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GILĀN XII. RURAL HOUSING

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xii. RURAL HOUSING

There are considerable differences among settlement and building styles according to geographic location (see Map 1, Map 2 and Map 3). Roughly, one can isolate four geographic areas, each with a distinctive type of rural dwelling: the Gilān plain; the low foothills of the Alborz range; the mountains, covered with forest and capped by alpine meadows; and finally the arid slopes of the Alborz.

On the Gilān plain peasants' enclosures are scattered around the rice fields or loosely knitted together in hamlets (*maḥalla*) thus forming alongside the enclosures the major units of social and territorial affiliation. The *maḥalla* is structurally defined in opposition to the equivalent units surrounding it (other *maḥalla*s) and by its integration into the immediately superior unit, the *maḥal* "locality". A *maḥal* thus groups together several *maḥalla*s, each designated by its own name. Often the references to the names of the *maḥalla* are topographical in nature and in some cases distinguish, in the *maḥal*, between upper (*bālā maḥalla*; *maḥalla-ye soflā* in eastern Gilān), middle (*wasaṭ maḥalla*) and lower quarters (*pāʾin maḥalla*; *jir maḥalla* in western Gilān and Ṭāleš; *maḥalla-ye ʿolyā* in eastern Gilān). The difference between "upper" and "lower" does not refer to altitude but rather the relative position of the hamlet in relation to the mountains and the sea: the lower quarters are those closest to the sea and the upper quarters those closest to the mountains, even though

the locality itself may be situated tens of kilometers from either.

A *maḥalla* (quarter), which may include just a few dozen houses or as many as several hundred, is foremost an irrigation unit and is usually endowed with a *bāzārča* (small bazaar), has its own *emāmzāda* and often has its own *dasta*. Together, these features confirm the identity of each maḥalla and its relations with neighboring *maḥalla.* Relations between *maḥalla*s are frequently tense and marked by rivalry and antagonism.

A peasant enclosure is surrounded by a fence (*parda, rameš, čapar*), which both marks the boundaries of the domestic space and protects the gardens from wandering livestock and other predators. The enclosure very often includes an orchard, a *jardin potager* (kitchen garden; *bāḡča*), and many outbuildings varying according to the productive activities and wealth of the farmer. The well (*čāh*) and the rice barn (see Map 4). These elevated structures, well suited for storing the sheaves, are called *kundej* in central and eastern Gilān and *kuti* in Paresar.

In the north of the province, these minimal constructions (wells and rice barns) are traditionally complemented by a covered area for rice threshing, and, in Rašt district, by a separate building for drying paddy, known as a *dudḵāna*, *garmḵāna*, or *bujḵāna*. In the silkworm growing areas, the silkworm nursery (*telembār*; āzād. Daub plays an ancillary part, for filling in the gaps of timber framing (*divār zigali*) and for covering the bases, the floors and the walls; daub is mixed with chopped rice straw (*kuleš-e gel*) or with the smoother and more homogeneous husks of rice (*fel-e gel*). The use of wood defines the craft of the carpenter-joiner (*najjār*) and his assistants: wood framed substructures or piles of alternate layers of logs and small beams for foundations, various forms of timber-framing for the walls, and complicated roof-frame structures (Plate III), has four sloping sides and rests mainly on rows of posts (*sotun*), delineating a veranda (*ayvān*) on the façade. Two other forms of veranda are often encountered in the architecture of the plain: the first completely surrounding the house on the lower floor level and sometimes the upper, and the second forming a loggia (*tālār*) on the upper floor of the building or just along part of the façade and the adjoining sidewall (CLOTHING xxii). Among other notable features of the local lifestyle, rooms are not differentiated according to gender; they are used differently according to the season. The passage from the cold to the hot season is the occasion of a migration of the household from below to above, and from the inside to the outside (in Ṭāleš, families who have no *tālār* establish their summer quarters

on a platform called *lam* or *kutām*, built a few feet from the house). If seasonal and everyday practices are combined with the rules governing the occupation of space according to the age group, it can be seen that the symbolic framework is ideally organized along three axes, the poles of each denoting opposed values (Figure 5). In this way, the bottom contrasts with the top just as the cold season contrasts with the hot, the older generation with the younger; when related families share a house, the younger family occupies the upper story (see Gilān, Kinship). In short, the first floor contrasts with the second as a semi-public universe exposed to the eyes of all with a world of privacy and secrets of the young people. The left side of the façade shelters the reception space, while on the right side stands the winter kitchen, symbolizing the grouping of the family and domestic intimacy. Lastly, contrary to the back of the house which is, as mentioned above, reserved for the less attractive activities, the front is naturally the part that is offered to view and is used for production, e.g. weaving, as well as for consumption, such as eating in the summer. Thus, the morphology of the house summarizes the cycles of the seasons and those of life, e.g. the ascending pattern which leads the young generations from below to above is reversed in the winter.

Recent developments have deeply affected building materials and techniques as well as the organization of space. Cinderblock construction (*boluk*) have replaced timber for wall construction, galvanized iron (*ḥalab*) has replaced straw and rush as a roof covering, and the saddle roof has replaced pointed and hipped roofs. Building operations are no longer in the hands of the traditional specialist: the through-stone builder or layer (*boluksāz*) has replaced the carpenter-joiner (*najjār*), and the iron-roofer (*ḥalabsāz*) has replaced the thatcher (*gālisāz*). The spatial pattern of these new houses, with only one habitable level, is horizontal, no longer vertical or oblique. Rooms are more specialized; the seasonal shifts within the domestic space are now more limited, and the sense of privacy is emphasized.

In the agricultural piedmont, traditional houses share the same generic features as in the plain: they are loosely knitted together in hamlets, surrounded by fences, made of wood (daub playing an ancillary part) but, owing to a firmer ground, they have lower bases than in the plain. Here, foundations consist of superimposed layers of stone and daub extended slightly above ground level. Wooden walls are often made of superposed logs (*zagme, verjin*) covered with daub. Roofs are covered with shingles (*lata, taḵta*) wedged in groups between two battens or with small boards nailed on to the

battens (Plate IV). The *ayvān* is often partially closed by a low front wall, and the *tālār* is less prevalent in piedmonts than on the plains. In the areas where wheat is grown the outbuildings include a bread oven (*tanur*).

The dwelling houses of Ṭāleš and Gāleš herdsmen and shepherds who winter on the wet downhill slopes (*qešlāq*) of the forests and summer on high grasslands (*yeylāq,* Ṭāleši *giriya*) also show unique features. Winter houses, made of rough logs (Ṭāleši *durgun*) with two sloping, shingle-covered roofs, are sometimes two- or three-storied, with the upper floor reserved for the livestock, which reach it by logged ramps (Ṭāleši *pord*; Plate V). This original style of building can be found in southern Ṭāleš, where it is called *vāne* or *vuna* and to the east of Safidrud in the Gāleš area, where it is called *kulom*. In Ṭāleš, shepherds' abodes are often semi-cylindrical or semi-ovoid huts (*pārgā, pori, poru*) made of branches and covered with woven goat haircloth (Plate VII) or, more rarely, constructions with walls made of stones, boards or branches, covered, in this latter case, with nylon-cloth, branches or woven goat haircloth (Bazin, II, p. 27; Bazin and Bromberger, p. 40). Shepherds' huts, often hemispheric, do not include installation for livestock; they usually remain outside, with lambs in a lamb-fold (*barajā*) and sheep in a sheepfold (*mandan*; see Bromberger, 1974, p. 41).

The settlement pattern in the arid mountainous areas of southern Gilān is in grouped villages, in which public spaces and facilities, such as fresh-water springs and public baths (*ḥammāms*), play an important part, and where community structures (shepherd's collectives, collective system of crop rotation, collective spaces for threshing and so on) are traditionally stronger. Two types of architectural pattern can be found: in Gāleš areas close to the forest one finds timber-framed houses coated with daub mixed with chopped wheat straw (*kāhgel*) or wheat husks (*gel-e pil*) and hipped, shingle roofs (Figure 6). Further south, houses are rectangular blocks with flat roofs that rest on main walls made of unbaked bricks coated with daub. An open veranda (*ayvān*) is created using heavy beams (*tirs*) supported by columns. They are made of large ceiling joists on which ceiling battens or reeds are laid; they are covered with a thick layer of brushwood. Then thin layers of mud and daub are added and compacted with a stoneroller. These houses are usually two-storied, the barn and stable being located in the basement (Plate VIII). There is here also a seasonal rhythm to the occupation of space: during summertime people sleep in the front veranda or on the flat roof. Over the last thirty years, change, accelerated by the reconstruction following the 1990

Manjil earthquake, has deeply affected traditional building techniques. Local unbaked bricks have been replaced by baked bricks, which are brought from outside of the community and are used to fill in the metallic frames of the wall and the roof. The roof is now sometimes covered with asphalt.

In a short span of time, vernacular architecture of Gilān, an important aspect of Iranian popular culture, has almost vanished.

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