

Domed Structures of the Suruç Basin

photograph

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ABSTRACT

Among the traditional mud-brick constructions of the Near East, those with a particular type of doming stands out as a distinct category. Such buildings are known to exist in the region between Humus in the South and Urfa in the North; however, within this extensive area, the domed structures are found only in four distinct regions: territories around Humus and Aleppo in Syria, and in the Harran and Suruç plains in Turkey. It is of interest that E.Banse, exploring in 1900's, notes Suruç Plain as the only region where such constructions are exclusively found. However, later, the domed traditional structures in the plain of Harran have been the focus of interest, relatively being well documented, their presence at Suruç almost completely overlooked.

Within the framework of the Cultural Inventorying Program of TUBA, the Turkish Academy of Sciences, Suruç and the neighboring district of Birecik have been selected as pilot working areas. Thus, in 2001 and in 2002, it became possible to conduct, for the first time, a thorough documentary survey of the entire region; the extensive coverage of the survey enabled in specifying the distribution area of the domed structures.

It became evident that the domed mud-brick structures were the only constructional type in the rural areas of the Suruç Plain and that this tradition faded away rather quickly by the second half of the 20th Century. All functional units of village houses, such as the living quarters, stables, granaries and other storage units were constructed in this manner. In the course of our work, domed structures were encountered at 137 villages or hamlets, though most of them abandoned and in decaying stage. Nevertheless, the structural details of numerous buildings could be documented, enabling also to define the relation between function and their plan-types. Within the framework of our work, alongside analyzing the set out of structural design in context, it also became possible to document structural details, the use of various building materials and in particular of mud-brick in walls and domes. Special effort was given in recording oral tradition concerning the use of these buildings and also of the experiences of actual constructors.

By the second half of the 20th Century, with the completion of the Birecik bridge over the Euphrates, wood for construction became available, and the tradition of constructing mud-brick domes died away rather quickly, giving way to flat-roofed buildings.

This paper, besides presenting main features of domed structures of the Suruç plain and noting their transformation, also intends to stimulate a discussion on means to protect the remnants of this tradition.