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OLD WATERSIDE HOUSES ON THE BOSPHORUS

SAFVET PAŞA YALISI AT KANLICA

By SETON LLOYD

DURING THE LAST century-and-a-half of the Osmanli Sultanate, the patrician families of the Court at Istanbul conformed to a social pattern no less complicated than that of their counterparts in England or France. At least three separate residences were deemed necessary, and fashion dictated a seasonal migration from one to another at fixed times in the year. The *konak* or town-house (often in Şişli) was occupied only from the end of November until early spring. At that season, since temperatures on the Bosphorus were still rather low, a movement was made towards the Marmara, where the family usually owned a house on the "Prince's Islands" or at one of the coastal resorts such as Erenköy, Çamlıca or Yakacık. It was the warmer months of the summer which were spent in the wooden palaces and fashionable waterside houses on the Bosphorus. Demolition, decay and above all the disastrous effects of fire have in time played havoc with these fine buildings ; but a dozen or so, which still survive, testify to the elegance of a milieu which had no exact parallel elsewhere, and show a happy compromise between the contemporary architectural tastes of Europe and Asia.

The *yalı* or waterside house, with which these notes are concerned, stands a little to the south of the Kanlıca boat-station, on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus. It is thought to have been built in about 1750, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century was purchased by Safvet Paşa, Grand Vizier to the Sultan and Minister of Foreign Affairs, to whose family it still belongs. The house is separated from the water only by a flower-border and a narrow stone quay, where two flights of stone steps represent the main approach from the Bosphorus. The modern coastal road now runs behind it, cutting it off from the remains of kitchen buildings and servants' quarters which once belonged to it. The house as it stands to-day comprises only a part of the original building. The northern half, consisting of the *haramlık*, or women's apartments, was demolished early in the present century, and its ruins levelled to make a walled garden, now shaded by fig and other trees of considerable size.

The original plan of the house, which is authentically reconstructed in Fig. 6, shows that the *haramlık* was by no means the less pretentious part of the building. The central hall and double staircase, leading to the main reception-rooms on the first floor, have a wider overall dimension than those of the *selamlık*. The pleasant upper chamber in the north-west corner of the old building, which, before the rebuilding of the quay, actually overhung the water of the Bosphorus, was reserved in living memory for the grandmother or senior lady, a figure commanding maximum

FIRST- AND GROUND-FLOOR PLANS.

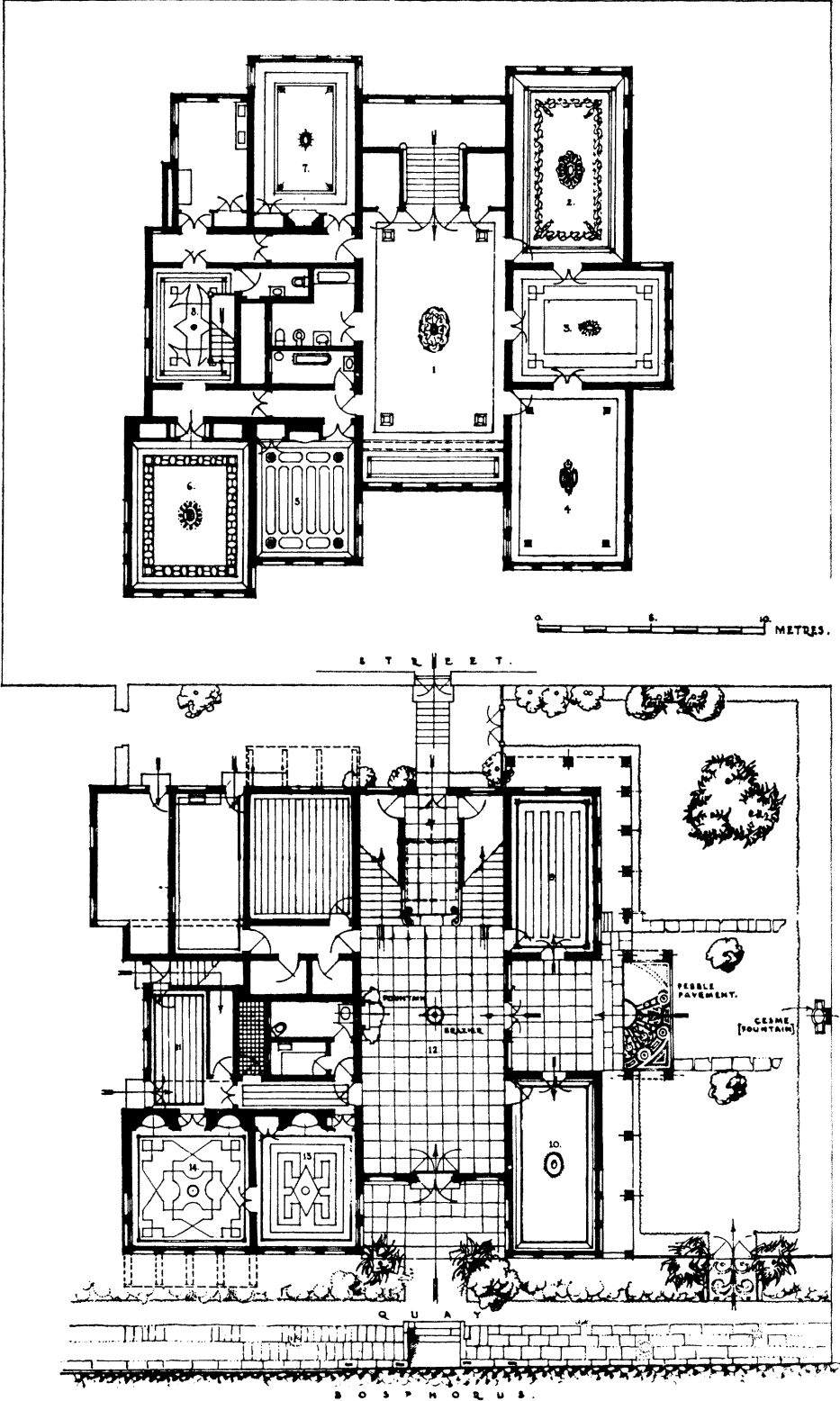
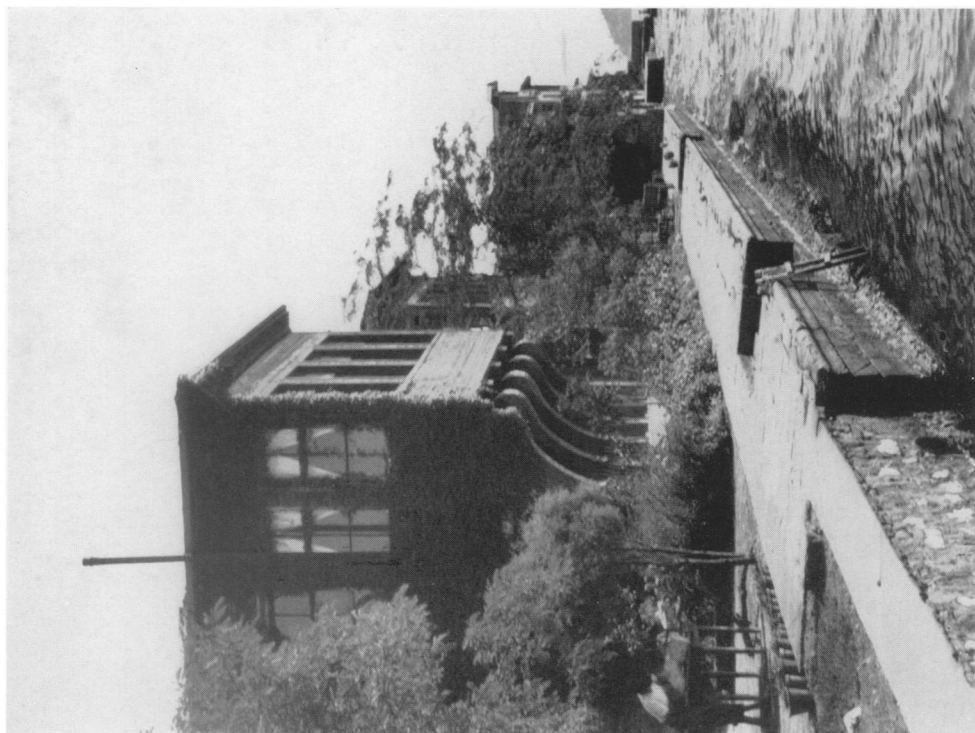


FIG. 1.



(b) House and Stone Quay from the Bosphorus.



(a) Main Entrance from the Bosphorus.



(b) Room No. 1 : Another View.



(a) Room No. 1.

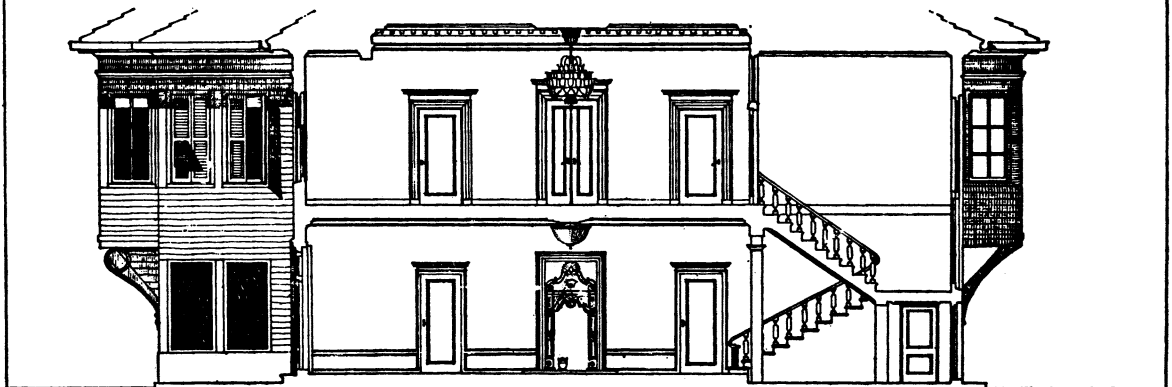
Elevation and Cross-Sections.



ELEVATION FACING THE BOSPHORUS.



LONG SECTION.



CROSS SECTION.

0 1 2 3 4 5 METERS.

FIG. 2.

respect in a Turkish family, whose authority in domestic affairs was undisputed. Annexed to this end of the house was also a private *hamâm* or Turkish bath.

Turning to the plan of the house as it survives today, one notices that a trace is still to be found of the oriental convention by which rooms are simply grouped around an open central court, though the lighting is here externalized and the whole principle thus reversed. The court is now replaced by major reception-units on both floors. The most conspicuous

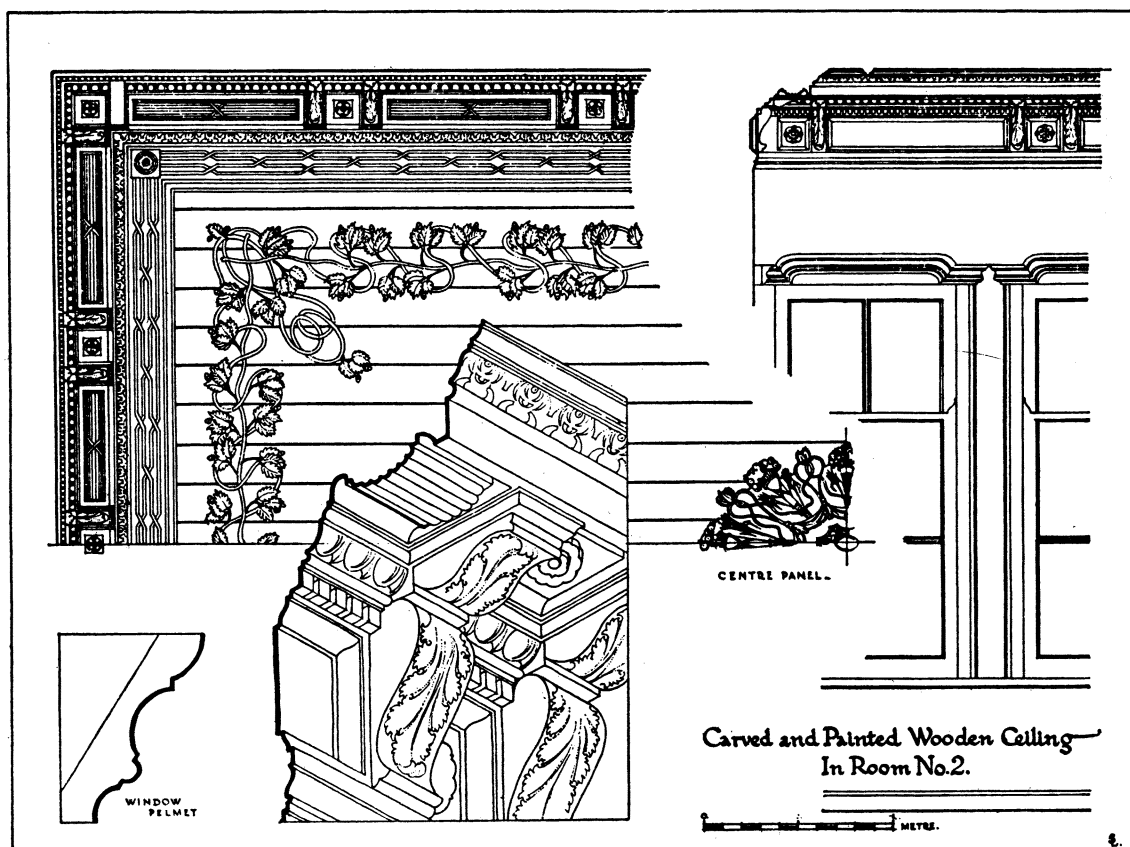
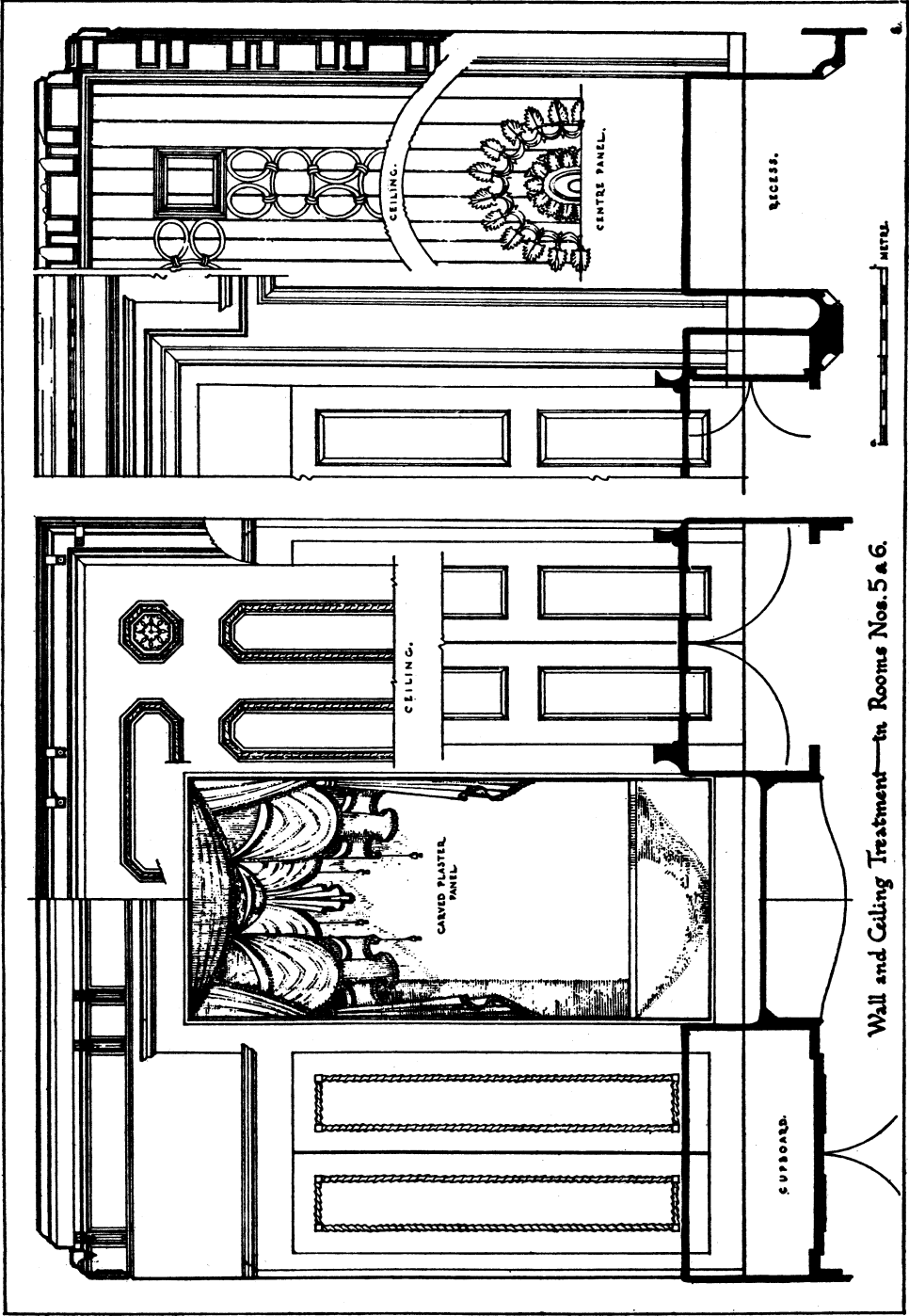


FIG. 3.

oriental feature which has survived, is the outward projection of the upper floor on consol-supports and wooden pillars, which serves the dual purpose of providing greatly increased floor-space above and of protecting the ground-floor windows from the direct rays of the sun. The size and number of the windows themselves, especially on the water side, one might think to be excessive, especially for a residence designed to be used in the summer months. But very high temperatures are in fact rare on the Bosphorus, and there was a general use of wooden shutters.

The house is built entirely of timber on a low stone foundation and roofed with pantiles. The structural framework gives even the outer walls



Wall and Ceiling Treatment—in Rooms Nos. 5 & 6.

FIG. 4.

an overall thickness of no more than twelve inches. The main facade has little sophistication and gains its character mainly from the five great wooden consols, which carry forward the upper structure of one wing and create a deep shadow. It is the interior which gives one the first impression of design and fine craftsmanship. The name of the architect is unknown ; but tradition identifies him as a Turk with Venetian training, who must

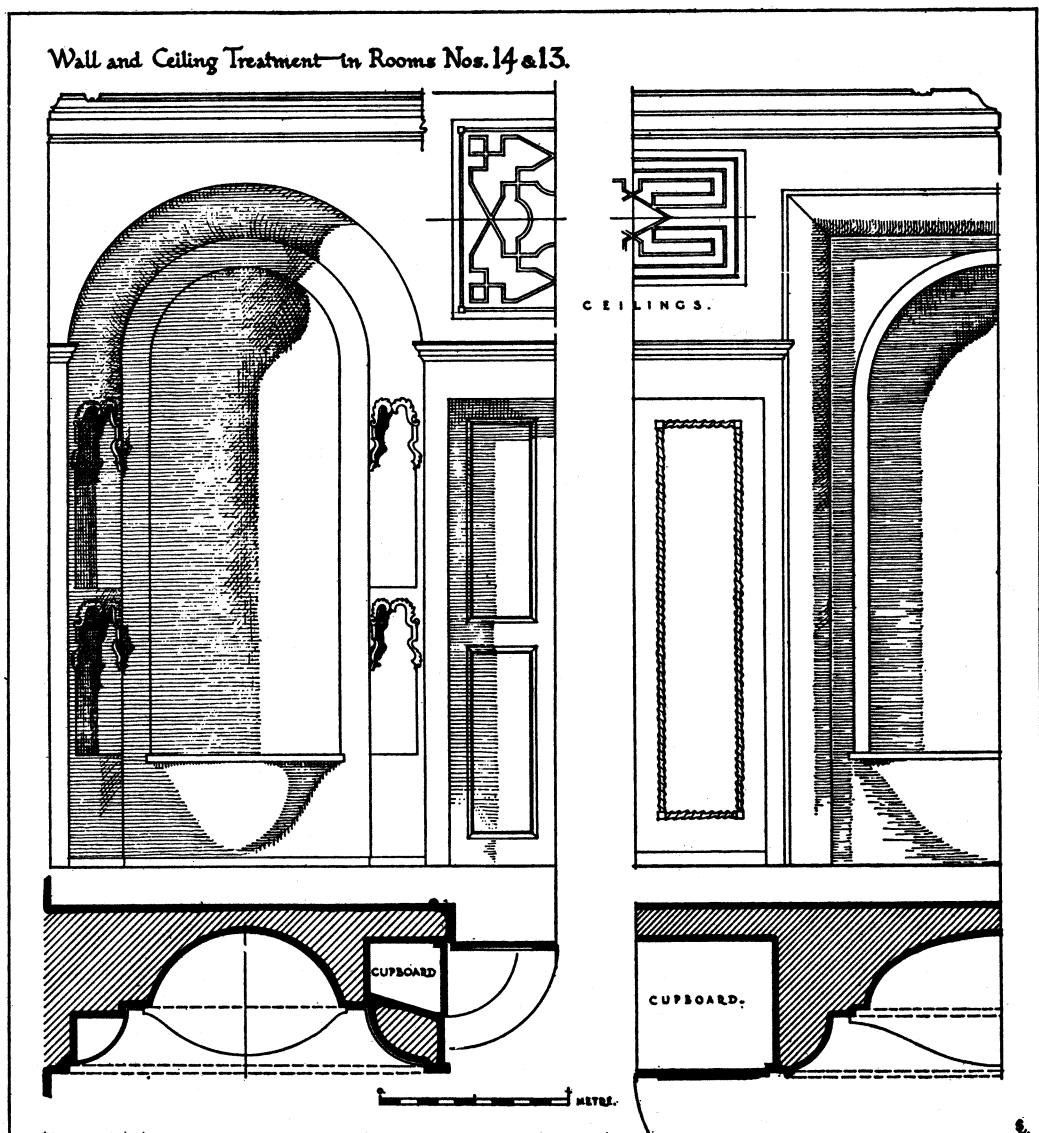


FIG. 5.

have employed a certain number of Italian craftsmen. There is indeed little to remind one of the Turkish idiom in the classical proportion and detail in these dignified apartments, with their recessed wall-niches balanced by panelled presses. Only a suggestion of arabesque in the strip ornament applied to some of the wooden ceilings, strikes an un-European note.



(b) Painted Ceiling in Room No. 2.



(a) Mock Window in Room No. 5.



(b) Room No. 4.



(a) The Garden Portico.

PLAN BEFORE PARTIAL DEMOLITION EARLY IN PRESENT CENTURY.

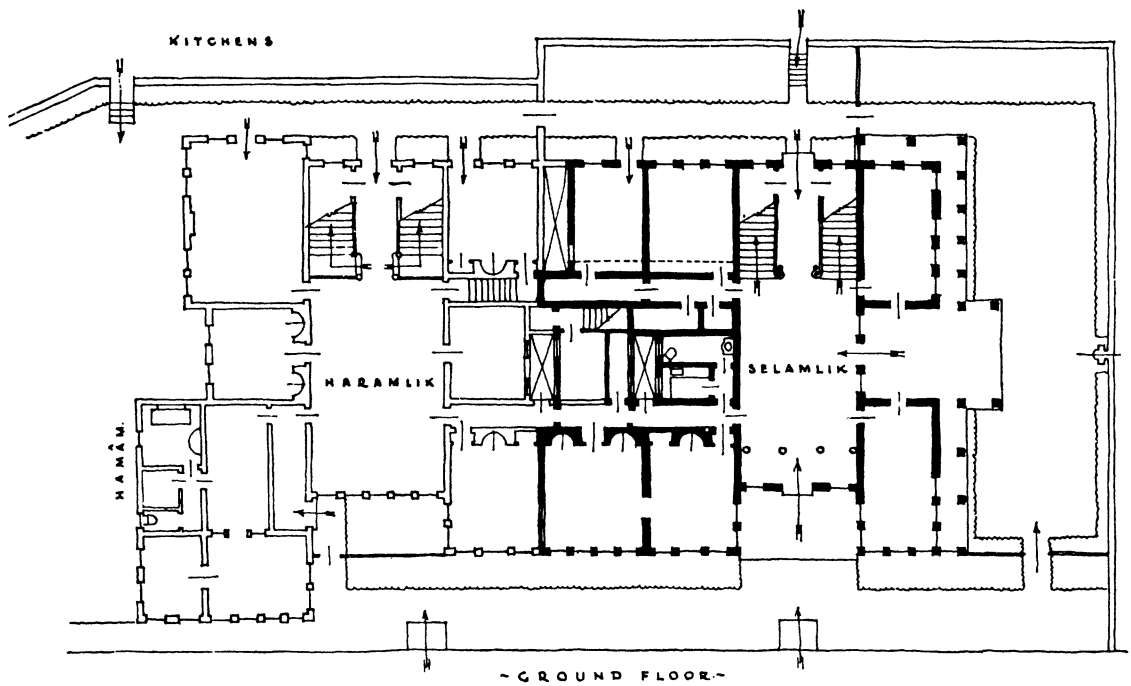
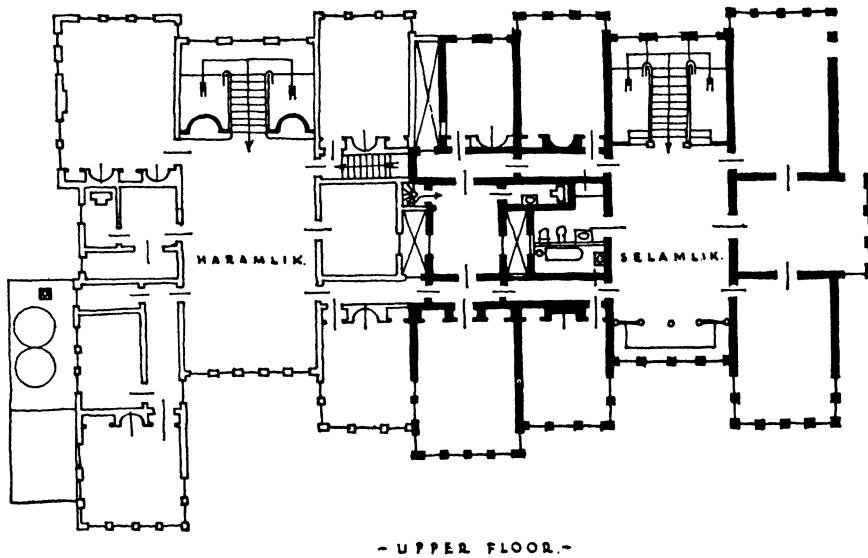


FIG. 6.

The entrance from landing-steps is directly into the lower hall, where a screen of wooden columns has recently been removed. Facing the doorway across a wide pavement of marble slabs are the double flights of the main staircase, and in the centre of one wall is a marble *çeşme* or drinking-fountain ; a familiar feature of Turkish houses, but in this case uncompromisingly western in design. The great *salon* above this hall on the first floor was originally open to the stairway at its eastern end. At the other, supported by the columns on the ground floor, was again a wooden screen, forming a recess with cushioned seats beneath the windows—the formal *divan* for receiving guests.

The very varied treatment of the chambers opening off hall and salon can best be seen in the accompanying drawings. Most notable among them is perhaps Room 2 with its famous eighteenth-century ceiling, whose intricate cornice and carved enrichment still bear their original painted colours—the olive-green, violet and gold—now a little subdued by time. Perhaps equally striking, in a more frivolous vein, is one bedroom (Room 5) in which a central wall-recess has the tasselled draperies of an imaginary window represented in plaster.

The drawings were made during August, 1956, during a period of very kind hospitality afforded by the present owner, Bay Kadri Cenani, a great-grandson of Safvet Paşa.