



An Examination of The Use of Courtyard in Traditional Turkish Houses from The Perspective of Yarenlik and ICH: The Case of Kula

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Abstract

This study examines the courtyard space, a significant architectural element in traditional Kula houses, and analyzes the spatial requirements of the traditional Yarenlik ritual in relation to this space. Courtyard-based residential architecture in Anatolia is comprehensively analyzed with respect to climate, privacy, and typology. Additionally, the socio-spatial role of the courtyard is considered within the framework of the Yaren phenomenon and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The spatial concept is grounded in Henri Lefebvre's definition, which characterizes space as a cyclical phenomenon produced by social life and generating social relations. Accordingly, the courtyard is interpreted not only as a product of climatic and formal considerations but also as a space shaped by social interaction. To substantiate the conceptual framework, a spatial analysis was conducted on three traditional courtyard houses from the 18th century in Kula, which exemplify courtyard-based ground floor plans. This spatial analysis examined the architectural reading, spatial usage ratios, mapping related to action-space-ritual, identification of communal seating areas, spatial identification of the spaces used by the Yaren during their activities (performance, food service, show, service), mobile or seated uses, group seating, central performance, hierarchical positioning, and the documented services of Yaren gatherings. The findings indicate that there is both spatial and action-related compatibility between the courtyard typology and ritual actions. Yarenlik is still being kept alive and sustained today, even outside of courtyard houses that are no longer in use. This research, which seeks to reveal the reciprocal relationship between built form and intangible values, contributes to the assertion that traditional courtyard houses are not only tangible architectural works but also the primary requirement for the realisation of social intangible cultural heritage values.

Keywords: Yaren, Traditional Turkish house, Atrium, Kula, Architectural heritage

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional courtyard-style Turkish houses have long been examined in the literature on architectural history and housing studies in the context of climatic factors, typological formations, and spatial organisation. In the context of Anatolia, extensive and multi-layered analyses have examined the formal characteristics of this housing typology, its spatial hierarchy, and its strategies for adapting to environmental conditions. Nevertheless, the role of courtyard morphology as both a physical organisational element and a spatial infrastructure that facilitates the production, continuity, and transmission of intangible cultural heritage has received limited theoretical attention in the literature and remains insufficiently addressed in academic studies. This gap necessitates a reassessment of the courtyard within the framework of the relational dynamics between spatial organisation and cultural practices.

According to UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) comprises practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, and associated cultural domains transmitted from one generation to the next ([Unesco, 2003](#)). Such cultural practices shape spatial relationships and derive meaning as they emerge within architectural structures. However, architectural research often treats the built environment and cultural practices as parallel domains, rather than as interdependent systems that co-produce and transform one another. This perspective limits discussion of the complex interplay between spatial form and social practices.

Kula, a historic settlement in Western Anatolia, offers a dynamic context for exploring this relationship. The region features a vibrant range of intangible cultural heritage, such as courtyard house architecture, music, cuisine, folk performances, and the Yarenlik tradition. Rooted in domestic settings, Yarenlik consists of communal seating, musical performances, hierarchical arrangements, food preparation, and ritualized social interactions.

Despite this spatial proximity, the relationship between courtyard typology and Yarenlik has not been systematically analysed. This study argues that the courtyard morphology of traditional Kula houses functions as a socio-spatial infrastructure that enables and structures the continuity of Yarenlik as an intangible cultural practice. Rather than treating courtyard houses solely as architectural works, the research interprets them as activity environments that facilitate ritual gatherings and collective embodiment. In other words, the space provides a suitable environment for activities and sets certain boundaries.

Furthermore, the relocation of Yaren gatherings to spaces designed for multiple rituals, such as wedding halls, is a consequence of the abandonment of courtyard houses. The disuse of traditional courtyard structures and the emergence of new houses with different techniques, materials, and forms significantly contribute to the loss of intangible

cultural heritage. The failure to establish a relationship between space and intangible heritage is a major factor in the decline of the yaren tradition today. Lifestyles have changed, and consequently, spatial forms have changed, producing new spatial-social life frameworks.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question:

How did the courtyard typology of traditional Kula houses spatially enable and structure the tradition of yarenlik, and what does the displacement of this tradition today reveal about the relationship between built form and intangible heritage?

Through a qualitative comparative analysis of representative plan typologies and documented ritual requirements, this research contributes to discussions on the spatial impact of architecture in the continuation of cultural practices.

THE SPATIAL PRODUCTION OF RITUAL PRACTICES

Architecture is not merely the result of the regular movements of social life; rather, social life, interaction, and all activities are constantly and actively shaping each other in a reciprocal manner. Henri Lefebvre's concept of socially produced space provides a critical framework for understanding this reciprocal relationship. *In his work *The Production of Space**, Lefebvre argues that space is both a product of social relations and a tool for reproducing these relations (Lefebvre, 2014). According to Lefebvre, the mode of production of social space indirectly and continuously influences the outcome, cause, and justification (Lefebvre, 2014, 25). Therefore, the relationship between space and people is cyclical. Furthermore, Lefebvre states that in order to discover a society's spatial practice, space must be deconstructed (Lefebvre, 2014, 67). Consequently, analysing the courtyard-Yarenlik relationship practice will also enable us to understand society through the tradition of social space. Thus, space is neither neutral nor passive; it is structured by practice and, in turn, structures practice.

When we adapt this perspective to local traditional architecture, the courtyard emerges not only because of climate and geography but also as a result of social life. Spatial parameters such as enclosure, adjacency, thresholds, and degrees of privacy reveal the results of how social life comes together, circulates, and moves.

Intangible cultural practices, especially ritualised gatherings, require specific spatial requirements. These include collective visibility, acoustic containment, circulation continuity, and accessibility. These conditions do not arise by chance; they are shaped by the cyclical structure of the architectural order, which is reconfigured according to feedback and needs. Consequently, ritual practices and their structure cannot be fully understood without examining the historical spatial infrastructures that support them.

Ritual theory further strengthens this link between spatial structure and abstract cultural heritage practice. Catherine Bell emphasises that ritualisation structures bodies within space, producing arrangements

and relational hierarchies through spatial positioning ([Bell, 1992](#)). While the impact of ritual and space is easier to understand when examined from a religious perspective, it can be more difficult to find traces of the ritual approach brought about by social life. However, space provides the most important source for interpreting ritual.

Within this theoretical framework, the courtyard of traditional Kula houses can be understood as a socially produced space shaped and structured by social practices such as Yarenlik. This study approaches architecture and ritual not as separate analytical categories, but as systems that condition each other reciprocally. The courtyard becomes a spatial area where social interaction is organised, authority is expressed, and collective identity is reinforced.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Regarding the literature, it was deemed appropriate to describe the concept of Yarenlik as a value of Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the Kula region before discussing the basic courtyard and ICH. Intangible cultural heritage can be explained, from one perspective, as the formation of culture specific to people in different regions ([Tezcan, 1990, 337](#)). One of these intangible cultural values that emerged in the district of Kula with the values brought by history is Yarenlik. Yarenlik is known as the plural of the Persian word yar. Yar means friend, beloved, acquaintance ([Oğuz, 2013, 7](#)). Yaren conversations are friendships, that is, pleasant gatherings between friends. Yarenlik and Yaren conversations play important roles in the social fabric of the Kula district and are evidence of a deep-rooted tradition ([Tezcan, 1990, 337](#)). The purpose of Yarenlik is to instil good behaviour in its members. This includes teaching appropriate sitting and standing rules when communicating with elders and children, norms for communal eating, communal singing, resilience training, and facilitating competitive activities. Furthermore, these organisations emphasise the expression of thoughts and feelings and the development of personal and environmental hygiene by offering lessons on communication. They encourage abstinence from harmful habits such as smoking and excessive alcohol consumption and instil values of respect and calmness within the community.

In the Kula system, a Yaren leader known as the Yarenbaşı is responsible. This person is also called the Yiğitbaşı or Kızanbaşı. While every individual in the Yaren is called a Kızan, those participating in the games are called Efe. The Yarenbaşı is responsible for the behaviour of the team. In the event of a complaint, it is reported to the Yarenbaşı, who imposes an appropriate punishment. The existence of similar organisations in many regions of Anatolia, such as the Çankırı Yaran Organisation, the Safranbolu Seymen Organisation, the Kula Yaren Organisation, and the Simav Yaren Organisation, is noteworthy. These organisations are based on the Ahi organisations. Historically, Kula weddings last three days, and the Yaren organisation is involved throughout the event. The organisation provides kitchen equipment and

firewood, prepares food, cooks keşkek, washes the dishes, and distributes tea and coffee. Another task of the organisation is to arrange entertainment and ensure that the event is enjoyable for everyone. The entertainment begins on Sunday when the Yaren visit the bride's house. They gather around a barbecue in the large room called "hayat" in the bride's house and start the Fasil. This is accompanied by a percussion instrument called darbuka and a traditional Turkish entertainment genre called Fasil. Before 1965, additional activities such as steamboat rides and İlikmen games were also part of the repertoire ([Arslan, 2010, 70-79](#)).

Yarenlik plays an important role in the region, particularly in the context of wedding traditions. Wedding hosts usually make a contract with Yaren in advance for their participation. According to sources, in the past, the responsibility of providing food, coffee, water, and related services to wedding guests usually fell to the Yaren girl. The Yaren's pounding of the traditional Central Asian dish keşkek, accompanied by joyful games and songs played on instruments such as drums and zurnas, was a source of entertainment and excitement. The wedding hosts give gifts such as clothing and money to the Yaren as a token of appreciation ([Arslan, 2010, 77](#)). Today, the role of the Yaren is largely limited to music, entertainment, and games.

It is important to recognise that every social structure forms a complex system in which the relationships and functions of the social institutions that constitute that structure interact with people and the social values that emerge from these interactions. When evaluating the origins of this social institution, collectively referred to as Yaren, it is necessary to consider the social needs of society and the conditions in which it existed during different periods. The fundamental characteristics and functions of Yaren organisations demonstrate this. From this perspective, the Yaren institution, which emerged under various names, can be seen as a civil social system shaped by the tasks and functions undertaken by Central Asian traditions in different contexts, within the framework of new knowledge and institutionalisations that emerged with Islam. The Yaren system has undergone a process of transformation, resulting in the loss of some functions and the acquisition of new ones. This evolution is concurrent with changes in the social structure. Consequently, Yarenlik has also undergone changes in its social orientation and formation over time.

The activities of the Yaren organisation are concentrated around the living areas and courtyards, which constitute the main areas of activity within the residence. In the context of weddings, circumcision ceremonies and similar events, the Yaren organisation carries out its duties in designated gathering areas within the houses. Consequently, it can be said that there is an intrinsic connection between the tangible cultural heritage value of Kula courtyard houses and the Yarenlik tradition. Courtyards, which are generally associated with the introversion and privacy of houses, are also the points where the dwelling integrates with the city.

The etymological origin of the word courtyard derives from the Greek word “aule”, meaning enclosed open space, and refers to the area surrounded by walls or fences around a house, or the enclosed space in the middle of a building or group of buildings ([Eren, 1999, 25](#); [Parlatır et al., 1988, 165](#); [Hasol, 2008, 57](#); [Coates, Graeme and Stone, 2011, 30](#)). Courtyard-based house architecture has been extensively studied in research on traditional Anatolian dwellings, particularly in terms of climate adaptation, privacy, spatial hierarchy, and typological formation ([Kuban, 2017, 105](#); [Bekleyen, 2019, 2](#); [Özkan, 2017, 499](#)). Kula houses in Western Anatolia are characterised by inward-facing spatial arrangements structured around enclosed or semi-enclosed courtyards. These studies define the courtyard as a mediator between the public street and the private domestic space, and as a space that accommodates production, circulation, and daily life ([Bozer, 1988, 5-23](#); [Deniz, 1992, 19](#)). However, while studies on the environmental and morphological functions of the courtyard are extensive, its active role in structuring social ritual traditions has not been sufficiently researched.

In cultural heritage research, the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has shifted the focus from material artefacts to living practices and performative continuity. First adopted on 16 May 2001, the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines ICH as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills transmitted from generation to generation ([Unesco, 2003](#)). In this context, [Türker and Çelik \(2014\)](#) have highlighted traditions such as the tradition of aşıklık, sema ceremonies, and ceremonial keşkek among Turkey's elements of ICH. As stated by [Smith \(2006\)](#), heritage is not a static object but a cultural process. Similarly, [Kirshenblatt-Gimblett \(2004\)](#) emphasises the performative production of heritage and states that continuity depends on contexts that allow for the staging, concretisation, and social negotiation of practices. Thus, the continuity of intangible heritage requires attention not only to the artefacts themselves but, above all, to the people and their entire habitus and habitats, understood as their living spaces and social worlds ([Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004, 54](#)). Furthermore, the 2001 definition of ICH included the spaces associated with these actions, emphasising the importance of space in the continuity of such activities ([Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004, 54](#)).

This performance-based understanding requires spatial research. Building on Lefebvre's view that space is a socially produced and socially functioning concept ([Lefebvre, 2014](#)), built environments can be interpreted not only as places where activities take place, but also as active frameworks that condition movement, visibility, hierarchy, and collective embodiment. Ritual theory further strengthens this connection. [Bell \(1992\)](#) argues that ritual practices structure movements within space, creating spatial arrangements and relational hierarchies through spatial positioning. Therefore, ritual cannot be considered separately from its spatial arrangement. When we focus on actions, we see that the

interaction between the body and its environment involves an important cyclicity: while creating the ritual, the body is also influenced and shaped by it. Similar approaches are also seen in local architectural research. [Oliver \(2006\)](#) emphasises that courtyard houses in different cultures are not only shaped by climatic conditions; they also function as social connectors that facilitate people coming together, communal production, and interactions based on ceremonies. Courtyards create a special space that facilitates gathering, with their enclosed yet open-centred structure. Islamic belief also plays an important role here. The place of women in society has determined how they relate to the outdoor space and the boundaries of this relationship.

Yarenlik, a social tradition shaped by hierarchical seating arrangements, communal meals, musical performances, dance, and ritualised interactions, has generally been examined from the perspectives of folklore and ethnography ([Arslan, 2010](#); [Bayram & Berrakçay, 2023](#)). Research conducted on Yâren communities in different regions of Anatolia indicates that spatial arrangement is an effective factor in structuring authority and participation ([Kartal, 2025](#)). Experience-focused analyses reveal that rhythm, centrality, and social movement are defining elements in Yâren gatherings ([Birkon & Köroğlu, 2025](#)). However, these studies do not address the spatial relationships in which these practices occur. In particular, the relationship between the courtyards of houses in Kula and ritual continuity has not yet been sufficiently explored.

Wedding ceremonies associated with camaraderie are increasingly being held in contemporary wedding halls, and in this process, the spatial conditions in which the ceremonies take place are also shifting from enclosed indoor courtyards to standardised event venues. This spatial transformation raises certain issues regarding the compatibility between traditional typologies and ritual performance. Positioned around the axes of courtyard morphology, ritual theory, and the continuity of intangible heritage, this study approaches architecture not as a static cultural object but as a performative infrastructure. By examining how courtyard configurations have historically shaped collective ritual activities, the research aims to contribute to bridging the interdisciplinary gap between architectural typology and intangible cultural practices.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative spatial analysis approach to examine the relationship between courtyard morphology and ritual performance capacity. The aim is not to make a quantitative typological classification, but to interpret the structural harmony between historical house typology and the spatial requirements of the Yarenlik tradition.

Case Selection and Sources

The research is based on documented ground floor measurement drawings of three 18th-century courtyard houses in Kula (Beyler House, Zeynep Onbaşı House, and Bozerler House). These examples were selected according to the following criteria:

- The presence of a clearly defined courtyard layout
- Availability of documented ground floor measurement plans
- Representativeness within the Kula courtyard house typology

The architectural plans were obtained from previously published academic sources and archival documents. No new field measurements were taken. Therefore, the study presents a qualitative, comparative spatial reading based on secondary plan documents. The selected houses are treated not as isolated architectural works but as typological representatives of courtyard-based house organisation in Kula.

Data on Yarenlik

Information on the tradition of yarenlik has been obtained from two sources:

1. Existing scientific and folkloric literature
2. Contextual cultural information related to regional practices

This study does not claim to be comprehensive ethnographic field research. Rather, the ritual components defined in the literature — communal sitting, musical performance, hierarchical positioning, food preparation, circulation patterns, and ceremonial transitions — provide a spatial framework for analysis. The aim is to examine the structural compatibility between ritual requirements and historical spatial conditions, rather than to produce a complete ethnographic narrative.

Spatial Analysis Framework

The analysis focuses on ground floor plans, where courtyard layout and access relationships can be most clearly read. The study does not prioritise stylistic or decorative features. Instead, it examines the following spatial parameters:

- The location and morphology of the central void
- The thickness and continuity of the surrounding spatial bands
- Entrance-courtyard relationships and threshold layers
- The placement of service areas
- Circulation continuity and visual orientation
- Transitions between public, semi-public and private areas

The methodological process takes place in three stages:

Morphological Reading; It aims to reveal how the geometry of the courtyard, its enclosure form, access points and spatial hierarchy are shaped.

Proportional Assessment; The spatial interaction and hierarchy of the courtyard within the ground floor layout is being evaluated. This evaluation has been carried out using a proportional approach based on

a comparative reading of the plan drawings rather than precise metric measurements.

Ritual-Space Mapping; The spatial configuration of documented ritual and traditional practices is interpreted through the identification of potential central performance areas, peripheral seating areas, logistical service corridors, and hierarchical thresholds within the plan configuration.

This study does not suggest that the identified houses were deliberately designed for specific traditional ritual practices; rather, it considers the courtyard typology as a structural spatial framework that enables collective traditional performance.

Limitations

This research has been prepared based on existing planning documents; detailed on-site measurements or comprehensive observations have not been included in the scope of this study. Therefore, the analysis proceeds with a qualitative and interpretative approach rather than a numerical data-based assessment. Although it does not provide quantitative spatial measurements, it aims to reveal the structural relationship between courtyard morphology and the continuity of rituals.

COMPARATIVE SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Morphological Structure of Courtyard Houses

The three selected Kula houses — Beyler House, Zeynep Onbaşı House and Bozerler House — exhibit common spatial principles despite parcel-based geometric irregularities. In each example, the courtyard appears as an open space surrounded by buildings on at least three sides and located at the centre. Although the plan configurations are not entirely regular or angular, the courtyard functions as a spatial core around which circulation and room placement are organised.

The ground floor configurations consistently reveal the following:

- A dominant open courtyard occupying a significant portion of the building's usable area
- A layered transition between enclosed rooms and the courtyard, typically separated by a sofa or semi-open threshold
- Peripheral service units (kitchen, storage, bathroom, toilet, stable) forming a continuous spatial band
- Controlled street access opening onto a semi-private area before reaching the courtyard

The courtyard now functions as a spatial regulator rather than merely an open space. Circulation patterns converge towards the courtyard; visual axes also focus on this central open space. This spatial dominance supports the interpretation of the courtyard typology as an inward-looking residential system ([Kuban, 2017](#); [Bozer, 1988](#)). However, the present analysis does not limit this interpretation solely to the residential

context; it broadens the framework by also considering the courtyard's potential to facilitate ritual practices.

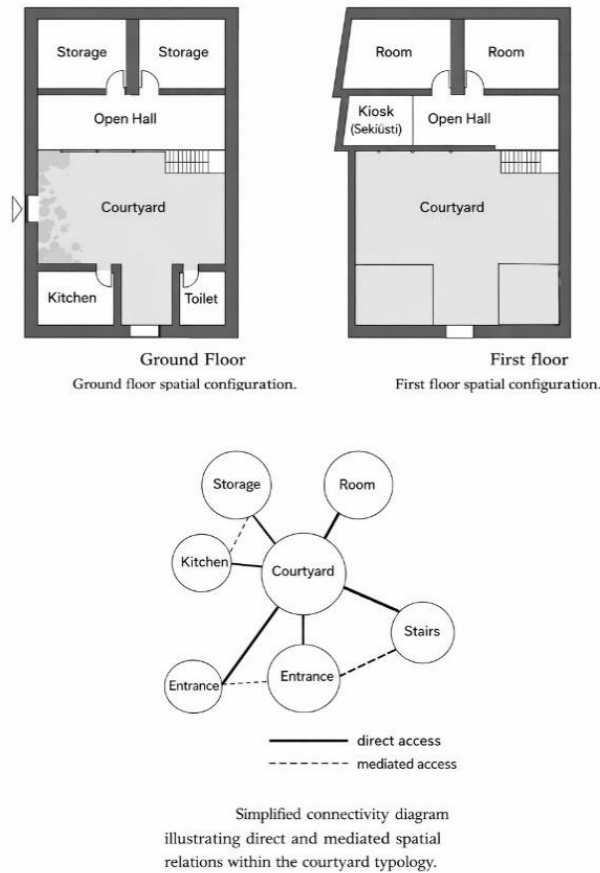


Figure 1. Courtyard space configurations (Author archive).

Proportional Dominance and Spatial Capacity

A proportionate reading of the plan drawings obtained through literature research reveals that the courtyard area is one of the largest uninterrupted spaces in all ground floor layouts. Even when additional structures such as shops or stables are considered, the courtyard maintains its dominant position spatially.

This proportional dominance enables the following:

- Collective gathering without fragmentation
- Clear central performance areas
- Peripheral seating arrangements
- Multi-directional visibility
- Simultaneous logistical operations along service bands

In this sense, the courtyard functions not only as a climatic infrastructure but also as a high-capacity spatial area. The empty space at its centre allows performance and observation to coexist, while the thickness of the surrounding structural elements provides a structural constraint. This situation aligns with the idea of spatial framing and the organisation of bodily practices emphasised in ritual theory (Bell, 1992). Architectural arrangement alone does not determine how a ritual will

unfold; however, it can prepare suitable spatial conditions in which people can move together and collective experiences can emerge.

Case-Based Micro-Spatial Readings

Beyler Mansion

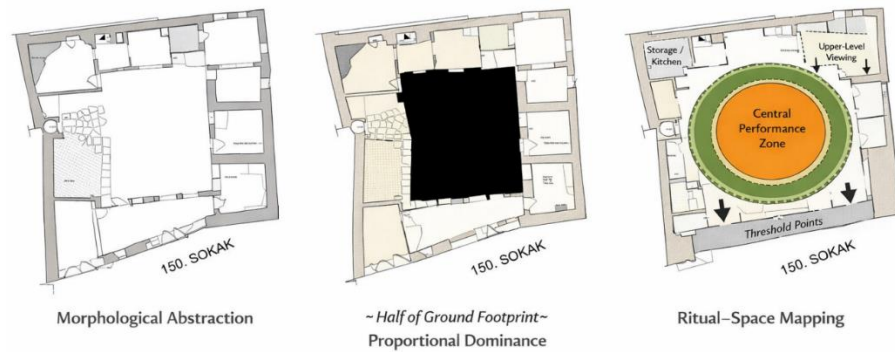
Beyler Mansion has a relatively balanced and geometrically regular courtyard layout. The central void occupies a significant portion of the ground floor and is clearly defined by the rooms surrounding it. This results in the building developing a strong inward spatial orientation.

One of the striking features of this plan is the thickness of the perimeter band. Service units are placed around the edges of the courtyard, forming a kind of buffer layer between the central gathering area and the outer boundary. Such a spatial organisation allows different activities to be carried out simultaneously: while the courtyard forms the main area for gatherings or performances, the surrounding sections can support food preparation and other functions without interrupting the central focus.

The entrance arrangement completes this concept. Upon entering from the street, one approaches the centre by passing through several transitional layers rather than reaching the courtyard directly. This gradual transition both enhances ritual privacy and creates a certain social filtering. Thus, the courtyard functions as a performance space, enclosed by architectural layers and separated from the outside in a controlled manner.

173

Figure 2. Beyler Mansion
Courtyard-Ritual Relationships
(Author archive).



Zeynep Onbaşı House

Zeynep Onbaşı House has an irregular courtyard layout. The void in the central area is asymmetrical and offset from the plan. Rather than weakening spatial consistency, this irregularity creates different edges and viewing angles.

The living area acts as a mediating threshold between the enclosed rooms and the courtyard, intensifying spatial stratification and highlighting hierarchical transitions. The courtyard emerges gradually rather than abruptly.

The asymmetrical design creates environmental areas suitable for different ritual functions such as sitting, circulation or service support. The ritual organisation also adapts to this geometry. The courtyard

functions as a flexible space that maintains the central performance while also preserving the peripheral support systems, as in other examples.

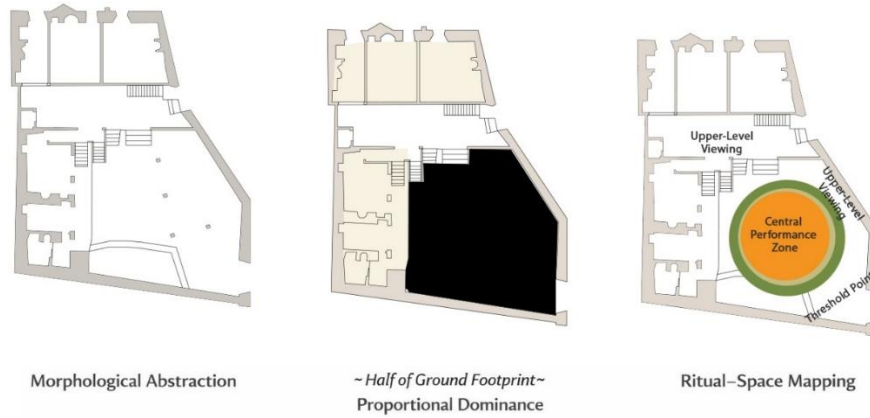


Figure 3. Zeynep Onbaşı Courtyard-ritual relationships (Author archive).

Bozerler House

Bozerler House creates a more comprehensive and functionally diverse environmental band on the ground floor (including the stable and wet areas). Despite this variety of functional movement, the courtyard maintains its structural dominance.

The operation of functional areas does not fragment the central void; instead, it reinforces the distinction between service and gathering areas. Circulation revolves around the courtyard, and controlled transitions maintain spatial boundaries.

This configuration demonstrates that the functioning and ritual life within the house coexist within the same spatial framework. Even if service areas are expanded, the courtyard can continue to serve as an uninterrupted performance space capable of supporting communal gatherings.



Figure 4. Bozerler Courtyard-Ritual Relationships (Author archive).

Ritual-Space Compatibility

The documented components of Yarenlik are as follows:

- Circular or semi-circular arrangements for communal seating
- Central music and dance performance
- Hierarchical positioning of leaders
- Food preparation and distribution

- Ceremonial entrance and processional movement

When these elements are reflected in the courtyard morphology, structural compatibility becomes clearly apparent. The central void is used for performance and dance. The surrounding edges support seated viewing. Service belts enable logistical operations. Semi-open thresholds denote hierarchical transitions. Elevated viewing positions enhance collective visibility.

This analysis does not claim that Yaren practices constitute a spatial and architectural design. Instead, it explains the reciprocal relationship between spatial construction and ritual organisation. The courtyard typology creates a spatial area where ritual consistency can emerge.

Spatial Displacement and the Transformation of Ritual Regimes

The shift of Yaren gatherings from the courtyards of houses to today's wedding halls is not merely a change of venue; it also signifies a transformation in the spatial arrangement where rituals take place.

The traditional courtyard has a structure shaped by layered thresholds, semi-enclosed spaces and the interior layout of the house. In this environment, movement follows a specific order, visibility is controlled, and participation takes place within a more limited, socially and spatially defined area.

Wedding halls, on the other hand, are more standardised spaces, often designed for commercial purposes. In such venues, scale and flexibility take precedence over a layered and hierarchical order. The distinctiveness of thresholds diminishes, and the restrictive structure of the domestic environment gives way to a more neutral spatial arrangement.

This transformation affects the following:

- Spatial intimacy
- Hierarchical expression
- Acoustic limitation
- Symbolic embedding
- Transition between public and private spaces

Ritual continuity may persist, but its experiential intensity may change. When evaluated from a heritage perspective, this change reveals the delicate relationship between physical space and intangible cultural continuity. The architectural environment does not determine the existence of ritual on its own; however, it significantly influences how it is experienced and its quality.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the courtyard layout in traditional Kula houses functions as a socio-spatial infrastructure that enables collective rituals to take place and shapes them to a certain extent. However, the view put forward here is not an architectural determinism claim that architecture alone determines rituals.

To suggest that traditional courtyard houses were consciously designed for Yaren rituals would be a reductionist approach. Instead, as noted in the analysis, attention is drawn to the structural harmony between these spaces and ritual practices. The defining role of the central void, the spatial thickness around it, the layered thresholds, and controlled access create particularly suitable conditions for collective performances. This distinction is crucial. The study does not claim that space determines ritual; rather, it emphasises that spatial organisation shapes the scope and consistency of possible performances. In the example of the courtyard typology, the ritual can be performed without spatial conflict thanks to the architectural arrangement being compatible with the requirements of collective gathering.

In this context, courtyard houses demonstrate the power of spatial influence. The built environment is active; it shapes circulation patterns, frames fields of vision, structures hierarchy, and limits acoustics. These elements influence how people come together, how authority is expressed, and how performance is perceived. Lefebvre's approach to space as a concept both produced by and producing social relations provides a theoretical basis for this interpretation ([Lefebvre, 2014](#)). Thus, the courtyard emerges not merely as a climatic or typological device, but as a spatial field where social reproduction takes place.

Furthermore, the transfer of Yaren practices to wedding halls demonstrates that the continuity of the ritual is not affected by spatial transformation, but that the qualitative structure of the ritual experience has changed. The weakening of transitions separating different layers of houses and established enclosed spaces indicates a transformation in spatial mediation. While the symbolic elements of tradition are preserved, the relational intensity and concrete form of the practice may change.

This study contributes to broader discussions on heritage. Conservation debates often address the physical preservation of buildings or the sustainability of intangible traditions separately. However, this study reveals that tangible and intangible heritage function as interconnected systems. Architectural typologies can serve as performative infrastructures that stabilise ritual practices across generations. Therefore, the preservation of courtyard morphology should be understood not only as an architectural necessity but also as a phenomenon related to cultural continuity. When domestic spatial infrastructures erode, ritual practices may continue, but their experiential structures are reshaped within altered spatial arrangements. In some cases, rituals may disappear entirely when they lose the spaces in which they emerged.

Positioning courtyard typology at the intersection of spatial form, social organisation, and the continuity of intangible heritage, this research advocates a relational understanding of heritage, analysing built environments and cultural practices not as isolated areas but as mutually conditioning systems.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between the courtyard morphology of traditional Kula houses and the spatial requirements of the Yarenlik ritual tradition. Going beyond climatic and typological interpretations, the research has approached house architecture as a socio-spatial infrastructure that enables and conditions collective cultural practices.

A comparative spatial analysis of the 18th-century three-courtyard house demonstrates that the central open void consistently functions as the dominant regulatory element on the ground floor. Circulation patterns converge towards this void, with peripheral service bands providing logistical support without disrupting communal gathering, while layered transitions mediate between domestic privacy and social performance.

When all documented rituals (group seating arrangements, central music and dance, hierarchical positioning, food preparation, and ceremonial transitions) are placed within these spatial arrangements, structural coherence becomes clearly apparent. The courtyard not only hosts ritual activities; it also spatially frames and stabilises them.

It is important to note that this research does not advocate architecture designed specifically for Yaren practices. The aim is simply to demonstrate the relationship in which spatial typology and social practices mutually shape each other. While the courtyard morphology offers spatial possibilities for the consistent performance of rituals, ritual practices also activate and reproduce the meaning of these spatial structures.

The relocation of Yaren gatherings to standard wedding halls today reveals the fragility of this reciprocal relationship. The ritual may continue symbolically; however, the transition from a layered domestic environment to a commercial and neutral hall space alters the qualitative structure of the experience. The architectural context does not determine the existence of the ritual, but it shapes the intensity of the performance and its relational fabric.

By revealing the structural harmony between the concrete courtyard typology and the abstract continuity of the ritual, this research contributes to heritage discourse in three fundamental ways:

1. It broadens architectural conservation debates beyond material preservation towards performative capacity.
2. It situates courtyard morphology within a relational framework that connects spatial form, social organisation, and cultural reproduction.
3. It proposes that heritage should be understood not as a collection of isolated artefacts or practices, but as an interconnected socio-spatial system.

Accepting this reciprocity allows traditional domestic environments to be interpreted not only as historical dwellings but also as cultural infrastructures that historically sustain collective identity and ritual continuity.

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Resume

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