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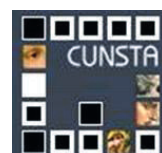
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# Embodied ideologies: Hagia Sophia contended status between mosque and museum

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## *Abstract*

This research aims to analyze how cultural heritage gets involved in the political discourse and to what extent it affects the status and functions of a specific cultural asset by taking Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, as a case study. As a symbolically charged monument with a multifaceted history, it was transformed into a museum in 1935. Nevertheless, the contemporary usage of Hagia Sophia has become a contested matter in the last sixtyfive years, with the emergence of a public demand to use the monument as a mosque. Such a public

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demand has also been backed at the political level and resulted in tangible outcomes within the last two decades. Consequently, the monument was transformed into a mosque in July 2020. The study demonstrates that Hagia Sophia has always been involved in political discourse(s) since its construction due to its multiple symbolic values. The contemporary shift in the discourse had both the tangible and intangible dimensions of the monument.

Questa ricerca analizza i modi e i contesti in cui il patrimonio culturale entra nel discorso politico e gli effetti di tale coinvolgimento sullo status e sulle funzioni del patrimonio culturale stesso. L'approccio è quello dello studio di caso e il bene culturale analizzato è Hagia Sophia a Istanbul. Si tratta di un monumento ad alta densità di significati, dal punto di vista sia propriamente architettonico e storico artistico, sia simbolico sia religioso sia storico. Hagia Sophia diviene museo nel 1935. Tuttavia, l'uso contemporaneo di Hagia Sophia è stata una questione controversa nel corso degli ultimi sessantacinque anni, con l'emergere di una richiesta pubblica di usare l'edificio come moschea. Tale richiesta pubblica è stata sostenuta anche al livello politico e ha raggiunto un picco significativo negli ultimi due decenni tanto che il monumento è stato in moschea nel luglio 2020. Questo studio dimostra che i molteplici valori simbolici legati ad Hagia Sophia hanno dato a tale opera, fin dalla sua costruzione, un ruolo di primissimo piano, di cardine potremmo dire, all'interno di discorsi specificamente politici. Il cambiamento contemporaneo dell'orientamento e della narrazione di ambito politico ha riguardato la dimensione sia tangibile sia intangibile del monumento.

## 1. *Introduction*

Museums as institutions have developed from traditional practices of collecting, preserving, and presenting objects, and they acquired their modern form during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>1</sup>. Yet, with the foundation of nation-states, the range, and relevance of museums' functions, for the nation-states themselves, for communities, and for individuals, underwent a gradual process of expansion and amplification<sup>2</sup>. Since their modern establishment as institutions, museums have played a significant role in representing a nation's culture and performed the function of housing a national heritage, thus satisfying national ambitions through the construction of national identity<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, they may also function as a communication medium for states' official discourses about their history and nation<sup>4</sup>. This communication often involves core issues and always implies processes of selection and manipulation. A definite past, for example, is usually selected to address contemporary issues. The ways in which the museum itself is constructed and the exhibited

<sup>1</sup> Bennett 1995; Pomian 1990, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Young 1999.

<sup>3</sup> McLean 1998.

<sup>4</sup> McLean 1998, 2005; Evans, Boswell 1999; Fladmark 2000; Macdonald 2003.

objects are selected and presented to the public represent this communication's primary tools. A related problem concerns whose voice and values the museum expresses and whom it speaks to. Since the pioneering studies by Pierre Bourdieu on the public of museums<sup>5</sup>, the issue has progressively been inflected in increasingly complex terms, for example, in terms of the multifariousness of the communities or classes of individuals to whom a museum should speak and be the expression of. This particular aspect directly involves the functions a museum might or must guarantee and allows functions that might meet the needs of specific communities or groups of individuals.

The issue becomes even more complicated when the "moving poles" double: not only is the public a changing element in the dialogue between museums and societies, but the museum itself could shift its cultural, social, or political positioning and change its form, voice, and function. This is precisely the case our analysis puts into focus.

This study aims to analyze the ways in which the status and positioning of a symbolically charged monument have been constructed during and through the process of its conversion into a museum, its involvement in the political discourse, and the effects of this involvement on the monument's status itself. For this aim, we conducted an exploratory case study of the relationship between cultural heritage and political discourse, focusing on Hagia Sophia, Istanbul. From its construction until today, Hagia Sophia has always been a subject of political discourse and one of the most significant symbols for the sovereign to communicate ideologies, values, and power. Due to this persistent significance, we consider Hagia Sophia to be a very suitable case study to assess the relations between political discourse and cultural heritage and, more generally, to look at the material and tangible embodiments of intangible entities, such as ideologies, identities, politics, through cultural heritage.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a detailed analysis of the political discourse in Turkey regarding Hagia Sophia. It demonstrates that the changes in the management and consumption of the monument are very much linked to the shifts in the political discourse, thus proving that the political discourse in Turkey has a direct effect on Hagia Sophia. Furthermore, it provides an exemplary study for investigating the processes of musealization and de-musealization of a historical monument.

The following section provides an overview of the related literature, and the case study is introduced in Section 3. We explain the research design and the methodological approach in Section 4. The political discourse analysis is presented in Section 5, and its effects on Hagia Sophia are discussed in Section 6. The last section is dedicated to the discussion of the results and recommendations for further research.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Bourdieu 1979.

## 2. *Public Museums and Authority*

According to Bennett, to understand the evolution of the public museum adequately, one must view it

in the light of a more general set of developments through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power<sup>6</sup>.

Pomian<sup>7</sup> identifies four different patterns on how the public museums were formed, namely the “traditional”, “revolutionary”, “evergetic”, and “commercial” models. The traditional model consists of institutions, such as medieval churches and palaces, which formed private collections throughout their operations. In the revolutionary model, the museum is founded by a decree, and the museum’s collection is gathered from various sources, such as royal or private collections. In the evergetic model, the private collections are donated to the city, state, or institutions so that the public can access them; finally, in the commercial model, the museum is formed through the purchase of collections and individual items from other institutions, on the market or from private owners. Among the four patterns, the revolutionary model was directly influenced by the practices and ideals of the French revolution and was related to the organization of state power<sup>8</sup>.

Foucault considers the museum of the nineteenth century as a product of modernity and describes it as a “heterotopia”, a place in which «all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted»<sup>9</sup>. The modern museum, according to Foucault, is a space organized in a way that lends itself to the «careful and ordered deployment of knowledge within an institutionally controlled and publicly monitored space»<sup>10</sup>, through which the authority communicates its power through the processes of representation and interpretation.

It is acknowledged that, in addition to the traditional roles of collecting, protecting, and educating, modern museums serve as the means of nation-building and creating cohesion within communities and within a country. As an example, Poirrier<sup>11</sup> states that since the French Revolution, the French state has been using cultural heritage as a means of nation-building, which is a process that continues today. Correspondingly, in her article on Singapore’s Asian Civilisations Museum, Henderson<sup>12</sup> argues about museums’ changing

<sup>6</sup> Bennet 1995, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Pomian 1990.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault 1986, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Lord 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Poirrier 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Henderson 2005.

role (from the traditional role of collecting, conserving, and preserving) into a socio-cultural tool that can be used for constructing a feeling of nationhood and identity. She demonstrates that museums' role in nation-building is most evident in the newly founded countries<sup>13</sup>, which have a multi-ethnic population due to the risks of conflict and the necessity for cohesion<sup>14</sup>. Gorgas<sup>15</sup> also refers to museums' social role in promoting unity within the nation by explaining the context of Latin America and specifically Argentina, home to people of many different origins, indigenous and immigrants. Additionally, states like Northern Ireland have already acknowledged cultural heritage and museums' role as a conflict resolution tool and included them in education policies and local government programs<sup>16</sup>.

As these examples also demonstrate, it is evident that the importance of cultural heritage for nations and societies is acknowledged and articulated as a value by the states, and museums operate as one of the main tools of building, selecting, manipulating, and communicating state ideologies and policies. In addition to the selection of objects to exhibit and the ways of representation, the building where a museum is hosted can also be a part of this communication. Today, apart from the type of museum and the collections it hosts, a high level of variability exists in terms of the buildings where museums are hosted. While some museums use modern structures built and designed specifically for housing exhibitions, some museums use historic buildings and monuments through adaptive reuse.

The adaptive reuse of buildings and monuments, which often had been designed for a different function, is a long-lasting tradition that goes back to antiquity. The conversion of pagan temples into Christian churches, or the patrician dwellings into monasteries with the orders of Pope Gregory the First in the 6<sup>th</sup> century; and the existence of dwellings, storehouses, workshops, and merchants that occupied the arches of the Coliseum, of the Theatre of Marcellus and the Theatre of Pompey in Rome in the 11th century are just some of these examples<sup>17</sup>. The practice still exists today, and the one more commonly referred to as musealization belongs to this category. Musealization brings about the attribution of new functions and status to an existing object, building, or site, and it is aimed at generating public benefit by guaranteeing its accessibility. Furthermore, musealization is a symbolic act<sup>18</sup>. It projects the object, building, or site into a physical and symbolic space characterized by its own values, which trigger specific behaviors and practices. A classic example of this symbolic nature of

<sup>13</sup> Prösler 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Hall 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Gorgas 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Crooke 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Choay 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Pomian 1990, 2020.



musealization is the Louvre, originally a royal palace that underwent continuous extensions and additions. After the French Revolution, the new state used cultural heritage to demonstrate its values<sup>19</sup> and turned the Louvre palace and the monarchy's private collection into a public museum in 1793. Likewise, Hagia Sophia Istanbul has gone through a similar and long symbolic musealization process after the Republic of Turkey's foundation.

### 3. *Hagia Sophia, Istanbul*

Hagia Sophia<sup>20</sup> was built in Constantinople between 532 and 537, as a replacement of a previous church, under the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, which is considered the most illustrious reign in the Byzantine Empire's history. In 532, in the fifth year of Justinian's reign, a three-day-long riot to depose him took place. Justinian was able to stop the riot; however, many buildings were damaged, and the former church occupying the site where Hagia Sophia would be built burned down during the rebellion. The construction of a new church, Hagia Sophia, was the center of Justinian's new building plan, and he wanted to regain the people's support and faith in his reign by building the most magnificent, the most beautiful, the biggest, and the most advanced church of all times<sup>21</sup>. We can consider the very origin of Hagia Sophia as an embodiment of a political plan, which was accompanied by an intense and successful communication strategy. Likely, upon the Emperor's request, the historian Procopius wrote an encomiastic work devoted precisely to Justinian's building policy; his account of the construction of Hagia Sophia is not only enthusiastic but so encomiastic to suggest that its magnificence was a matter of divine will. In commenting on the destruction of the church occupying the site where Hagia Sophia would be built, Procopius says that 'God permitted them [the destructors] to accomplish this impiety [the destruction of the previous church], foreseeing into what an object of beauty this shrine was destined to be transformed. So the whole church at that time lay a charred mass of ruins. But the Emperor Justinian built not long afterward a church so finely shaped, that if anyone had enquired of the Christians before the burning if it would be their wish that the church should be destroyed and one like this should take its place, showing them some sort of model of the building we now see, it seems to me that they would have prayed that they might see their church

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Catoni 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Some of the most influential works on Hagia Sophia, Istanbul include, but not limited to, Mainstone 1988; Mark, Çakmak 1992; Mango, Ertuğ 1997; Freely, Çakmak 2004; Nelson 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Freely, Çakmak 2004.



destroyed forthwith, in order that the building might be converted into its present form<sup>22</sup>.

Hagia Sophia served as the Imperial Church for more than 900 years. It was renovated many times within this long period, and many architectural and decorative elements were added to the church by different emperors who wanted to demonstrate their power and associate themselves with the monument. This remarkable monument firmly functioned as the symbol of the Byzantine Empire's greatness, its rulers, and Orthodox Christianity until the fall of Constantinople and, consequently, the empire.

Hagia Sophia continued to be an imperial and religious symbol in the Ottoman Empire as well. Constantinople was conquered by the Ottomans in 1453, and the inspection of Hagia Sophia was among the first acts of Sultan Mehmed II after entering the city. He was fascinated by its monumental magnificence and imperial prestige so as to order the refurbishing and repair of the building and its transformation into a mosque<sup>23</sup>. According to Necipoğlu,

the appropriation of Hagia Sophia as an imperial and religious symbol by the Ottoman sultans had involved an awareness of its former significance, as well as a shared language of architectural forms<sup>24</sup>.

Different Ottoman sultans made renovations and additions to the monument; some aimed for its integrity, whereas others tried to explicitly associate the building with themselves. In the end,

Hagia Sophia became a true site of memory in which a wide variety of memories (Christian-Byzantine and Islamic-Ottoman) crystallized, passing down from one generation to the other and continually being reinterpreted according to changing contexts<sup>25</sup>.

Eldem<sup>26</sup> explains that Hagia Sophia's perception as a "monumental building" has a long history and encompasses a major part of its Ottoman past. According to him, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Constantinople underwent a process of musealization, and Hagia Sophia, among other sites and monuments, was part of it. The increasing number of visits from foreign officials, the restoration of the monument by foreign experts, and the international representations of these restoration works are examples Eldem uses to demonstrate that Hagia Sophia had already started to be considered a world heritage<sup>27</sup>. Consequently, Hagia Sophia, which was interpreted by the Europeans

<sup>22</sup> Procopius, *On buildings*, I, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Necipoğlu 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Ivi, p. 225.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> Eldem 2015.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

as one of the most important symbols of Christianity on the one hand and integrated by the Ottomans into their culture and the Islamic context on the other, started to be perceived as belonging to a larger, more general and common context, especially with the Westernization movements in the Ottoman Empire<sup>28</sup>.

The foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 introduced a series of political, legal, social, religious, and economic reforms, which aimed at creating a modern and secular nation-state, as opposed to the Ottoman Empire it succeeded to. The transformation of Hagia Sophia from a mosque to a museum can be considered one of the most significant symbols of these reforms<sup>29</sup>. For the third time, a political-territorial organization identified by a definite position toward religion decided to physically intervene on the same building on which different State powers in the past had acted upon in order to affirm its values, extension, and power. We could almost say that Hagia Sophia is the material embodiment and counterpart of immaterial notions such as State powers and State values. It constitutes a composite landscape and is constituted by a number of material and ideological layers, and in the intentions of different political powers of the present, is expected to be able to embody modern powers, symbols, and values in the name of the layers of powers, symbols, and values it already embodies from the past.

Hagia Sophia was transformed into a museum with the Council of Ministers' Decree No 2/1589 of 24.11.1934, which stated that

Hagia Sophia is a unique architectural masterpiece and transforming it into a museum would make all the Eastern World happy, as well as bringing a new scientific institution to all humanity<sup>30</sup>.

As the decree shows, the decision was not only a matter of internal politics in the recently established Republic of Turkey but also aimed at representing the new country's values within the international context. The building's new function as a museum was expected to place the monument's identity on more a neutral ground instead of favoring a specific national or religious identity, as was also the case with the newly founded secular democratic republic.

Nevertheless, the public opinion on the consumption of Hagia Sophia has always been dichotomous. Since the 1950s, an increasing public demand pushed to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque and use it for Muslim religious practices, and such public demand found its way into the political discourse. These debates continued until 10 July 2020, when Turkey's Council of State, the country's highest administrative court, overruled the Council of Ministers' Decree No

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> Aykaç 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Dursun 2011, p. 32. Quote translated by the author.

2/1589 of 24.11.1934, which had turned Hagia Sophia into a museum. After this decision, Turkish President Erdoğan announced that the monument would be transformed back to a mosque, and the first Muslim prayers took place on 24 July 2020. Since then, daily prayers are being held in the monument.

#### 4. *Research Design and Methodological Approach*

Our research aims to analyze how the political discourse involved Hagia Sophia and to what extent the political discourse affected various aspects of the monument, from both the material and the symbolic point of view. To this end, we collected the official statements and speeches of government officials through media coverage and official communication channels of related governmental bodies.

The research divides the timeline into two periods; “the historical timeline”, from the 1950s – when the first public demands to convert the monument into a mosque appeared – to 2002 – when the current government party (AKP) came to power –; and the “contemporary timeline”, from 2002 until 2019.

Since its foundation, the political environment in modern Turkey has been very fluctuant, and the parliamentary democracy has been interrupted several times due to military interventions. This, in fact, creates a significant limitation for the current study, both in terms of the selected periodization and the comprehensiveness of the paper. To cover the issue focusing separately on each government period requires a more extensive study and could not be done within a single article.

On the other hand, it is also acknowledged there is a significant disparity between the two timelines in terms of the periods they cover, as the historical timeline covers a period of roughly fifty years and the contemporary timeline covers only seventeen years. The main reason for this selection is that, even though Hagia Sophia was involved in the political discourse since the 1950s, the significant changes regarding its uses took place only within the last fifteen years. Therefore, we chose to divide the timeline not according to the different government eras but the physical changes in the monument’s uses<sup>31</sup>.

The data were collected from the Anadolu Ajansı – the state-run news agency –; Milliyet – a private newspaper founded in 1926; Hürriyet – a private newspaper founded in 1948; TRT – the national public broadcaster of Turkey –; official websites of Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Prime Ministry of Turkey, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>31</sup> For a recent study investigating how Hagia Sophia was included in different socio-political identity discourses from the foundation of the Turkish Republic until today, see Aykan 2021.

The data were analyzed using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Furthermore, we employ word clouds to understand the government officials' vocabulary and examine the weighted importance of the recurring themes related to Hagia Sophia in their discourse.

### *5. Political Discourses Regarding Hagia Sophia*

As mentioned above, the timeline was divided into two halves, corresponding to the "historical timeline" (1950 to 2002) and the "contemporary timeline" (2002 – 2019), respectively. Shifts in the public discourse regarding the monument were analyzed through a contextual analysis of the speeches made by the government officials. More specifically, we have focused on four dimensions of the contextual discourse analysis: the "who" (meaning 'the person who gave the speech'), the "where" (meaning 'where the speech took place'), the "to whom" (meaning 'who was the target audience') and the "what" (meaning 'the content of the speech').

In the historical timeline, we see that most speeches were held by various state ministers (35%), while the speeches made by the Minister of Culture and Tourism (20%) and the Prime Minister (20%) amount to an equal share. In the contemporary timeline, the number of speeches made by the Minister of Culture and Tourism increased (37%) while the prime minister and vice-prime minister's total percentage equals 27%. Other state ministers did not give any speech on the topic (fig. 1). We consider this change to be due to the one-party government rule in the contemporary timeline, which suggests a clearer distribution of roles among the government and government officials' shared ideologies, as we will be explaining below. A particularly relevant datum emerges from comparing the historical vs. the contemporary timelines (fig. 1): the Directorate of Religious Affairs' consistently increasing role in the debate on Hagia Sophia. The increase in number (10% to 27%) and the content of the Directorate of Religious Affairs' speeches indicate that religion and religious authorities got more intensely and actively involved in governmental issues and discussions since 2002.

In terms of the locations where the speeches took place, three categories were identified: the parliament, press conferences, and public statements. Looking at both timelines, we see that only a very small number of speeches were held in the institutional setting of the parliament. This datum easily shows that the debate around the usage of Hagia Sophia has mostly taken place outside of the technically institutional bodies and this datum, in its turn, suggests that the target audience was the people. The aim was to gain a popular consensus of the public rather than the parliamentary consensus needed to produce the allegedly desired change in Hagia Sophia's function (fig. 2).

In the world cloud of the historical timeline, we see a strong emphasis on words such as “government” (*hükümet*), “state” (*devlet*), “nation” (*millet*), “national” (*milli*), “Turkey” (*Türkiye*), “administrative” (*idari*) and “decision” (*karar*), which outline the recurring themes within the discourses around Hagia Sophia. Nationalistic and state-centered vocabulary is an important indicator of the dynamics of that time. The presence of words such as “Greek-Orthodox Patriarchy” (*Fener Rum Patrikhanesi*) and “the Pope” (*Papa*) indicates that some importance was given to the international and intercultural relationships within the officials’ discourses related to the monument (fig. 3).

On the other hand, looking at the contemporary timeline, we see a very strong emphasis on “Sultan Mehmed” (*Fatih Sultan Mehmet*) and “the conquest” (*fetih*). These expressions are indicators that the Ottoman past of the monument is very much stressed, while, correspondingly, very little reference is made to the monument’s Christian past. In terms of intercultural relationships, we only see a small reference to “world” (*dünya*), and no other related vocabulary appears (fig. 4).

In the historical timeline, we discover a similar distribution of the words “Muslims” (*Müslümanlar*), “Greek-Orthodox Patriarchy” (*Fener Rum Patrikhanesi*), “mosque” (*cami*), and “church” (*kilise*), and this suggests that both the Christian and the Islamic past of the monument are almost equally referred to (fig. 3). On the contrary, the contemporary timeline shows a highly consistent reference to the Islamic identity and the religious function of the monument through the frequent occurrence of words like “mosque” (*cami*), “God” (*Allah*), “house of worship” (*ibadethane*), “Islam” and “Muslim prayers” (*namaz*) and almost no reference to the Christian past of the monument (fig. 4).

Lastly, in the historical timeline, we can appreciate the presence of the words “mosaics” (*mozaikler*), “icons” (*tasvirler*), “art” (*sanat*), “culture” (*kültür*) and “museum” (*müze*), which shows that the historical and artistic values of the monument and its function as a museum-like space were well recognized and referred to in the official speeches (fig. 3). On the other hand, the word cloud related to the contemporary timeline shows a lower emphasis on the words “museum” (*müze*), “work of art” (*eser*), and “architecture” (*mimari*). The words “restoration” (*restorasyon*) and “protection” (*korunması*) emerged; however, from a closer and deeper analysis of the speeches, it was understood that these words are related to the sense of belonging associated with the Ottoman past of the monument (fig. 4) and not its status as a world heritage.

This general overview can be detailed by analyzing exemplary speeches to provide a better understanding of the shift in the political discourse around the monument.

In 1974 during a press conference, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, while responding to a question regarding the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, stated that



Hagia Sophia is a great work of art and should be perceived as such. Presenting these mosaics to the people of the World indicates the Turkish nation's respect for history and culture<sup>32</sup>.

This comment addresses the monument's architectural and art historical values and highlights its international status as a world heritage. It indicates that the "people of the world" are claimed as the addressees of the exhibition of the mosaics and the concomitant exhibition of Turkey's respect for history and culture. Both the addressees and the function of Hagia Sophia as identified in this speech, however, were not accepted by all members of the government as it is documented by the statement issued by the coalition partner Erbakan, that was delivered only two days after Ecevit's speech:

Hagia Sophia is a mosque that belongs to a vakf, and according to the laws regarding the vakfs, they can only be used for their original purposes<sup>33</sup>.

Two years later, in 1977, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, Rıfkı Danişman, recommended that a part of Hagia Sophia can be used as a mosque and another part can be used as a museum<sup>34</sup>. This last discourse testifies to the attempt at settling the dispute not only at the theoretical level – by stating that both functions should co-exist – but also within the very body of the "contended heritage", that is, the physical building of Hagia Sophia. At the same time, such an attempt also reveals that the opposite positions were irreducible.

Another example is offered in 1990 by the State Minister, Ercüment Konukman, who said that «if the people demand Hagia Sophia to be converted into a mosque, there is no problem in government fulfilling it»<sup>35</sup>. While these statements and their chronology might indicate a linear timeline moving from the ideas "using the monument as a museum" to "changing its function to a mosque", it is important to stress that such an impression would be misleading. Within the period that we defined as the historical timeline, the debates on the monument's function keep occasionally appearing and disappearing from the public scene in line with the era's political dynamics. Furthermore, we can also see conflicting comments from different government ministers when there is a coalition government.

On the other hand, the ideology in the contemporary timeline and the speeches' content are much more linear. In 2013, during the opening of the carpet museum next to Hagia Sophia, the Deputy Prime Minister and the government spokesperson Bülent Arınç commented on the status of Hagia So-

<sup>32</sup> «Milliyet», September 4, 1974.

<sup>33</sup> «Milliyet», September 6, 1974.

<sup>34</sup> «Milliyet», April 5, 1977.

<sup>35</sup> «Milliyet», January 8, 1990.

phia as a museum by personifying the monument as being mournful and said, «Pray to God it would soon be smiling again»<sup>36</sup>. Similarly, in 2015, during the re-opening of the fountain and the library of Mahmut I, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, Yalçın Topçu, stated that

Fatih Sultan Mehmet held the first Friday prayers in Hagia Sophia and from that day until the end, Hagia Sophia has been marked as a mosque in the hearts of the Islamic World<sup>37</sup>.

The feeling that the monument must be preserved due to its Ottoman-Islamic past is also apparent in the speech made by the Minister of Culture and Tourism Numan Kurtulmuş in 2017: «Hagia Sophia is our inheritance from Fatih Sultan Mehmet. Because of that, we should do everything necessary to protect and preserve it»<sup>38</sup>.

## 6. *Effects of the political discourse on the monument*

The effects of the shifts in the political discourse can be observed mainly relative to the dimensions of the monument's representation and consumption.

Du Gay *et al.* define representation as the «practice of constructing meaning through the use of signs and language»<sup>39</sup>, a mixture that is not limited to written texts. Since textual representation elements, such as information boards and labels, can easily be changed and modified, we focus our analysis on exclusively visual elements.

Hagia Sophia, serving as the imperial church of the Eastern Roman Empire for more than 900 years, and being adorned with Islamic and Ottoman architectural and decorative elements for nearly 500 years after its conversion into a mosque, houses architectural and decorative elements of the highest quality and aesthetic value. While the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque brought about the destruction and alteration of some of the Christian decorations, it, on the other hand, gave a highly significant impulse to the production of Ottoman and Islamic artistic elements and decorations. Hagia Sophia houses some of the most representative works of art and, in the course of its existence as a museum, these elements were in a certain way ideologically neutralized. The coexistence of

<sup>36</sup> «Milliyet», October 16, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Press Release, September 2015, «T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müşavirliği», <<https://basin.ktb.gov.tr/TR-144050/ayasofya-i-mahmut-sadirvani-ve-kutuphanesi-ziyarete-aci-.html>>, 27.06.2021.

<sup>38</sup> «Milliyet», October 12, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Du Gay *et al.* 1997, p. 24.



Christian and Muslim, Byzantine and Ottoman artworks in the context of the museum-monument visually document the multifaceted, multi-layered and multi-cultural character of Hagia Sophia, as well as the multiple functions and status it has embodied throughout its biography, the last being one of the main objects of representation and narration.

From its construction until its musealization in 1935, the primary usage of Hagia Sophia was always related to religious practices. In the Byzantine Empire, apart from serving as the seat of the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, it was a space to perform religious practices, celebrate religious festivities, and a place of pilgrimage. Since it was the Imperial Church of the empire, the coronation ceremonies also took place in the monument.

The structural additions during the Ottoman Empire provided the monument with additional usages. The introduction of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century library and the private sections devoted to religious and scientific lectures (*maksure*) in the interior spaces of the monument and the elementary school built adjacent to the monument turned Hagia Sophia into a center for education. Furthermore, public fountains and the Alms-house built in 1743 transformed the monument, together with the entire complex, into a social space.

The consumption of the monument changed substantially with its conversion into a museum. The religious practices were completely excluded from the monument, and the monumental space was arranged to allow people to visit and appreciate its architectural and aesthetic beauties. Consequently, the monument, now a museum, became a space of education and admiration, where all people, regardless of their religious, cultural, and national background, could access. Musealization, then, was supposed to realize a sort of neutralization of the most ideologically, culturally, and religiously charged and potentially divisive values (and related practices) in favor of an allegedly ideologically uncharged and universally accepted set of values and practices (the museum-related ones). Additionally, the opportunity to conduct scientific research on Hagia Sophia with a more comprehensive historical approach, including the Byzantine, Ottoman, and the Republican periods, has become possible thanks to this transformation.

The first re-appearance of the religious practices in the Hagia Sophia complex dates to 1980, when Hünkar Kasrı (the Sultan's Lodge) – a small building next to the monument built between 1847-49 for the Sultan to rest before attending the prayers inside the monument – was opened to allow Muslim worships for the Turkish and foreign presidents. However, only a month after the decision, following the military coup, this practice was abandoned once again, until February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1991. Since that time, Hünkar Kasrı has been used as a *mescid* – a small worship area – for Muslim prayers. According to the former Hagia Sophia Museum Director Jale Dedeoğlu, this *mescid* is not related to the museum and the Museum Administration, but it is dependent on the Di-

rectorate of Religious Affairs<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, with the orders of the Minister of Culture and Tourism of the time, Namık Kemal Zeybek, four minarets of Hagia Sophia started to play *ezan* – the Muslim call to prayer – on March 31, 1991. This practice continued until August 21, 1996, when *ezan* reading was limited to only one minaret. With an imam's appointment to Hünkar Kasrı in October 2016, *ezan* is being played once again from all four minarets<sup>41</sup>.

Hagia Sophia, as a museum, was also used as a space for temporary exhibitions from time to time. The exhibition *Aşk-ı Nebi*, for example, has been co-organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Directorate of Religious Affairs annually since 2014<sup>42</sup>, except for 2018. In the exhibition's opening ceremony in 2015, with an audience including high-level government officials, Quran readings took place inside the monument for the first time in its history as a museum. The following year, on July 1, 2016, at the closure of a TV program organized by the Directorate of Religious Affairs for celebrating the Laylat al-Qadr, an *ezan* reading, marking the morning prayer time, took place inside Hagia Sophia<sup>43</sup>. The following year, a special TV program for the Ramadan month called *Bereket Vakti: Ayasofya*, which included Quran readings and prayers, was organized by the Presidency of Religious Affairs inside Hagia Sophia and the state-run television TRT live broadcasted it throughout the month. These actions created a big dispute both inside the country and in the international community, calling for the government to respect the monument's symbolic value for non-Muslims and its status as a museum and urging the government not to allow religious practices inside the monument.

On the other hand, the public opinion on the consumption of Hagia Sophia has always been dichotomous. Since the 1950s, the demands to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque and use it for Muslim religious practices can be regularly and continuously observed. These demands are expressed mostly by civil associations and youth branches of political parties through press statements and public demonstrations. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, close to the anniversary of the conquest of Constantinople (May 29), big rallies and demonstrations demanding Hagia Sophia to be turned into a mosque were organized. Although these gatherings mostly took place outside Hagia Sophia, some protests were carried out inside the monument. For example, in a protest organized by the *Milli Türk Talebe Birliği* (National Turkish Students Union), 150 protesters entered the monument and performed Muslim prayers (*namaz*) inside Hagia Sophia<sup>44</sup>. These claims were not, in their turn, shared by the whole population, as demonstrated by the circumstance that many civilians,

<sup>40</sup> «Hürriyet», July 4, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> «Milliyet», October 21, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> «Anadolu Ajansı», April 8, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> «Anadolu Ajansı», July 2, 2016.

<sup>44</sup> «Milliyet», May 8, 1976.

academics, and non-governmental organizations such as the TMMOB (The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) have been opposing the conversion of the monument into a religious building, and demanding that it continued to be kept as a museum, in the name of the universal and multi-cultural values the monument embodies<sup>45</sup>.

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Turkey's Council of State, the country's highest administrative court, overruled the 1934 Council of Ministers' Decree that had turned Hagia Sophia into a museum. After this decision, Turkish President Erdoğan announced that the monument would be transformed back into a mosque. Two weeks after the court's decision, on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the first Muslim prayers took place in Hagia Sophia, and since then, daily prayers have been regularly held.

This transformation had some immediate effects on the monument's biography: from a material point of view, from a symbolic perspective, and in terms of its positioning within the general awareness of its "users." First and foremost, the access to the Christian mosaics was interrupted. The mosaics visible from the first floor of the building, which is now used as a praying area, were covered with curtains. Although a public statement issued by the government stated that the mosaics would be uncovered after the prayer's times and would be made available to visitors, they have never been uncovered so far. Furthermore, the second floor of the monument, which houses many other Christian mosaics, is also closed to public visits both during and outside the prayer times. The floor mosaics and the marbles on the first floor, except for the *omphalion* mosaic – where emperors were coronated –, are covered with carpets and they would not be visible as long as the monument remains a mosque.

## 7. Discussion

The research proves that the changes in function and identity of Hagia Sophia have always been strictly connected to and affected by the national and political agenda. During the transformation from a mosque into a museum, the monument was detached from its religious functions. This circumstance opened the way for the uncovering of its pre-Ottoman past and its material embodiments. The Byzantine-Christian past of the monument was revealed, and its elements were represented together with the elements of its Ottoman-Islamic past. The museum status provided, then, Hagia Sophia with the symbolic and functional space apt to shed light on the long life of nearly 1,5 millennia of the monument; the space of the museum functioned as a free port, where the dif-

<sup>45</sup> «Milliyet», January 17, 1966.

ferent political, ideological, and religious embodiments of the monument got historicized and projected their divisive charge and potential at a level which is supposed to be detached from the *hic and nunc* of the ideological battles, in the name of a global perspective and “universal” (or claimed to be so) sets of values.

On the other hand, contrary to the constructed identity of the monument through the musealization process, in line with the changing political discourse, actions such as playing the call to prayers from the minarets, holding Muslim prayers and Quran readings inside the monument, and reserving a building – Hünkar Kasrı – in the Hagia Sophia complex as a prayer room for Muslims clearly emphasized the monument’s Islamic identity and its function as a mosque, distancing it from its status as a museum. Finally, in July 2020, Hagia Sophia has converted into a mosque once again.

Considering its multifaceted history of one-and-a-half-millennia, various uses, and many identities reflected on and embedded within the monument, it is apparent that Hagia Sophia cannot be confined within the boundaries of a singular identity and a function. Its different identities, such as Byzantine, Ottoman, and a world-heritage, are simultaneously present. Likewise, its different – sometimes conflicting – functions are at play simultaneously, such as the presence of Christian mosaics during its time as a mosque and the Islamic call to prayers during its use as a museum. Hagia Sophia is a monument that embodies many different symbolic meanings and thus, cannot be bound within a single definition.

Our research shows that due to its symbolic and historical value, Hagia Sophia plays a highly relevant role within Turkey’s political discourse. The shifts in the political discourse have been impacting both the tangible and intangible dimensions of the monument. The musealization of Hagia Sophia was not due to an instant decision, but it was the result of a process that covered almost the last 150 years of its history as a mosque. The internal movements of modernization and democratization in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the developing international relations related to the westernization of the political sphere, led the way to the monument’s musealization. Conversely, the recent de-musealization of the monument resulted from debates and discussions within the public and political spheres that continued to appear and disappear in the last 70 years, depending on the political dynamics of the time.

This study demonstrates the close relationship between political discourse and cultural heritage management and how politics might affect the well-being and uses of cultural heritage assets. In the analysis of this relationship, Critical Discourse Analysis is proved to be a useful methodological approach.

The research aims to cover the gap in the literature by studying Hagia Sophia’s development and function as a museum and how its different statuses and functions were affected by the ideological shifts in its micro and macro environment. Further research focusing on the changes in the managerial and regulatory aspects of Hagia Sophia after its de-musealization would comple-

ment the present contribution in terms of this specific aspect of cultural heritage management. A further complement to the present study involves the sociological side, and it should focus on a comparative investigation of the visitors' experience of Hagia Sophia during both its museum status and its mosque status.

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## Appendix

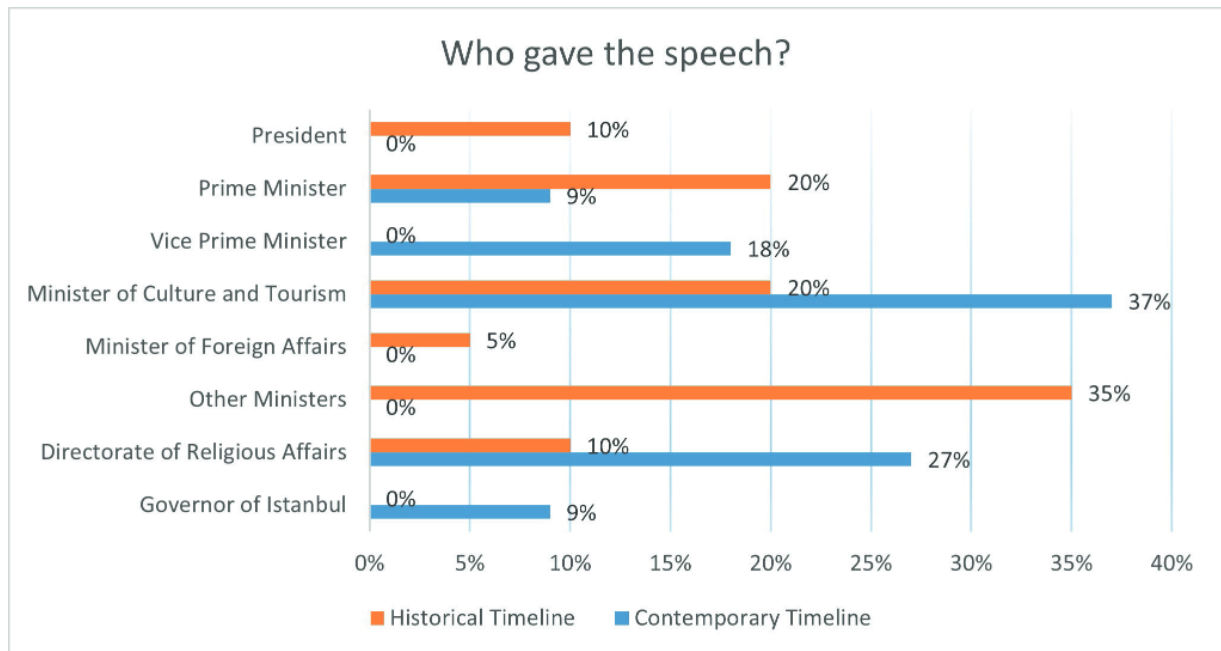


Fig. 1. Who gave the speech?

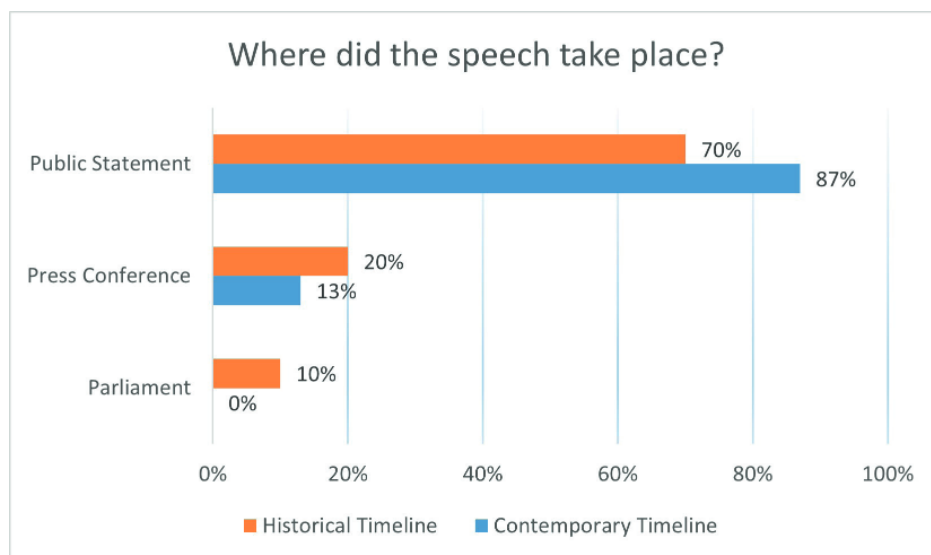


Fig. 2. Where was the speech given?





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