

## **ARCHITECTURAL REFLECTIONS of FALCONRY (SPARROWHAWKING) TRADITION as an INTANGIBLE HERITAGE of EASTERN BLACK SEA REGION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The falconry (sparrowhawking) tradition, which is an ancient method of obtaining food from nature, has been practiced for centuries in mountain areas of the Eastern Blacksea Region of Turkey as well as in many other regions of the world, is mostly disappearing due to various reasons including the changes in social life, restrictions due to the nature conservation laws, migration and depopulation in the region, etc. Although there is a decrease in the number of falconers, a small number of people, who are living in or have a root from the region, still continue this ritualistic activity for the purposes such as sport, entertainment, relaxation in a natural environment and meeting with the neighbors and relatives. Nowadays, falconry still plays an important social role in the lives of the people in the region. The traces of this living culture can be seen in every area of the lives of local people such as folk songs, stories, poets. Such that, there are statues dedicated to sparrowhawks in the public squares of the towns also the nicknames of the football teams of the region such as Rizespor, Arhavispor, Hopaspor, Ardeşenspor are called sparrowhawks. The practice of falconry was inscribed on "UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" as a living heritage of 18 countries and manifested in the following domains: "Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe", "Oral traditions and expressions", "Social practices, rituals, and festive events", and "Traditional craftsmanship" according to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The practice, present in many countries around the world, may vary regarding certain aspects, for example the type of equipment used but the methods remain similar. Despite Turkey and neighboring Georgia are not included among these countries, the cultural tradition has similar rituals and characteristics as the other countries. Starting from catching the mole cricket, the process continues with trapping and educating red-backed shrike, constructing the trapping house, trapping the sparrowhawk with this small bird and educating sparrowhawk for hunting quails. In this processes falconers have

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built some primitive shelters to meet the spatial necessities. This paper aims to discuss the architectural reflections and space uses of falconry tradition in the regional context. It was based on site trips, close observation on the falconers, interviews and the author's own experiences. Further researches will tell us more about the specific social and cultural meanings of this tradition and will enable us to develop a plan for safeguarding this intangible cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Intangible Heritage, Eastern Blacksea, Sparrowhawking, Unity of Tangible and Intangible Values in Conservation, Holistic Conservation Approaches

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The falconry (sparrowhawking) tradition, which is an ancient method of obtaining food from nature, has been practiced for centuries in different regions of the world. Although done in the past as a way of feeding one's family, today, people practice this tradition generally as a sport or a leisure activity. According to various researchers' arguments, falconry has first emerged in China around 2200 BC., and following years it had started to spread towards Mesopotamia, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula (Wilson, 2001). As trade between the different civilizations of the time moved from west to east, falconry also transferred from Middle East to Anatolia and Europe (Wilson, 2001). In the course of time falconry became a status symbol in the Middle Ages (Gualtieri, 2005:1; Carroll, 2015). Falconry became prominent as an important endeavor in the 11th and 12th centuries when Crusades took place (Kumerlove, 1996). Such that the Holy Roman Emperor II. Friedrich (1194-1250) was completed his book titled "De arte venandi cum avibus", which was one of the first scientific studies about the training and biology of hunting birds, with the information obtained during the Sixth Crusade (1228-1229) (Wood and Fyfe, 1943). There is no doubt that there was also a special interest in falconry for centuries in the Turkish states established in Anatolia. As a matter of fact, there was a falconers' ward within the hunting organization of the Ottoman imperial palace (Özcan, 1991: 82; Kiran, 2015: 151). Falconry, of which many societies have shown interest in history, has been practiced by the peoples living in the Eastern Black Sea migratory raptor path for centuries. This social practice has become so familiar with the life of the local people that happiness was linked with "having a good horse, a dog and a **sparrowhawk**" in a proverb of Megreles, one of the indigenous communities in the region (Magnin and Kurdoğlu, 2017: 16).

The first systematic scientific research on this centuries-long tradition of falconry in the eastern Black Sea Region of Turkey was carried out by the forest engineer Kurdoğlu, who is from the region, in the 1980s. He has focused in his research on

issues such as processes and history of falconry in the region, the care, training, and feeding of sparrowhawks, number of sparrowhawk trappers, flyways of raptors, factors leading decrease in the number of birds of prey, and importance of birds of prey in natural balance (Kurdoğlu, 1988). After detection of alarming decline of many European raptor species by the International Council for Bird Conservation (today Birdlife International), a research team has been comprised of Magnin and Kurdoğlu, and some kind of awareness-raising activities were carried out by World Wide Fund for Nature Turkey (WWF Turkey) during the early 1990s in the region (Magnin and Kurdoğlu, 2017: 10). In the following years, there is an increase in the number of researches about falconry practice in Georgia and Turkey (Van Maanen et al., 2001).

During the recent years the concept of cultural heritage has been continually broadened. According to Bouchenaki (2009: 1), the quest for the “message” has become more important and it requires us to identify the ethical values, social customs, beliefs or myths of which intangible heritage is the sign and expression. Ito (2009: 4) stated that the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage is so close and it is impossible to separate. Brâncoveanu (2018:7) argued with a reply to his question “Is the classification of cultural heritage as tangible and intangible only a bureaucratic tool destined to describe the sorts of cultural heritage or this distinction reflects a real division?” that, cultural heritage in its entirety is, actually, intangible and constructed. According to Karakul (2011: 2), a historical fabric, which is formed by tangible features, namely, the physical structure made of built and natural structures; and intangible values, specifically, cultural practices and expressions within the built environments, meanings expressed by them and values attributed to them, should be considered as a whole with its tangible and intangible values in the conservation studies. Despite the broadening concept of cultural heritage Pocock et al. (2015: 962) asserted that the conservation of heritage continues to be dominated by a process first identifies a physical site and then identifies the associated values that comprise its significance.

Although the tangible physical structure made of built and natural structures seems so primitive and unpretentious in the falconry case, it was aimed to discuss the architectural reflections and space uses of this tradition with its effect on the lives of people in the Eastern Blacksea context, in this paper. It is not only questioned that what is changing in this intangible heritage and its related architecture, but also tensions caused by the dilemma of safeguarding an intangible heritage and nature conservation approach taken into consideration. It was based on on-site trips, close observation on the falconers, interviews, and the author’s own experiences.

## 2. FALCONRY TRADITION IN EASTERN BLACK SEA REGION

According to the Magnin and Kurdođlu (2017: 6), migratory raptors, which have winged to their wintering grounds, converge in a narrow corridor between the eastern end of the Black Sea and the mountains of the Lesser Caucasus (called Eastern Black Sea flyway) during Autumn times since centuries (Figure 1). This migration should have attracted the indigenous people of the region and they tried to benefit from this natural event by developing some techniques and constructing some primitive structures.



**Figure 1. Map showing a basic representation of raptor migration paths in Autumn in north east of Turkey (Magnin and Kurdođlu, 2017: 7).**

Trapping chiefly takes place in the 100 km long and 10 km wide coastal strip, which overlap with the Eastern Black Sea flyway (Figure 1; Magnin and Kurdođlu, 2017: 14). Rize, Gündođdu, Çayeli, Pazar, Ardeşen, Fındıklı, Arhavi, Hopa, and Kemalpaşa are the cities located in this zone. Magnin and Kurdođlu (2017: 14) stated that the trapping sites are located generally from sea level up to 700 metres altitude, but occasionally trappers are active at vantage points at 2,000 metres. There are many sites suitable for trapping, and trappers built several trapping houses and use one of them, which best suits to daily weather conditions.



The process starts with catching the mole crickets (ğapa)<sup>1</sup> by digging or pouring soapy water into visible holes on the soil towards the end of July. Then captured mole cricket put into a cage trap for the migratory red-backed shrikes (ğaço). After trapping the red-backed shrikes, there is an education period lasts around 15 days or more, when the shrike is trained to get accustomed to fly with a string fastened to a one meter-long wooden rod. Generally, a piece of minced meat is tied onto the stick and replaced daily for feeding the shrikes. Because of its easiness, falconers started to give a boiled egg to decoy birds in recent years. Despite searching another instrument for trapping sparrowhawks, shrikes considered as the most suitable birds used as a decoy by interviewed falconers, because they can live long without water, and accustomed fast compared to other bird species. It can be thought that in the long history of falconry tradition other birds should be tried to be used for the purpose of decoy but as a result of the experiences, falconers still continue to prefer red-backed shrikes. Generally, two months old female chicks of red-backed shrikes, which are accustomed more easily and fast compared to male and older birds, kept for training. Then the eyes of shrikes glued with a leather cap, which still allows seeing their rod with leaving a gap on the underside, for not to dive down upon instinctively when the sparrowhawk (sifteri) approach. Otherwise, the sparrowhawk can feel the trap and not approach towards the decoy bird. Falconers built simple shelters on the hills, where the raptor migration can easily be seen, for hiding away from sparrowhawks and erect triangular or rectangular nets with wooden sticks (Figure 2).

As a similar approach in choosing for the training among those caught decoy birds, only three or four months old female chicks of sparrowhawks are kept for training and hunting quails, males or adult females are generally released immediately after capturing. The falconers have wrapped their caught sparrowhawks with a white handkerchief until the end of the day they sit in trapping house. When they return to home or hovels, they fastened their sparrowhawk to a shaped wooden branch to get accustomed to people and accelerate the domestication process.

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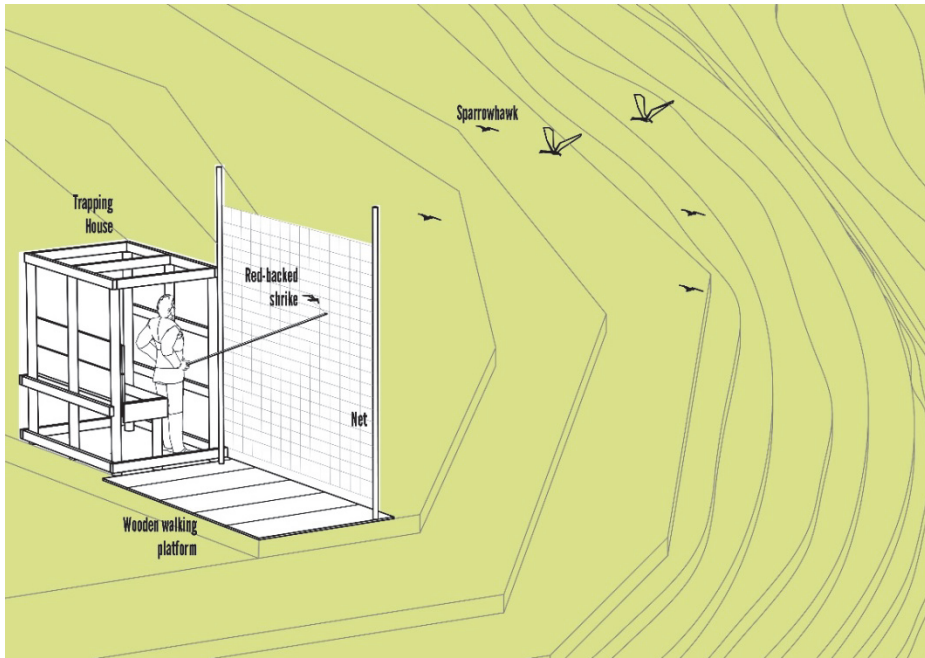
<sup>1</sup> The equivalent of the word in the Laz language. The Lazs are one of the indigenous community living for centuries in Eastern Blacksea Region. The falconry in the region is mainly attributed to this community and in Laz language there are many words related to falconry tradition. Unfortunately UNESCO listed the Laz language as definitely endangered. One of the components that creates the tangible or intangible culture is definitely local languages. A large number of words related to this tradition in the language is proof of the importance of this tradition in the life of the local people.



**Figure 2. Processes of falconry practiced in Black Sea Region of Turkey.**

Sparrowhawks are trained for hunting the quails, which migrate through the area in vast numbers. According to the Magnin and Kurdođlu (2017: 17) although hunting quail with sparrowhawks was widespread until the 1960s, when many of the Black Sea villages were still isolated and not yet connected to the main road system, currently hunting quail with sparrowhawks become only a marginal due to changes in lifestyle. Despite the decrease in hunting quails, feeding and training sparrowhawks is still a prevalent phenomenon in the region.

A small number of local people still hunting quails generally in the company of their trained hunting dogs. After the training period of a sparrowhawk, falconers go to open green areas such as tea or corn fields and the dog searches the environment to flush out the hidden quails from their positions. The falconer keeps tabs on their dog and when it finds a hidden quail, he/she let their sparrowhawk fly and catch the flying quail. The falconer allows his/her sparrowhawk to catch only one quail on its first hunt. The sparrowhawk flies back to falconers' arm after hunting the quail. After a successful hunt, falconer awarded their sparrowhawk to encourage and motivate for the next attacks. After gaining experience for hunting quails a sparrowhawk can catch 20 to 30 quails per day.



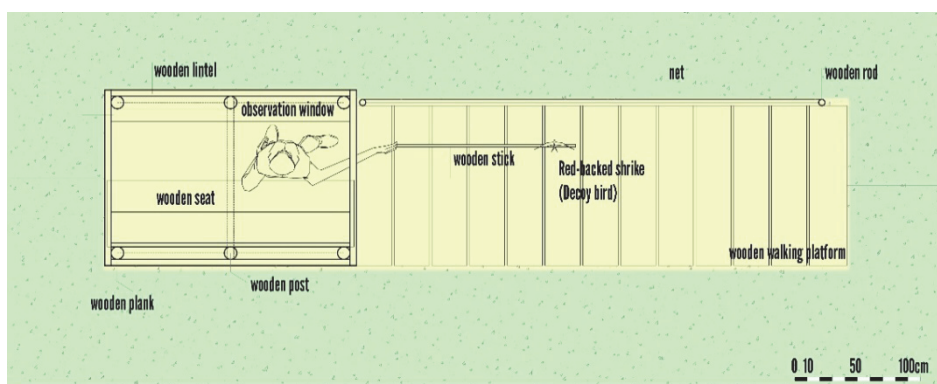
**Figure 3. Axonometric drawing of an idealized trapping house.**

### **3. ARCHITECTURAL NECESSITIES and SPACE USE**

The trapping houses have emerged to meet the necessity of hiding in the process of trapping the sparrowhawks (Figures 3-6). If the sparrowhawks notice humans, they don't approach to hunt the decoy bird. Falconers have been built the trapping houses for a few days of use with brushwood obtained from the surrounding trees, in the past. It can be seen that similar primitive structures are still being built at any point on the migration flyway. However, in the last 30 years, with the building of new forest roads to the high altitude hills, falconers get the opportunity to stay longer (almost 2 months) in their hovels located on the migratory routes, which have been started to build by falconers' own means with generally industrial materials such as concrete, brick, shingle, etc. With the extension of the stay periods in hills, falconers used metal fasteners and shaped woods, generally chestnut, the main building material in traditional architecture, in the construction process of the trapping houses for increasing the durability against natural conditions. Whereas only materials obtained from the immediate vicinity could be used in the past, currently in some cases, wood or other materials are transported by cars from the city centers. The sparrowhawk trappers spend more time in hills and trapping houses, compared to limited numbers of days in the past. Although there is a decrease in the number of

falconers, a small number of people, who are living in or have a root from the region, still continue this ritualistic activity for the purposes such as sport, entertainment, relaxation in a natural environment and meeting with the neighbors and relatives.

In general sparrowhawk trappers built the trapping houses by themselves as a craftsman. It is crucial to choose the best location to build a trapping house. It should be an open spot and a good point to observe the migration from the opposite mountains. So that, in some cases falconers built their trapping house on a tree. Sometimes, the location can be changed because of the growing trees that close the viewing angle in a few years. It can be thought that this detail should cause the tradition doesn't produce stronger permanent trapping houses.



**Figure 4. Plan of an idealized trapping house.**

In an idealized conditions construction of the trapping house starts with the erection of 10 cm. sectioned in diameter wooden posts. Then they connect all the wooden posts in three level generally with the same 5/10 cm. sectioned wooden beams. The first level is the beginning that 10 cm. up from the soil surface, the second one is located generally to the eye level of falconer allocate to watch the migration of birds of prey from the opposite mountains, and the last one is the lintel which is generally 2 meters high (Figure 3-5). After the completion of the timbered structure, the cabin is covered from side surfaces to the roof with the leafy branches (generally branches of cherry laurel tree are preferred due to the later decay of their leaves compared to other local plants) or fern obtained from the immediate vicinity. To a large extent a wooden bench is nailed on the cabin (Figure 3-6). Leaves provide a canopy both the decoy bird and sparrowhawk trapper. For not to miss any sparrowhawk, trappers carry their lunch with them. Some of the fanatic falconers spent all the day in this cabin. Outside of the cabin a wooden walking platform is formed and a net is fixed with

the two wooden sticks. These wooden sticks are generally prepared from the hazelnut trees in the region.

The sparrowhawk trappers have carried their required equipment for this tradition such as nets, which are limited and it is fixed to wooden sticks with a triangular form or other accessories used for the training and feeding process of decoy birds and sparrowhawks. In winter times falconers prepare their tools and accessories almost all of them can only be produced with the handicrafts. So it can be said that this ritualistic activity, which has ancient roots, not only creates primitive architectural shelters for trapping but also creates some kind of handicraft works with natural leather and sewing cotton, which are transferred from generation to generation.

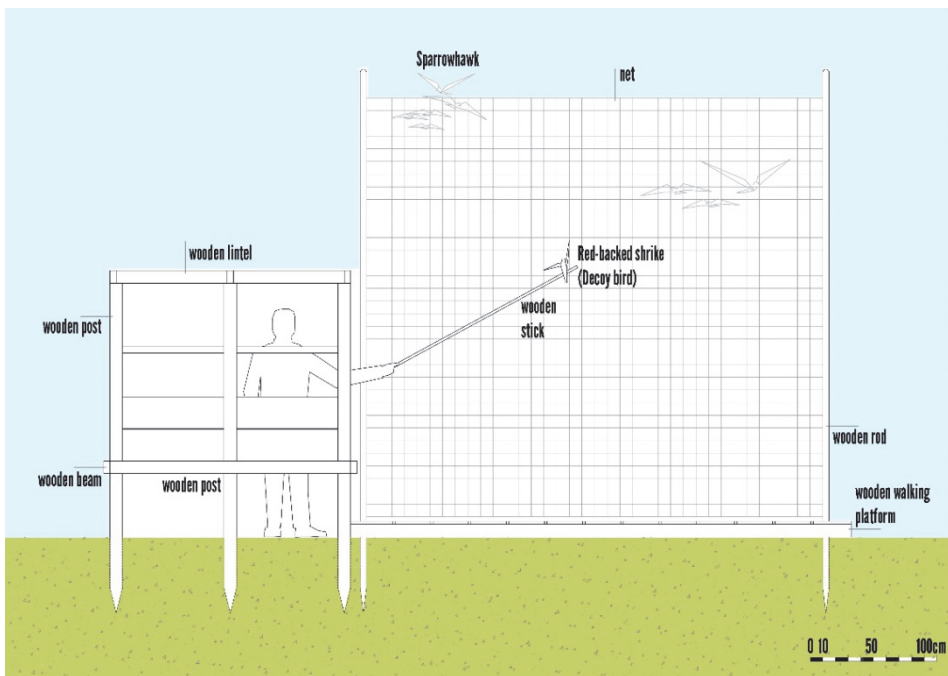


Figure 5. Section of an idealized trapping house.





**Figure 6. Views from different kinds of trapping houses in the region.**

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Falconry, which has been practiced in mountain areas of the Eastern Blacksea Region of Turkey, is mostly disappearing due to various reasons including the changes in social life, restrictions due to the nature conservation laws, migration, and depopulation in the region, etc.

Although there is a decrease in the number of falconers, a small number of people, who are living in or have a root from the region, still continue this ritualistic activity for the purposes such as sport, entertainment, relaxation in a natural environment and meeting with the neighbors and relatives. According to the findings of Kurdođlu, the number of trapped sparrowhawks is down by up to 50%, and the number of active falconers dropped from 741 to 450 almost nearly in the last 30 years. The age composition of falconers has also changed in recent years, such that the average age of trappers was between (17-50) in 1987, whereas the youngest trapper is over 40 years of age today (Magnin and Kurdođlu, 2017: 50).



**Figure 7. Views from the sparrowhawk statues located in the Black Sea region of Turkey.**

Sielicki argued that (2016: 19), falconry is a sustainable activity, and the numbers of birds used are small comparing to the natural mortality rates. Furthermore, it was stated that falconry techniques have educational values, which are still widely used in conservation and rehabilitation of birds of prey, and falconers can contribute to the conservation of huntable species. Abandonment and gradual loss of this tradition have been considered as a conservation success from another perspective. As one of the reflections of this dilemma, General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks of Turkey has been considered this trapping activity as a tradition and allowed only after a mandatory education process about responsible falconry but also restricted this activity in national wildlife protection laws (Doğa Koruma ve Milli Parklar Genel Müdürlüğü, 2010).

Falconry still plays an important social role in the lives of the people in the Eastern Black Sea region. The traces of this living culture can be seen in every area of the lives of local people such as folk songs, stories, poets. Such that, there are statues dedicated to sparrowhawks in the public squares (Figure 7). Much of the population in the region recognized falconry as a part of their cultural heritage and see it as a sense of their identity and continuity.

Although the tangible physical structure made of built and natural structures, which have been tried to be analyzed in Eastern Black Sea context thoroughly, seems so primitive and unpretentious, they are directly physical remnants of centuries-old cultural accumulation. As a conclusion, it can be said that all the tangible or intangible processes (the practice, representation, expression, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith) of this cultural event should be considered as important, and to be safeguarded as a whole (UNESCO, 2003; Başat Metin, 2013: 70; Oğuz, 2007: 32). Conservation measures should be applied for safeguarding this tradition, which should be respected for cultural diversity and human creativity, as a responsible manner, that will be sustainable and will not harm wildlife and nature. Holistic rural policies should be developed for both conservation of wildlife and safeguarding the falconry tradition.

It can be concluded with a wish that falconry tradition in the eastern Black Sea Region, which can be considered as shared cultural heritage of Turkey and neighboring Georgia, can be added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO. The practice of falconry was already inscribed on the list with including 18 countries unfortunately without Turkey and Georgia. It can be said that the extension of the list with these two countries should contribute to the recognition of this intangible heritage and encourage the efforts for safeguarding it.

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