



An Intercultural Perspective on Architectural Representations of Poetic Spaces

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Abstract

In contemporary academic research, interdisciplinary studies are important for bringing new perspectives to the scientific community. Interdisciplinary approaches synthesize the fragmented nature of knowledge to reveal a holistic perspective. In this context, this study is an interdisciplinary effort encompassing the fields of architecture and literature. Architectural depictions found in poetic texts within the field of literary studies have been examined through a cross-cultural approach. The study examines examples of poetry in Kurdish, Turkish, and Arabic. Architectural space depictions in poems written in different periods and languages have been illustrated, and efforts have been made to address the structural characteristics of the poems. While analyzing the poetic texts from an architectural perspective, comparative and survey methods were employed.

Keywords: Architecture, Space, Poetry, Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic.

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Introduction

Descriptions of place in poetry serve as a crucial and reliable source for understanding the architectural history of a text. In addition to adding a unique literary beauty to poems, these descriptions provide a highly effective framework for interpreting the poetry. Space is one of the most significant factors influencing human emotions. For this reason, many poets have written poems that consist solely of descriptions, narratives, and praises of a particular space.

In ancient times, particularly during periods when poetry was widespread, it can be cited as one of the key sources for understanding the culture, architecture, and building styles of people from that era. Emerging from the oral tradition and easily retained in human memory, poetry served as a bridge for transmitting historical knowledge from one generation to the next during periods when writing did not exist or was not widespread. Indeed, we can give meaning and an accurate form to the architectural features of the ruins of those old structures and buildings many of which have fallen into disrepair that have managed to survive to the present day, specifically through the descriptions found in poetry. We observe that poets who meticulously depict the structural features of the buildings they describe in their poetry generally possess a refined aesthetic sensibility, as well as a keen eye for observation and a vivid imagination.

In this study, we will attempt to provide examples of architectural depictions of certain Middle Eastern countries found in poems written in different periods and languages, and to discuss the architectural characteristics of various nations across different eras. First, we observe that these depictions are expressed in a more realistic and sincere manner in popular and anonymous poems prevalent across various social strata. Given the breadth of the subject, the study includes examples from Kurdish, Turkish, and Arabic poems. Let us now examine how spatial depictions are conveyed in poems composed in different languages.

1. Architectural Depictions of Places in Turkish Poetry

We observe that descriptions of space in Turkish poetry have evolved in tandem with changes in building forms and characteristics brought about by advancements in construction and building technology over the centuries. In contrast to the depictions of green and musk-colored (black) tents in Fuzûlî's masterpiece *Leylâ* and *Mecnûn* from Classical Turkish Literature (Doğan, 2000), modern poetry features descriptions of high-rise buildings, apartment

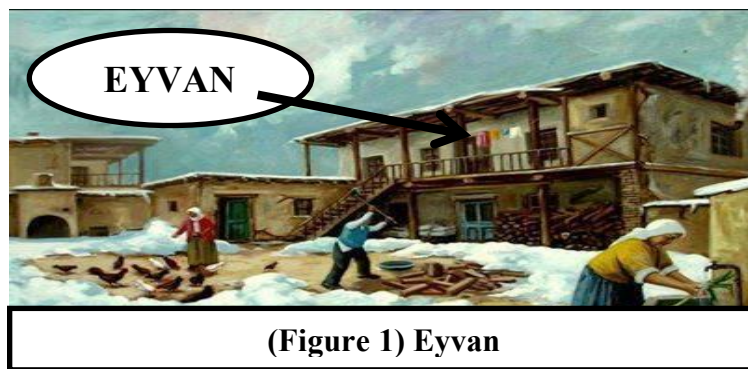
complexes, and their interior spaces. However, we rarely encounter depictions of iwans and balconies. This is why we say, “The architectural characteristics of each era manifest themselves in the poetry of that era.”

1.1. Architectural Depictions of Places in Classical Turkish Poetry

It is possible to gain some understanding of the architectural features of that period through descriptions of certain architectural structures found in early Turkish poetry. Consequently, some architectural elements mentioned by name and described in classical Turkish poetry were either never used in later periods or were used in a way that attributed them to earlier times.

1.1.1 Eyvân

Eyvan is the term used to describe building sections constructed in the form of a sâyebân or çardak, featuring columns, posts, or arches, with an open front and a covered roof (Pakalın, 1983). This term was also applied to open-fronted, roofed porches inside homes (Kağnıcı, 2008). The eyvân is an architectural element mentioned as “eyvân” in Turkish, Kurdish, and Persian poetry (Figure 1). It also features in poetry as a place where people sit to observe the outside world and where lovers can best see their beloved.



(Figure 1) Eyvan

In love poetry, the places where the beloved lives play a very significant role in terms of spatial descriptions. We see that the lover is as enamored with the places where the beloved lives as with the beloved herself, and that he describes those places with a distinct sense of excitement and enthusiasm. The underlying spirit behind the beautiful depictions of the spaces, buildings,

and structures used by the beloved in love poems lies in the lover's following thought: "For the sake of one eye, many eyes are loved. Since my beloved is beautiful, then everything connected to her, serving her, or belonging to her is also beautiful."

"Nerede buldu Ferîdun bu celâl ü câhı/Nerede gördü ya Kisrâ bu bülend eyvânı"
(Where did Ferîdun find such majesty and glory? / Where did Kisra see such a lofty hall?)

Nedim

The architectural term "eyvan," which appears in this couplet by Nedim, one of the poets of the Ottoman Tulip Era, not only refers to a structural element but also symbolizes the spatial manifestation of power. Indeed, imagery and abstract meaning are common elements in classical Turkish poetry. The phrase "Bülend eyvan," meaning "high eyvan," represents the vertical hierarchy in Ottoman architecture. In the poem, the eyvan is portrayed as a lofty architectural structure from which Sultan Ahmed III, the ruler of the era, observed or surveyed the outside world and greeted the people.

1.2. Architectural Depictions of Places in Modern Turkish Poetry

With the advancement of technology in Turkey, people's lifestyles have changed. In the past, several families referred to as "extended families" lived together in mansions, estates, and large standalone homes. With this new era, society has transitioned from a way of life characterized by very strong social ties, where everyone was aware of one another's lives, to a way of life where social interactions have been reduced to a minimum, and people have chosen or been forced to live in apartment units as nuclear families.

In the past, even if homes were far apart, the shared mosque, tea house, street, neighborhood, and so on were sufficient to maintain social ties. However, today, even though people share the same building, they live disconnected from one another and as strangers. It can be argued that architectural design plays a significant role in this disconnection between individuals. This is because architectural designs guide and accustom society to a certain lifestyle. In this context, it can be said that an architect's designs steer people toward either socialization or individualization (anti-socialization). For example, from the perspective of family structure, it may be difficult for large families to sustain their lives in apartment living.

The apartment's connection to the outside world is its balconies. For Anatolian people, who are not accustomed to living in enclosed spaces like apartments, the balcony has become an important architectural feature where they can breathe fresh air and see the sky.

1.2.1. Apartment

The apartment is not a setting often praised in poetry; despite its negative image, it has found a place in poetry, albeit a small one. For a poet, an apartment is practically a prison. This is because the poet is part of society through his emotions and social relationships. The apartment, however, is a place where human relationships are very weak, social ties are severed, and human values have withered, which wounds the poet's sensitive soul. For this reason, the apartment serves as material for poetry not because of its beauty, but because of the negative things it brings. In this regard, we can cite Hidayet Doğan's poem titled "Apartment Prison" as an example.

Apartman Hapishane (Apartment Prison)

Apartmanda dargın, herkes birine,
Herkes kara diyor, ak dediğime,
Ben görmedim var mı, mutlu bir kimse,
Apartman işkence, bir hapishane.

(Everyone in the apartment building is at odds with someone, Everyone calls it black when I say it's white, I haven't seen a single happy person, The apartment building is a torture chamber, a prison.)

Koyma ayakkabını, kapı önüne,
Çıkart çöprü hemen, vakti gelince,
Merdivende asla, sigara içme,
Apartman eziyet, bir hapishane.

(Leave your shoes by the door, Take out the trash right away when it's time, Never smoke on the stairs, Living in an apartment building is a nightmare it's like a prison.)

Aşağıda okusak, güzel Kur'anı,
Olur mu şimdi bu, hep oynamalı,

Halbuki herkesten, kabul görmeli,
Apartman gönüllü, bir hapishane.

(If we were to read the beautiful Quran below, Is this really how it should be—always playing around? Yet it should be accepted by everyone, The apartment building, a prison of its own.)

Parayı soran yok, harcar bir yere,
Tamamda ayda bir, olsun sergile,
Bilelim paramız, emin ellerde,
Apartman işkence, bir hapishane.

(No one asks about the money; it just gets spent somewhere, Fine, but at least once a month, show us the balance, So we know our money is in safe hands, Living in an apartment is torture—it's like a prison.)

Güven yok bitmiş, artık burada,
Sanırım arkadan, konuşur bana,
Kalbim çok bozuldu, bunca yıl sonra,
Apartman sıkıntı, bir hapishane.

(Trust is gone, it's over now, I think he's talking to me from behind, My heart is so broken, after all these years, The apartment is a burden, a prison.)

Komşu nasılsınız, isteğin var mı,
Şöyle yapacağız, nasıl uygun mu,
Bir kişi istemez, o yapılmaz ki,
Apartman gönüllü, bir hapishane.

(Hey neighbor, how are you? Do you have any requests? Here's what we're going to do—does that work for you? If even one person objects, it won't happen. This apartment building is like a prison.)

Üçbeşi birlik olmuş, çevirir durur,
Karar oldu bitti, hemen yazılır,
Ya Allah nidası, arşdan duyulur,
Apartman işkence, bir hapishane.

(A handful of them have banded together, going round and round, The decision's been made, it's written down right away, The cry of "Oh God" is heard from the heavens, Living in an apartment is torture, a prison.)

Ölsem cenazem, kalır günlerce,
Hasta olsam bir kez, sormazlar bile,
Yaşarken girdim ben, süslü kabire,
Apartman eziyet, bir hapisane.

(If I were to die, my funeral would go on for days, If I were to fall ill even once, no one would even ask, While I'm still alive, I've entered a gilded tomb, This apartment is a torment, a prison.)

By using the concept of a "Voluntary Prison" for the apartment building, the poet has essentially likened each apartment within it to a prison cell. From an architectural perspective, the apartment building is one of the symbols of modernization. However, these expanding and rising structures have significantly eroded the traditional Turkish understanding of neighborliness. Indeed, in the poem, it is possible to discern this through the erosion of trust and the monotony in human relationships. The phrase "Don't leave your shoes by the door" in the poem also highlights the conflict within apartment buildings and the architectural ambiguity stemming from the inability to place shoes by the door. Similarly, the lines "If we were to read the beautiful Quran downstairs / Is that even possible now? We must always play" highlight the issue of sound insulation in apartment architecture. The concern about disturbing other neighbors in the building reveals how architectural changes impose restrictions on individual freedom. From this, it is possible to directly observe the impact of architecture on living culture.

Apartman (The Apartment Building)

Dün iki katlıydı,
Bugün üç katlı
Derken
Dört katlı, beş katlı, altı katlı
Yükseliyor efendim yükseliyor,
Memleket yükseliyor.

(Yesterday it was two stories high, Today it's three stories high And then Four stories, five stories, six stories It's rising, sir, it's rising, The country is rising.)

In his “Apartment” poem, Melih Cevdet Anday takes a critical look at the new architectural style that emerged alongside urbanization and modernization. The lines “It’s rising, sir, it’s rising / The country is rising” may seem to point to a positive development, but they are actually an ironic statement. Through the lens of apartment building construction, he offers a critical view of the country’s rapid, unplanned urbanization process. The rise that comes with the increase in the number of floors is actually portrayed as a false sense of progress. Additionally, the phrase “It was two-story yesterday” signifies a longing for and attention to the low-rise, horizontal architecture of the past. When Anday says “The country is rising,” he exposes the misguided perception of development behind high-rise construction, thereby revealing in the poem the damage the architectural structure of the apartment building inflicts on cultural codes.

Behçet Necatigil, known in Turkish literature as the “poet of homes,” critically examines the transformation of cities in his poem “The Changing World.” The architectural imagery in the poem reveals the destructive impact of this transformation on both the individual and society. In the poem, which depicts the transition from horizontal to vertical architecture, the poet wanders through the neighborhood where he spent his childhood. “Then, in place of many houses / New buildings had sprung up. / Like octopuses, apartment buildings / Have spread their tentacles here too / Where are the old days? / Open your door so I can enter your home / But where are those homes? / I don’t know.” With these lines, he lays bare the way modern architecture has invaded the space.

Değişen Dünya (A Changing World)

Çocukluğumun geçtiği sokakta
Biraz dolaşayım dedim,
Şimdi oturduğum yerden uzakta.

Öyle bir hüznün çöktü ki içime,
Ne bileyim
Ağlayasım geldi kendi kendime.

İnsanları değişmişti,

Ondan belki de.

Sonra pek çok evlerin yerinde

Yeni binalar dikilmişti.

(On the street where I grew up, I decided to take a little walk, Far from where I live now. Such a deep sadness came over me, I don't know why, I felt like crying all by myself. The people had changed, Maybe that's why. And in place of so many houses, New buildings had been erected.)

Ahtapotlar gibi apartmanlar

Buraya da salmış kollarını,

Yoksul aileler çekilmişler

Satıp savıp mallarını.

Böyle böyle bizim eski mahalle

Hoyrat servetlerin karşısında

Silinip gitmiş bile.

Eski günler neredesiniz,

Açın kapınızı da evinize gireyim.

Ama nerde o evler,

Ne bileyim.

Şimdi anam ağlıyor

Zenginlik nedir, fakirlik nedir

İnsan zamanla anlıyor.

(Apartment buildings like octopuses, Have spread their tentacles here too, Poor families have retreated, Having sold off their belongings. And so, our old neighborhood, In the face of ruthless wealth, Has vanished without a trace. Where are you, days of old, Open your doors so I may enter your home. But where are those homes, I don't know. Now my mother is weeping. What is wealth, what is poverty, One comes to understand with time.)

It is clear from the poem that the architectural transformation also paved the way for a class-based transformation. Necatigil's following lines support this idea: "Poor families have

moved away / Selling off their possessions. / Little by little, our old neighborhood / Faced with reckless wealth / Has vanished entirely.” The dispossession of poor families and their relocation from their neighborhoods reveals the connection between architectural change and the economy. In modern Turkish poetry, space is not merely a pile of concrete. Space, or the home, is a carrier of memories, a warm haven. Consequently, the architectural changes experienced signify not only a visual transformation but also the loss of the individual’s childhood and memories.

1.2.2. Balcony

Architecturally speaking, the balcony is the only window in an apartment building that opens to the outside and connects it to the outside world. As it is the only place where lovers can see their beloved, balconies are the one place in an apartment that lovers and poets cherish most. For this reason, descriptions of balconies appear frequently in poetry. Poets have depicted balconies in two ways. What matters to us is understanding and perceiving the architectural character of the balcony. In this context, what is a balcony? Is it the place where a beloved makes an appearance, the exit from a prison, or a passageway opening onto the world?

In his poem “Balkon,” Sezai Karakoç both depicts the eerie height of balconies, which is particularly noticeable on the upper floors of apartment buildings, and highlights their function.

Balkon (Balcony)

Çocuk düşerse ölür çünkü balkon
Ölümün cesur körfezidir evlerde
Yüzünde son gülümseme kaybolurken çocukların
Anneler anneler elleri balkonların demirinde

İçimde ve evlerde balkon
Bir tabut kadar yer tutar
Çamaşırlarınızı asarsınız hazır kefen
Şezlongunuza uzanır ölü

(If a child falls, they die because of the balcony, Death is a bold gulf within homes, As the last smile fades from the children’s faces, Mothers, mothers, their hands clinging to the balcony

railings Inside me and within homes, the balcony, Takes up as much space as a coffin, You hang your laundry a ready-made shroud, The dead lie stretched out on your lounge chair.)

Gelecek zamanlarda
Ölüleri balkonlara gömecekler
İnsan rahat etmeyecek
Öldükten sonra da

Bana sormayın böyle nereye
Koşa koşa gidiyorum
Alnından öpmeye gidiyorum
Evleri balkonsuz yapan mimarların

(In the days to come, They'll bury the dead on balconies, No one will find peace, Not even after death. Don't ask me where I'm going. I'm running there. I'm going to kiss her forehead To the architects who built houses without balconies.)

Sezai Karakoç's poem "Balkon," which has left a profound mark on Turkish literature, generally focuses on the negative consequences brought about by modernization and urbanization. The line "If a child falls, they die because of the balcony" points out that, within the context of modern urban architecture, the balcony is a dangerous architectural structure far removed from nature. The poet expresses his rebellion against this modern architecture with the line, "I am going to kiss the foreheads of the architects / Who build houses without balconies." Ultimately, Karakoç treats the balcony as a component of modern architecture that separates humans from nature, leading to isolation and bringing them closer to death (Figure 2).



(Figure 2) The Balcony Depicted in Karakoç's Poetry

In her poem “Balkon Sızmaları,” Nazife Abaylı describes the balconies found in villas and single-family homes. While depicting a two-story house its paint, roof, and shape she also describes the shape of the balcony and notes that it is a space where one can sit.

Balkon Sızmaları

Karşı evin balkonunda bir adam
Hani şu, kahverengi çatılı,
Sarı boyalı evin sahibi.

Rakısını yudumluyordu az önce.
Anason kokusu geldikçe yağmur öncesi esintiyle.
Aklımı başımdan almıştı..
Yazık..
Yağmurun sesini duyamadan gecenin sessizliğinde..
Sandalyesinde sızdı kaldı.

(A man on the balcony of the house across the Street, You know, the one with the brown roof, The owner of the yellow-painted house. He was sipping his raki just a moment ago. The scent of anise drifted over on the pre-rain breeze. It had completely captivated me... What a pity... In the silence of the night, without even hearing the sound of the rain... He dozed off in his chair.)

While the poet describes the man on the balcony of the house across the street in great detail, he also highlights the balcony's role as an architectural stage that reveals two contrasting lives. In this context, the balcony can be described as a viewing platform. The man dozing off in his chair is a depiction that shows how modern architecture has encroached upon people's privacy (Figure 3).



(Figure 3) Balconies in Villas

2. Place in Kurdish Poetry

This section of the study focuses primarily on the regions inhabited by Kurds in Iraq (Ali & Khayat, 2024). The characteristics of the structures and buildings in these regions can be observed in their poetry. Although the regions inhabited by Kurds are not very developed architecturally, it is evident that the buildings and structures have retained their traditional features to this day.

We can see this truth in poetry as well. We know that the inclusion of architectural elements in poetry is not so quick or easy; at least ten years must pass since the structure's construction. First, people will come to recognize these elements by their names and functions; then they will begin to use these names in their daily conversations; and finally, they will

naturally incorporate these names which they have grown accustomed to using into the lines of poetry.

We often encounter the terms “roof” and “iwan” in Kurdish poetry. This can be attributed to the architectural structure of the houses. When we pay attention to the descriptions of houses found in the verses of these poems, it becomes clear that the houses consist of one, one and a half, or two stories. We see these characteristics most frequently in love poems. We would like to analyze this point using a few anonymous poems. Namely,

2.1. The poem titled “The Girl on the Roof” tells the story of a girl working on a roof (Figure 4). As we mentioned earlier, houses in Kurdish regions are typically one-and-a-half stories tall. The ground floor served as a stable for animals, while half of the first floor the front section was left empty, and the other half was used as living quarters. Virtually all of the household’s daily chores were carried out in this front section.

راوستاناوه لقاو بانه
دهستی له کهمتر دانا
دهستی له کهمتر دانا
هتر نهکلی کضة سولتانه (Farhang Gafur)



(Figure 4) The Girl on the Roof

In the poem “The Girl on the Roof,” this two-story space is described with the following lines: “Standing on the roof, her hands on her waist (belt), just like the sultan’s daughters.” In other words, just as sultans stand in a high place when addressing the people, this girl is standing in the same place. It should also be noted that the comparison of the beloved to a sultan is a common metaphor in Eastern literature.

2.2. Architectural features of places are also frequently encountered in Kurdish poems set to music. Although some of the descriptions of places in these songs may be exaggerated, they generally employ very realistic expressions and details. These songs are widely accepted by the majority of the community. In songs that are performed orally within the folk tradition (Kesmecı, 2022) and are particularly favored by people of a certain age, stories from earlier periods are told. These songs, which recount long stories and frequently depict the architectural structures of past eras, are of great importance for architectural research. The song below is known to date from the first half of the 20th century.

وڤرة نازیز ئه‌و کۆلمه‌ت بۆ وا ناسکن،
ئه‌و طه‌ردنه‌ت بۆ وا زه‌ردن ده‌را نازانی له‌به‌ر وانی ستر هه‌له‌یه‌نا
ه‌ نازیز بۆسی وا که‌له‌طه‌ت و به‌ذن بۆندی، به‌ذنت وکو داری عوده‌ ده‌له‌ نازانی هه‌سه‌ره‌که‌مان بۆنده‌ که‌سم له‌
(HawtaAsad). دیار نه‌بوو له‌به‌ر خۆ هه‌له‌که‌شانا

The song describes a girl’s physical beauty. It then, in an interesting way, links this beauty to architecture, and between the lines offers clues about the houses of that time mentioning that they had gardens and that the garden walls were high and says: “O my beloved, come and tell me. How did you achieve this beautiful, slender, tall, delicate stature?” The girl replies, “Since the walls of the house’s garden (fortress) were so high, I couldn’t see anything. As I raised my head to look outside, my stature grew.” (Figure 5)

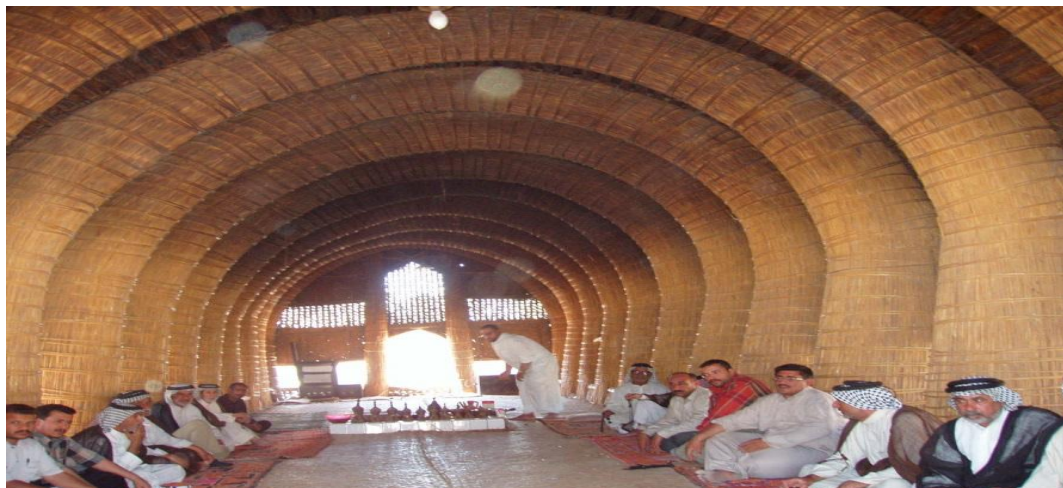


(Figure 5) Houses with High Walls and Gardens

3. Place in Arabic Poetry

This section of the study focuses primarily on the settings featured in the poetry of Bedouin Arabs. Arabs living in southern Iraq have two very important types of structures dating back to ancient times: tents and reed huts. We see both of these featured in the poetry. Tents are indispensable spaces for nomadic people. The sight of an Arab horse right next to a tent has been a frequent subject in painters' works. Poets have not overlooked this scene either, frequently using the names and characteristics of the tent in their poems.

As for reed houses, they are a type of structure commonly found along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the south. The most important of these reed houses is the "Mudhif House," or guest house. The guest house can also be described as a house of poetry, music, and culture (Figure 6).



(Figure 6) The Guest House of the Arabs of Southern Iraq

Conclusion and Evaluation

Various methods have been used in the study of human life and history. Undoubtedly, the most reliable of these methods and the one that best reflects reality is the human-centered approach. Evidence that provides clues about ancient architecture and reaches us through certain methods such as ruined buildings, paintings, and other works of art may have been damaged during the process of reaching us and may not have been able to convey the artists' emotions and perspectives on life to later generations. As a literary genre, poetry is one of the most popular art forms within society. Poems have played a significant role in the dissemination of traditions belonging to societies and their transmission to future generations (Kesmecı, 2025). People have used poetry and songs to express their joy on happy days and to soothe their sorrows on painful days. The architectural features of spaces have also drawn inspiration from the art of poetry and have reached us to a certain extent through this art form.

In this study, the poetic space a common ground shared by architecture and literature is examined through an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on a body of literature comprising poetic texts in Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic. It was found that in the poetic texts examined in all three languages, poets do not view space as merely a physical structure. According to the poets, space is also a symbolic structure where emotions, memories, and love are constructed. The fact that similar results were reached in this study, which examines literary works from the geographies of Turkey and Iraq, can be explained by their shared geography and similar perceptions.

Our research has led us to the conclusion that these poems were not written solely for aesthetic purposes. This is because readers of these poems will encounter information about the living conditions of the society during the period in which the poems were written, as well as the architectural forms of houses and other structures. Consequently, these poems can also be described as a cultural archive in terms of the cultural bridges they build across different eras. For example, it has been observed that the function of high spaces such as the *eyvan* or the roof where the beloved is situated serves as a symbol of hierarchical and aesthetic superiority in Turkish, Kurdish, and Arab cultures alike. Furthermore, architectural elements such as the *eyvan* and the tent have transformed into spaces like apartments and balconies alongside

modernization. These changes demonstrate how architectural transformation is reflected in poetry.

In the poems by poets such as Hidayet Doğan, Behçet Necatigil, Melih Cevdet Anday, and Sezai Karakoç that we examined within the scope of this study, we observe that architectural change has led to certain forms of damage in social relationships such as neighborly relations and privacy as well as in the human psyche. Vertical architecture, and particularly apartment buildings, has been criticized through negative metaphors such as prison, the edge of death, invasion, torture, torment, and distress. In this context, it is possible to say that modern architecture in Modern Turkish poetry has also brought about spatial alienation.

In Kurdish and Arabic poetry, elements associated with traditional life such as tents, roofs, reed huts, and high garden walls are frequently featured. In addition to reflecting traditional structures, these architectural elements contain clues regarding cultural identity codes; it is understood that they could serve as a source of data for scientific studies conducted in regions where historical remains are scarce. In conclusion, architecture and literature are disciplines that support one another. Poetry will be one of the leading sources that those writing the history of architecture will turn to in the coming years. It is evident that poetic texts offer both oral and written memory for architectural historiography. In future research, deepening such interdisciplinary studies across different geographical regions and broader literary genres and periods will be of critical importance for the preservation and understanding of cultural heritage.

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طروشى نەۋاي ھەولەير = فەرھەت غەفور