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Research Article

The Karaağaç Coastal Palace in visual and written sources

Nuran KARA PİLEHVARİAN, Sümeyye Reyhan GENÇ

Department of Architecture, Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul, Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

The Karaağaç Coastal Palace was built in Istanbul, on the Golden Horn, near the Kağıthane Stream. The structure takes its name from the elm gardens in its vicinity, which are mentioned in contemporary sources. Based on written and visual sources, it is generally accepted that the coastal palace was located near the area where the Golden Horn Congress Center stands today. Thought to have been built during the reign of Sultan Murad IV, the palace was frequently used as a residence by sultans until the reign of Sultan Selim III. The increased frequency of use over time led to the spatial expansion of the structure and various additions made in different periods. It can be said that the Karaağaç Coastal Palace was used more intensively, particularly during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III, and therefore, the most significant architectural changes and modifications occurred during this period. During this process, it is understood that the palace, along with the surrounding garden arrangements, transformed into a more comprehensive complex. It was frequently used and underwent the most changes during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III. By the time of Sultan Selim III, the use of the palace gradually decreased, and it was eventually completely abandoned. Some of the materials from the decommissioned structures were used in the reconstruction of the Kağıthane Palace, while the remainder was used in the construction of barracks built in the 19th century. As a result of this process, the area where the Karaağaç Coastal Palace was located was gradually completely abandoned, the physical presence of the palace disappeared, and the structure has survived to the present day only through written sources.

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THE KARAAĞAÇ COASTAL PALACE

The Karaağaç Coastal Palace stands as a significant example of a *coastal palace*[1] (*sahilsaray*) extensively utilized for the seasonal migrations of Ottoman sultans, despite not having survived to the present day. This study examines the reasons behind the preference for the Karaağaç Coastal Palace, its historical evolution, and the factors leading to its eventual disappearance, as reflected in written records. Its complete physical extinction remains a primary reason why the palace is categorized among structures that can only be evaluated through limited architectural and historical data.

[1] These structures are palace complexes constructed along the shores of Istanbul to serve the day trips and seasonal migrations of Ottoman sultans and members of the dynasty; however, they are not as extensive in scope as the administrative palaces.

***Corresponding author**
*E-mail adress: sumeyyereyhan0@gmail.com

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Furthermore, its limitation to short periods such as the summer months has led to a lack of sufficiently detailed information in primary written sources. Consequently, information regarding the Karaağaç Coastal Palace can primarily be traced through indirect and fragmented data. Due to the scarcity of extant sources, scholarly debates persist concerning the palace's exact location, date of construction, architectural scope, and phases of transformation.

During Istanbul's tenure as the capital of the Ottoman Empire, the coastal strip along the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn evolved over time, becoming diversified through palatial life, the culture of public promenades (*mesire*), and spaces of daily utility. In this context, there was a progressive increase in both the number and functional variety of coastal structures. Among these typologies, coastal palaces used by sultans and members of the dynasty for seasonal migrations and day trips hold a prominent place. These structures, particularly favored during the summer months, emerged as architectural elements serving the seasonal mobility of Ottoman court life. Numerous coastal palaces, such as the Beşiktaş and Karaağaç Coastal Palaces, were constructed along the shores of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus; these sites were frequently preferred by the sultans and the dynasty due to their integration with the natural environment and ease of maritime transport. Unlike the administrative palaces, which served as permanent residences and centers of state affairs, coastal palaces were primarily designed and utilized for the sultans' short-term excursions and migrations, traditionally referred to as *Biniş-i Hümâyun*. Therefore, rather than formal state protocol, these palaces were shaped as spaces catering to temporary accommodation, recreation, and leisure functions.

From the onset of spring until the end of summer, the sultans typically reached the pavilions and promenade areas around the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn via maritime routes. Within the framework of Ottoman court etiquette, these excursions were officially designated as "Biniş-i Hümâyun" [1]. Biniş-i Hümâyun excursions also served as a primary factor in determining the functional patterns of the pavilions, kiosks, and waterfront palaces constructed along the shoreline. From the 16th century onwards, the area stretching from Eyüp on the Golden Horn to Karaağaç, Sütlüce, and Kâğıthane on the opposite shore began to rank among Istanbul's most significant promenade districts. Owing to its natural landscape, water resources, and proximity to the administrative palaces, this region evolved into a prominent resort area extensively utilized by both the court dignitaries and the public, particularly during the spring and summer months. As the allure of these promenade areas increased over time, the construction of kiosks, pavilions, and palatial structures in the region commenced [2]. Particularly by the 18th century, a distinct increase in the number of excursion sites along the Golden Horn is observed, paralleling the evolution of entertainment and promenade culture within Ottoman court life. During this period, the shores of the Golden Horn—most notably the environs of the Kağıthane Stream—became significant excursion destinations frequently visited by the sultans and members of the dynasty. Among these destinations, Karaağaç stands out as a prominent station, distinguished by its strategic location and environmental characteristics [3]. Karaağaç is situated on the northern shore of the Golden Horn. During the Ottoman period, this area gained prominence due to its lush vegetation, proximity to the waterfront, and its neighborhood to the tomb of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari [4]. The coastal palace constructed in Karaağaç is among the structures recorded in the *Bostancıbaşı Registers* (*Bostancıbaşı Defterleri*) of the period, yet it has not survived to the present day. In the chronicles of Evliya Çelebi, it was initially documented as the Karaağaç Mansion (*Karaağaç Yalısı*), a seaside residence that was formerly a vizierial palace within the gardens of Defterdarzâde İbrahim Pasha [5]. These records are of significant importance as they point to the functional and ownership transformations that the Karaağaç Coastal Palace underwent over time.

Şehsuvaroğlu states that the Karaağaç Coastal Palace derived its name from the surrounding grove, which was known as the Karaağaç Grove at that time [6]. On the other hand, Hovhannesyan noted that the grove consisting of elm trees (*karaağaç*) was located outside the walls of the palace garden [7]. This perspective demonstrates that there are varying approaches among sources regarding whether the grove, which served as the basis for the palace's naming, was an integral part of the structure or an element of a broader landscape. This discrepancy stems from the fact that the environmental boundaries and the garden layout of the Karaağaç Coastal Palace have not been precisely determined.

Although no architectural remains or traces of the Karaağaç Coastal Palace survive today, visual sources of the period offer significant clues regarding the structure's location. In this context, considering the extant topography and shoreline, it can be argued that the Karaağaç Palace depicted in the engraving by Antoine-Ignace Melling was situated on the site currently occupied by the Halic Congress Center. Melling's detailed descriptions and use of perspective contribute to the determination of the approximate location of the Karaağaç Coastal Palace on the shores of the Golden Horn, even though the building itself has not reached the present day.

There are divergent views regarding the period in which the first structure was erected on the site of the palace. While Artan suggests that the initial building was commissioned during the reign of Mehmed IV, Erdoğan asserts that it was constructed by Murad IV [8, 9]. Şehsuvaroğlu recorded the construction date of the structure with the following statements: "One of Istanbul's gardens was the Karaağaç Garden in Sütlüce. Formerly the property of Deft-

erdarzâde İbrahim Pasha, its location and the elegance of its scenery made a profound impression on Murad IV, becoming one of his frequently visited spots. (...) We even know that he constructed a pavilion (*kasır*) here in the year 1083 (1672 AD)" [6].

From its date of construction until the reign of Selim III, the Karaağaç Coastal Palace remained a site of significant interest for the sultans. Due to the gradual expansion of its boundaries, it eventually began to incorporate the neighboring Yusuf Efendi Garden [8].

Archival records concerning renovations and imperial migrations suggest that the Karaağaç Coastal Palace reached its peak usage during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III.

Numerous archival documents exist regarding the migrations to the Karaağaç Palace. According to extant records, various sections—including the *Imperial Sofa* (*Hünkar Divanhanesi*) and the Queen Mother's room (*Valide Sultan Odası*) in the Harem, the Imperial Chamber (*Hünkar Odası*) in the *Selamlık*, as well as water systems and the Imperial Stables (*Has Ahır*)—were renovated. Based on these records, it can be argued that the Karaağaç Coastal Palace functioned as a fully organized Ottoman palace complex [8].

The Karaağaç locality, flanked by the Ebusuud Efendi Garden to the north and the Koca Yusuf Pasha Garden to the south, was utilized—albeit infrequently—until the late 17th century. It is known that following the fire at the Tersane Palace in 1677, Sultan Mehmed IV resided in the pavilion (*kasır*) constructed at this site [9].

Due to insufficient space, the palace staff of Sultan Mehmed IV, who moved to the Karaağaç Coastal Palace in 1682, were accommodated in the Koca Yusuf Pasha Garden. Based on this information, it can be inferred that the palace was not yet large enough at that time to house the Sultan's entire retinue. For this reason, although it was still referred to as the "Yusuf Efendi Garden" in the latest *Bostancıbaşı* registers, it is believed that the Koca Yusuf Pasha Garden was gradually annexed to the Karaağaç Palace and eventually became part of the palace grounds [10].

It is recorded that the Karaağaç Palace complex comprised several structures, such as the Harem, the Privy Chamber (*Has Oda*), the Chamber of the Holy Mantle (*Hırka-ı Şerif Dairesi*), the quarters of the Sword-Bearer (*Silahtar Ağa Dairesi*), the Treasury Chamber (*Hazine Odası*), and the office of its *Kethüda* (steward), as well as the ward of the pantry officers (*Kilarlılar Koğuşu*) and their *Kethüda's* room [6].All units within the palace were organized independently of one another. The layout featured a *sofa* (central hall) positioned over the sea, with rooms facing the garden side. A large portion of the palace was enclosed by high walls; specifically, on the seaward side of the Harem, an additional screen wall (*havale duvarı*) was constructed to supplement these high boundary walls. The *Daire-i Hümayun* (Imperial Suite), the seaward section of which was supported by piles, contained a colonnaded *divanhane* (council hall) and various other rooms. While half-lattices (*yarım kafes*) were utilized for the ground-floor windows, shutters were employed for the upper floor, which featured a lower ceiling height. The palace possessed two piers, referred to as the *Kazıklı İskele* (Piled Pier) and the *İskele-i Cedid* (New Pier). Additionally, a gate opened directly from the stone wharf of the palace into the *Daire-i Hümayun* [6]. In the vicinity of the Karaağaç Coastal Palace, there is also a bathhouse (*hamam*) commissioned by the *Babüssaade* Aga (Chief Eunuch of the Palace) of Ahmed III for the use of the palace staff [11].

It is recorded that the following couplet, known to belong to Sultan Ahmed III, was inscribed above one of the gates of the Harem within the palace:

"Like the stature of a beloved, a delight for the heart,
My dispeller of sorrow is the Karaağaç Garden."

The only extant engraving known to visually depict the Karaağaç Coastal Palace is included in the album of Antoine-Ignace Melling, published in 1819 (Fig. 1). Melling's work is of paramount importance, as it portrays not only the Karaağaç Coastal Palace but also the shores of the Golden Horn from a panoramic perspective. In these engravings, the coastal settlements along the Golden Horn, waterfront structures, and their spatial interrelations can be observed, albeit without granular detail. It is evident that Melling's depictions visually represent many structures recorded in the late-period *Bostancıbaşı* registers. This indicates that these works serve as significant historical documents regarding the coastal architecture of the era. In particular, the locations, quantities, and sequential arrangement of the buildings along the shoreline allow for comparative readings with archival records. According to these archival sources, Sultan Selim III commissioned the construction of ten *chalupa* (sloop) boathouses in the Yusuf Efendi Garden [10]. However, it is noteworthy that Melling's engraving depicts nine boathouses along the shoreline, situated immediately adjacent to the Karaağaç Coastal Palace. This discrepancy suggests either that one of the boathouses may have fallen out of use by the time the engraving was executed, or that one structure was omitted due to Melling's choices regarding perspective and framing. This situation is significant as it demonstrates the existence of points of divergence between visual sources and written archival documents. Furthermore, it indicates that Melling's engravings must be evaluated with a critical and comparative approach in studies aimed at the architectural restitution of the Karaağaç Coastal Palace and its surrounding built environment.

Brick and tile production was carried out during the summer season in the region where the Karaağaç Palace was located, utilizing the freshwater sources and the black mud extracted from the wetlands of Sütlüce [7]. This situation indicates that the construction of the palace relied not only on materials brought from distant centers but also on local nat-



Figure 1. The engraving of the Karaağaç Coastal Palace (Melling, 1819).

ural resources. Furthermore, not only the structural elements of the palace but also the surrounding landscape arrangements were handled in a systematic manner. In 1745, by an edict of Sultan Mahmud I, it was ordered that five thousand saplings—including linden, oak, elm, ash, and plane trees—be brought from Izmit for the palace grounds [12].

It is recorded that Sultan Mustafa III frequently utilized the Karaağaç Coastal Palace during his summer residencies. The reasons for favoring this palace include its proximity to the tomb of *Eyyüb el-Ensârî*, which facilitated regular visitations, the established tradition of seeking repose in this region due to its refreshing climate, and its convenient location near the Topkapı Palace [13].

During the reign of Sultan Selim III, the palace remained entirely disused and eventually fell into a state of dereliction. During the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, certain materials required for the reconstruction and repair of the Kağıthane Palace were initially sourced from the Karaağaç Palace; subsequently, in 1826, when the stones needed for the construction of military barracks were also taken from this site, the palace was completely demolished and ceased to exist [6, 8].

In conclusion, although the Karaağaç Coastal Palace has not physically survived to the present day, extant written and visual sources indicate that it was one of the significant "migration palaces" (*göç sarayları*) of its era. The evidence demonstrates that the palace played a functional role within the seasonal mobility of the Sultans around the Golden Horn and Kağıthane. In this respect, the Karaağaç Coastal Palace can be considered a noteworthy example within the tradition of Ottoman waterfront and migration palaces.

The engravings produced by Antoine-Ignace Melling provide crucial visual data, revealing the structure's spatial relationship with the shoreline and its general silhouette. In addition, Şehsuvaroğlu's descriptions of the palace and contemporary archival documents provide complementary information regarding the building's location, patterns of use, and environmental context. The integrated evaluation of these diverse source types enables inferences regarding the architectural features of the Karaağaç Coastal Palace and facilitates restitution studies. Such a study would not only reveal the potential architectural configuration of a lost structure but also contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of the spatial organization and usage practices of coastal palaces along the shores of the Golden Horn during the Ottoman period.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Concept: N. Kara Pilehvarian, S. R. Genç. Design:S. R. Genç, Supervision:N. Kara Pilehvarian, Data:S. R. Genç , Analysis: S. R. Genç, Literature search:S. R. Genç , Writing:S. R. Genç , Critical revision: N. Kara Pilehvarian.

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The published publication includes all graphics and data collected or developed during the study.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ETHICS

There are no ethical issues with the publication of this manuscript.

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