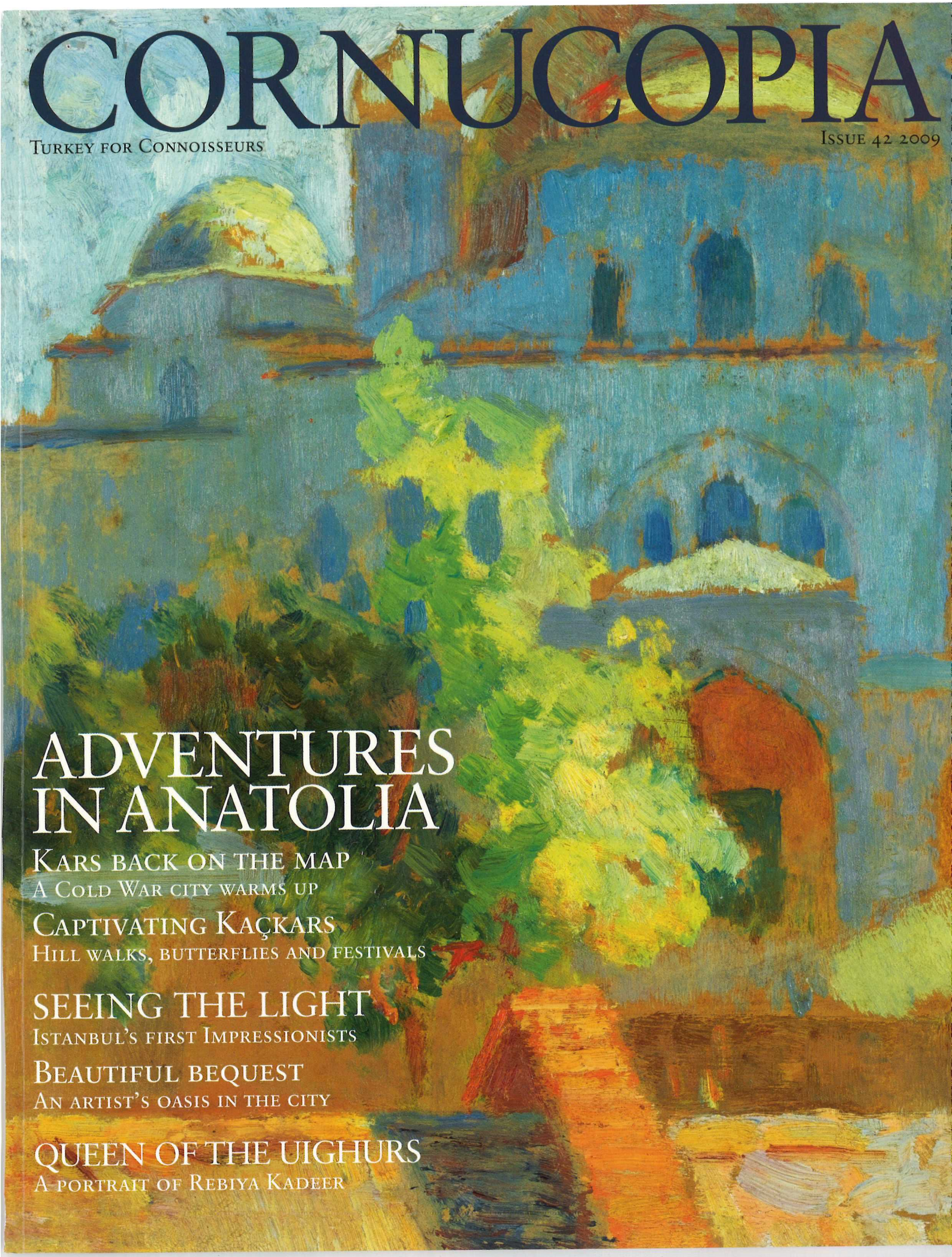
CORNUCOPIA

TURKEY FOR CONNOISSEURS

ISSUE 42 2009



ADVENTURES IN ANATOLIA

KARS BACK ON THE MAP
A COLD WAR CITY WARMS UP

CAPTIVATING KAÇKARS
HILL WALKS, BUTTERFLIES AND FESTIVALS

SEEING THE LIGHT
ISTANBUL'S FIRST IMPRESSIONISTS

BEAUTIFUL BEQUEST
AN ARTIST'S OASIS IN THE CITY

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It's the place where Orhan Pamuk set his grim novel 'Snow'. And it was long dismissed as a Cold War frontier town. But have we been missing something? A new book reveals that, beyond the bleakness, the city of Kars – and the whole northeastern corner of Turkey – is an architectural historian's treasure trove

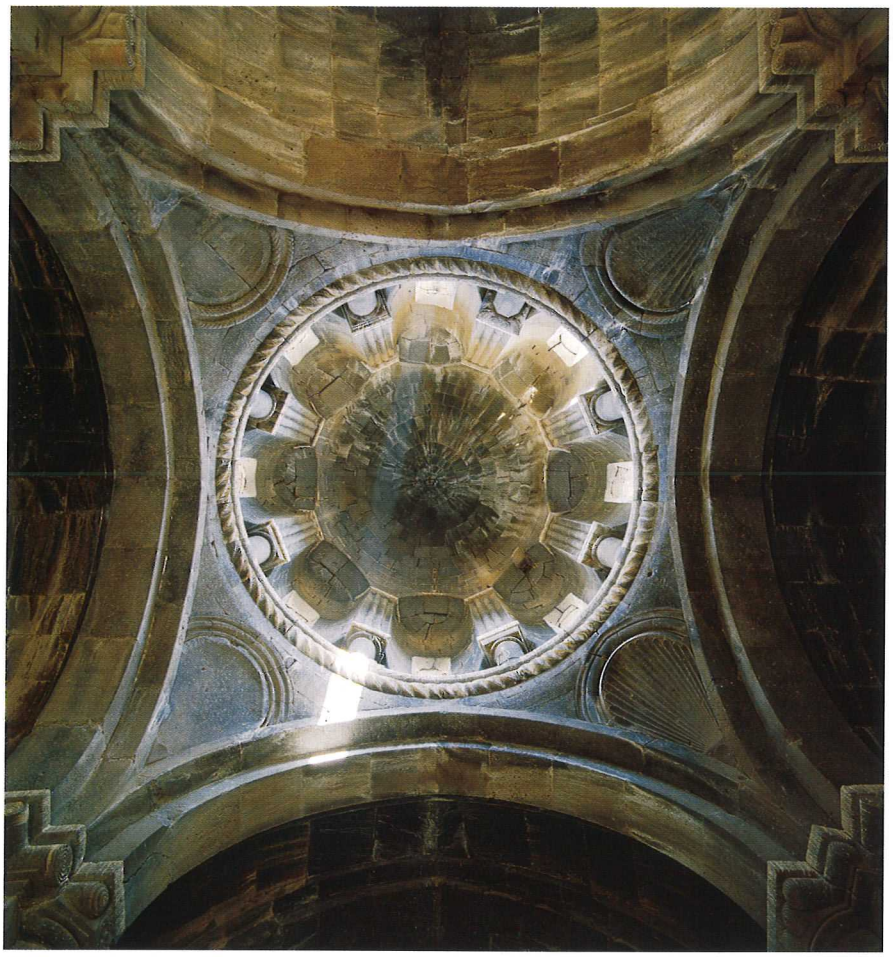
THE STONES OF KARS

Winters are fierce – minus 30°C is common. But there is bounty, too. Beyond the city of Kars (the name rhymes with *sparse*) is a rich land of plains and mountains, lakes and rivers, great flocks of sheep and herds of wild horses, a land flowing with milk and honey. It has long been border country, a conduit for invading armies, traders' caravans and nomads seeking pastures. Waves of Armenians, Georgians, Ottomans and latterly Russians have all left their mark. *Architecture in Northeastern Anatolia*, a fascinating new book of photographs by Ali Konyalı, unveils a wealth of architectural treasures, not only in Kars itself, but to north, south, east and west, from steppe to rainforest. There are medieval castles, soaring domed cathedrals, wedding-cake townhouses, even sturdy plantation mansions complete with tea gardens.



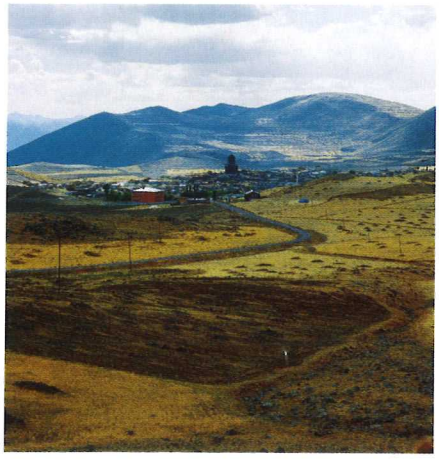
West of Kars, in the southern foothills of the Eastern Black Sea Mountains, stand the medieval ruins of Alatarla Castle (left). Built by Georgian–Byzantine rulers in the 10th or 11th century, it rises above a poplar-lined stream that is dry in summer but cascading in winter

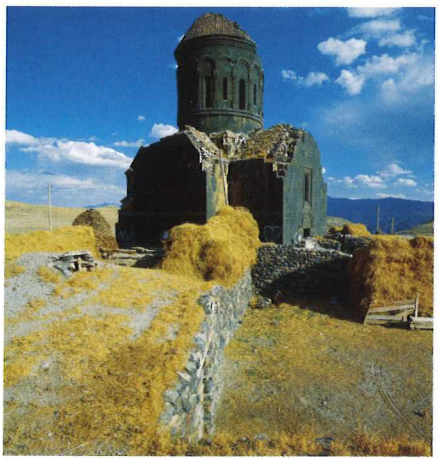
A tombstone crudely carved in human form evokes the funeral practices of the Scythians and Huns. This cemetery, near Çildir, lies in rolling moorland north of Kars, close to the Georgian border. The river below eventually reaches the Georgian capital, Tbilisi (Tiflis)



The Black Church of Kağızman

The church at Çengilliköy, near Kağızman, due south of Kars, lies in a broad, gentle sweep of arable land. But its dark stonework and soaring silhouette give it a forbidding aspect. The building is 25 metres in height and cruciform in plan, with entrances on the north, east and west sides. A tall drum is surmounted by a dome capped externally with a conical roof. The church is thought to date to the 10th or 11th century, though inscriptions in Georgian mark repairs in 1362. The masonry is of magnificently hewn ashlar stone.





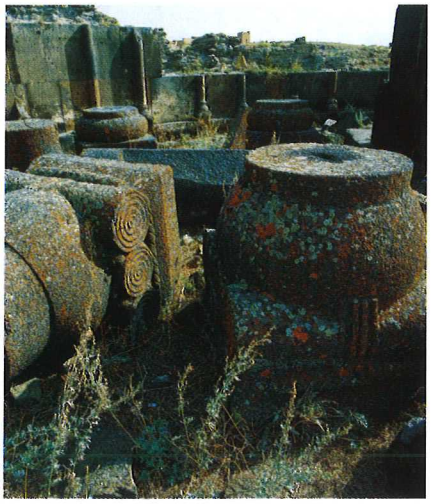
'Dark stone and a soaring silhouette'





Ani: a City of Churches

Founded in the 10th century on a plateau overlooking a huge ravine 45 kilometres east of Kars, the city of Ani controlled the old Silk Road. For a brief century it was the capital of Armenia, but was soon taken in turn by Byzantines, Seljuks, Georgians and Ilkhanid Mongols. Before it was devastated by an earthquake in 1319, Ani had a population of 100,000 and was known as the city of 1001 churches. Now nothing but the walls and a handful of churches survive, colossal stone hulks in a sea of grass. Yet it is one of the most beautiful sites in Turkey, rich in architectural detail.



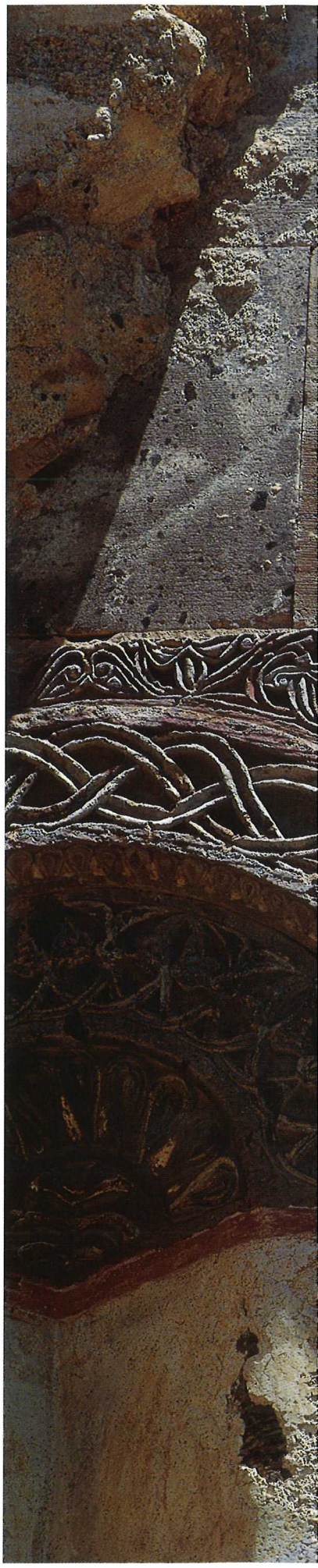
Above: The remains of a church dedicated to St Gregory. Massive and circular, it was completed in the year 1001 for the Armenian King Gagik. A statue of the king, 2.5 metres tall, dressed as an Oriental potentate in turban and kaftan, was unearthed by the Russians in 1905

Right: The richly carved Church of St Gregory the Illuminator (Şirli Kilise), built in 1215, when Ani was under Georgian rule. Carvings of birds of prey, lions, monkeys, deer and dragons adorn a blind arcade

Below: A capital with strong Central Asian influences



'Colossal stone hulks in a sea of grass'











The City of Kars

A Russian garrison town from 1878 to 1917, built on a grid pattern and towered over by a forbidding citadel, the city of Kars nonetheless has touches of lightness and charm.

Left: an exuberant ceiling rose in a private house dating from the early years of the 20th century covers almost the whole ceiling

Above: 'Kar's Hotel', a Russian townhouse reopened as a boutique hotel in 2004. Its Baltic Neoclassicism is enlivened by hints of the Orient: overlooking a small courtyard are delicately carved wooden balconies that recall the houses of Tbilisi

Right: a tulip-shaped wooden capital in a private house



'Touches of lightness and charm'







Kars: the Russian Legacy

When the Russians settled in Kars, they built a new town of 16 city blocks in the 1890s, leaving the old town unchanged. Their streets were wide and the buildings low and richly decorated with mouldings, pediments and balustrades. Kars used to have the appearance of an unloved town, but it has recently been been given a facelift with fresh paint and newly planted trees.



This page: four photographs of Kars in 1937, the 20th anniversary of the city's return by Russia to Turkey

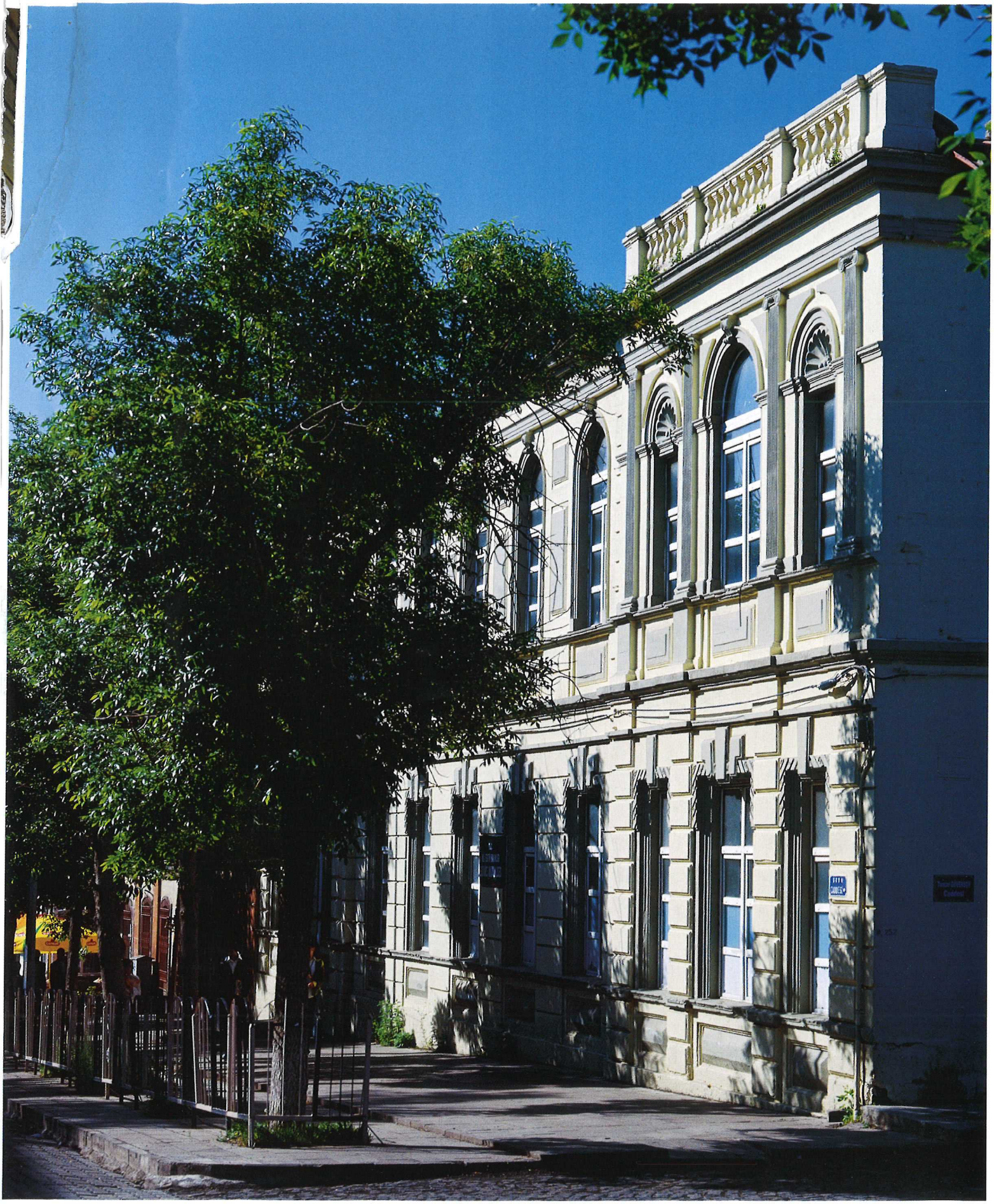
Above: cutting a dash on skis

Top left: a statue of Atatürk is unveiled

Centre left: a sleigh ride

Left: a winter party in Vladikars, a White Russian village outside Kars now known as Kümbetliköyü. It was settled by various groups, including Estonian Lutherans, Volga Germans and Molokans (or milk-drinkers), a sect so named because they refused to abstain from milk on Russian Orthodox fast days. By 1962, when the last of the Molokans left, the village had been taken over by settlers from Georgia

Opposite: the Neoclassical façade and scallop-shell arches of what is now the Kars Gazi Primary School

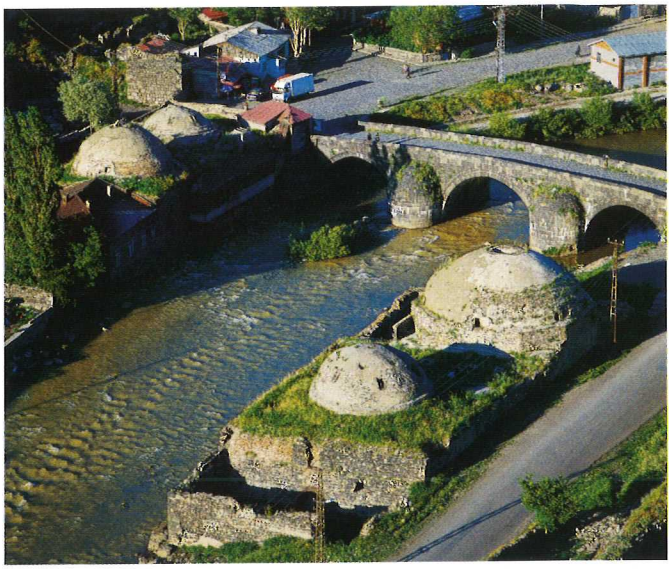




The Domes of Kars



For 1000 years every ruling power has left its public buildings. The first thing the 16th-century Ottomans did, in Kars as elsewhere, was to build elegant hammams. The medieval Armenians and Georgians lavished their energies on austere churches, the 19th-century Russians on ornate ones.



Left and above: The Russian Church of Alexander Nevsky, finished in 1890, became the Fethiye Mosque in 1984. In its Russian heyday, it boasted an elaborate belltower and a splendid dome crowning the apse, both capped with onion domes



Top right: A view of Ottoman Kars. Hammams flank the Stone Bridge (Taşköprü), built during Murad II's restoration of the city in 1579 and rebuilt in 1719 on the original supports. The Mazlumağa Hammam, on the near bank, is contemporary with the first bridge. Badly damaged in the First World War, it was restored and remained in use until recently. The 18th-century Ilbeyoğlu Hammam, on the far bank, is still in use, although its iron doors were stolen in April 2009



Centre: The medieval cathedral of Kars has had many occupants. It was built by King Abas (929–953), of the Georgian–Armenian Bagratid dynasty (still nominally the royal house of Georgia). The Ottomans turned it into a mosque in 1579. In 1877 the Russians converted it into the Church of the Apostles. In the 1960s and 70s it became a museum. Now it is once more a mosque

Right: A relief of one of the apostles. The decorative bands are characteristically Georgian

'A thousand years of public buildings'

Mansions of the Black Sea

Drive north from Kars over the Eastern Black Sea Mountains and you enter a world of rainforests. Hidden high in the hills above the region's rivers are the magnificent 19th-century mansions of Hemşin and Çamlıhemşin – some 70 of which survive.





Above: the façade of this fine house — the Abbasoğlu Mansion in Çamlitepe, above the River Hemşin — has smooth square stones set in a grid of chestnut timbers, a style unique to the region

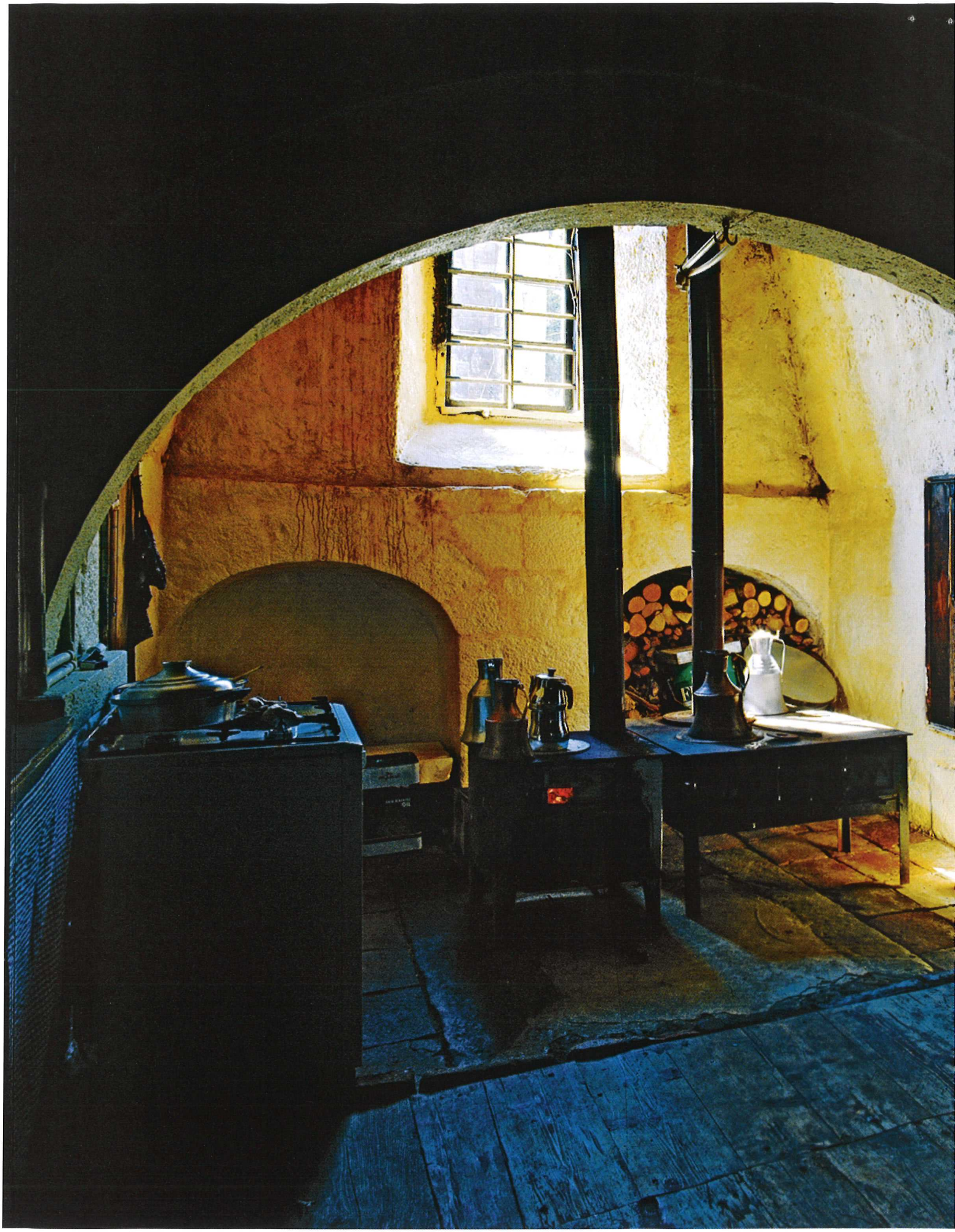
Opposite: the house has two granaries ('serander'); this one, built on stilts, is palatial, with delicate mashrabiye screens

Right: a perfect rainforest mosque that has avoided the plague of the modern minaret. Instead, a small balcony is used to call the faithful to prayer

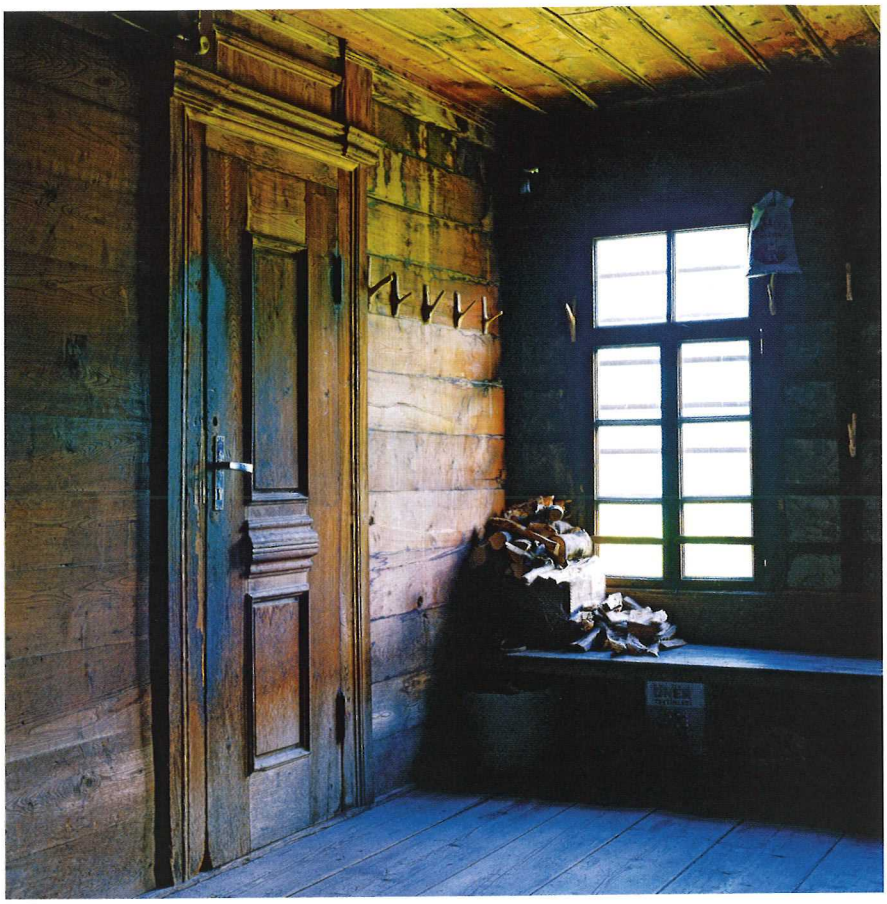


'Magnificence in the rainforest'









Black Sea Mansions

As in all of Turkey's eastern Black Sea houses, a giant fireplace, lit from behind, was the focus of family gatherings.

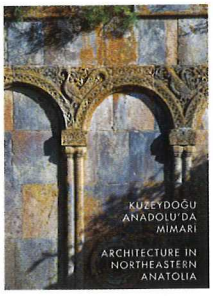
Left: the hearth in this house – the Hunaoğlu Mansion, near Çamlihemşin – has been turned into a kitchen for modern use. The house was built above the River Firtina in 1896–97 by Halil Bey, the great-grandfather of the present owners

Above: the upstairs rooms are lined with massive pine planks

Right: giant tea bags of freshly picked leaves wait to be collected by the tea factories of Rize, on the coast. Many of the Black Sea mansions turned their land over to growing tea in the 1950s



The photographs in this article, by Ali Konyalı, are taken from *Architecture in Northeastern Anatolia*, published by Milli Reasürans, 2009, with text in Turkish and English by Metin Sözen, Hamza Gündoğdu and Aarand Roos. They will form part of an exhibition at the Milli Reasürans art gallery in Istanbul from October 15 to November 26 (www.millireasurans.com.tr). The project, curated by Amélie Edgü, is a sequel to the 2005 book and exhibition *Rural Architecture of the Black Sea Region*, featured in Cornucopia 34. Both books are available online (www.cornucopia.net, £45 each)



'Massive planks and giant tea bags'

A COLD, HARSH REALITY

IN THIS SHORT HISTORY OF THE LONG-TROUBLED CITY OF KARS, THE CONTROVERSIAL ACADEMIC NORMAN STONE HAS SOME WORDS OF ADVICE FOR THE ARMENIANS

Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* – in Turkish, *Kar* – begins with a dramatically claustrophobic bus journey to the town in northeastern Turkey where the novel is set, Kars. It is a depressing novel, centred on the suicide of religiously cramped girls, and snow does not help, but the town's name has nothing to do with it: it is very old, probably from a Georgian root meaning "gate".

Still, in Kars the snow sometimes immobilises the place, and in the not-too-distant past the inhabitants were forced to live some way underground. There, ten years ago, they heated themselves with bricks of straw and animal dung, which give out a low calorific heat that keeps body and soul together.

In Kars today, use of natural gas is spreading, and a considerable effort has been put into improvements: a proper park, a decent hotel, a campaign to put archaeology on the tourist map. A pipeline carries oil from Baku on the Caspian towards the Mediterranean, and a railway is planned to Tbilisi in Georgia and to Baku. But back in 1990 poor old Kars made the guidebooks – Diana Darke's classic *Eastern Turkey*, for instance – as "disinviting". She says it has the two worst hotels in the world: a place to go only because of the extraordinary ruins of the old Armenian capital, Ani, which was just on the Cold War border, and which you could visit only with military permission.

Those ruins are indeed extraordinary. You drive from Kars for about an hour through flat countryside, towards what is now the Armenian border, on the Arpaçay river, and you find a long line of huge walls, with a swastika dating from the sixth century. Then you see the ruins of churches, a vast cathedral, and, down by the river, a Church of the Virgin that has survived the devastations and the earthquakes better than the other buildings, and still contains recognisable biblical fresco scenes.

An Armenian composer, a Khatchatchurian, might well write a symphonic poem about the tragedy of Ani, capital of a might-have-been Greater Armenia. If you go to a Kars hotel in the summer – the Karabağ Hotel is decent – you will find French Armenians explaining, in Armenian, to resentful small boys and their bored French mothers that, once, Armenia was an empire, with a worthy capital. However, on the Armenian side of the river, they have set up a quarry, dynamiting rock for yet more concrete somewhere or other, the explosions not being helpful to the ruins' survival. It is a sorry reminder of the absurdity of the whole relationship between Turks and Armenians.

Kars was once an Armenian city. The Armenians in 1919 bit off a great deal more than they could chew, and had fantasies of restoring Greater Armenia, including the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Kars would have been its capital. It ended in tears, and now, until the Armenian diaspora recognise that it is strongly in their interest to have co-operation from Turkey, relations across the border will consist of booms and bangs signifying nothing. For a long time, Kars languished on this dead border of the Cold War, but now things are moving again.

The immediately striking thing about Kars is that it is quite unlike any other town in Turkey, because the streets are built on a grid pattern that you find in the Baltic, and the houses, stoutly built in the local stone, over one or two floors, with double-glazing in carefully sited windows, proceed, rank upon rather dull rank, down hundreds of yards. There are eight principal roads, off which lesser roads go, at right angles, and on the major ones there are larger buildings with balconies and elaborate pediments. Nowadays, much of it is run-down, but the grander buildings were not so long ago the official buildings of a Russian province: an officers' club, complete with theatre; an opera in the professional classes' club (now a specialist hospital). Today's Cumhurriyet Caddesi was Aleksandrovka, and Faik Bey Sokak was Garnizonskaya. The headquarters of a Russian garrison was acquired by a rich Azeri, then leased out; Orhan Pamuk admits that he took some licence and allotted it to a clergy-training school, but its present-day function is secular, and anyway Kars is not notably pious – there are very few chadors, and you only hear one call to prayer at a time, as against Erzurum's bombardment. A Russian girls' school (very imposing) became the municipality.

These buildings ran down, and for a good reason: almost the entire population that had built Kars fled in 1920. The Turkish military and professional classes had to pick up the pieces, and there were complications. They were solidly secularist-republican, and when, in 1950, there was a free election, their party lost. They then did not get any money. Money went to Erzurum and Rize, which had voted for the opposition; Erzurum got the new university, Rize got subsidies for tea. Kars got nothing for years, and languished until the Soviet Union collapsed, in which period it also got its university, named Caucasus, which concentrates sensibly on animal husbandry and archaeology, and tries to connect over the border. It is sad that the obvious connection, with Armenia, works only in fits and starts.

What stands out in Kars is the fortress. Like Van, it has a huge rock, ideal for the construction of a fortress; and from the ancient kingdom of Urartu onwards, local rulers concentrated on building one that would dominate the plains all around. Kars occupied one of the essential strategic places, connecting Anatolia with the Caucasus, and invaders – Urartian, Armenian, Byzantine, Ottoman – had to have it.

Today's fortress was properly built up, in modern times, by the 16th-century Turks, in the course of their wars with Persia, but in the 19th century the British took a hand. They had decided to support Ottoman Turkey against Russia, which had been taking over the Caucasus and threatened to take over Anatolia as well, including Constantinople. Liberal opinion detested Tsarist Russia, the heartland of reactionary empire, and in any case a Russia athwart Anatolia could threaten British connections with India. War resulted, fought in the Crimea (1853–56), with a sideshow in the Caucasus when the Russians besieged Kars. A British general, Sir William Williams (1800–83), was sent with a team of officers, medical and other, to help, and in 1855 made a great name for himself.

It was an episode that showed the worst and the best of the Turks. The men fought a defensive action with extraordinary courage, only giving in when they were too weak even to hold their rifles straight. But the generals suffered from infighting and prudence, so that capitulation became unavoidable. (It was managed with great