

Free-standing Chardaks of the Balkans and Anatolia

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Abstract:

Chardaks – tiny structures built for repose beside farmers’ fields – abound throughout the Balkan and Anatolian countryside. Across many languages and cultures, this word and building form remain surprisingly consistent, adopted by peoples of differing religions and languages. The modest chardak invites us to speculate about broad cross-cultural themes that link diverse architectural cultures.

Over the past fifteen years we have collaborated in the study of vernacular wooden architecture of the Balkans. This study has covered not only artifacts of the Balkans but also those of the Venetian, Austro-Hungarian, Slavic, Ottoman and Greek neighbors who contributed both population and settlements to this diverse cultural region.

The goals of this research are a survey and comparative analysis of settlement types, building elements, and variations in form, construction and detail, to reveal patterns and similarities. Extensive fieldwork has yielded a multitude of data, but the task of analysis remains incomplete. The chardak is a pervasive building type that has emerged as a particularly provocative artifact for concentrated study.

Both the architectural idea and the word came from the East -- *čardak* is defined in Serbo-Croatian dictionaries as of Turkish origin, with Persian roots from the word *cartaq*, in which the root *car* means “four” and *taq* means “arch.” Words from these roots with similar meanings exist today in Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Romanian, Bulgarian, and even farther east in Aramaic and Farsi. It is thought that the earliest chardak structure of the ancient middle east was made by farmers near their fields, by joining together four adjacent saplings in order to form a platform for sitting above the ground, exposed to breeze and shaded by foliage overhead. Over time, this temporary, agricultural structure (this “primitive hut”) grew to be part of houses, first as an exterior arbor and then built into the body of the dwelling itself, always maintaining its essential qualities of elevation, repose, sociability, and connection with nature. Along the way, the concept of chardak entered folk culture and acquired its most vivid definition as “a place between heaven and earth.”

What accounts for the temporal endurance and geographic spread of this tiny building type? How has its essential meaning survived? Perhaps we cannot answer these questions, but in recording and comparing the easily overlooked chardaks (everyday structures, outside the mainstream of cultural themes) we can make a convincing argument for the importance of such inquiry.

With the chardak as a focus for this presentation and paper, our objective is to define approaches of the larger project on Balkan vernacular architecture. Examples (photographs, drawings and analytic diagrams) will describe environmental settings, spatial characteristics and details of materials and assemblages that have been recorded across the landscapes of the Balkans and Anatolia.

Introduction

The chardak is an element in the architecture and lives of a large proportion of the people of the Balkans and adjacent Asian areas of the northeastern Mediterranean. This observation has come from extended research about the buildings of the Balkans and those countries whose empires have controlled the region in the past. Tracing the word and the original forms, as free-standing single space constructions, is a task which has occupied us over several years.¹

The romantic definition of the chardak as “a place between heaven and earth” is haunting and has made it imperative to look for the ideal examples of this definition.² Is this a purgatory, a place of transition, or is it a place that provides a view to the best of what is beyond? A number of scholars who are very familiar with chardak structures and elements view them as utilitarian spaces that have simply functioned as places for work and relaxation that began as freestanding elements but also became integrated into the dwellings of the past.³ But one can find even within the accepted integration of the chardak as an element, the remnants of more noble and honorific stature. It is this singular noble stature that is most compelling and ideal.

Goals and Objectives of Research

The goals of our research are a survey and comparative analysis of settlement types, building elements, and variations in form, construction and detail, to reveal patterns and similarities. To frame this study let us look at four examples taken from different parts of the Balkan and Anatolian worlds and consider the great variety of meaning and usefulness that have been assigned to the various chardaks (figures 1 - 4).



Taurus Mountains, Turkey
Fig.1 RURAL AGRARIAN



Macedonia, Formerly in YA
Fig.2 TOWER LIVING



Serbia in Yugoslavia
Fig. 3 WORKING PORCH



Serbia in Yugoslavia
Fig. 4 GUEST QUARTERS

The Rural Agrarian Chardak

One of the simplest forms of the chardak can still be found in the Taurus Mountains in the southeastern part of Turkey. These structures are crudely constructed and are set next to broad fields in level areas of the mountain range but also occur in steeply sloped areas where the land is terraced for planting.

The principal attributes of most of the chardaks that we studied include an elevated position, protection from the sun, access of breezes and orientation to distant views. Use of the spaces, even in their simplest forms, varies greatly. The chardak is a place to view and as such can serve as a platform to the land and the sky. This platform provides a

place of repose for those who work in the field and a place to watch over the fields to protect them from birds or animals that might steal the fruits of the fields. The chardak also serves as a place for family members to work in view of the fields but protected from the sun; a perfect place for someone to shell peas or work on textiles while watching a sleeping infant. Roofs of early chardaks were believed by scholars to be made using boughs and as posts, the trunks of adjacent saplings.



Uzumdere, Turkey / Chardak near the top of a terraced field and view of the fields and valley from chardak
Figure 5



Figure 6

In examples we found two years ago, the raised platforms were constructed of planks but the vertical elements were constructed of stripped poles. Shade roofs were made using hewn branches interwoven or bound together with roping and then covered with boughs for shading and cover. The sides of the raised platforms were enclosed with low rails made of planking or with sticks organized in regular patterns. The chardaks were sited to command views of the fields and the landscape. The examples found today vary in size and proportion from those that accommodate two or three people comfortably to larger structures for four to six (figures 5 - 10).



Akseki, Turkey
Figure 7



Uzumdere, Turkey
Figures 8, 9 & 10



An open freestanding chardak serves well as a perfect outdoor room in the balmy climate of Anatolia and beyond. The columns of the chardaks are often of the size and scale of saplings and the roofs vary from framing and boughs or climbing vines to open planking to provide well-ventilated shading. Variations in the freestanding chardaks of Turkey today have yet to be fully explored but the building type does survive in agrarian settings as well as along roads as shelters for vendors and dining structures at restaurants. In the contemporary setting the need for additional living and working space for use during the

extended mild seasons of the year and the simplicity of construction allow people to continue the use of chardaks.



Figs. 11 & 12 - Yakaçiftlik, Turkey / View of a chardak built beside a house, detail shows female within the chardak

In a number of small Anatolian villages we also found instances where the chardak abuts the dwelling of the owners (figs. 11 & 12). This is an important step as a precursor to the integration of the chardak into the fabric of the house, a condition more often found in the Balkans (Yugoslavia & its separate republics, Bulgaria and in Sub-Carpathian Romania).



Chardaks joined to dwellings / Ibradi, T
Figure 13



Akşahap köyü, T
Figure 14



Tarşagil, Turkey
Figure 15

In the Balkans, one chardak (figure 16) (after a drawing in “Seoska Arhitektura I Rurizam” by Branislav Kojić, Beograd 1973) illustrates an example of an open freestanding chardak found in the Sar Planina mountains that join Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This chardak was supported on post and beam structure with woven boughs to stabilize the structure and form the enclosing walls of a granary (ambar) below the platform. Floor, seating and rails were made with planed timbers.

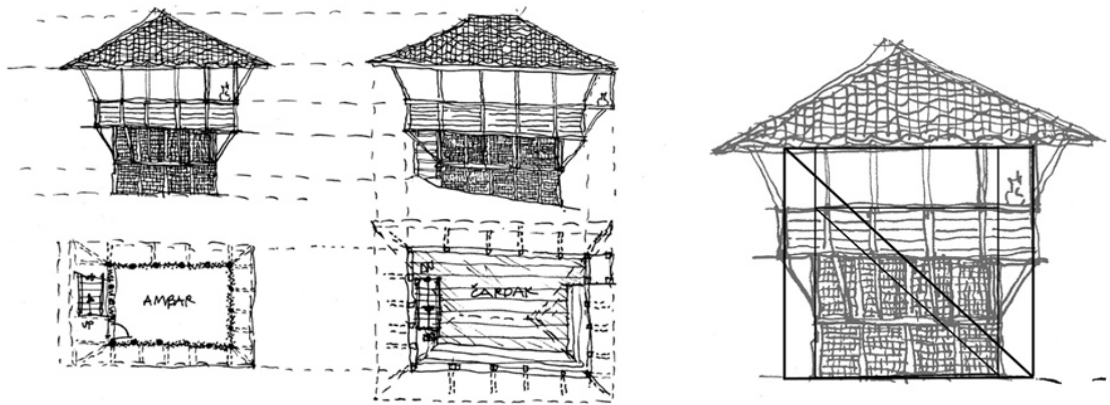


Figure 16 - Example of an open freestanding chardak structure found in southern Yugoslavia in 1960
Thresh and straw stables and barn structures, of the same construction type, still existed in the region near Bitola in the late 1980's. The characteristic extension of the upper structure beyond the base enclosure as well as the further extension of the roof to provide further protection from the sun are common formal expressions in many of the traditional buildings in both Turkey and the Balkans

The Chardak as a Tower for graceful living

The term “chardak” and “kula” are sometimes used interchangeably in Serbian folklore and elsewhere⁴. A *kula* is a tower structure that is found as a vernacular building type in Bosnia, Montenegro, the Serbian province of Kosovo, Macedonia and Romania. In many tower dwellings the viewing room at the top of the structure is referred to as the chardak. However, in most cases each level of the tower is a single room.⁵ The most compelling example of a kula that serves as a chardak is the tower structure of the former Dervish monastery in the city of Tetevo, of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (figs. 17-19). This monastery is an eighteenth century complex and the tower is set on the edge of the tekke (the Macedonian word for a dervish monastery). The tower was built, according to local historians, for the daughter of the leader of the tekke since women were not allowed within the tekke proper.



Figures 17, 18 & 19 - Tetevo, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

This building has all of the attributes of the chardak - height, light, views and breeze - but does not exhibit the four-posted structure. Wooden structure and paneling occur on three sides of the upper portion and are painted a deep blue color. A minor band of wall above

this, appearing like a frieze, is plastered and contains small windows and detailed paintings. Seating lines the interior of the upper level. The paneling is designed with shutters that open up and down. Those that open up serve as shading devices, while the lower panel serves as a backrest and rail for the seating. A solid masonry wall to the north contains the fireplace. The mountains to the north are part of the Sar Planina range and the source of winter winds and cold weather. Views to the south, east and west overlook a wide valley.

The tower form presents a clear cubic base of stone with stone corners that extend upward to provide support for wooden corner columns. Its strong masonry base contains a storage room and its appearance is reminiscent of storage buildings of market town centers and fortress houses that line the Serbian-Albanian border to the northwest. Stone steps and platform provide a counterpoint to the offset storage door and the solid landing serves as a spring point for the light wooden steps that give a more open ascent to the tower itself. The location of the stairs beyond the confines of the tower itself also extends the entry to a central space; an external stair is typical in most freestanding cardaks. This tekke complex (Sersem Ali Baba monastery) has many interesting pavilions and includes another chardak element, a surveillance space that sits as a guard tower that spans over the principal gate of the tekke.

The Chardak as a Work Space

At Poganovo, in the Stara Planina mountains at the eastern edge of Serbia, less than ten kilometers from the Bulgarian border, is the monastery of Saint John (Sveti Jovan) built in the fourteenth century. The monastery is famous for its church, icons and the small chardak that sits within the walls (figure 20). In cultural literature the chardak is indicated as ‘an example of 14th-century artisan building’.⁶ It sits within the compound with its back to the defining walls and steep mountains and faces the open green space, gardens and church to the east and south.

The chardak has served a number of uses including as a granary on the base level and a working and guest sleeping area on the upper level. The exterior area on the upper level provides a space to sit and work with shade from the summer sun and cover from autumn rain and winter winds. Views from this area give occupants visual access to the entire complex (the garden, church, river beyond and approach pathways).



Poganovo, Serbia / Chardak with interior stair
Figure 20



Initial study of building's regulating lines
Figure 21

The most striking characteristics of the Poganovo chardak are its clarity of form and complexity of compositional elements. The mixture of various construction expressions

and spatial intricacies makes it especially noteworthy, and its component forms and technologies reflect attention to the environmental needs and the aesthetic expression of the buildings of the times. The granary, indoor and outdoor spaces display characteristic expressions found today in the preserved vernacular architecture of the rural and urban buildings of the Balkans.

The building construction is a blend of wood plank and a construction technique named “bondruk”. Bondruk consists of a frame infilled with wattle and daub and covered with a white wash. The arches visible in the chardak are made by placing lath over the framing and plastering over this to generate the shapes shown. This false-work technique is found in the vernacular buildings in various parts of former Yugoslavia as well as in the revival national architecture found in Bulgaria. This combination of bondruk and plank construction responds to the various uses of the building. The wooden granary element provides well ventilated storage space protected from the dampness of the ground and condensation that might destroy the food stores of the monastery, and the bondruk construction provides a more appropriate seal from air infiltration in the occupied spaces of the chardak. The projection of the roof and upper level beyond the base serves to protect the lower bondruk surfaces from rain-wash.

As a whole the visual composition of the chardak’s exterior presents a clever interplay of exposed framing and interlocking formal elements that show a concern for ordering of the elevations with playful offsetting geometries that give the building its special character. Through the simple overlay of regulating lines, shown above, one begins to see the level of skill used in the subdivision of form (figure 21).

The Chardak as Guest Quarters and Place for Negotiations

One of the most interesting chardak forms is that of the chardak as “gostinica” or “konak” (guest house). This type of chardak came into use in the Sumadija district of Serbia during the Ottoman occupation after the Turks allowed trade among the ‘unbelievers’ to resume in the country. The chardaks served as guest quarters on farms for traders (most often pig traders) traveling to negotiate with the farmers and owners for produce and livestock. The structures typically contained a granary or storage space underneath the room to accommodate the guest travelers accessed by an exterior stair. A number of these chardaks still remain in the countryside of Serbia (figures 22 - 26).



Fig. 22 - Pranjana, Serbia



Fig. 23 - Dobrinja, Serbia



Fig. 24 - Brezna, Serbia



Savinac, Serbia / Chardak elevation toward dwelling
Figures 25 & 26



Elevation to land and valley below

The chardak in Dobrinja was constructed by Prince Miloš Obrenović as a place to rest when he made visits to a church he had built in the village where he was born to honor his mother. The chardak sits as a monument and symbol of the opening of trade that was accomplished through his efforts. In the other, more typical examples, casks of plum brandy from the orchards of Sumadija were stored in the ground-level spaces of the chardaks, and served farmers well in helping to negotiate deals with the visiting merchants. Most of these chardaks are located near the farmer's dwelling but had their principal windows overlooking the fields and orchards of the farm. The winters in the mountains are cold so the chardaks are often enclosed with only small windows. Typically the farms were on the south-facing slopes of the mountains and the dwelling structures were located to catch the sun and view of the fields below.

Closing Observations

In our travels and studies we found numerous cultures and ethnic groups that adopted and adapted the chardak into their lives, building traditions and environments. The creation of this simple, elevated, covered place surrounded by nature appears to be an inescapable imperative that transcends cultural ownership. Furthermore the word chardak does not establish a fixed dominant form that must be replicated; instead it establishes an idea that allows all to build their vision. The examples included above give a sense of the range of uses and forms created in Anatolia and the Balkans over the past four hundred years but one is hard pressed to identify single elements that are carried by all. Instead each has developed to respond to the cultural, social and climatic setting. Although the chardak sadly has left the lexicon of building forms of our contemporary lives, in the mountains of these places, one can still find that the value of a simple place for mankind to view and engage nature is still understood.

¹ See J. Bing with J. Brooke Harrington, "A Study of Words and Buildings: The Cardaks of Former Yugoslavia", - *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series* (Volume 100 / IASTE 100-96), Center for Environmental Design Research, University of California at Berkeley, pp. 1-40.
- *Environmental Design*, Journal of the Islamic Environmental Research Centre, Como, Italy, no.1-2/1994-1995, pp. 174-200.

² First introduced to the authors in 1987 by Professor Zoran Petrović of the Architecture Faculty at the University of Belgrade in Yugoslavia

³ Dr. Amir Pašić, architect and planner in Mostar, Bosnia & Hercegovina; Dr. Ayda Arel, former lecturer at Istanbul Technical University; and Dr. Rachele Anguelova, professor of architecture at the University of Sofia in Bulgaria each have their own views on the chardak as principally highly useful elements and structures.

⁴ In *Felt Tents and Pavilions , Volume I* by Peter Alford Andrews, Melisende, 1999, there is a reference on page 736 in a passage he translated of the records about an official event in Samarkand in 1404. His text indicates “Though in this case the booths should perhaps be regarded as elaborate market stalls, their use at this date in a camping ground is of some interest as four-posted pergolas called *chardaq* have come to be used extensively by the Turkish Yörök. There is a footnote that follows (173) that states within it “... Though Lurish nomads use them too, they call them *kula*.”

⁵ We have not included our studies the kulas of Bosnia, Montenegro, Kosovo or Romania since these structures typically contain more than two levels (a ground level, intermediate, and top level). In the examples of Kosovo and Romania the uppermost level normal has more than one habitable space.

⁶ Rakić, Kosta, editor *Treasures of Yugoslavia* , Beograd 1986, page 385.