

↳ KAIDE
[PLINTH], OR WHAT
DOES 0.75 M³
MEASURE?

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Architecture¹² as² Measure⁷
Ölçü⁴ Olarak⁶ Mimarlık⁸



Kaide [Plinth] by Aslihan Demirtas, collectorspace, 2017. Photo by Ali Taptik.

Kaide [Plinth]¹ was conceived as a performative sculptural work formed by ramming the soil of Istanbul. It derived its measurements from a module of the traditional growing beds still used at Istanbul's Historical Yedikule Urban Vegetable Gardens (bostanlar).² The gardens have been repetitively drawn and redrawn in terraformed grids by the gardeners (bostancılar) for over 1600 years.³ Called maşula or tava, the earthen grid modules measure around 1m x 1.5m. The depth of topsoil necessary for the agricultural activity of human sustenance is about 50 cm. Kaide [Plinth] weighs 1.5 tonnes, measures 1x1.5x0.5m and is composed of soil, lime, flax fiber, fine crushed küfeki stone,⁴ and brick dust. The volume, 0.75m³, is the smallest unit of a qualitative measurement system manufactured to measure the tenuous existence of urban agriculture in a megacity, the ephemerality of intangible cultural heritage such as gardening, and the precarity of living as a gardener—a caretaker, in a city of vulgar construction.⁵ Rammed in two days by two restoration craftsmen, Kaide [Plinth] is an embodied measurement of the process of the physical labor of making a basic volume (prism) with the most basic of materials (soil) by way of basic gestures (ramming). In the absence of facilitating mechanical tools, the earthen monolith measures

1 <https://aslihan-demirtas.com/archives/portfolio/kaide-plinth-2017>

2 Yedikule Bostans were cultivated continuously throughout the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empires and the Republic of Turkey. The earliest farmers were Greeks and Armenians, followed by Bulgarians. Albanian farmers took over the trade, and today most of the farmers are from Kastamonu, Cide, a village on the Black Sea coast of Turkey. For a comprehensive account of the urban market gardens of Istanbul, see Paul J. Kaldjian, "Istanbul's Bostans: A Millennium of Market Gardens", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 3, People, Places & Gardens (July 2004): 284-304.

3 "The typical size of an Istanbul bostan is about 10-12 dönüm (1-1.2 hectares), about the size necessary for a household of five to meet its most basic livelihood needs. One definition of a dönüm is 'land enough to plow in a day'... According to the gardeners, roughly one worker is needed for every 2 dönüm of land during the summer growing season. As many as 30 dönüm may be necessary to support a household without relying on external sources of income. A bostan of 40 dönüm suggests a large or extended family; small families are more likely to have gardens of less than 10 dönüm." Kaldjian, "Istanbul's Bostans," 286-87.

4 Fuat Aktürk writes: "Küfeki Stone is the only type of stone that has survived in artifacts over a long period of time such as 2000-2500 years. Meeting the building stone needs of Istanbul and Thrace for centuries, it is also known as 'lumachelli limestone,' 'limestone with maktra,' or 'Bakırköy stone.' It is a type of limestone that contains seashells and oyster shells intensively. Küfeki Stone is frequently preferred especially in Byzantine and Ottoman periods and... is the most used stone in the restoration of historical monuments." (Trans. from Turkish.) Fuat Aktürk, "Tarihi Tophane-i Amire Yapısının Dinamik Karakteristiklerinin Deneysel ve Sayısal Yöntemlerle Belirlenmesi," unpublished master's thesis, Department of Structural Earthquake Engineering, Maltepe University, 2020, p. 87.

5 Tanıl Bora, ed., *İnşaat Ya Resulullah* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2021).

the proportions of architecture and labor, both human and planetary: the human bodily labor of carrying, ramming, building, and the planet's geological slow workings of rock formation, and grinding it into soil. This proportion exists only in performance and is thus theoretical: a symmetrical power relationship with matter rarely exists in construction where tools and machinery multiply human strength and will. Additionally, the labor of the planet and the ownership of its own property are unaccounted for. 0.75m³ of rammed soil includes the labor and the ownership of soil and attempts the immeasurable.

About the author

Aslıhan Demirtaş is an architect and the co-founder of KHORA Office, based in Istanbul. Her practice is situated on and around the boundaries of disciplines engaged in making, often in the forms of buildings, gardens, and art projects, while contemplating a revised mode of existence and practice on our planet. She is an active member of the Initiative for the Protection of the Historical Yedikule Urban Gardens and a recipient of the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts Grant.