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**INTERIOR DESIGN DECORATIONS
OF THE MACEDONIAN TRADITIONAL HOUSE**

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ABSTRACT

Background:

It is necessary to proceed from one's heritage, in order to accept the advances of modern architecture.[1]

At present it is difficult to talk about the Macedonian folk house because of a significant lack of data, as well as because our traditional Habitats are rarely saved in their original form. Therefore, this research article deals with education for traditional style design of the Macedonian traditional interiors, to support and improve the sector of vernacular architecture. Its goal is to present the authentic architectural aesthetics in the spatial plastic of our old houses.

Results:

Using analysis of the Macedonian traditional interior spaces are shown their interior processings and equipment, as well as symbols and semantics of their decorations and ornaments. This document gives an overview of the local ethnic characteristics of the domestic interior architecture, which are incurred as a result of centuries of continuous folklore creativity and tradition.

KEY WORDS

Macedonian traditional house, interiors, ornaments, symbols.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. General Information about Macedonian Traditional House

Macedonian architectural heritage includes a wide range of simple habitats to high living standard old houses with developed functional and aesthetic solutions. Raised on one or several floors with porches for shadows and salons with view named "*Chardaks*" (plastic element in the façade), are houses with a widely open panoramas that even at present times inspire man and gets him closer to natural environment.[2] Whether we talk about village or town houses, they are example of cultural heritage with universal significance, whose greatest permanent value is the special relationship to the used materials, structure, spatial composition and Man's location in their interiors. The house for living has become a dynamic space with existential dimension, in which Man was naturally provided with functional factors from the close environment (food, water, natural building materials, wood beams, roof hay etc.).

1.2. Goal and Structure of the Research Article

The main purpose of this analytical research serves to describe the authentic old style interior design of the Macedonian traditional house. Through theoretical and field exploration as well as photography are shown significant elements and creative spirit of one national housing culture. The following literature obtains old house interiors dating from the Ottoman rule from XIV to XIX century, that origin from numerous original country places: Ohrid, Veles, Krushevo, Kratovo, Strumica, Debar, Galicnik, Tetovo, Skopje etc.

The further of this document is divided in two parts:

- **Approach and state of research.** The reader gets informed about the applied working methods used as approach to the research and basic information about the structure of plastic modeling of the old Macedonian house space, which are of interest for

understanding the theme to the people who are not familiar with the authentic Macedonian interior architecture;

- **Interior equipment and processing.** This part refers to decorations, ornaments, symbols and semantics of the integrated, built- in and movable traditional furniture and interior's original features of the region.

2. APPROACH AND STATE OF RESEARCH

2.1. Applied Working Methods

This article is created based on methodically research of existing professional literature and ethnographic records on cultural values of the Macedonian traditional style house and field exploring of authentic morphological Macedonian places that are mixture of the past and the present with old traditional houses, remains of old houses, reconstructed houses or newly built houses modeled on the “*Original Macedonian house*” that perpetuated the old Macedonian housing tradition. Also published journals and internet materials are being used as source of information.

2.2. Macedonian Old House's Spatial Organization

Bared by the Turks from public life, the Macedonians focused their architectural imagination on a house for everybody. The interior plastic housing is developed horizontally and vertically with levels, which number of rooms and spatial differentiation showed the holders' economic power. *The Porch*, “*Chardak*” and “*Minsofa*” are usually set on three spatial levels, fused into a single functional area. The archaic space is structured according several basic codes: up- down, left-right, male- female, culture and nature, sacral and profane, centre- periphery etc. The fireplace represents the hearth of the house, while the walls and the thresholds signify the peripheral and boundary areas of the dwelling. The horizontal house division contains two worlds: “*our*” and “*alien world*”, in which very important role plays the symbolic meaning of the house doorstep. It represents the “*boundary*” between these two worlds and the people's crossing from one to the other world. The guest who enters the house, symbolically represents the outside world. He must pass through several ritual stages starting from the entrance of the house (the lower level), so that he can reach the space with the fireplace (which is host's intimate room).[3] Often the spatial pattern of Macedonian traditional house is divided in two oppositions: male and female. The female section is marked as inaccessible place, a symbol of the female principle, fertility and keeper of bread and food, in contrast of the male principle.[3] Space with interior staircase provides vertical communication between levels, a symbolic link between heaven, earth and underground. The cattle lives in the lower level which implies the nature, while in the upper part is the cultural world with its representative rooms and fireplace, where is the center of family ceremonial events.

The fundamental structure of the Macedonian old style house has developed with three types of residential rooms: “*Economic space*” (household premises) with *Porch* on the bottom, winter premises (usually set in the upper level) with the room called “*Hause*” and summer living area with representative rooms (usually set on top level) called “*Chardak*”. The central (middle) level called “*House*” representing today's living room, functions as a tampon zone between production rooms placed on the bottom and sleeping rooms on the top. Also, the house has various specific premises for household, sanitation and connecting spatial elements and other winter and summer rooms: “*Minsofa*” (room with a fireplace) and “*Tron*” in the “*Chardak*”, guest room “*Sharena*

odaja” (painted room), lounge, hallway, shelter in the basement, bathrooms, winter and summer kitchen, “*Gjezentija*” (big hallway), wardrobe, kitchen called “*Ima*”, “*Sanduk*” room (female room), “*Kled*” and “*Dark room*” (pentry in the basement), laundry, “*Balkonce*” (Balkon) etc. In conclusion, the traditional space housing is divided horizontally and vertically in sectors for everyday activities with interpretation of Holiness connotation.[3]

3. DECORATIONS OF INTERIOR EQUIPMENT AND FURNITURE PROCESSING

Macedonian traditional style interior decorations of old town and village houses have symbolic, semiological, mythical and social characteristics. Integrated and movable wood equipment (ceilings, walls, “*Musandras*”, cupboards, doors, pillars, frames, boxes etc.) contain decorative carved surfaces and ornaments with motives from nature, everyday life and folk customs (figuration, zoomorphic, floral and geometric shapes). They directly provide interpretation and understanding of the basic meaning of the natural human environment and interior space. The degree of decorative treatment is a symbol of family’s prestige and wealth or shows the importance of the room and it’s aesthetics or functional value. City rooms impacted village rooms not only with spatial conception, but also with interior decoration.

3.1. Decorations, Ornaments, Symbols and Semantics of the Integrated Furniture

The system of integrated furniture is a mixture of colorful and wood carved decorative ceilings that connect to decorative doors and processed curtains over windows with decorative profiles, and make meaningful compositional system, in which everything is subordinated to the man and his measures.

Construction Carpentry with its decorative treatment enriches the appearance of Macedonian traditional style house. Decorative carpentry construction follows the decorative treatment of ceilings and cupboards in interiors and forms harmonious aesthetic space union.

In some areas, **exterior Entrance Doors** were semicircular shape in the form of a horseshoe and symbolized breeding culture in those regions. The decorations of the entrance doors can be simple or richer with decorated fields of carved wood.[4]

The interior Doors can be classify in different types: single and double winged, depending on construction to *carpenter* or “*tesar*” type, with rectangular or semicircular frames, carved with one or several decorative surface fields etc. Decorated doors indicate the representative character of the room (guest rooms, “*Chardaks*”, etc.). They were integrated in the walls and made interior union with the “*Musandras*”, ceilings, cupboards, shelves, fireplaces etc. The final decorative treatment of the doors was conditioned by the room’s function and importance. Representative rooms had beautiful doors, while rooms with secondary significance had doors with simpler treatment. Doors were often decorated only on the one surface, the one that was in the side of the representative room.

Decorative ornamentation of interior doors is with shallow aesthetic plastic on door surface, which make geometric compositions of squares, rectangles, triangles and trapezoids. Circles and semicircles were used less frequently, “*Rosettes*” appeared as a central motive on the door wing, with geometric decorative treatment developed around. The decorations on the doors are usually applied in the fields of the door frames and profiles with carved details. Usually are used geometric compositions on the door surfaces, to note the entry of the room. *Tesar type doors* were processed with geometric decorations.[5]

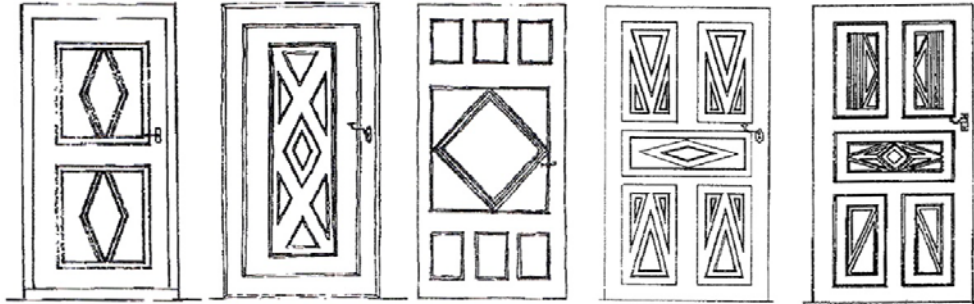


Fig. 1: Carpenter type doors with geometric carved decorations in separated fields

Windows with their forms, processing and rhythmic brought art in the interiors and harmonious play of light and shadows. The most important window's decorative element is the so called "Pervaz", a wooden profile around the window hole. It represent a wooden mask, placed on the window frame. It can be like the window form or with a timpanon. Sometimes windows are with light openings above, with decorative wooden frames. The general impression of the elegant interior is completed with decorative wool and tweeted curtains.

The Ceiling surface symbolizes the sky in the room of the house, while **the Rosette** in the middle glorifies the sun which brings light, heat and happiness in the family.[3] Decorative ceilings and walls have important role in the Macedonian interiors. The ceiling has a wide range of treatment- from simplest concepts to very high quality and complex solutions with high artistic contents. They are decorated with painted figural decorations and carvings with central "Rosettes". From this period we find "raster" zoographical ornamental decoration as substitute for expensive European wall tapestry. The decoration is applicable in guest rooms, reception rooms or balcony. Often, rooms with applied ceiling decoration are found in houses where wealthy families show their economic power.

Ceilings are classified in types: according to architectural forms ceilings can be flat (set in kitchen rooms and bedrooms) or high ceilings (set in guest rooms); according to applied materials they can be wooden, plastered or combined; according to applied decorative elements ceilings can be wood- carved with geometrical or floral decorative elements; according to composition they can be with proper raster or central composition with middle circle or polygon constitutive wooden element called "Rosette" etc.[6] The basic concept of the "Rosette" and the composition of its foundation are the logical final part of the entire ceiling. The rosette is most often placed in the interior rooms, and more rarely in the open ceiling surfaces in the enclosed porches.

Ceilings consist decorative frames usually with rectangular shape, whose angles are sometimes formed corners (with carved floral motives). Second decorative frame on the ceiling is called cornice with rectangular, square, hexagonal or eightgonal basis in the central part of the ceiling, thus forming circular or elliptical area called *mirror*. The *mirror* reflects the shape of the central motive of circular form, the *wheel* called "Rosette". This middle area of the ceiling has highest concentration of decorative elements with stylized motives in carvings, most commonly used the "Sun Rosette". These parts are usually represented in complex ceilings, while the simple ones, such as flat ceilings consist initial frame on the ceiling surface.

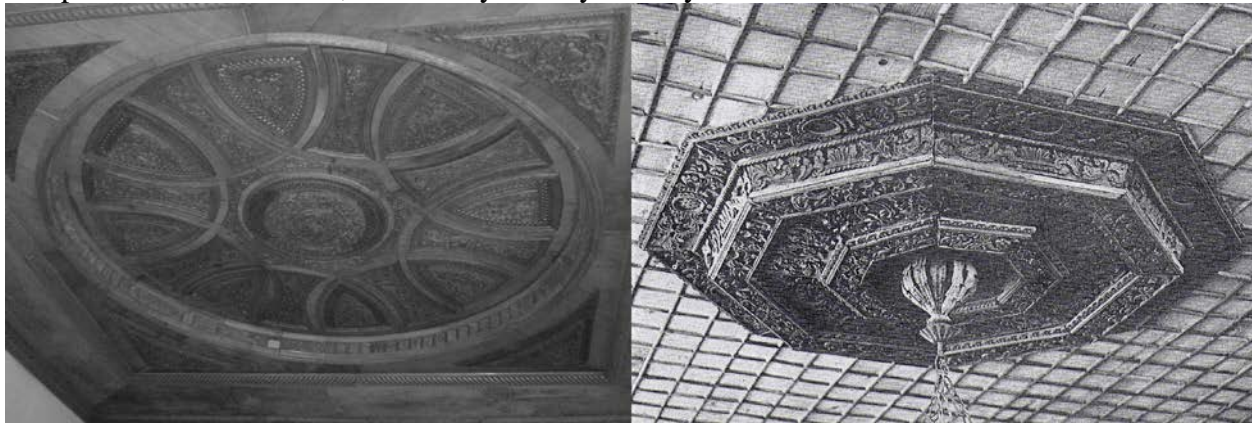
Macedonian traditional ceilings contain greater volume of carved surfaces with high architectural and aesthetic values, composed in harmonious processing with other elements. Especially distinctive are the wooden ceilings with ornately carved "Rosettes" with branches that belong to the group of high ceilings with complex form, placed in guest rooms. Most representative

samples were prepared in the form of stylized floral motives that are complemented by shallow, accurate and undermined carving. Splendid central motives in the ceiling compositions remained unsurpassed interior components, sign the talents of folk artists to thinned their spirit and sense of artistic extent. We can find great presence of art processing ceilings in the urban environment. They are decorated with friezes of geometrical and plant motives of stylized suns, stars and flower bouquets. Also ceilings with technical processing solutions and simple geometric patterns, expressed as reduced form and material, are present in village houses.

According to the decorative structure of ornamental timber motives, ceilings can be classify into three main decorative structures:[6]

1. Decorative structure I (DS I)- with application of geometric ornamental motives- material of straight lines
2. Decorative structure II (DS II)- with applications from the elements of DS I and geometric ornamental motives- material of curves
3. Decorative structure III (DS III)- with applied elements from DS I and DS II and ornamental motives- timber with biotich structure.

Most applied stylized motives in the carved ceilings are parts of grapevine (leaf), acanthus leaf, flower as a central motive (bus, stylized wild rose, tulip, narcissus), different geometric motives and rare animal motives (birds). Leaf from the vine symbolizes Christianity, tree of life and immortality, or Roses as symbol of love etc. Aesthetic and decorative elements applied in the processing of ceilings form a union with built- in furniture, doors and cupboards. Very common used is application of plastic decoration, “shepherd carving” on ceilings and cupboards. The further development of woodcarving techniques applied motives of animal origin in combination with plant motives stylized forms. Often applied form is a Dove with a symbolic significance for peace at home, always set with the beak near the stylized flower bloom, by repeating the same composition several times, fulfilled symmetry and rhythmic element.



a. House in Ohrid

b. House in Tetovo

Fig. 2: Carved wooden ceilings with geometric and biotich ornamental motives and Rosette

Rosettes which were a final element of the ceiling construction, were placed in the representative rooms of the Macedonian city house. The so called “*Wheel*”, usually sets indoors in the rooms or in open porch ceiling surfaces. The ones which are placed on the porch or ceiling surfaces in rooms have modest decorative treatment, smaller dimensions, and are applied on shallow carvings with simple technique. They usually have circular shape or elliptical. Constructive compositions of two or three decorated pieces are placed one above another by

reducing the dimension of the smallest on the upper surface. The smallest surface contains a stylized form of the Sun which is formed of set of sheets in the middle of the “Wheel”. [7]

The rhythm of the composition of geometric patterns is composed in whole “Rosette”, which is a stylized rhythmic element. The parts set in the highest area, with small dimensions, is set mostly elliptical shape with stylized flower and bud set in the middle of a wheel and also on the ceiling that has symbolic significance of light, life and fertility in the family. Rosettes have various sizes. The smallest, represent a union of two carved pieces placed one over another, with the applied technique “undermined accurate carving”. [7]

The Man’s gene instinct to create a pleasant atmosphere at home, reflected colored decorations in **interior Wall surfaces**. The range of simple motives to more complex compositions, became arabesque embedded in human sensibility for beautiful and representation. Plant motives dominate, naturally treated or stylized. Composed in “girlandas” or “friezes”, floral motives meet wall surfaces and section of ceiling called “Chicheklaci”. Bird motives correspond to the plant world, enclosed by curtains and window openings. It is made a unity of artistic expression with arabesks that appear as architectural boundaries. The “Al- seko” technique of painting on dry malter, is also frequently used. [5]

3.2. Decorations, Ornaments, Symbols and Semantics of the Built- in Furniture

The Fireplace is the most important element in the interiors of Macedonian old style house. It can be found in various forms: typical open fireplace with stone stool in the lower part- set in the middle of the room or built in the wall; half- open fireplace with a final cap with rectangular, prised or funnel form; fireplace built of stone with ceiling chimney for smoke; wall masonry stove etc. It is set in almost every room of the house (on the ground floor, upper floors and the representative chambers), but mostly in the kitchen where can be built in the wall, set in the middle between cupboards or in a line with “Nishas”.



a. With geometric decoration, floral elements and Star of David b. With geometric decoration c. With geometric decoration, floral elements and stylized Sun

Fig. 3: Types of fireplaces, houses in Krushevo

The Hearth plays the role of Micro Center of the cultural housing space, with holy symbolism. It's primary function is heating, lighting, food preparation and decorative function. Simply it's a ritual space and family temple. It represents the center of life in the house and in the kitchen is used for preparing food in pots set on metal tripods or hanging on chain above the fire.[3]

It's construction consists floor section and drainage channels called "*Cap*" (Umbrella) for collecting smoke. According to the type of the "*Cap*", can be open or semi- open type of fireplace, with wooden or stone caps, with oval or square cap, with funnel form etc. The floor under the fireplace is made of pressed earth for fire protection.

Most common are fireplaces with geometric decorations of the closing cap, with basic geometric shape of a circle or rectangle. Also is found applicable vegetable and floral decoration in "*Pike-technique*" on a flat vertical surface with symmetric layout. On the bottom surface of the hearth is placed so called "*Pirustija*" or "*Fingu*", a small metal stove or tripod for cooking, decorated with stylized motives. Often in mountain places the form of the fireplace is flat treated with decorative floral motives and a central motive of stylized "Sun of David". Above the fireplace is set the "*Prayer*" on the wall (an icon of the family saint).[4]

Musandras, Dolaps and **Nishas** are cupboards with shelves with different dimension solutions and decorative treatment, built in the kitchen walls, guest rooms, representative chambers, balcony and other rooms. They serve for storage of cooking products in kitchen and decorative objects in guest rooms and *Chardaks*. They can be single or double doored, made from wood or glass, with rectangular, semicircular or elliptic form, with horizontal decorative shelves in the bottom. Usually are single mounted in the room or in composition unit made of *Nishas, Dolaps* and *Musandras*.



a. House in Krushevo

b. House in Bitola

Fig. 4: Symmetric type Musandras with geometric decoration (a. and painted floral elements)

Cupboards were decorated depending on the located room. Examples can be found with geometric decorations (straight, square or triangular ornaments), with repeated vegetable ornaments and decorative moldings in the upper part of the cupboard, painted with floral elements. Flaps of the cupboards are wooden with many reach decorative treatment, usually in the representative rooms. The kitchen *Musandras* are made with wooden doors, produced in carpentry technique with simple treatment and painted decoration. Cupboard wooden doors were usually made of carpenter processings (frames with filled tables) and geometric or vegetational decorations. The division of the cupboard parts is often emphasized with decorative processed "*Pillars*" with a pear form in the bottom and "*Capitel*" with ornately carved floral elements in

the top part. Specific detail is a segment of the wooden doors that associates to a piece of fabric moveable curtain. It is usually decorated with carvings with geometric and plant motives.[8]



a. Opened Dolap, house in Galichnik b. Closed Dolap, house in Galichnik

Fig. 5: Built- in Dolaps (cupboards) with carved decoration and floral motives

3.3. Decorations, Ornaments, Symbols and Semantics of the Movable Furniture

Rooms were equipment with treasure of movable furniture which today represent rare ethnic examples. Tripod chairs of massive wood, colorful “*Minders*” placed along the windows, long chairs, *Kanabs*, beautiful simple, colorful or representative carved wooden chairs, carved wooden and metal rectangle and circle “*Sofras*” (tables), furniture for sleeping: “*Odars*” or “*Trons*”, classic beds (people started using them from the early 20th century) etc. Furniture for seating and laying are decorated with white wool cloth with colored ornaments, as well as floors are covered with carpets with rich ornamentation and windows are decorated with handknitted curtains (made with known applied techniques called “*Rishelje*” and “*Angle*”). Also the interiors are decorated with beautiful candlesticks, family pictures, clocks, mirrors with carved wooden frames, lamps for lighting, hanging lamps called “*Lusters*” (Chandeliers) placed on the ceilings in the middle of the “*Rosettes*” etc. Special spiritual significance have the “*Prayer icons*” placed in “*Nishas*” or “*Musandras*”.

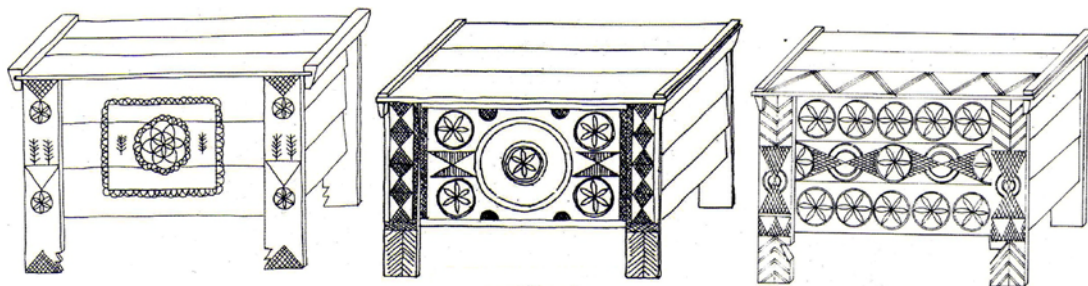


Fig. 6: Carved wooden coffins with geometric decorations and floral motives

Crates for girls clothes (*Cheiz*), carpets, curtains, beds, etc are kept in special rooms called “*Sanduk*” chambers. Those interiors had different types of trunks: storage boxes for “*Noshvi*”, containers for flower and bread preparation, etc. Regardless their purpose of use, had a rectangle

form with four legs and upper cover. They were made manually, with geometric decoration of the frontal and side parties. The decoration could be geometrical with circles, triangles, line decoration and their mutual combination, or vegetable with small twigs with rhythm and symmetry. Each country region had a unique ornament decoration. Also plastic decoration as “shepherd carving” can be observed on most furniture objects, such as: boxes, wood and bone spoons, items for the kitchen etc.



Fig. 7: Guest carved wooden Sofra (table) with carved wooden chairs
(decorated with vegetative and zoomorphic forms)

With the rapid development of industrial production, gradually were abandoning traditional forms of life. Besides furniture, many decorative and functional items were made of metal, such as lamps, cups of coffee, small boxes for jewelry, ashtrays etc.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Macedonian traditional architecture has been developed in our authentic old villages and old quarters of urban neighborhoods as a reflection of dialectical union of different factors such as, period of creation, geographical location, climatic conditions, economic, social and cultural level, as well as by the influence of all possible nationality traces: Turks, Spanish Jews, Cincars, Gypsies, Vlachs, Greeks, Albanians and Macedonians. Marked as “*Folk architecture*” or “*Architecture without architects*”, has been created by anonymous creators called “*Dungers*” (builders) characterized with strong creative energy, which succeeded to build unique living environments in poor construction conditions.[1]

When we talk about Macedonian traditional house we refer to its various forms, no matter it is a Mediterranean or a Mountain style house, built in the distant past or recent period of time, made of interwoven wooden branches covered with mud or made of stone, with a closed cubic form or divided spatial plastic, built on symmetric or asymmetric base, with closed or open “*Chardaks*”, with bay window thrown façades or flat surface façades, ground- floor houses, two- storied or more- storied houses etc. Depending on lifestyle, occupation and variables of population’s economic existential needs, it has great development opportunities and differences of interior rooms. Fisherman’s house, houses that belonged to traders, vintners, tanners, carpenters, craftsmen, farmers, etc., they are all recognizable by their timeless identity with the representative salons in the air for welcoming guests and the unique ornaments and symbols in

their interiors.

Most traditional interior decorations are with ornaments in shallow plastic and drawings of geometrical arabesque. Spatial illusion was accentuated with wall paintings, polychromatic staining or background color of the velvet and natural wood color or polychromatic painted colors of the interior equipment. Often are found reach interior decorations with accurate carvings in fine, yellow wood ceilings, cupboards, stairs or golden wood carvings equal to Church golden carvings, which were a symbol of family's prestige and wealth. Particularly significant aesthetic values have the appearance of applications in the carving vegetative ornamental motives- the timber ceilings, doors and cupboards. Special attention deserve the stylistic design of the Bridel wood coffins with shallow reliefs and patterns.

In aesthetic analysis of woodcarvings and interior decorations of traditional homes, can be perform classification in nine groups of ornamental timber:[6]

- I. Geometric shapes;
- II. Symbolic decorative forms;
- III. Vegetative forms;
- IV. Anthropomorphic shapes;
- V. Object forms;
- VI. Zoomorphic and prosopomorphic forms;
- VII. Forms created by the influence of the architectural and building forms;
- VIII. Fantastic (theratomorph) forms; and
- IX. Individual free forms.

5. CONCLUSION

Macedonian old style house has been organized with traditional interior spaces, furnished in its own unique style furniture made of massive wood with special features of ethnic spiritual ornaments and symbols. The interior designs have high aesthetic and functional values, made according to cultural characteristics, population's traditions, terrain and climate of the original Macedonian settlements and cities. This housing design influenced their public and religious architecture, which they succeeded to develop Macedonian stylish creations of old urban and rural homes to the extent of popular style.

The fireplace is the hearth of the house with the strongest symbolic significance. It has various locations in the house, with various shapes and performances. It is the center of the internal world and all family activities with functional, existential, social and decorative significance.

The ceiling had functional and strong representative message, according to the value (extent) of its decorations. "*Wheels*" (called "*Kolca*") or "*Rosettes*" represent a unique feature of the country's cultural heritage.

Treasure of movable and immovable furniture like different cupboards (Musandras, Nishas and Dolaps), girl's coffins, doors, windows, low tables, chairs etc., are timeless produced with decorations that signify the identity, culture and unique genesis of the Macedonian people.

We can conclude that our inherited traditional houses with their interiors have enormous significance for us, not only because they represent our cultural heritage, but because they are witnesses of the existence and development of our history. Ornaments with their symbolic meanings which simply showered space equipment, carry a strong message of a cultural construction creation of universal significance. Today, many ruins of old traditional houses testify to the existence, identity and fate of our nation.

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