1908

when the Young Turk revolution enabled Ismail Kemal to return to Turkey. Elections had made him the leader of a band of twenty-five Albanian deputies in the first Ottoman Assembly since 1877, but he was also the most senior of the Young Turks' opponents. On Tuesday April 13, 1909, Ismail Kemal Bey's only moment as a front-rank figure in Turkish politics arrived. There was a counter-coup in army units in Istanbul against the Committee of Union and Progress and the Young Turks. The Young Turks fled amid scenes of violence and Ismail Kemal was briefly elected president of the assembly.

It was during the fleeting hours that he possessed this office that, after a gap of nine years and for the last time in his life, Ismail Kemal met Abdülhamit, "in the most affable manner". They spoke as old friends, regretting the things that had come between them in the past. The 1909 uprising was suppressed by the Salonica army in

THEIR DETAIL AND ACCURACY MAKE HIS MEMOIRS AN AMAZING FEAT OF MEMORY.

THEY ARE THE ONLY REAL INSIDER ACCOUNT OF THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE WRITTEN IN ENGLISH

a few days and is remembered in Turkish history as a dark moment for the forces of modernity. Ismail Kemal's Turkish career ended with him on the wrong side.

Brief exile followed, and eventually more clashes with the Committee of Union and Progress, and then Ismail Kemal and his twenty-five Albanian deputies departed for Vlorë and an irrevocable break with the empire. He ruled Albania briefly but the great powers were not disposed to encourage Albanian unity as they had encouraged Greek nationalism. In 1913 they recognised only a small Albania (thus creating Balkan problems which have lasted to this day) and tried unsuccessfully to impose a German prince as its ruler rather than back Ismail Kemal against his rivals as the

new country's prince or president.

Aubrey Herbert, one of the few British observers at this date who was friendly to Turks and Albanians, recorded that during his last years "Ismail Kemal Bey, [was] a kindly and a versatile man, whose life had been a long and precarious see-saw. His weakness lay in his circumstances and in his affection for his children. If he was tortuous, it was because it was difficult to be straight in his position. Impecuniosity was his taskmaster." "[He looked like] a wise and benevolent tortoise with... a real liberalism which never faded... He was canny and he was able."

Ismail Kemal blamed the First World War partly on British mistakes, believing that "it was due to Britain's carelessness and indifference that Turkey had come into the war on the side of the Central Powers, England having always until the last few years been looked upon as the protector and unchangeable friend of Turkey."

In 1916 he went to Paris and lived most of his last years in a small hotel. Evidently he was a great raconteur. Perhaps because of this, an American journalist friend, William Morton Fullerton, also a friend of Henry James and Edith Wharton, persuaded him to produce his memoirs and found a collaborator who worked with him, under great difficulties, for eighteen months, before the story broke off with the end of Ismail Kemal's Turkish career. "He had no papers, no notes, and often regretted all his papers left behind at Constantinople," recalled his collaborator, the *Daily Mail* journalist Sommerville Story. Yet their detail and accuracy make his memoirs an amazing feat of memory. They are the only real insider account of the late Ottoman Empire written in English. Ismail Kemal's imagination still seems to have been largely Turkish and Ottoman, for he praised Story, saying "he deserved to be a Turk for his powers of comprehension".

Ismail Kemal's own story broke off soon afterwards, as abruptly as his autobiography. On a round of routine contacts across Europe, he was lured to Italy with an invitation from its government, and then placed under surveillance in Perugia, where he died, bitterly complaining of his treatment. ♦

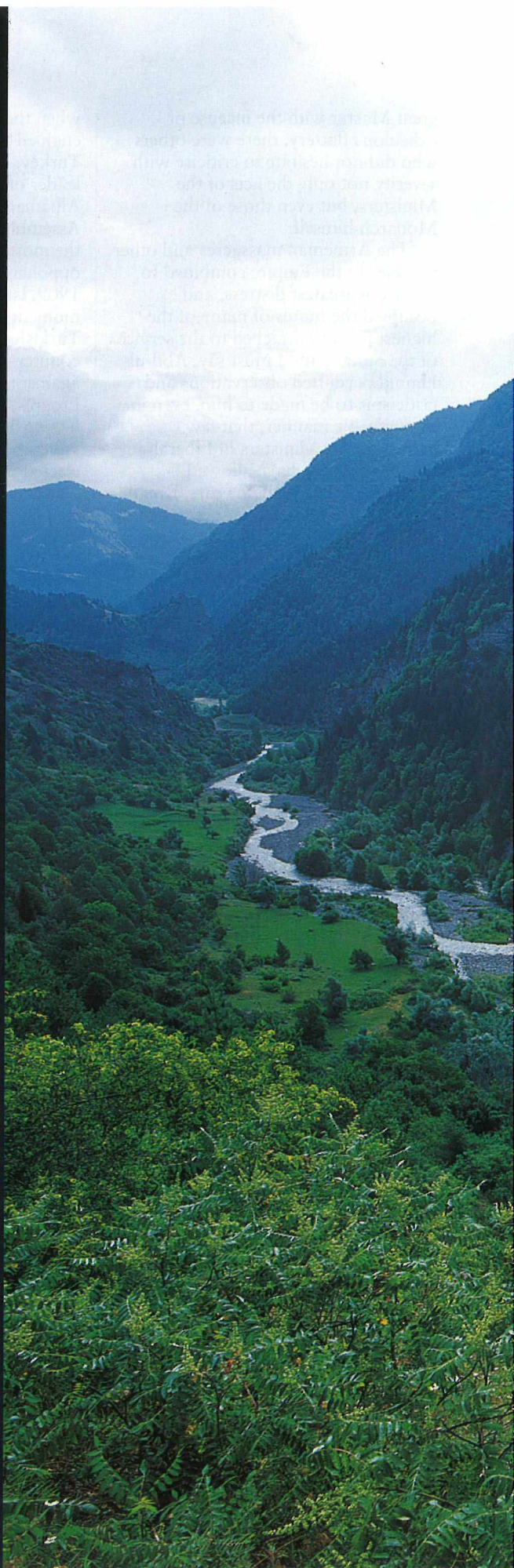
David Barchard: db@cornucopia.net.

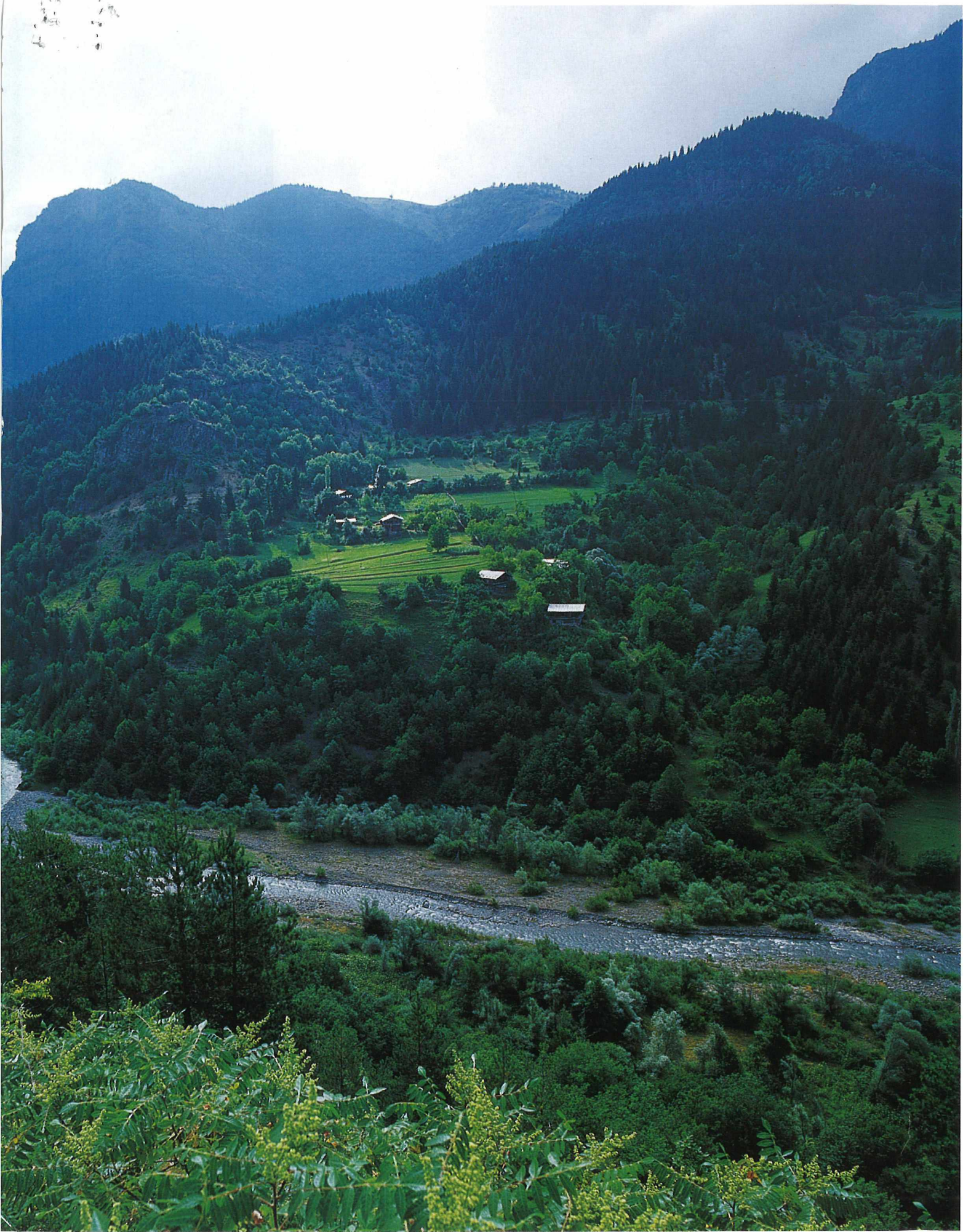
COUNTRY HOUSES OF THE BLACK SEA

LAND OF A THOUSAND MANSIONS

Emerald-green tea gardens, thunderous rivers, magical rainforests – Turkey's Eastern Black Sea Mountains are a remote paradise when they emerge from the mists and the rain. In a special report featuring the photographs of Ali Konyalı, we celebrate the beauty of the mansions and farmhouses that survey the valleys

EDEN OF THE EAST: A HANDFUL
OF BARNS AND HOUSES SET IN
CORNFIELDS IN THE VALLEY OF
CIRIT DÜZÜ, NEAR TURKEY'S
BORDER WITH GEORGIA. A RIVER
SNAKES ITS WAY INTO THE DISTANCE





COUNTRY HOUSES OF THE BLACK SEA

In 2004, the photographer Ali Konyalı set out with his publisher, Ameli Edgü, to capture the magnificent houses of Turkey's Eastern Black Sea Mountains. The resulting book, published this summer, is a unique record of the region.

CORNUCOPIA presents 38 pages of the book's visual highlights, with accompanying text based on the detailed knowledge of Mustafa Reşat Sümerkan, an authority on the region's vernacular architecture. But how did these houses come to be built? The anthropologist Michael Meeker investigates on page 74

Most visitors who venture east of Trabzon, the great port city of Turkey's northeast, head up to the high mountains, to walk across hills of breathtaking beauty covered in wild rhododendron, campanulas and primulas.

But the valleys have their treasures too, which visitors rush past when they head for the heights. Tea gardens, orchards and forests of chestnut and alder envelop these remote valleys in a thick mantle of green. And rising from this lushness are magnificent mansions and farmhouses, many at least a century old. They are handsome buildings, lovingly constructed of timber and stone, and perfectly fitted to the landscape and climate.

In their search for the riches of the eastern Black Sea region, the editorial team – photographer, publisher and architectural historian – set off from Trabzon towards the east. They wandered through the tea gardens of Çaglayan, a

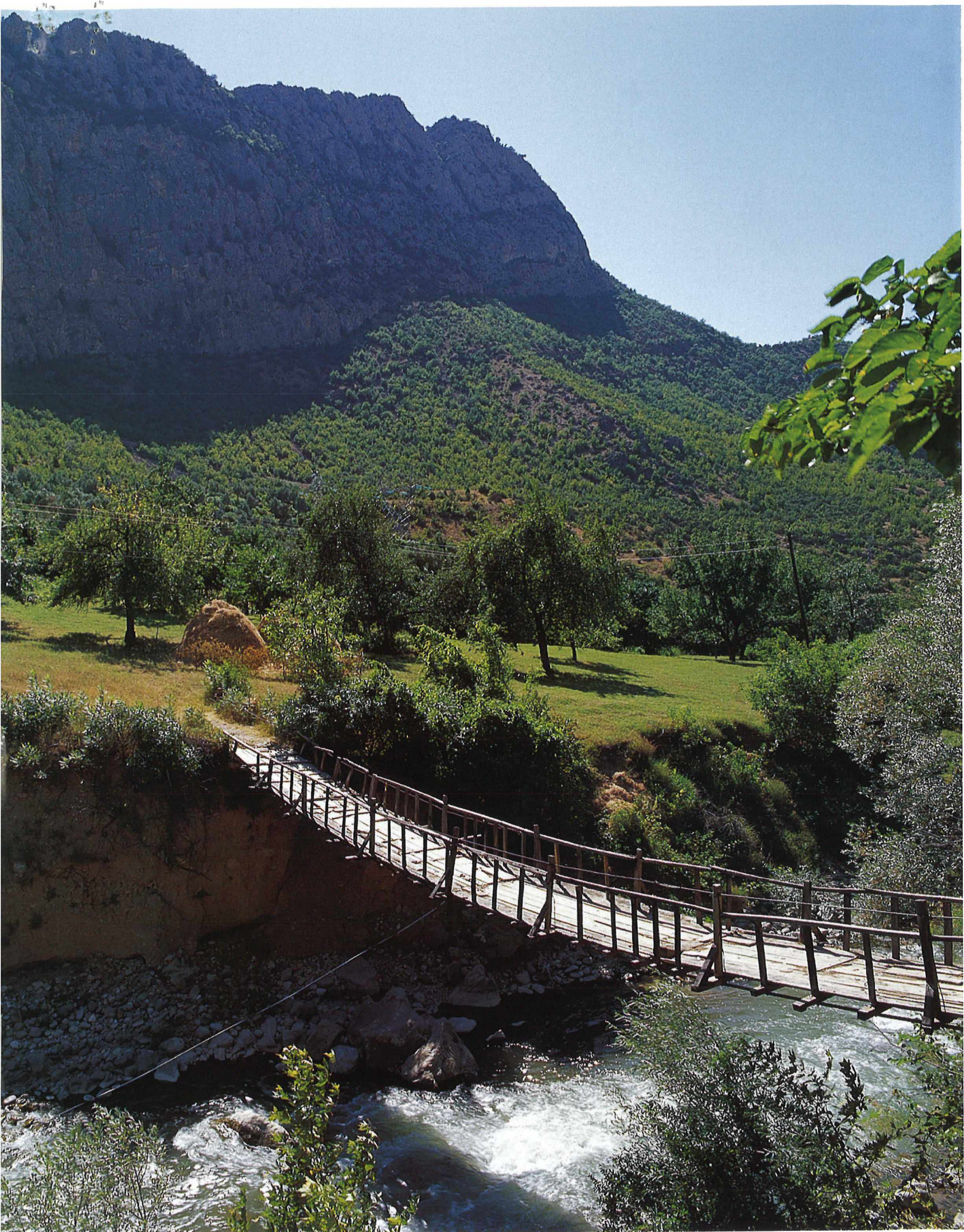
broad valley with stately, almost Elizabethan houses. They visited Çamlıhemşin, where merchants who had made fortunes abroad built massive mansions just a few yards from each other, and Hemşin, with its solid, stone-built farmhouses. In the more easily reached valleys above the small port of Arhavi, they found houses whose façades are draped with scented grapevines in the gentle climate. At Şavşat, well inland, close to the border with Georgia, they entered a landscape of Alpine chalets. And in the rainforest surrounding the tea country of Rize they visited wooden mosques that look for all the world like houses.

But these buildings are vanishing fast. When Ali Konyalı captured them on camera, he was doing so in the nick of time. City life is luring away the descendants of the men and women who built them. Inheritance laws divide and divide again until properties have dozens of owners and no single individual can take on the responsibility of maintaining them. And there is little or no funding for restoration. Many houses are simply abandoned, left to the mercy of the elements. Unless laws are passed and funds are found, this unsung heritage could soon be lost for ever.

For details of the book containing these and many other photographs by Ali Konyalı see page 77

RIGHT: AN ORCHARD OF APRICOT TREES IS REACHED BY A NARROW FOOTBRIDGE OVER A TRIBUTARY OF THE ÇORUH RIVER





ÇAĞLAYAN MANSIONS OF THE TEA GARDENS

The village of Çağlayan, near Fındıklı, prospered from growing tea, first planted in the 1930s. One of its finest mansions is the konak named after Şevket Bey, whose father built the house in the 1770s. The estate is still cultivated and tea gardens stretch out in front of the house and up the slopes behind. The Şevket Bey Konak is one of the many beautiful houses that give Çağlayan the feel of an open-air museum. But many are now abandoned.









Çağlayan

Left: the tree of life is a dominant theme in the main room of the Şevket Bey Konak. It appears both in murals and in the attractive mantelpiece, recalling ancient animistic beliefs that still hold sway in the remote villages of the Caucasus. From the steamship on the wall, however, we may assume that Şevket Bey was a man of the world, an image reinforced by pictures elsewhere in the room of regiments of soldiers, weaponry and various cities, in particular Istanbul. It is now extremely rare to find such decorations. This room would have been reserved for respected visitors.

Top right: built-in niches (*takçagöz*) with elaborate frames are a feature of all Çağlayan's old houses. This one is part of a wall cupboard in the Hurşit Bey Konak, which is just 150 yards to the north of the house of Şevket Bey. Echoing the sinuous curves of the pierced frame, the surrounding wall is decorated with chiselled floral patterns.

Bottom right: in one of the bedrooms of the Şevket Bey Konak, light accentuates the outline of niches next to a fine fireplace with an almost Mughal arch. Fireplaces here are tall and profusely carved with surface motifs, but because they are shallow, stone brackets are needed to provide protection from burning embers.



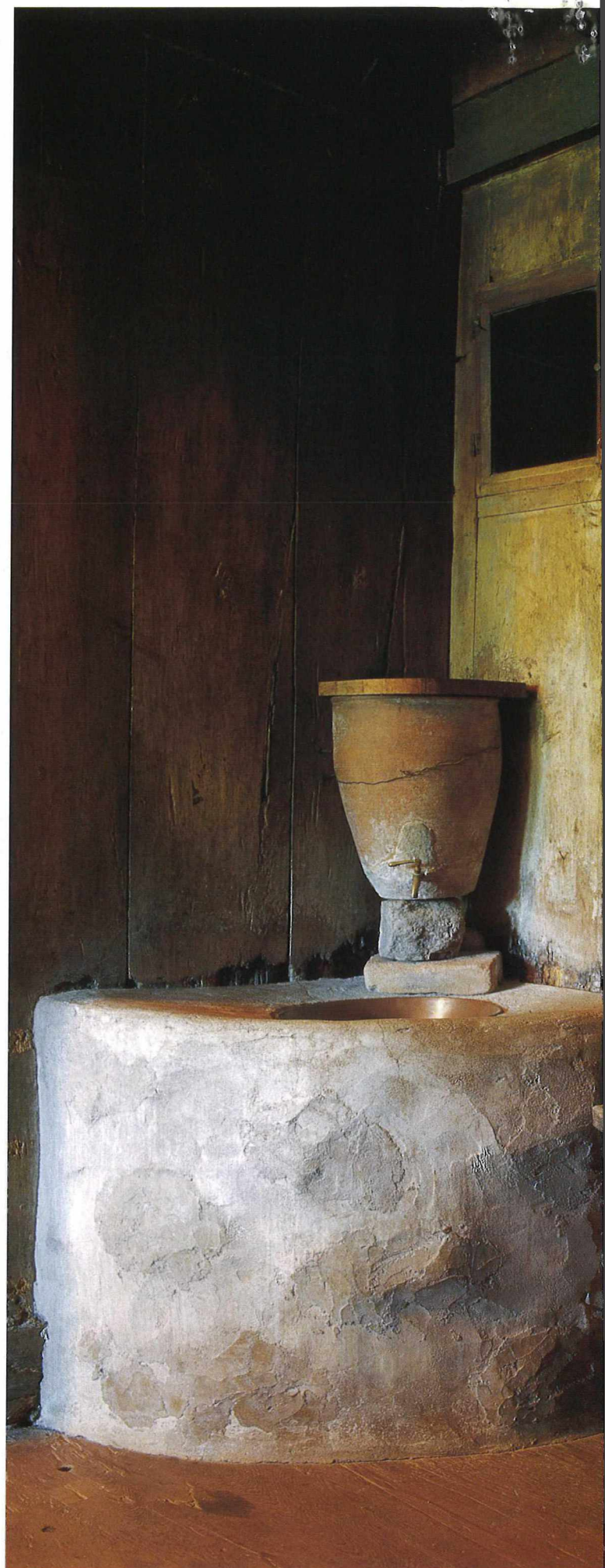


Çaglayan

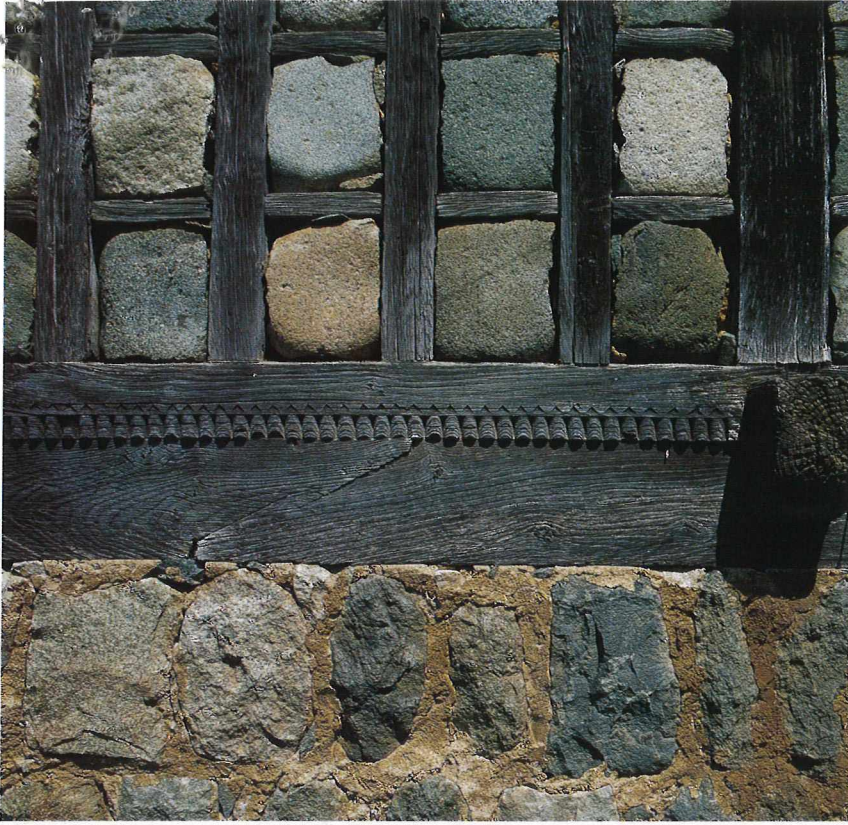
Carpentry has always been held in high esteem in this land of giant forests. Wood, preferably chestnut, is used not only for doors, but for internal walls and ceilings, which are usually left exposed.

Right: in the guest quarters of the Şevket Bey Konak, the door is carved with stylised patterns of exotic plants and fruit. In a corner of the room is a massive stone sink with a copper basin where visitors can wash their hands under the tap of an earthenware vessel.

Above: many of Çaglayan's fine houses are left empty as owners continue to abandon the village, but this house, belonging to the Hacaloğlu family, has recently been restored. With its glowing woodwork, it is a wonderful example of the massive timber buildings of the region, and of the skills of joiners, carpenters and carvers. Each room has spacious built-in cupboards. The niches were for immediate essentials or decorative objects. They also served as steps up to the gallery storage area above.







Çağlayan

Right: a magnificent quadrant of stone steps leads up to the main, south-facing entrance of the Hurşit Bey Konak. This is the way into the living quarters upstairs; below is a stable for cattle. The front doors of houses in Çağlayan are like compasses, invariably facing away from the prevailing wind. The door leads into a small hallway (*küçük avlu*), where, off to the right, in a separate wing, are the kitchen, bathroom and lavatories. They were kept apart from the main building, which smelt far sweeter.

Top left: a detail of the stonework in the Hurşit Bey Konak. A technique known as *göz dolma* ("eye-filling") was used, in which a grid of timbers is infilled with cut stone. A massive wooden plank is placed on the lower stone wall. On top of this, strong vertical planks are erected every fifteen centimetres to help bear the weight of the roof. Horizontal blocks of wood are added, without nails, to create square niches, which are then filled with polished stones gathered from the riverbed and cut to size. Their natural colours and sheen create a beautiful effect.

Bottom left: the arch above the front door of the Hurşit Bey Konak is seemingly shaped to accommodate a visitor's head and shoulders. It is carved with geometric motifs, a sphere of heaven (*çarkıfelek*) and two small rosettes. A horn motif adorns the iron brackets that secure the door.









ÇAMLIHEMŞİN THE VALLEY OF THE STORM

Çamlıhemşin is a town surrounded by clusters of country houses spread over a wide area of steep, heavily wooded hillsides. Here at Yolkiy, two giant houses stand guard over the River Fırtına hundreds of feet below. Fırtına means “storm” and the river lives up to its name, filling the air with its roar. Yolkiy is made up of some thirty houses linked by a path so narrow that two people can pass only with difficulty. Another complete quarter of magnificent mansions lies hidden on the hillside opposite among the giant trees of the rainforest.



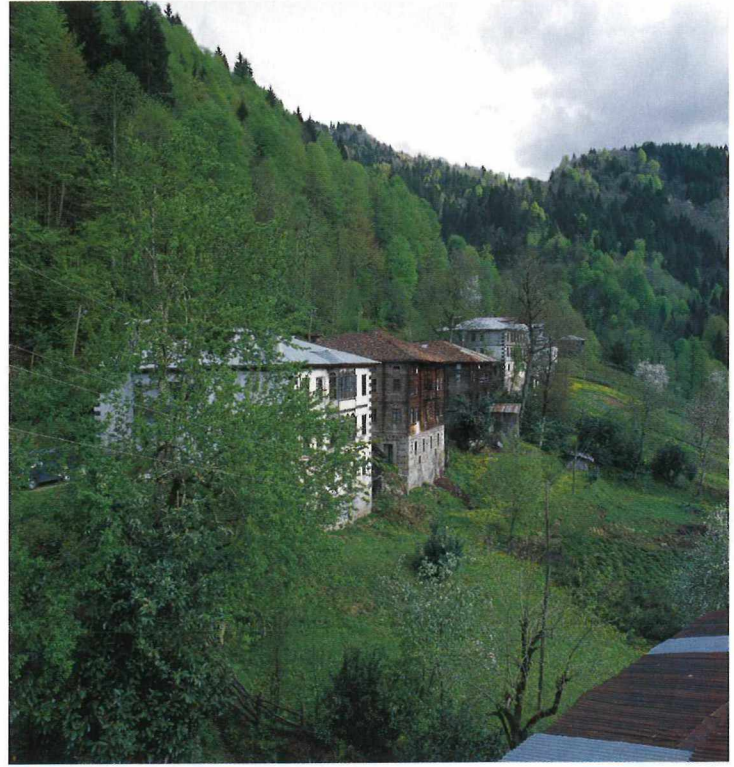
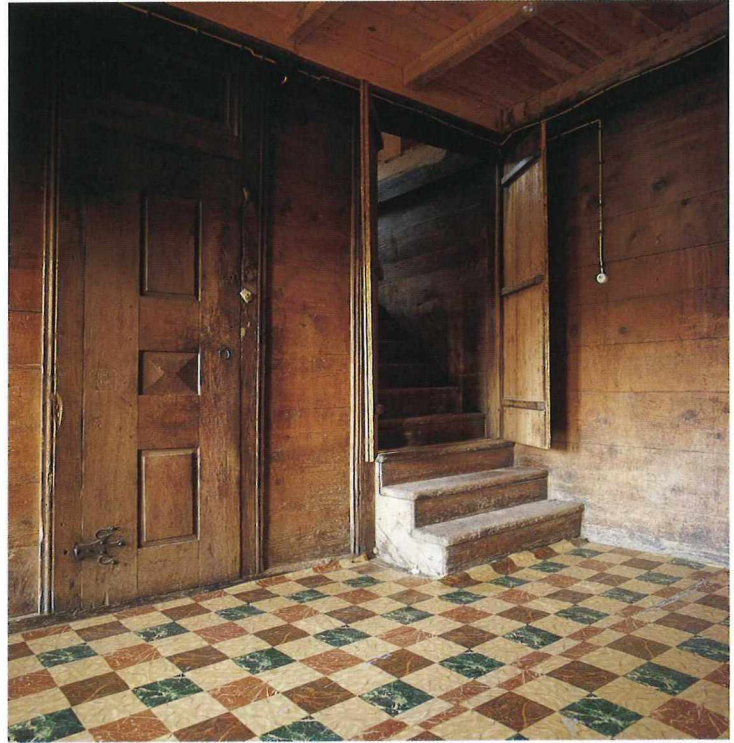
Çamlıhemşin

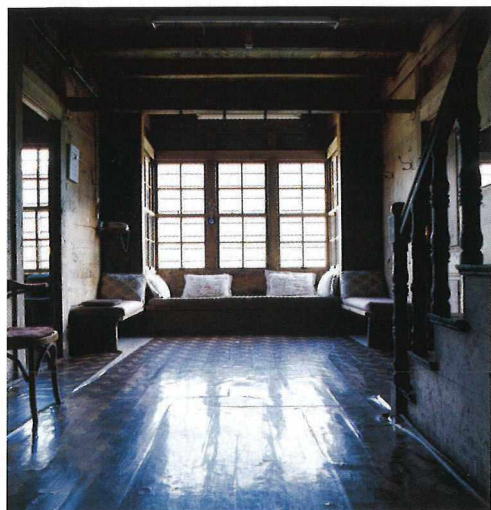
The district of Konaklar is close to the town of Çamlıhemşin, and it was here that wealthy merchants built the Black Sea's sturdiest, grandest mansions. Many of them, including restaurateurs who prospered in the Crimea in the 1900s, made their fortunes in Russia, bringing back with them a taste for stained glass and brass doorhandles.

Top right: this row of imposing konaks, built in the first decade of the twentieth century, commands a wonderful view of the river.

Bottom right: a corner of the living room in the Şaban Sarıoğlu Konak – the more distant of the two white-washed houses in the picture above. The inner walls are all of solid chestnut wood.

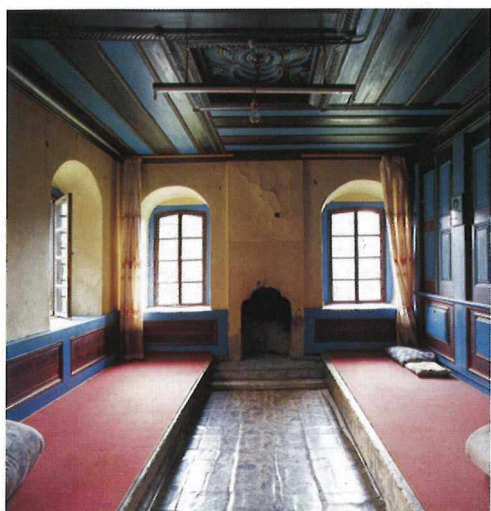
Left: this corridor is on the top floor of the Yunus Gülapoğlu Konak. In an early form of double-glazing, both inner and outer walls have windows, which insulates the house from the damp and cold.



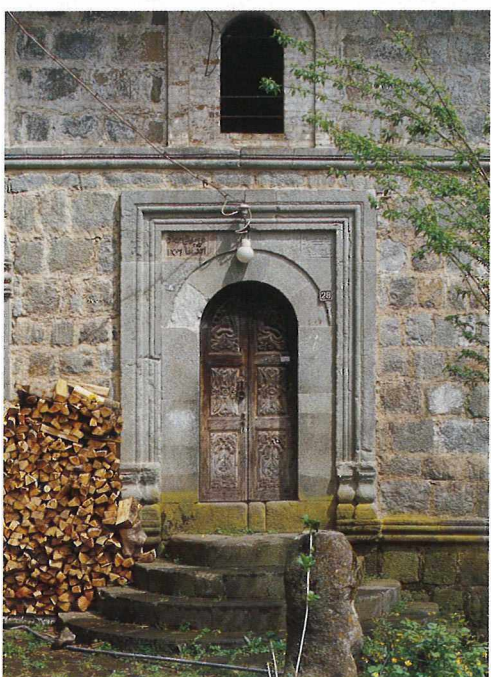


Çamlıhemşin

Top left: a divan fills the huge bay window in the *hayat* (living room, literally “life”) of the Gülapoğlu house. Doors on either side lead to bedrooms. One of the great joys of living in a house like this is to sit in the window, with the family gathered round, gossiping, sipping tea or coffee and looking out across the valley.

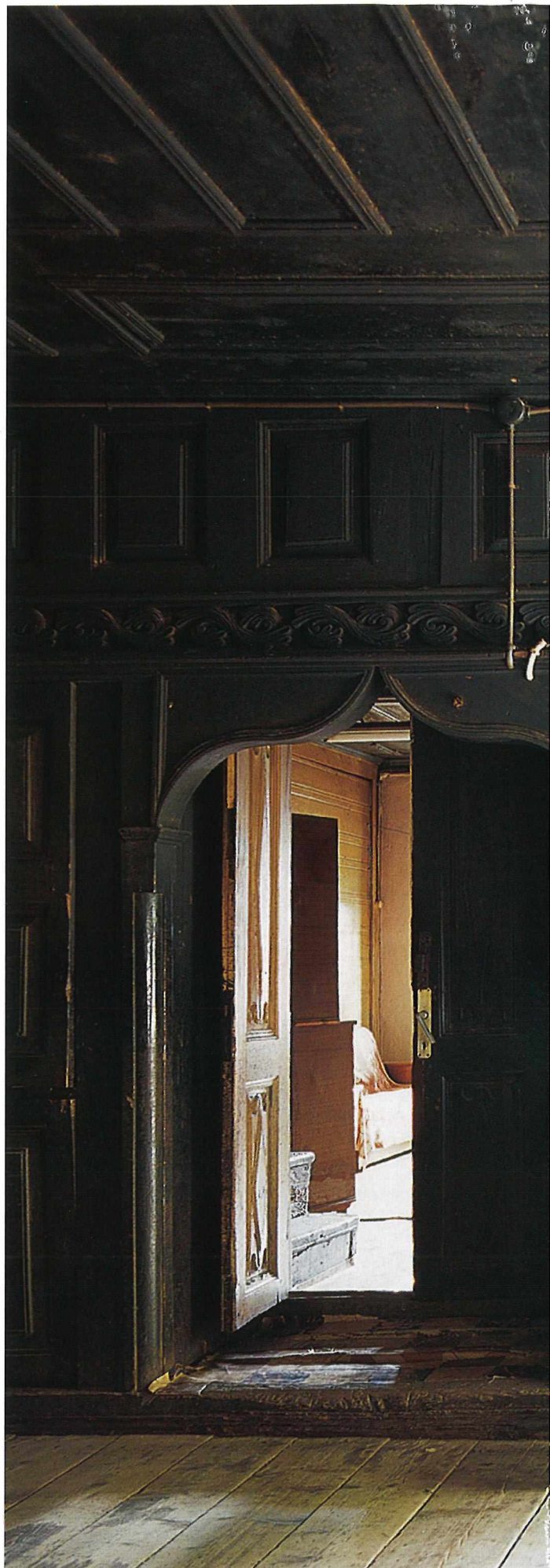


Centre left: the Galip Pelit House, in the district of Merkez Kavak, has a guest room painted in the colours of Trabzonspor football club. Raised platforms (*kerevet*) are used for sitting and sleeping; in the daytime the bedding is rolled up and put away in cupboards. Merkez Kavak is higher up the valley, and the arched windows flanking the fireplace look out over the road to the summer pastures.



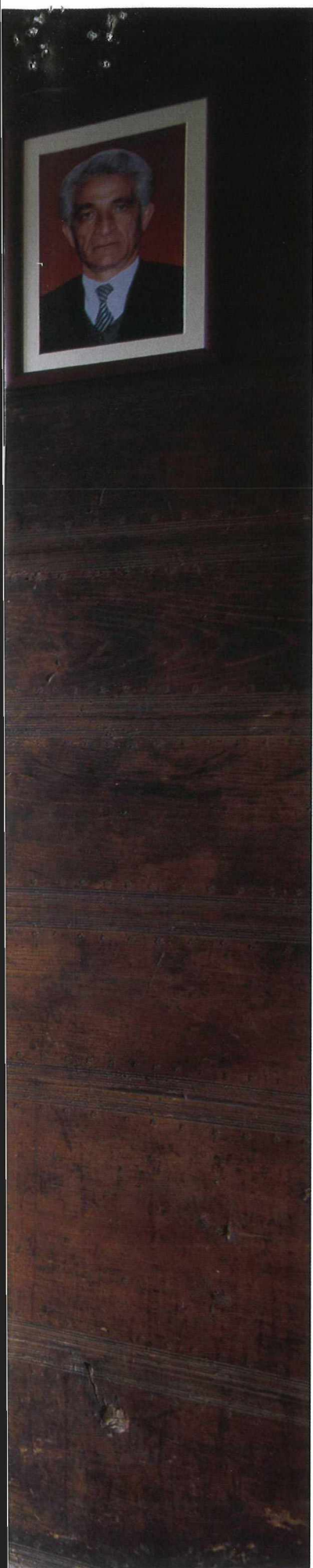
Bottom left: from the outside the Galip Pelit house has an almost ecclesiastical feel. This distinctly Romanesque door leads straight into the kitchen (right). There is no shortage of firewood.

Right: nowhere else on the Black Sea is there a kitchen quite like this one. The three ogee arches in the panelled kitchen of the Galip Pelit House are unique – the craftsmen may have come from outside the region. The two arches on the right are used as cupboards, and a stool is needed to reach the top shelf. The left arch is incorporated into the doorway to the room beyond. The keystone above the front door tells us that the house was built in 1891.









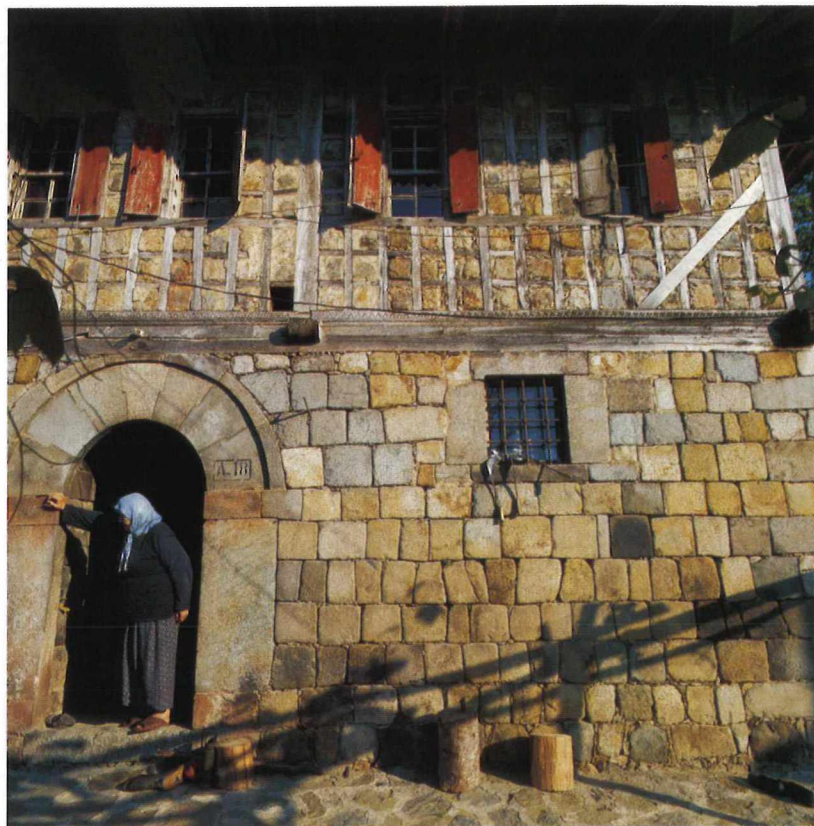
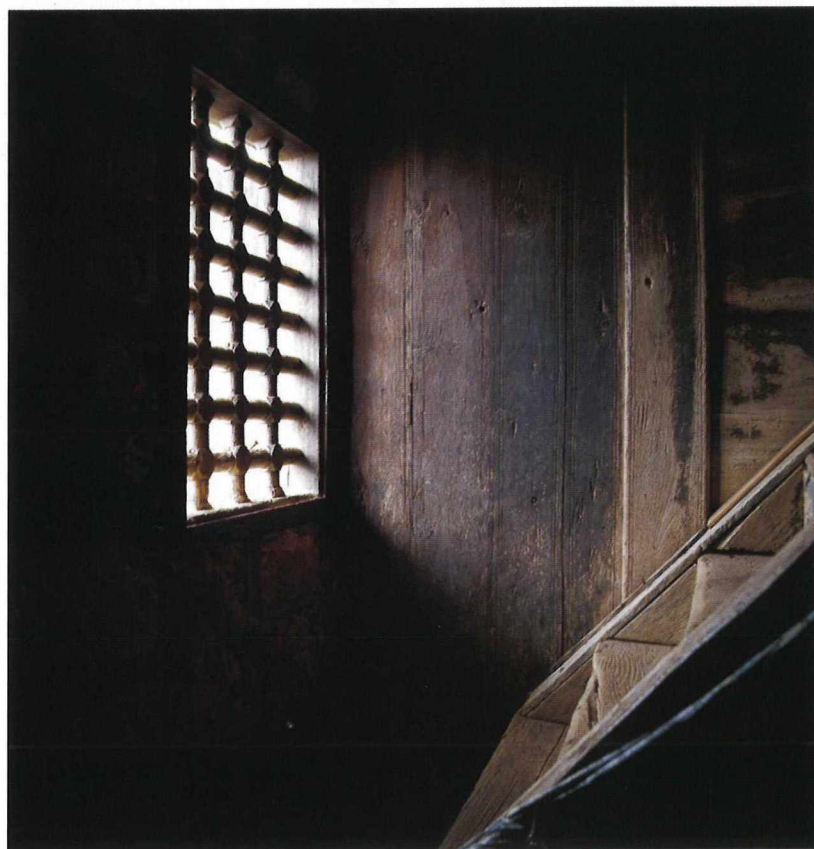
HEMŞİN GRAND FARMHOUSES

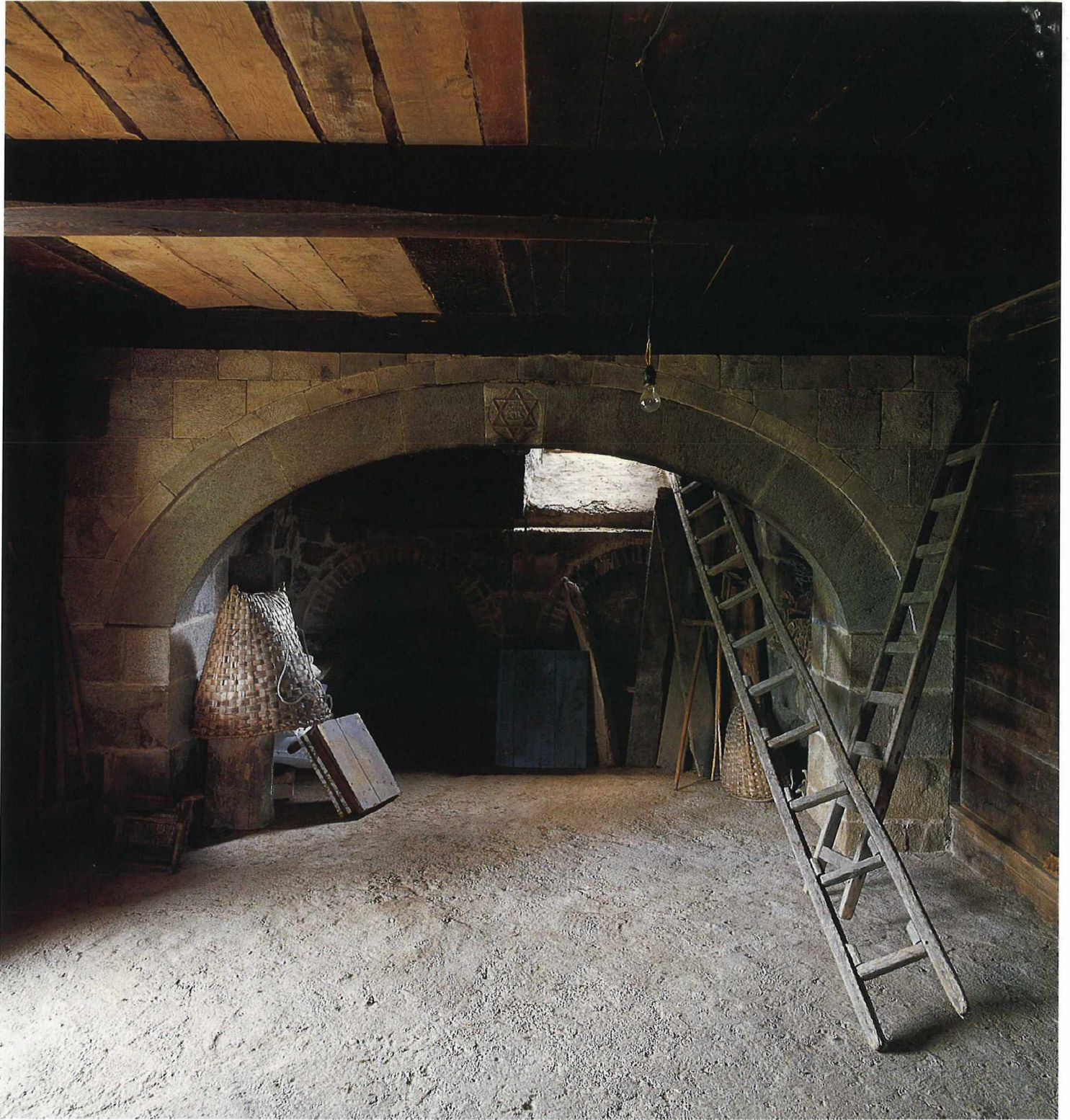
Hemşin, a few kilometres to the east of Çamlıhemşin, may lack its wealthy mansions, but it is the home of some redoubtable clans. Farmhouses in the village of Bilenköy could never be described as konaks, or mansions, yet they share the same vocabulary of handsome carpentry and colossal stonework.

Left: the rich doorway of the house of Emrullah Doruk, dated to 1761, would not be out of place in the grandest of homes. A tree of life covers a door beneath a horseshoe arch surrounded by a frame of effusive vegetation.

Top right: ashlar masonry is laid in solid courses on the lowest of the three floors of the neighbouring Onat House, anchoring it to the hillside. Stone blocks infill the timber frame walls above. The house is entered through a stone arch that is pure Romanesque.

Right: Black Sea houses always had robust wooden grilles, made without nails, at the unglazed downstairs windows. This one sheds light onto the worn stairs leading up to the living quarters.





Hemşin

Yılmaz and Nazif Onat have two fine houses in Bilenköy: the one they live in and an empty one, seen in these two photographs. Its enormous fireplace is a sign of the original owner's wealth, a feature shared by all the larger houses in Hemşin and neighbouring Çamlıhemşin. The sacred nature of the hearth is emphasised by

the seal of Solomon on the arch's keystone. The arched fireplace is as wide as the room it was designed for and is a marvel of engineering. With a perfect through-draught, the fire lit straight on the floor would be used for cooking and for heating the whole building.



The ground floor holds the essential tools of life: baskets worn by women harvesting tea and walnuts, great basins for washing, and shelves for storing produce. The room next door is a carpentry workshop. In their heyday, houses such as the Onats' were hives of industry. Despite their remoteness, the valleys of the eastern Black Sea were

more densely populated than almost anywhere else in rural Turkey – so much so that the land could not support all the inhabitants. Many were forced to leave.



ARHAVI FAIRY-TALE VALLEYS

Right: the area above the small port of Arhavi is more accessible than many of the densely wooded valleys of the Black Sea. Some thirty villages thrive here. Ortaca is one of them, pinpointed by the minaret. Surrounding the village are orchards and tea gardens. Tea was only introduced to the area in 1934. Before that villages survived on trade with the Caucasus and crops of hazelnuts, corn and hemp.

Top left: the house of Sabri Nazmi Kosif stands on a hillside in Arılıköy, a hamlet that can just be seen in the distance in the picture on the right. The north and west façades, exposed to wind and rain, are built of solid stone. A technique similar to the “eye-filling” style seen in Çağlayan is used for the attractive façade on the south and eastern sides. Here the stone infill is triangular instead of square, and the technique is known as *muskalı dolma*, or “amulet-filling”, after the triangular amulets worn to ward off the evil eye. The wood framework is filled with stone pieces secured by clay mortar. Two upstairs bedrooms are entirely concealed by a vine with richly scented black grapes peculiar to the Black Sea.

Bottom left: in nearby Borçka, sun shines through large square windows onto an inviting divan.

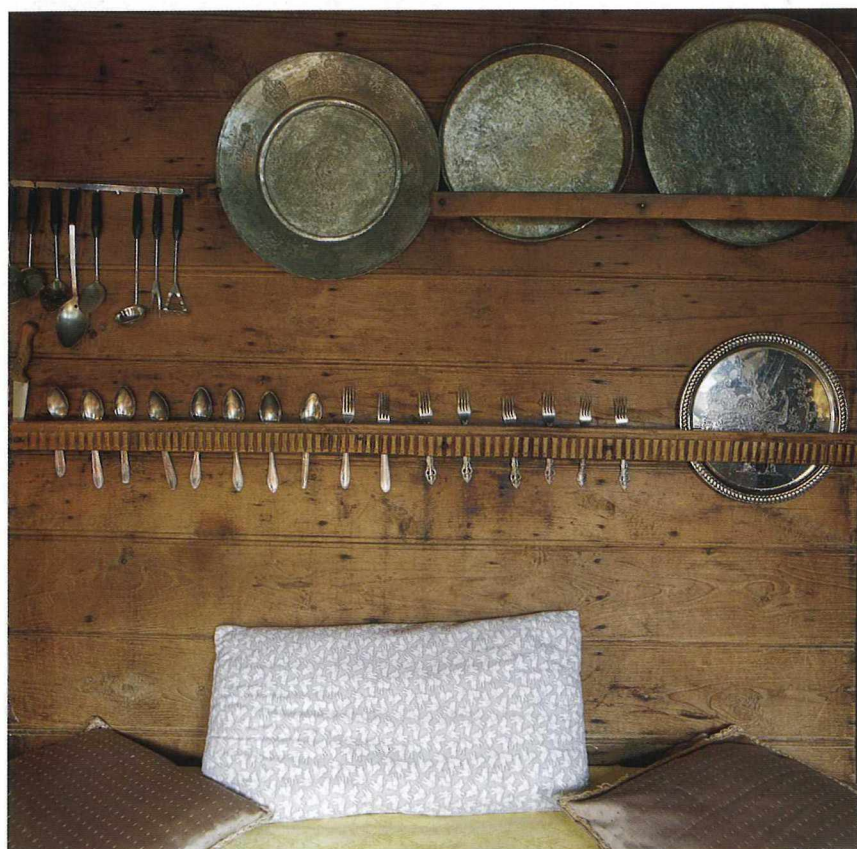
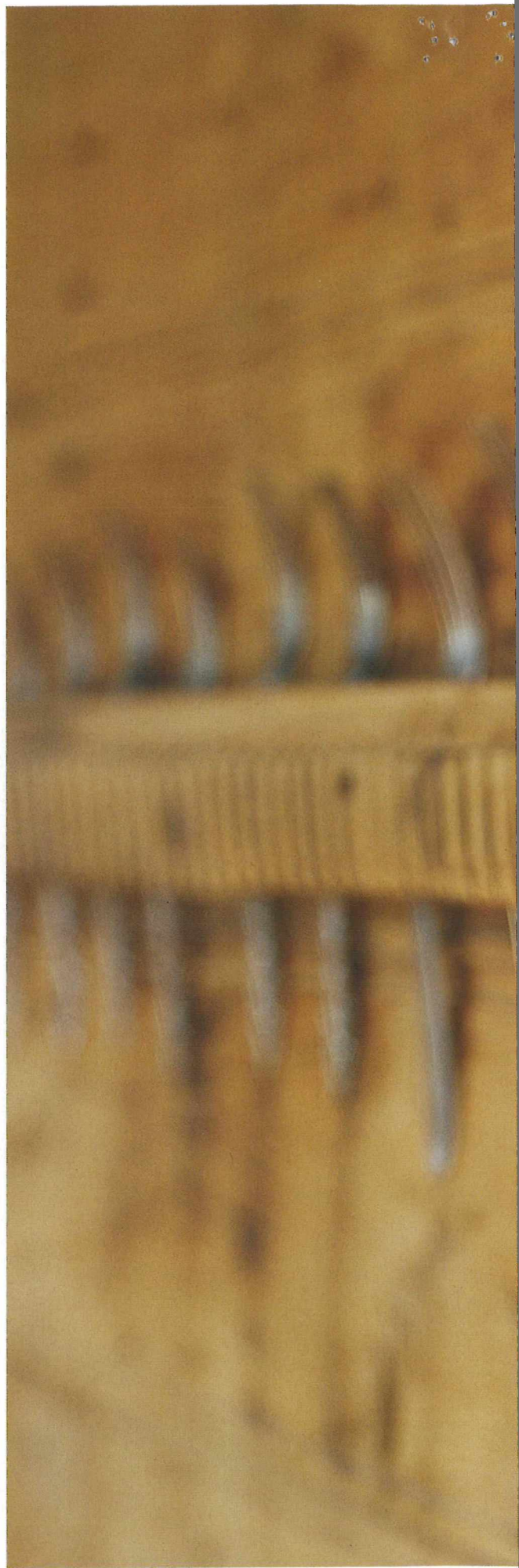


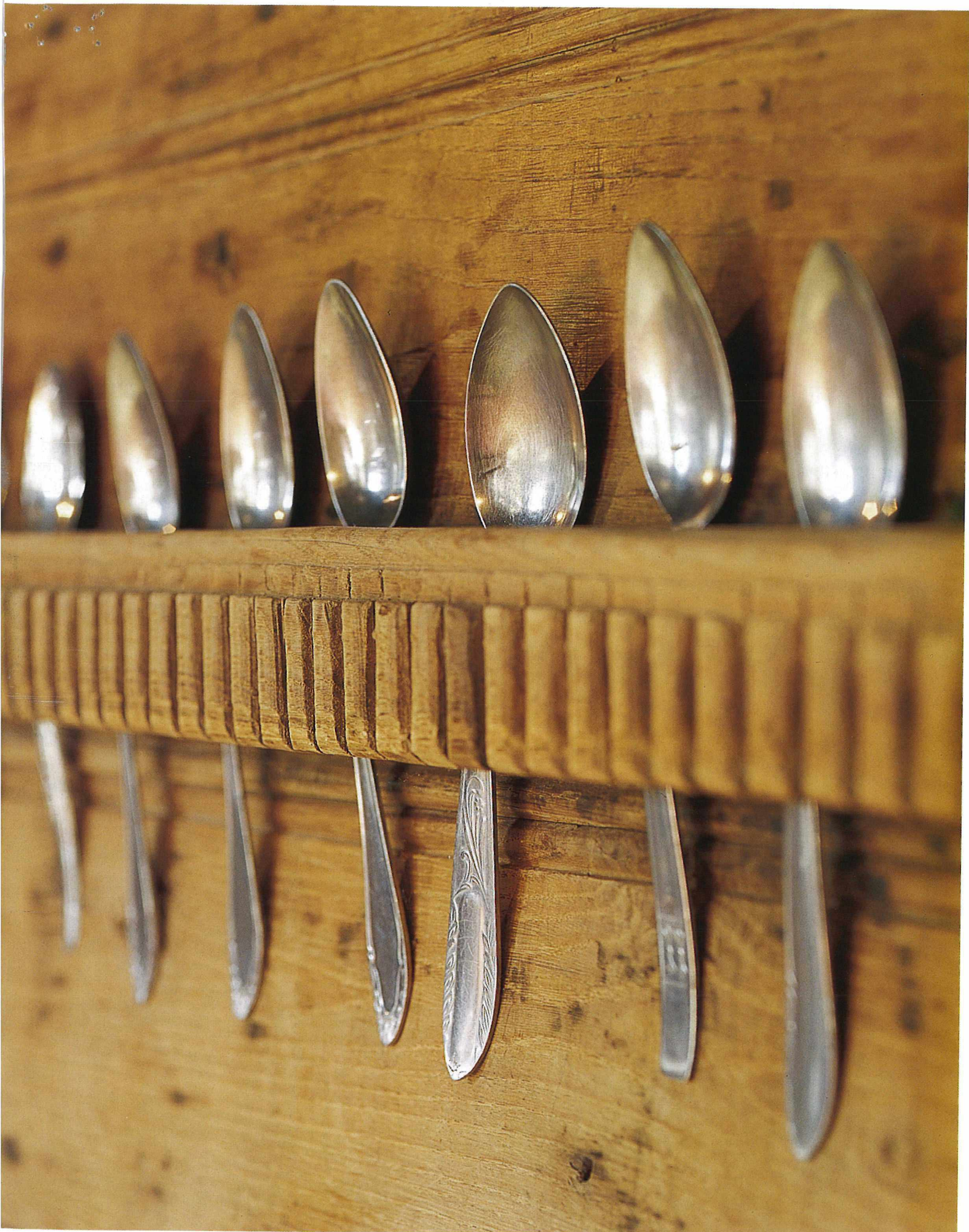


Arhavi

Right: old Anatolian houses were never cluttered. There was a place for everything. In this house in Arılıköy, a couple of simple carved strips of wood provide elegant storage for a row of spoons and forks.

Below: dishes are still generally communal and families gather round a large tray to eat. A row of handsome tinned copper dishes and baking trays is stored in a rack above the cutlery. The seating beneath is low, as is all furniture in these minimalist houses.





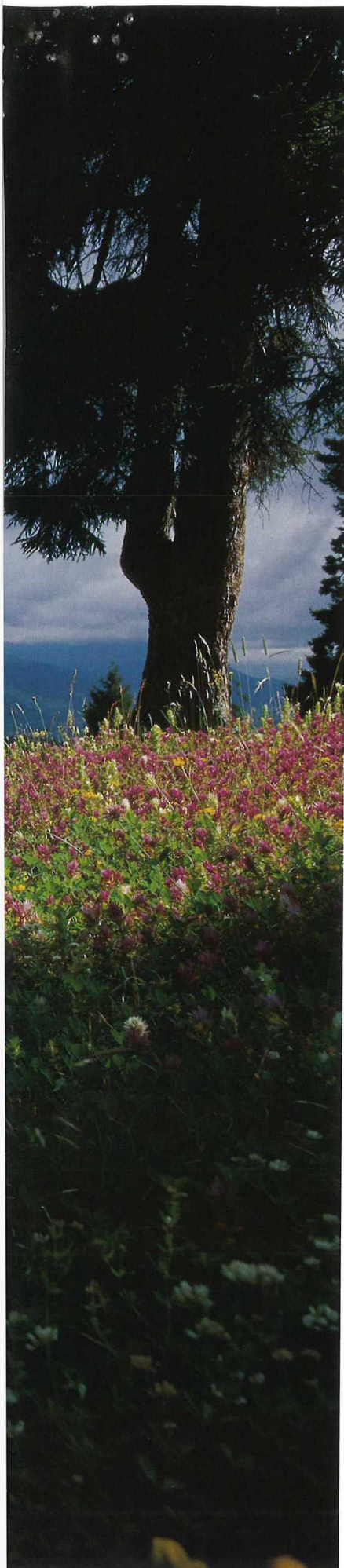


ŞAVŞAT HOUSES OF THE HIGH PLATEAUX

Technically part of the Black Sea region, the district of Şavşat is 150 kilometres inland, close to the Georgian border. "Trees grow everywhere in Anatolia," runs a local saying, "but it is the people of Şavşat who know how to make lace out of wood." In spite of its solid log base, there is a delicate quality to this house in the village of Veliköy. The massive logs enclose an area used as stables and a winter kitchen. A covered balcony, or *eyvan*, runs around three sides of the living quarters on the first floor. The attic is used for drying grain, pulses and fruit.







Şavşat

Top right: the balcony of the house in Veliköy pictured on the previous page serves as kitchen and living room in the warmer months. The charming overhang with its raised platform becomes the favourite sitting-out area when not being used as an all-purpose table. From the Balkans to the Caucasus this typical feature is known as a *köşk*, or kiosk.

Bottom right: another *köşk*, this one in the village of Kocabey, is brightened up with a pierced flower design. The platform is covered with kilims and cushions.

Left: a meadow of honey-scented clover on the high plateau above the village of Meşeliköy. Two fine Oriental spruce trees frame a view of the distant hills that surround the famous lake of Karagöl.





RIZE MOSQUES IN THE RAINFOREST

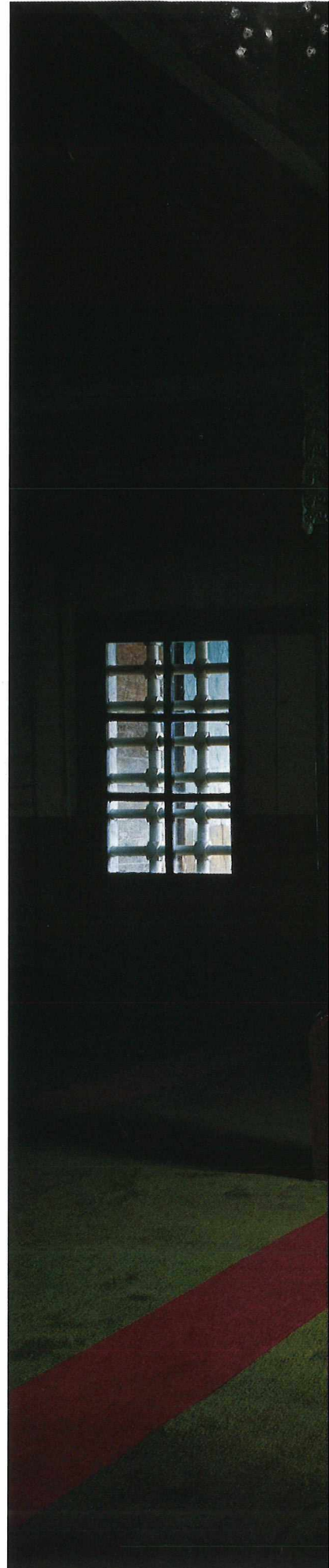
In the mountainous hinterland above Rize, a city famed for its tea, mosques traditionally looked like houses. They had balconies, square windows and shutters and were built with the same materials and techniques.

Top left: the mosque of Şenköy, a peaceful village in the Çamlıhemşin valley, seems almost to grow out of the wooded landscape. The windows are small, the interior dark, austere and very atmospheric.



Bottom left: in the village of Bilenköy, in the Hemşin valley, the mosque is again built entirely of wood. But its entrance is more imposing, with elaborate carving, a double staircase and a two-tiered veranda. From the unpainted exterior one would never expect the riot of colour within.

Right: the exterior of the door to the Bilenköy mosque is carved with rosettes and interlaced octagons, now covered with faded, peeling paint.







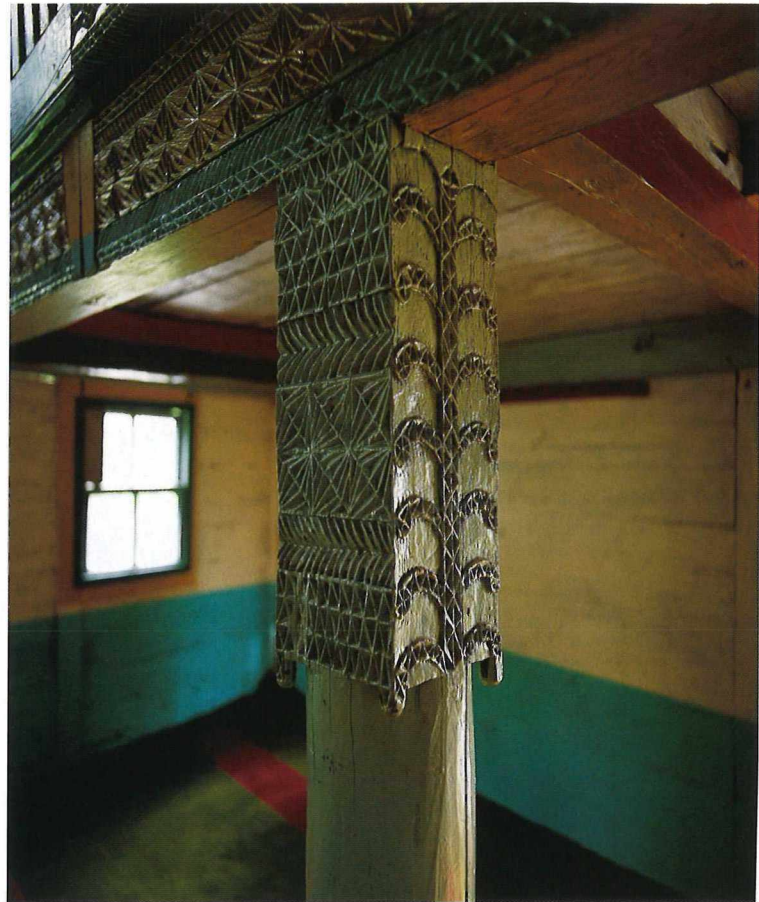
Mosques

Restraint is not the keynote inside the Bilenköy mosque. The building is nineteenth-century, as are most of the carvings, but the colour scheme is outrageously modern. The carpet combines brilliant fuchsia with acid green, while the woodwork is a rainbow of yellow, turquoise, reds and numerous shades of green.

Left: a gallery runs round three sides of the interior.

Top right: the square capitals of the columns supporting the gallery are carved with tree of life motifs on two sides and deeply incised with stylised geometric floral motifs on the others.

Bottom right: one of the columns on the gallery that support the ceiling.



THE STONES OF SÜRMENE

MICHAEL MEEKER SETS OUT TO DECIPHER THE ARCHITECTURE OF A

With its bay sparkling hundreds of metres below, the vista from above the town of Sürmene, forty kilometres east of Trabzon, is one of the most stunningly beautiful along the eastern Black Sea coast. I had set out on a tour of these mountains with, as my guide, a passionate amateur historian who has devoted his life to a study of the area.

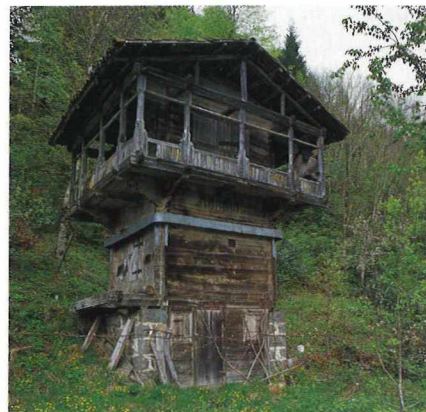
"This is the very spot where Xenophon is said to have first observed the sea as he led his army out of Persia," Mr Aslan announced as we reached one of the hilltops that seem to hang over the bay. Was this true? Who could say? Certainly the spot deserved its reputation by virtue of its breathtaking panorama.

Thanks to the network of roads that first began to link mountain villages in the 1950s and 1960s, we were able to make the trip by car. It was a thrilling drive. Here and there we lurched



ABOVE: DESIGNED TO WITHSTAND FIERCE FLASH FLOODS, ONE OF THE MANY ANCIENT BRIDGES SPANNING THE BLACK SEA RIVERS.

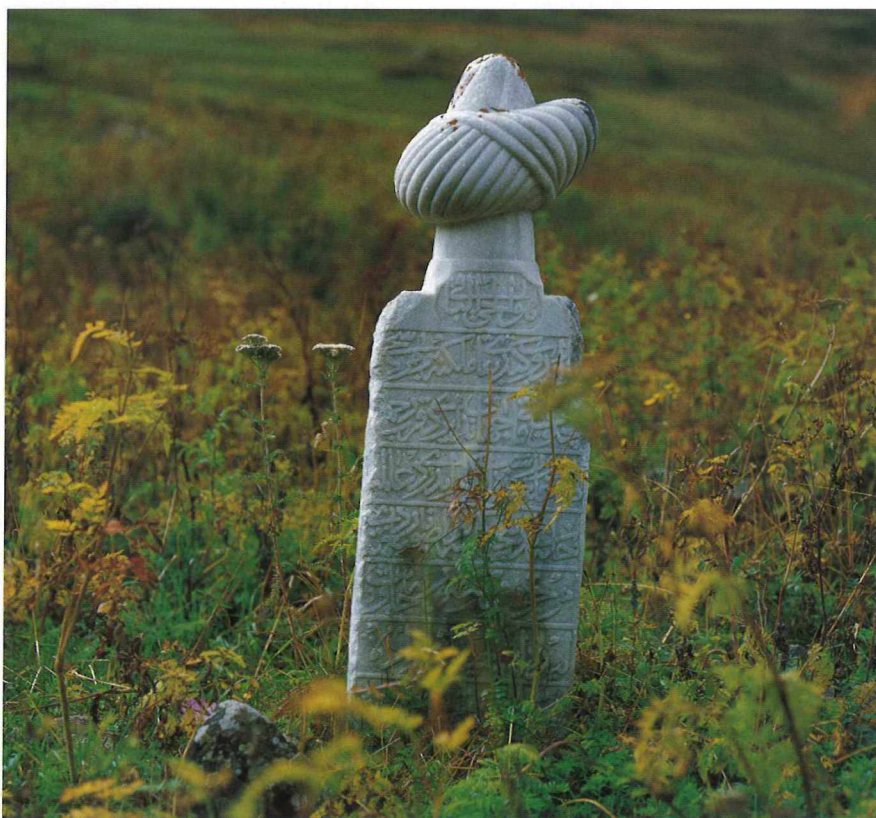
ABOVE RIGHT: A TYPICAL 'SERANDER', OR GRANARY. BELOW: ON A REMOTE HILLSIDE ABOVE SÜRMENE, A 19TH-CENTURY TURBANED HEADSTONE MARKS THE GRAVE OF A MAN OF GOD. OPPOSITE: A DRY STONE WALL WITH A COAT OF MOSS



forward, wheels spinning out of control as we climbed the vertiginous slopes. I was treated to a series of fascinating scenes. Stopping at a roadside forest, Mr Aslan led the way through the undergrowth, then tore away the brush to reveal tombstones bearing dates from the late Ottoman period. Each was topped by a stone-carved emblem indicating the sex of the deceased and, if male, his status as a cleric or government official. Higher up, perched on mountain bluffs, were the walled graveyards of distinguished families, some of recent construction, some Ottoman.

At one stage of our winding journey Mr Aslan pointed out a secret route through the foothills, used by Russian troops for their invasion of the coastal districts in 1916. Most foreign observers claim that the coastline provides the only convenient way to travel east and west. Neither the Turkish nor the Russian military were ever troubled by such a misperception.

In many places our road intersected or paralleled the course of older trade routes: dirt or cobbled tracks crossed by wooden or stone bridges of medieval origin. Higher still, we could observe the principal trade route that has linked the coastline with the interior for many hundreds of years, snaking across the ridges of vivid green but treeless mountains, sometimes disappearing in the clouds that hang in the valleys. Here and there along its way, small clusters of storerooms and warehouses



FORGOTTEN BLACK SEA STRONGHOLD



CORNUCOPIA 75

were visible, little mini-caravansarays of wood and stone, some still in use.

As an historically minded anthropologist, my special interest lay less with Xenophon than in the area's variety of family life and housing. How, I wondered, had these been influenced by the broad historical changes the Black Sea coastal region had undergone over the centuries?

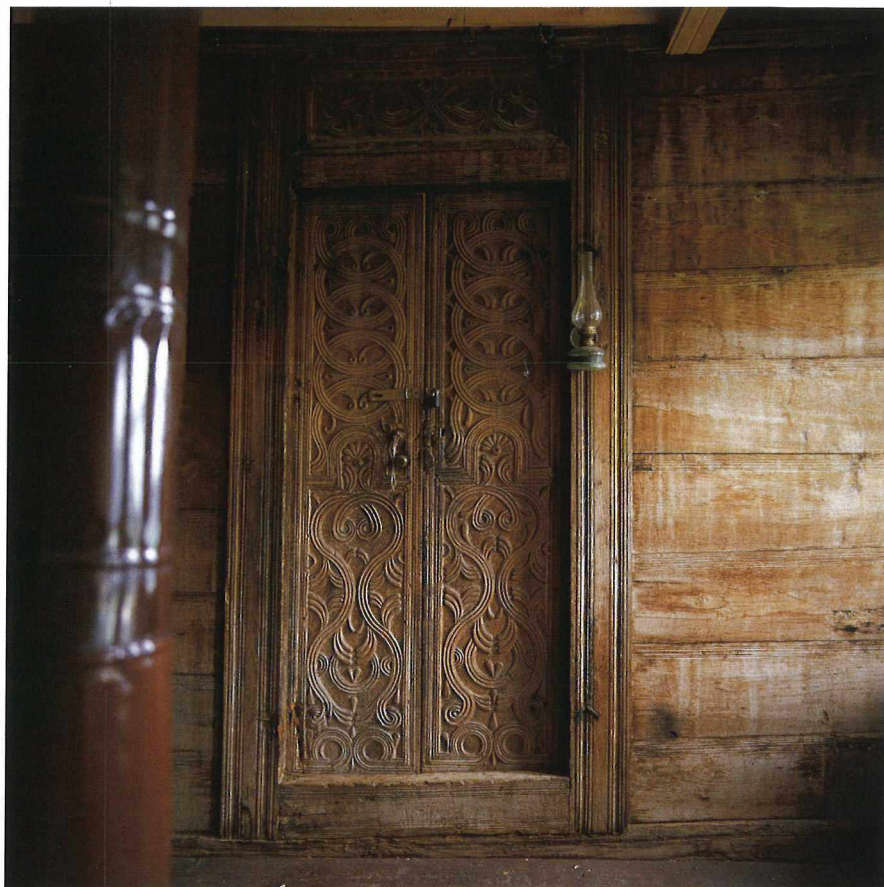
Surely, I had originally thought when I went to live in the area, language and religion must determine styles of family life and house structure. In the district called Of, for example, I had learnt that many of the tools and methods of construction could be traced to practices of the Greek rather than the Turkic population, and that the hearths of Christian houses were situated differently from those in Muslim houses.

Eventually I realised it was not that simple, that ethnicity and religion had been fluid rather than fixed. The region had been settled at different times by a number of ethnic groups – Lazi, Armenians, Greeks and Turks – who had lived under a succession of imperial regimes espousing different religions. But no group had preserved a pure “ethnic” tradition. For example, there were Christian Turks in the region during both the late Byzantine and early Ottoman periods, some of whom probably became Greek-speakers. And in the twentieth century there were Muslim Greeks, Muslim Lazi and Muslim Armenians, many of whom had become Turkish-speakers.

Such crossovers persuaded me to alter the focus of my research. I began to consider the issue of how an ethnically and religiously diverse population had been ottomanised in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I set aside the question of discovering the “original” or “primordial” way of life in the region to focus instead on change and variety in the patterns of family life and house structure.

As we toured the foothills and mountains of Sürmene, Mr Aslan showed me dwellings, maize granaries, pilgrim fountains and walled gardens in a remarkable range of types and styles that opened my eyes to the complexity of official and domestic architecture.

It is important to understand the

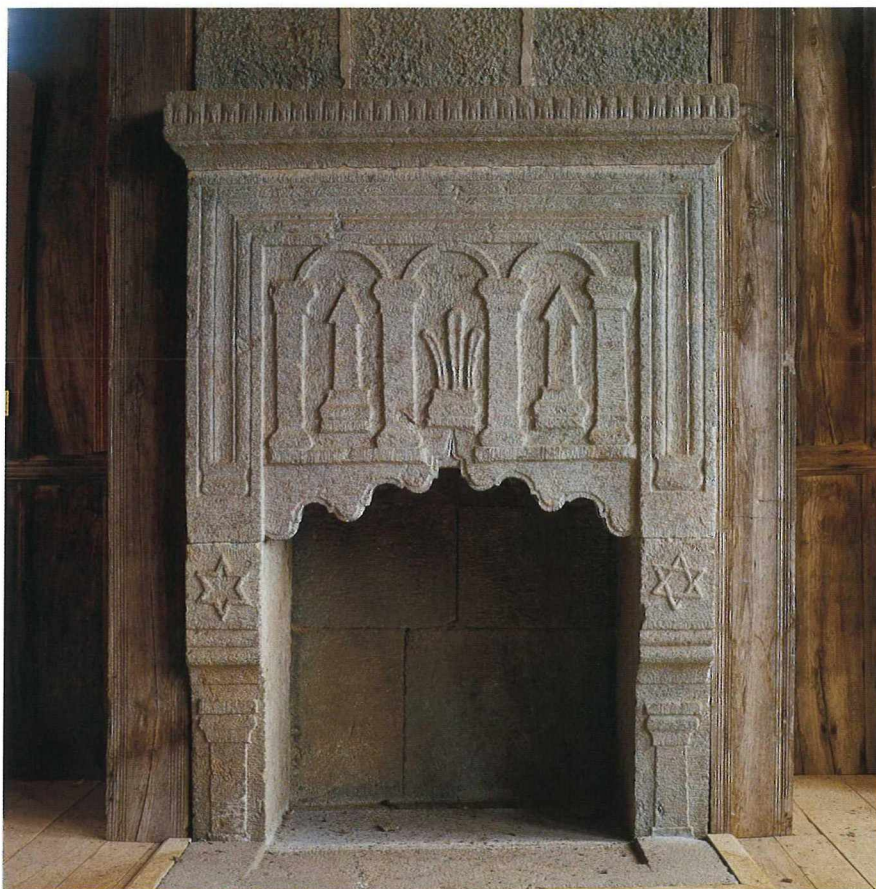


SINUOUS, ALMOST MEDIEVAL CARVING ADORNS A BEAUTIFUL OLD DOOR IN SÜRMENE

relationship of Sürmene to Trabzon. From the medieval period, Trabzon was a walled and fortified town that served as the capital of all the coastal districts from Batum in the east to Ordu in the west. But until recently it was Sürmene, rather than Trabzon, that offered the shortest path from the coast to the trade routes of the interior. This enabled Sürmene's bay, market and town to compete commercially with those of the provincial capital. The topography of Sürmene, however, posed a security risk. The foothills rising so abruptly from the bay may offer stunning views, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they also proved ideal sites for the local elites to build fortified residences from which they competed for control of the town. Those who came out on top could hope to benefit from the collection of taxes, some of which they passed on to Trabzon, some of which they kept for themselves.

Sürmene, as a result, became a place of both exceptional architectural interest and social disorder. On several occasions the provincial government forcibly relocated the town, destroying shops and warehouses in an effort to wrest control from local strongmen.

Competition among local elites had a direct bearing on architecture. In the eighteenth century large mansions (*konaks*) took the form of fortified buildings with reception rooms for meeting supplicants, followers and allies. They also served as places of government, sometimes incorporating a jail, a tax and census office, an accounting room and perhaps some kind of hospital. By the 1830s the provincial government had destroyed the older fortified hilltop residences, but the coastal districts remained ungovernable without the assistance of the local elites, who now re-emerged as officially appointed, supervised



THE EMBLEMS ON THIS FIREPLACE IN SÜRMENE'S HAŞIM AĞA KONAK REMAIN A MYSTERY

representatives. They began to build new mansions, usually in the lowlands near the coast, which, while still serving as sites of local government, no longer took the form of strongholds.

The homes of ordinary villagers were also affected. For the local elites, the site and style of their residences had become both a political tool and a manifestation of status, and they were naturally keen to prevent ordinary villagers from building large houses at strategic points. But as the elites began to submit to central government and lost their fortified residences, ordinary villagers were at last able to construct larger houses where they pleased.

Economic circumstances also played their part. Since at least the Middle Ages, the villagers of the district of Sürmene have produced goods and artefacts for overland and overseas markets. But these markets have always been in a state of flux. Products

such as butter and cheese, wool and hides, beans, flax, hazelnuts, hemp, maize and squash, and activities such as boat-building, anchovy-fishing, cloth-dyeing and arms manufacture – all demanded a variety of storerooms and workplaces, either next to or within domestic residences. House design changed as the importance of these various activities waxed and waned. Since the 1930s, for example, the whole region of Rize, from Sürmene to Arhavi, has become famous for tea production, which in many places has replaced maize as the staple crop. As a result, old granaries on stilts (*seranders*) are no longer needed, and many have been destroyed.

Labour migration had an effect, too. The villagers of the Sürmene district have always had contact with the world beyond their seemingly isolated hamlets. For centuries they left their mountain fastnesses to seek their

fortunes as soldiers, preachers, tradesmen, craftsmen and labourers in the towns of the Ottoman Empire. Some travelled to Istanbul, Erzurum, Konya or Bursa, others to Romania, the Crimea or the Caucasus.

In some areas houses came to serve as bases for large groups of people rather than homes for single families, with the result that numerous families might claim shares in a single house. On an earlier visit to the district of Hemşin, east of the town of Rize, I had come across very large houses which are today claimed by a hundred or more absent owners, who live and work in different Turkish cities and return occasionally with their families to the ancestral home for a summer vacation.

Connection with the outside world also introduced new building crafts and fresh ideas about the functions of a house – just as the return of local residents after a period of employment in Germany in the 1960s led to the building of Bavarian-style chalets.

During my tour of the valleys and hilltops of Sürmene, I was shown how houses in the eastern coastal region can be viewed as documents of local history. Each area – Of, İkizdere, Rize, Pazar, Ardeşen, Hemşin and Artvin – has its own distinctive landscape and climate, its own different position in the imperial system, its own unique relationship to the surrounding sea and land routes. And these houses are not the remainders of an archaic “folk” tradition so much as palimpsests of a local imperial society. The salons, balconies, fireplaces, façades, carvings and paintings that have survived are layers of a bygone life, breathing in an ever-moving present. ♦

Book Offers

- The photographs in this article, by Ali Konyalı, are from *Rural Architecture in the Eastern Black Sea Region / Doğu Karadeniz’de Kırsal Mimari* (Milli Reasurans Art Gallery, Istanbul). Available to CORNUCOPIA subscribers at £45 inc p&cp.
- *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*, by Michael Meeker. Subscriber price £24.95 post-free.
- Issues 12 and 28 of CORNUCOPIA are devoted to the Black Sea and are still available for sale. Order online at www.cornucopia.net



PAINTING HIS WAY INTO

The dashing Abdülmecit Efendi, pictured here in his library, was the last member of the Ottoman dynasty to hold court on the Bosphorus. Cultured, enlightened and with a passion for painting, he was cousin of the last Sultan and spent two years as Caliph. But in 1924, the caliphate was abolished and



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OF THE LAST CALIPH

LITTLE BEAUTIES
OKRA COOKED
TO PERFECTION