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Journal of Modern Greek Studies, Volume 40, Number 2, October 2022,
pp. 425-455 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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Between Ritual and Restoration: Remembering and Reclaiming Ionia's Religious Architectural Heritage

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Abstract

Following the Balkan Wars, the First World War, the 1919–1922 Greco-Turkish War, and the 1923 mutual and compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey, millions left their towns and villages behind and their homes, schools, and religious buildings were re-used by incoming refugees from the other side or were left in ruins. In the last two decades, a number of old church buildings across Anatolia have been reused, on the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as sites of sporadic or periodic religious services. During the same period, many of these buildings have been restored as cultural centers. A range of stakeholders were involved in these two processes, including the local authorities, religious bodies, and professional experts, all pursuing their own priorities and interpretations. How do rituals—in the form of religious services—and restoration activities become entangled in competing relationships with buildings and with the past? The situation in the Izmir region offers insights into the complex involvement of space, matter, form, and ritual in the making of meaning and heritage, and can inform discussions about the legacy of the Population Exchange and heritage preservation in regions overridden by antagonistic nationalisms and uncontrolled development.

The wars that brought about the end of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of republican Turkey led to the expulsion of millions of people, constituting a major chapter in the history of post-imperial ethnic unmixing. One of the most sizeable displacements was imposed by the 1923 compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey, according to which Greek Orthodox Christians were displaced from Anatolia and Eastern Thrace to the Kingdom

of Greece while Muslims moved in the opposite direction.¹ As the property question was not resolved in Lausanne, many of the displaced harbored hopes of returning to their homes; however, the Greek-Turkish Friendship Treaty of 1929–1930 mutually cancelled property claims and put an end to aspirations for return. The material footprint of these events was tremendous—hundreds of thousands of public and privately owned buildings and the surrounding land were reinhabited, repurposed, transformed, abandoned, or destroyed.

Religious sites are especially interesting since they carry a symbolic capital that usually led to their religious conversion or to their destruction and erasure, making them unavailable for reuse by their original owners even in the unlikely event of their return. On some occasions, their large interior spaces provided valuable infrastructure for public or commercial uses that was scarce in the war-torn countries.² At the same time, in the absence of their original communities, their ownership was usually transferred to public institutions (most often municipal authorities and ministries), a fact which brings into focus the role of politics, relationships between center and periphery, and heritage policies in defining the fate of these sites.

This study explores the circumstances under which, from the mid-2000s onward, a significant number of churches in the Izmir region became sites of religious services—sometimes exceptional, in other cases periodically repeated—at the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and with permission from the Turkish state. During the same period, many of them were also restored by the local and regional authorities; a process which entailed year-long studies, multiple evaluations, and substantial interventions in the physical structure and form of the buildings, rendering them more visible within the built landscape. While undertaking the task of mapping and recording for the first time these important developments in historical Ionia, this work explores the role of local and central authorities, religious bodies, and experts; raises questions of agency and negotiation; and examines the various meanings that these religious rites and spatial transformations have held for different stakeholders. What kinds of relationships between community, land, and state emerge through the systematic organization of religious services with the permission of the local and central authorities? How do performative, repetitive practices such as religious rituals and official requests for permission from the state become entangled with one-off permanent interventions in the life of these monuments, such as their restoration, and how do they reshape people's relationships with these buildings? How do these practices and processes participate in the making of heritage? While addressing these questions, this article contributes both to the discussion of the history of the

Population Exchange and to the debates about heritage preservation in a region overridden by antagonistic nationalisms.

This study is based on primary sources in English, Greek, and Turkish, including heritage legislation and published patriarchal sermons. Substantial data was collected through ethnographic research and architectural field surveys. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with nine informants (Greek and Turkish citizens) who represented key actors in the developments being studied: architects involved in the restoration processes, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the local Orthodox community, the Greek consulate, and the restoration department of the municipality. Informants were approached in their professional capacities within the respective bodies, and in some cases a snowball technique was employed in order to access persons with more direct involvement or complementary testimonies. In all cases, informed consent forms were signed, and anonymity has been preserved whenever requested.

Becoming heritage: From undesirable ruins to cultural assets

Before delving into the case studies, it is important to grasp the wider historical and political conditions under which these churches were turned from sacred spaces into discredited ruins in the first half of the twentieth century, and then into tolerated or potentially valuable cultural assets in more recent decades. Along with the other profound economic, political, and social consequences of the Population Exchange on both sides of the Aegean (Aktar 2003; Hirschon 2003; Keyder 2003), the “unmixing” of the Greek and Turkish populations turned immovable assets into the booty of the respective states.³ The city of Izmir and its vicinity, studied here, was one of the most profoundly affected regions, since its Greek population had been demographically, economically, and culturally important. It was also physically and symbolically the site of the final stage of the Greco-Turkish War, one of the last areas to be evacuated by the Greek army after its defeat in late summer 1922 (M. Smith 1998). In September 1922, the city itself was all but destroyed by fire.⁴ Some religious structures that survived the fire were demolished at a later date—such as the Evangelistria church, whose structure still stood within the boundaries of Izmir’s Culture Park in the 1930s—and hundreds of other structures in the region were left in ruins. A few other churches served new purposes: among those examined in this article, Hagios Voukolos in Izmir’s city center served as an archaeological museum, Timios Stavros in Bornova was until recently a carpenter’s workshop, Alaçati’s Presentation of the Virgin Mary was converted into a mosque, and Çeşme’s Hagios Charalambos was used as storage space.

The absence of their original users and the perception of these buildings and ruins as related to the enemy—or, at best, as functional infrastructures—must also be assessed alongside another important factor: the transfer of property rights to the state, whereas before 1922 their preservation had fallen within the legal and administrative scope of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.⁵ In comparison, the buildings of other communities, for example the Jewish community, remained under their own jurisdiction (Amygdalou and Asrav 2021a). A triple rupture thus took place—in users, perceived value, and ownership—which conditioned the physical treatment of the spaces.

Before the political and economic domains improved in the late 1990s (these improvements have more recently met significant reversals), a new law (No. 1710/Historic Artifacts Act, 25 April 1973) related to the protection of cultural assets and aligned with the international discourse on heritage conservation entered into force in 1973, paving the way for the registration of many churches (along with other Ottoman-era buildings and sites) as cultural assets. This did not result in an immediately noticeable change in their material fates, as financial limitations and the indifference of local actors, investors, and owners could not be easily overcome (Şahin Güçhan and Kurul 2009). Nevertheless, the change in the legal status—in the “rights”—of these buildings and their implicit recognition as historical heritage can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s. For this study, the most notable examples are the registration of Hagios Voukolos in 1975 and Hagios Charalambos in 1985. In addition, the establishment of new bodies, such as the Regional Councils in 1983 and the Ministry of Culture in 1989, increased the number of available institutional mechanisms through which built heritage could be defined, recognized, assessed, and protected when the circumstances should be ripe.

The political realm improved in the late 1990s with the Greco-Turkish rapprochement, coupled with the start of Turkey’s EU accession negotiations.⁶ A democratization reform process unprecedented in the history of republican Turkey created new opportunities for the reconsideration and reevaluation of non-Turkish heritage in Anatolia, including derelict or converted religious buildings. And as the perceived cultural and economic value of these buildings gradually increased, benefiting from the progress in heritage legislation and in the political climate, the Patriarchate began to take a renewed interest in Orthodox Christian religious sites—not as a potential owner, but as a potential user.⁷ Beginning in Cappadocia in the 1990s, the Ecumenical Patriarchate started organizing pilgrimage visits and holding religious services in abandoned religious landmarks throughout Turkey, including on the Black Sea and Aegean coasts.⁸ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew often personally officiated

at masses, gathering hundreds of locals and tourists from Greece. An analysis of his sermons reveals a consistent approach: while reinforcing its claim to be the heir of a rich historic and cultural tradition, the Ecumenical Patriarchate also stressed its unalienable connection to Asia Minor as a homeland, its respect for the local and central authorities, and its commitment to peaceful coexistence and ecumenical values (Macar 2021). According to the Patriarchate's line of thought, Turkey's Christian heritage should be seen as a reason not to divide two peoples but to bring them closer together.

The vast majority of the religious services held at Christian sites were supported and embraced by locals all over Turkey, and the interest of government and local authorities in inviting the Ecumenical Patriarch was also notable.⁹ An eventful visit—due to the presence of some protesters—on 8 May 2006 in Bergama, at the ruins of Hagios Ioannis Theologos, was an exception to the norm, but such an example demonstrates well the gradual—and sometimes difficult—transformation in the perceived value of these buildings (described above) and the equally gradual reemergence of their users. During his sermon, Bartholomew thanked the local authorities who gave permission for the mass, pointing out the significance of religious tourism for the region. As a few far-right protesters in the vicinity used the slogan “Love it [Turkey] or leave it” (*Ya sev, ya terk et*), Bartholomew responded:

The friends chanting slogans outside are saying, “Love it or leave it.” Who said to them that we do not love our homeland? They are saying there is no Christian community. But under these lands there are millions. It is our duty to pray and wish “may they rest in peace.” We have no political objective. We are children of these lands. (*Günaydın Aliğa* 2006)

For his part, the mayor of Bergama, Raşit Ürper, who was one of the attendees of the mass, drew attention in his own speech to the historic past of the Bergama province. Stating that next to the basilica in Bergama stands a mosque and, 20 meters beyond, a synagogue where Jews performed their religious services, he added:

This is Bergama's wealth. We must use this wealth. Bergama, being a touristic town, is one of the most important centers of religious tourism. We support this religious service. There is a particular significance to our support since it comes from a mayor elected with AKP support. (*Günaydın Aliğa* 2006)

The words of the mayor of Bergama testify to the rise of a new view among local authorities in Turkey, who saw an opportunity in the revitalization of the region's multicultural and multireligious heritage. The organization of these events often involved Greece-based refugee associations (whose members'

ancestors had lived in the places where the landmarks were located) and enabled the establishment of relations with the current residents, most of whom were themselves second- or third-generation refugees from Greece or other Balkan countries.¹⁰ These events gave rise to religious tourism and created opportunities for meetings with local authorities, allowing for the reframing of religious ruins as cultural assets with latent economic value. This requalification fit the rather favorable political and economic conditions of the late 2000s and early 2010s. Turkey's Minister of Culture and Tourism at the time, Ertuğrul Günay, had a secularist political background and favored the promotion of Turkey's multiethnic and multireligious heritage both as a means to attract more tourists to the country and as a goal in its own right.¹¹ This context paved the way for the restoration of Greek Orthodox cultural and religious landmarks in Turkey, especially in municipalities where the tourism industry had not developed its full potential.¹²

Further legislative changes that promoted decentralization of heritage policy facilitated the reactivation of historical buildings for social and economic benefit.¹³ Even though decentralization had already been attempted before 2004 by involving different actors (governors, museums, regional councils, municipalities) in conservation activities, the engagement and financial capacity of local authorities increased in 2004, and this in turn multiplied the number of restoration projects.¹⁴ This proliferation was confirmed in our interviews with a conservation architect at Izmir Municipality's Directorate of Historic Sites and Cultural Assets and with a university professor specializing in restoration, both of whom were involved in the restoration process of Hagios Voukolos (Amygdalou and Asrav 2021a; 2021c). While this trend was reversed after 2011, many of the churches studied here were approved for restoration in the late 2000s and early 2010s.¹⁵

It was within this complicated and fluid political landscape¹⁶ that the ideological framing of Orthodox architectural heritage, involving national and international actors, took place. In the early 2000s, political, legislative, and economic developments had paved the way for reemerging users and the remobilized institutional owners of these buildings to imagine new futures for them—futures that would take physical shape through ritual and restoration.

Izmir's Greek Orthodox churches between ritual and restoration

In the early 2010s, very few Orthodox religious services were taking place in Izmir. Hagia Foteini, a former Dutch Protestant church rented by the Greek government since 1951, was used for Easter and Christmas celebrations and

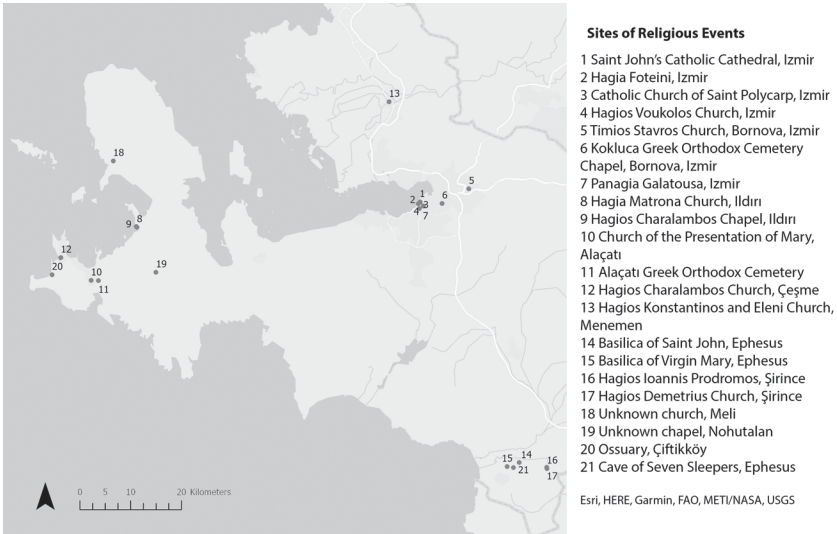


Figure 1. Recorded sites of religious activity in urban and rural areas of İzmir. Credit: Emine Çiğdem Asrav, 2021.

other occasional community events (these became more frequent under the permissive political conditions in the second half of the 2000s, mentioned above).¹⁷ The day-to-day religious needs of the very few Greek Orthodox locals and Greek nationals who resided in the city were hence met, by arrangement of the Greek consulate, in a Gothic Revival chapel near İzmir's Culture Park (Kültürpark). Meanwhile, since the 1990s, annual patriarchal visits had occurred at the Basilica of Hagios Ioannis the Apostle in Ephesus, an archaeological site of great spiritual importance in antiquity and the Byzantine period that had been ruined centuries before the Population Exchange (figure 1).¹⁸

A truly groundbreaking event was the 2011 patriarchal visit and celebration of vespers (*εσπερινός*) at the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary (Merkez Kilise-Pazaryeri Camii) in Alaçatı, which was widely covered by national and local media in both Greece and Turkey (Omaç 2011). The church had recently been restored by the Turkish authorities, and the restoration process brought to light the architectural and artistic value of the building, including the large-scale marble iconostasis created by the famous sculptor Ioannis Halepas in 1874. For the first time in the area, this event exemplified the potential for synergy (described earlier) between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and governmental and local authorities, and it was of particular importance because the building had had a clear, ongoing religious function as the central

mosque of the town of Alaçatı since 1923, so using it for a Christian religious service was indeed remarkable.¹⁹

The next turning point for the region was in 2013, when Kyrillos Sykis was assigned by the Patriarchate as head of Izmir's incipient Greek Orthodox parish. At the same time, Turkish authorities allowed for the church of Hagia Foteini to become a fully functional church—more than 90 years after the elimination of the Greek Orthodox presence in Izmir. In addition to performing daily and weekly rituals, Kyrillos made it his goal to reestablish a local Greek Orthodox community, keeping the church open for long hours and making it as accessible as possible.²⁰ This new beginning coincided with a small increase in the local Greek population in a period when the Greek economy was entering a crisis while the Turkish economy was doing relatively well. Gradually, as part of the social and religious activities of the parish, visits and religious services at forgotten religious landmarks of urban and rural Izmir were organized (Amygdalou and Grigoriadis 2021c; see figure 1 for the locations and figure 5 for the plans of the religious landmarks). As will be seen below, from 2014 to 2016 a series of ruined churches became sites of religious practice by permission of the Turkish authorities, and in many cases this “reopening” was preceded or followed by restoration activities.

The first “reopening” of the public sphere of Izmir to the Greek Orthodox community took place in small steps, sometimes with the support of the local Catholic church. Most significantly, in 2014, when the dates of Greek Orthodox and Catholic Easter coincided, the two communities performed the Good Friday rituals together. The Catholic clergy participated in the Good Friday observance on 18 April, and both clergies then joined the Epitaphios procession that exited the Hagia Foteini church, moved for a couple of dozen meters under police supervision, and entered the nearby Catholic Saint John's Cathedral, where the ceremony was completed. This was the first time an Epitaphios procession had taken place in the city since 1922—and a rare instance of an intercongregational and interdogmatic procession (figure 2).

But the most important step, from both a symbolic and material perspective, took place later in the same year. In August 2014, the Greek Orthodox Church received permission to perform a liturgy inside the newly restored Hagios Voukolos church (Aya Vukla), one of the very few Greek Orthodox religious buildings surviving within the municipality of Izmir (Doğan Haber Ajansı 2014).²¹ With the overt support of the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (the mayor Aziz Kocaoğlu delivered a speech on the day of the rite), the Greek Orthodox community of Izmir was able to pray in a space of Greek Orthodox architecture (Pappas 2014), in a typical domed nineteenth-century church

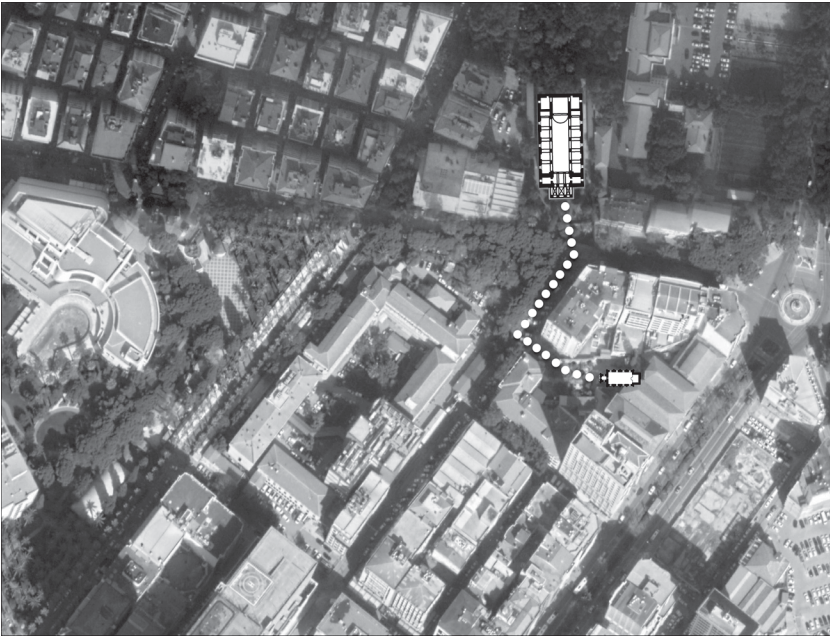


Figure 2. The route followed by the Epitaphios procession in 2014 from the Greek Orthodox church of Hagia Foteini to Saint John's Cathedral, Easter 2014. Credit: Emine Çiğdem Asrav, 2021.

constructed in the Byzantine Revival style (figure 3). The ability to move the liturgy to a church of Orthodox design brought about a crucial improvement in the conditions of the religious service, as architecture is an integral part of a synthesis of liturgical practice, material culture, and iconography. Many elements of church architecture are specifically designed to facilitate, accompany, and accentuate the multisensory experience of religious ritual.

On 6 February 2015, during an official patriarchal visit to the region, the reopening of the Hagios Voukolos church took place—and from that year onward, all the major celebrations, such as Easter and Christmas, would take place there, always after obtaining permission from the authorities (more on this below). This church hence became for the Orthodox community the second-most-used religious space in the city—and the juxtaposing of the two architectural spaces, the small, humble, Gothic Revival-style Hagia Foteini with the more monumental, classical-style Hagios Voukolos, would be a usual topic of discussion in the community (see plans in figures 2 and 4). In two of his sermons in the Hagios Voukolos church in Izmir, on 6 February 2015 and

2016, Bartholomew made clear references to the symbolism of his visit and articulated a clear narrative of the rebirth of Izmir's Greek Orthodox heritage, of a historical, religious, and spiritual connection linking the Patriarchate and the visiting descendants of refugees to these spaces, and of a peaceful reclaiming of this cultural heritage that was compatible with interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding. On 6 February 2015, during the first mass to be officiated in Hagios Voukolos since 1922, he proclaimed:

We see the today nonexistent 16 churches of İzmir, foremost among them the church of Hagia Foteini, and the rescued and restored church of Hagios Voukolos, in which we send glory and thanks to the Lord.

Before our eyes stand the famous Evangeliki Scholi, the Central Orphanage, the Hagios Charalambos Hospital, the Nursery, and the orphanage, approximately 150 educational associations, more than 200 libraries, 35 community newspapers and magazines, the sports and cultural activities of Panionios, Apollon, and other sports associations of İzmir. (Holy Diocese of Kos and Nisyros 2015)

A year later, the Ecumenical Patriarch officiated at another mass. In his sermon of 6 February 2016, Bartholomew argued:

When visiting Izmir, we don't feel as if we are coming to this city for the first, second, or third time, but we simply experience the emotions of "expatriates" returning to their homeland, to their home, to their family. . . . And as approximately one hundred years have passed since that era of "great grief," we have all the good reasons to be optimistic that a new tomorrow is dawning for this jewel of the Orient, our Izmir. . . . We therefore wish on the occasion of this glorious day that Izmir and Ionia remain places of peace and human unity, places of tolerance, or rather acceptance, of minorities, places of literary cultivation, places of progress and culture, as they have always been in their long history.

We thank the honorable prefect and mayor of Izmir, who gives us the chance to fulfill every year the desire for our return to this place. To highlight this event, in response to the invitation of mayors and other institutions of the region, as well as the request of the city's Orthodox community, we have established two patriarchal and pastoral visits per year in the Izmir region: one to commemorate Hagios Voukolos, as [happens] today, and the other in commemoration of the patron of Ephesus Hagios Ioannis the Theologian on 8 May, when a mass in Menemen is also held. (Holy Diocese of Italy 2016)

These quotations clearly manifest the strong and direct historical connections drawn between the Patriarchate, the city's lost past, and the few material remnants that still stand. The few surviving buildings are charged with the mission of reviving, resuscitating, and condensing a much larger built landscape



Figure 3. Hagios Voukolos church in Izmir. Credit: Emine Çiğdem Asrav, 2021.

which related to the early twentieth-century Greek Orthodox community. At the same time, this revival is made possible only through a paternalistic relationship between state and church, whereby an enlightened state gives *ad hoc* permission for this event to take place.

A series of churches and chapels of diverse material condition and in a variety of local contexts followed Hagios Voukolos (see figures 3 and 5). In August 2014, Kyrillos performed a liturgy at the Church of Hagios Ioannis Prodromos in Şirince (Çirkince or Kırkınca),²² and a visit by the Patriarch followed in 2016. In 2015, the churches of Timios Stavros in Bornova,²³ Hagios Konstantinos and Helene in Menemen,²⁴ and Saint Demetrius in Şirince²⁵ also saw their first religious ceremonies since 1922 (Altun and Erdağ 2020). In January 2016, for the first time in 94 years, the Greek community celebrated the “blessing of the waters” ceremony at the Izmir quay during the Feast of the Epiphany (Theophaneia); this event, which was carried out jointly with the Catholic community, was a particularly important one, as a religious rite was taking place in a public space. In the words of a member of the consulate at the time, the presence of representatives of the Jewish community, the Greek and Italian consuls, and dozens of Turkish citizens of Izmir reflected an extraordinary revival of Izmir’s pre-1922 cosmopolitan condition in the public realm (Amygdalou 2022). A month later, the Patriarch performed a liturgy at the monumental Church of Hagios Charalambos in Çeşme, which is also being used as a cultural center.²⁶

The role of local authorities was very important. In cases where the municipality was particularly hospitable, such as in Selçuk, this facilitated the organization of the religious services in all the religious landmarks standing within its borders. Meanwhile, Greek consuls who served in Izmir over this extended period also played an important role in these events, especially in the relations with local municipalities (Amygdalou 2022).²⁷ In interviews with Greek professionals residing in Izmir and a local Greek Orthodox woman, consuls were compared to each other with regard to their efforts to embrace and support these events (Amygdalou and Grigoriadis 2021a; 2021b; 2021d). The Turkish locals also responded positively by approaching and welcoming the Patriarch or even by attending some of the liturgies (Amygdalou 2022).

While most news announcements that circulated in Greek media mentioned that consecrations were performed during these reopenings, this was not the case: all these sites (whether ruined or reused) were considered to be consecrated since their initial construction prior to 1922 (Amygdalou and Grigoriadis 2021d). According to the Orthodox Church, any surviving authentic material remain was sufficient to preserve the sanctity of the site—hence the appropriate religious procedure was not a consecration (εγκαίνια or



Figure 4. Mass in Hagios Demetrios church in Şirince, August 2015. Credit: Athina Samoglou, 2015.

θυρανοίξια) but a much simpler sanctification ritual provided for such cases in the Great Euchologion of the Orthodox Church (Bilalis Anatolikiotis 2014, 289, 296). Hence the material presence of humble ruins became the evidence of a historical and religious continuity. On the other hand, while this ceremony could have been conducted by a cleric lower in the hierarchy of the Patriarchate, the presence of the Patriarch was considered essential to express the historical symbolism of the event and to manifest the revived bond between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and these sites.

Most interestingly, in addition to these liturgies in functional, restored, or repairable buildings, and with the initiative of Kyrillos and his local team, religious rituals also took place in small ruined and abandoned churches and chapels in the region. Kyrillos organized visits and prayers at the ruins of Hagia Matrona church on the acropolis of Ildırı (Erythrai), at a little half-demolished chapel (dedicated to Saint Charalambos) next to the ancient theater at the same archaeological site, at the abandoned cemetery of Alaçatı, at a humble ossuary at Çiftlikköy (Kato Panagia), at a long-forgotten chapel in Nohutalan, and at other sites (see map, Figure 1). These sites fall outside any strategy or vision of possible restoration or refunctioning—the visits to them resemble the Patriarchal visit to the Basilica of Hagios Ioannis, but on a different scale and with perhaps a slightly different meaning.

The Basilica of Hagios Ioannis in Ephesus, and Hagios Ioannis himself—who is thought to have been buried underneath the basilica—are fundamental



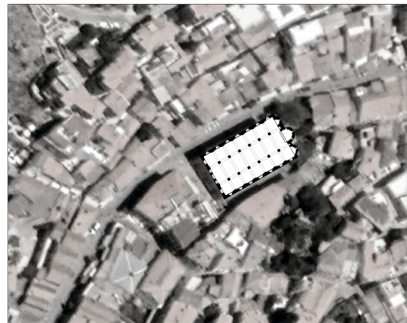
Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, Alaçatı



Hagios Voukolos (Aya Vukla) Church, Izmir



Hagios Konstantinos and Eleni Church, Menemen



Hagios Charalambos Church, Çeşme



Timios Stavros Church, Bornova



Hagia Matriona Church, Ildırı

Figure 5. Plans of the religious sites where the events studied took place. Credit: Emine Çiğdem Asrav, 2021.

points of reference in the history of Christianity. The Ecumenical Patriarch's visit at the site confirms the relationship between Istanbul and Ephesus, the Eastern Roman and Byzantine genealogy of both spaces,²⁸ but also the Patriarchate's ecumenical character. Similarly, Kyrillos's visits to non-functional, humble ruins within the vicinity of Izmir demonstrate the religious and historical connection of the Greek Orthodox to those sites and to the lands where they are situated. While this is also the case for the complete and better-known churches of Izmir, Menemen, and Şirince, the visits and prayers amid the ruins accentuate a feeling of reconciliation and a return to the sites of displacement, embodying an act of remembering and caring for the dead, an act of healing of past and present traumas, while still reclaiming space. The material qualities of the ruin—abandoned, voiceless, devalued, lifeless—can eloquently express and externalize the self-perception of the all-but-vanished Greek Orthodox Christians of the region and the descendants of the displaced refugees who often visit from Greece (and attend some of these religious events).

This small but significant differentiation between the various sites of reemergence, whether these are repaired, complete churches in Izmir, Menemen, and Şirince or ruins in the countryside, was also visible in interviews with the two Greek expatriate professionals living in Izmir and one local Greek Orthodox woman. When asked about which events meant most to them, the Greek professionals stressed that all of them were unique. In their own words:

I remember equally clearly the little chapel of Timios Stavros here in Bornova, where it was just a few of us, the first Patriarchal visit to Hagios Voukolos and Izmir, where we ran around helping with preparations day and night. . . . Or in Menemen, at Hagios Konstantinos and Helene, it was incredible! The Greek national anthem was played [by the Menemen Municipality band]; we were left astonished. Or Hagios Charalambos in Çeşme, or the celebration of Dekapentavgoustos [Dormition of the Mother of God] in Şirince, or the visit to the Basilica of Theotokos with the Patriarch, down in Ephesus, under the hot sun—unique things! . . . I cannot pick one. (Amygdalou and Grigoriadis 2021a)

You know, one cannot choose one [example] unless they have a specific reason, a personal reason to choose. All were very moving, the love of the people, the locals, the politicians and institutions, the support we found. Also, you know, the realization that, in this region and also in wider Asia Minor, under every stone, you will find something Greek, is very moving; it is moving to experience it and I am saying this mostly for us, Greeks from Greece. You learn it in the books and from history, it is important, but when you live this in your daily life it is very moving. (Amygdalou and Grigoriadis 2021b)

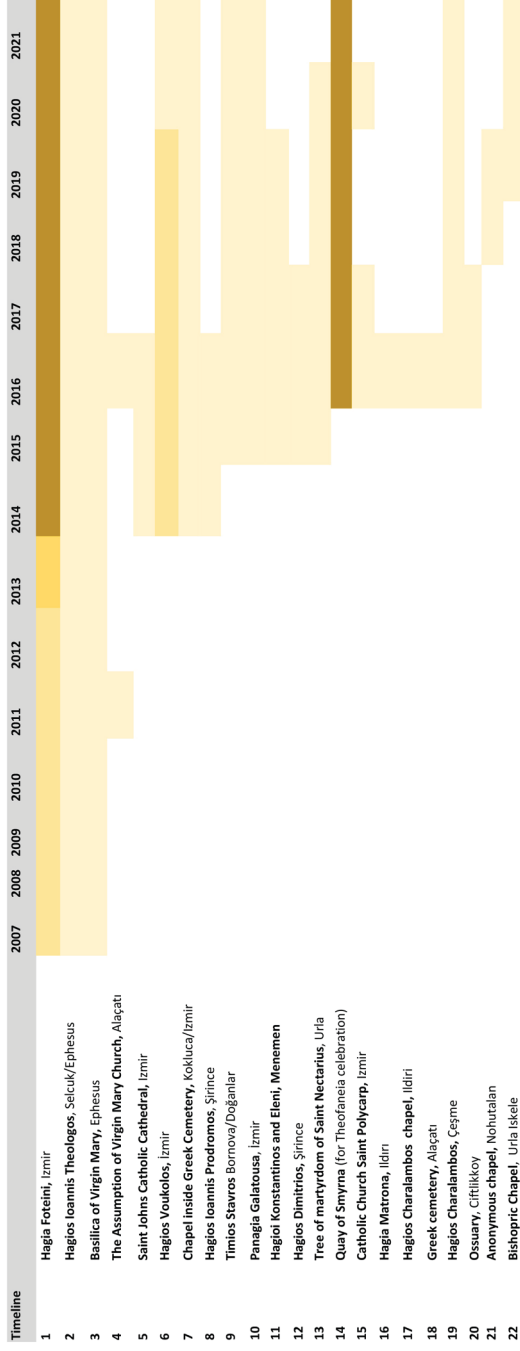


Figure 6. Timeline of the reemergence of religious activity in the region studied, sometimes preceded by restoration of the various churches. Credit: Kalliopi Amygdalou, 2021.

It seems that the historical dimension and the feeling of reconciliation, as well as astonishment at the support for and embracing of these events by the local municipalities and the Turkish state were very central in these two informants' memories. And rightfully so—these events were groundbreaking, given the history of Greek-Turkish relations in the twentieth century. The feeling that there is room for Greek Orthodox identity to be re-experienced in Anatolia, with the blessings of local authorities, was revolutionary for Greek citizens who grew up in Greece during the second half of the twentieth century.

The same was true for the Greek Orthodox woman from Izmir who was interviewed, but her response included a significant twist:

For me, on the other hand, when we did the research for the sites—a cemetery, a chapel, a buried church that we searched out, located, and traveled by bus to pray there . . . well, when we looked for these sites one by one and went up the mountains, for me that was very important and emotional because—think about it: you are born here, grow up here, without your religion, your language, your customs, we had to bury them inside us so that they continue to exist and so that we can carry them to the future. So, when you face the tombs, a marble that you know belonged to a tomb, you become so emotional that you say: we existed here once! And because we existed, we should keep existing tomorrow! . . . I felt that things buried inside me came out one by one. (Amygdalou and Grigoriadis 2021c)

The spatial and material metaphor is striking—having been born and raised in Izmir in times when religious and cultural diversity was greatly discouraged in Turkey,²⁹ this informant likens the unearthing of ruins and half-surviving, humble chapels to the resurfacing of her own individual or collective religious identity. She focuses on the idea of rediscovery and implies that the process of reasserting value and caring for the forgotten buildings and sites held perhaps a deeper meaning for her than did the more celebratory, monumental liturgies in well-known churches. As Manolopoulou et al. have also pointed out, this testifies to the different kinds of cultural value that buildings and sites can acquire, including a kind of cultural value that is usually not considered by institutions when deciding what and where to restore (Manolopoulou et al. 2018).

For all these informants, this astonishing revival of religious ritual in the region meant a reenactment of a lost, or heavily wounded, relationship with the past and with the land. Every religious ritual manifested a connection between specific individuals and sites, but still more between the communities that these individuals represented and the historical and cultural landscape that the buildings inhabited. On the other hand, however, every religious ritual was subject to authorization by the local and central authorities, and a detailed application had to be filed each time both with the Municipality and the Ministry of Interior

in order to gain permission for the event. This application needed to contain information about the nature and purpose of the event, the date and time, the number of people attending, and the transport and touring organized, if any. The preparation and submission of the application and the attainment of approval represent another performative and repetitive act, one which precedes and conditions the ritual and which explicitly confirms the Turkish state's authority over and ownership of the site. By requiring a new application each time, the Turkish authorities reassert their own legal relationship to the site while underlining the temporary effect of the ritual and its incapacity to create a permanent change in the ruin or church. At the same time, the religious ritual is framed as a "privilege" or "favor" granted by the authorities to the community. The hierarchical—and asymmetrical—relationship between citizens and state is thus the third relationship that is performed through the application process.

This process of permission-granting is what allows two sides, state and community, to simultaneously claim the same space. The permission request is at the same time the result and the epitome of the complicated political, legal, and economic landscape described earlier; it is made possible by the increase in inclusiveness, the building of trust, and the successful negotiation and reorientation of multiple institutions at higher levels. Yet this paperwork gives rise to a paradox: it confirms and relieves two antithetical agonies—both sides' ownership of the space. It makes possible a claim of belonging pursued by the Greek Orthodox community while confirming the Turkish state's legal ownership of the sites. Each side chooses to overcome the claim of the other; the religious service is performed; time is temporarily suspended; the site is then evacuated, and the return to the unchangeable present is confirmed.

This subtle competition over the "ownership" of these buildings resurfaces in discussions of their restoration. In some cases, restoration preceded a religious ceremony on the initiative of the municipality, such as at Alaçatı's Presentation of Mary church and Hagios Voukolos, Timios Stavros in Bornova (restored in 2014 and visited by the Patriarch in 2016, as mentioned above), and the monumental Hagios Charalambos church in Çeşme, which was restored between 2011 and 2015 and reinaugurated by the Patriarch in February 2016. In other cases, restoration followed the religious ceremony, such as in the case of Hagios Ioannis Prodromos in Şirince; after a liturgy performed by Kyrillos in August 2014, the Municipality of Selçuk restored the building, which was then reinaugurated during a Patriarchal visit in May 2016. Were these two processes related, and if so, in what way?

In our interviews with representatives and members of the Izmir Orthodox community, it was claimed that repetitive pilgrimages to these churches and

meetings (of the community or the consuls) with the local authorities helped trigger or accelerate the restorations. Such a connection could be explained by the well-founded synergy between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and state authorities as well as by the political climate of the period—and further research would be needed to assess this. But beyond this possible connection, what is interesting here is the articulated claim (or rejection) of sovereignty over these spaces. By arguing for an active role in the restoration process, Kyrillos and the Orthodox community have furthered and deepened their relationship with the sites, a relationship of spiritual, cultural, and historical belonging also evident in the Patriarch’s sermons and in the lack of need for reconsecration of these spaces. For the Orthodox community, continuity is there, even when not provable through ownership deeds.

On the other hand, interviews with state actors and experts involved in the restoration processes (individuals from the municipality, the university, and restoration companies) downplay or completely reject such a possibility:

As the municipality reclaimed and embraced historical buildings, we prepared a project for that place. In the restoration process, survey drawings were made, the current state was assessed etc. . . . This was actually a single-nave little chapel. It is very interesting that it closely resembles the Virgin Mary’s church in Kula. We restored it as an art center and worked on it as well as its surroundings. . . . This is a neighborhood center. But of course, we know that at times there are prayers, when special religious services are requested by the communities here. The municipality considers this suitable. But its function is a neighborhood center. (Amygdalou and Asrav 2021a)

These buildings were not treated as religious sites during the restoration process (Amygdalou and Asrav 2021a). They were historical buildings, cultural assets to be reactivated in the urban fabric and reused for cultural purposes to serve Izmir’s society. Their reframing from “enemy remains” in the early twentieth century to “cultural assets” in the early twenty-first century is complete. In the case of Hagios Voukolos, the restoration process was triggered by IYTE University’s Restoration Department, which approached the municipality in 2003 and asked for its restoration agenda in order to choose a project for its postgraduate students. Ownership of the church had just been transferred from the state to the municipality, it had been included in the agenda for restoration as a cultural center, and the professors decided to assign—for the first time at IYTE—a church building to the students. At the invitation of the municipality, the restoration project was further developed in 2007 and then was implemented in the field.³⁰ According to the company in charge of implementation, there was no request from or involvement by the Patriarchate; nevertheless, the Patriarch

was informed of the restoration process and paid a couple of visits (Amygdalou and Asrav 2021b).

Again, the restoration entails two different outcomes: on the one hand, an important piece of local heritage is acknowledged, repaired, and maintained, and this is to the benefit of the Greek Orthodox community in Izmir as well as to the whole of Izmir's society. On the other hand, restoration involves a process of studying, knowing, deciding what to keep and what to erase, shaping the building, controlling its form and matter—and hence owning the building, leaving physical and largely irreversible traces of the restorers' authority and ideology on the building. The permanent and temporary elements of this story of reemergence are all entangled: amid the centuries-old material and through religious services, performative permission requests, and restorations, different actors negotiate and affirm their identities and their relationships to each other and to the material landscape of Izmir. And this complicated process has a measurable, tangible footprint: some of these churches are still functioning on a yearly basis; it is a reopening that has now been marked in the memory of both the locals and of the state.

In other cases, important reversals are witnessed: the Municipality of Menemen has now allocated the Church of Hagios Konstantinos and Helene to Izmir's Protestant community. This reversal is remarkable if one considers that, in 2015, at the first mass that took place in the restored building, the Ecumenical Patriarch; the Greek consul in Izmir, Theodoros Tsakiris; and the Mayor of Menemen Municipality, Tahir Şahin, released white doves while the municipal band played the Greek and Turkish national anthems and Greek and Turkish dance groups performed traditional dances (Pappas 2015). An equally important reversal took place in the case of Hagios Voukolos, in which members of Izmir's Russian community also started performing masses using the same permission mechanism.³¹

These "reversals" in the remarkable success of the Patriarchate and local Greek Orthodox community might be due to the political developments of the second half of the 2010s. As a result of AKP administration policies, social polarization became a defining feature of Turkish politics. Following the 2013 Gezi events, Turkey's democratic backsliding worsened, and the state of the rule of law and human rights deteriorated precipitously in the following years. The primary victims were the Kurdish minority, the Alevis, and the secularist middle class, and there was no visible deterioration in the state of Turkey's non-Muslim minorities. In fact, the cosmetic value of non-Muslims in an Ottoman-inspired model of illiberal pluralism increased. On the other hand, the promotion of an Islamist nationalist ideology necessitated the reenacting

of practices of symbolic conquest (*fetih*) through the conversion of Christian monuments into mosques.³² These included the conversions of Hagia Sophia churches in Trabzon, Vize, Enez, and Iznik and culminated with the conversion of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia and Kariye (Chora) museums.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that this type of cultural monism, not a secularist but an Islamist nationalist one, inspired the secularist middle class, which has been dominant in Izmir and its district, to reconsider the value of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity was no longer considered a feature to be erased by nation-building assimilation policies but was regarded as an essential element of a liberal-democratic society accommodating different lifestyles. Hence, despite the aforementioned reversals, highlighting the Greek Orthodox cultural heritage of the region in which secularists lived was believed to help them make a more convincing claim about the need to protect cultural diversity in today's Turkey. Meanwhile, the reactivation of the metropolitan bishopric of Smyrna and the appointment of two bishops of Erythrai and Vryoula pointed to the institutionalization of the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Izmir and its vicinity.

Conclusion

Revisiting and reclaiming Greek Orthodox religious landmarks in Ionia became possible due to a particular set of conditions. The liberalization wave that shaped Turkish politics in the 2000s was favorable to such initiatives. The building of trust between the state and the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the benefits of religious tourism also contributed to the granting of permission for religious services on these sites. On the other hand, the gradual reframing of these buildings as cultural assets, the legislative changes in the field of heritage policy, the support of local authorities, and novel interest in the multireligious and multicultural heritage of the region all contributed to their restoration. The combined result—the reemergence of these monuments in the region—had a surprising effect and stands in stark contrast to the situation in previous decades, when local authorities often collaborated in the effacement of evidence of non-Muslim cultural heritage in and around Izmir.

The parallel processes of religious activity and permission-seeking shaped the relationships between community, state, and the built environment, while the restoration activities left a tangible material footprint. The negotiated outcome of these processes appears permanent but also, at times, unstable: the material condition of the buildings has greatly improved, but the authorities do not hesitate to reassert the contingent character of their new status by rendering

them to other communities when they see fit. Nevertheless, these developments have not only provided an opportunity for local Christians and descendants of refugees to visit and establish a bond with their ancestral land and its landmarks; they also turned these architectural landmarks into invaluable assets in the promotion of reconciliation and peace. Most importantly, this new capacity has been inscribed in the collective memory of the local populations, irrespective of faith or ethnicity, and in the “bureaucratic” memory of the local and central administrations.

As Rodney Harrison states, heritage is “a form of social action” realized, on the one hand, through “official heritage practices” whose decisions on interventions, uses, and restorations embody claims to authority and ownership, and, on the other hand, through “unofficial heritage practices” that create intangible engagements and bonds through community involvement (Harrison 2010; 2012). In the first case, heritage serves to confirm state authority and official ideology, as well as economic priorities. In the second case, values and meanings are more localized, fragmented, and fluid. Laurajane Smith has discussed this dichotomy under the rubric of “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD) and states that AHD prevents “active engagements of public with heritage” and thus interrupts active processes of making meaning, forming attachments, remembering, and creating new memories (L. Smith 2006, 30–31). She also claims that performances or visits are important activities for an audience’s entanglement with heritage through a process of “emotional engagement” in the course of which meaning and memory are exchanged. In the end, individual and group identities are re-formed (L. Smith 2006, 67). The Greek Orthodox churches discussed here complicate the above division and stand between the “official” and the “unofficial,” the permanent and the temporary, the centralized and the grassroots. These are entangled heritages that manage to embody simultaneous claims of ownership and belonging, to evade crystallizations of function and meaning, and hence to open opportunities for inclusive encounters with the “other”—even if such opportunities remain fragile and subject to reversal.

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NOTES

Acknowledgments. We would like to thank Dr. Gökçen Beyinli-Dinç, University of Hamburg; Merve Çalışkan, conservation architect from the Department of Urban History and Promotion, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality; Ariadni Kalokyri, architect and intern at HOMEACROSS; Dr. Vicky Manolopoulou, Newcastle University; all the participants in our ethnographic research; the editors of this special issue; and the anonymous reviewers for their contributions to the making of this paper.



This publication is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 950178).

¹The agreement, signed in Lausanne on 30 January 1923, also retrospectively ratified ethnic cleansing operations that had taken place since the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars, hence expanding the affected populations by many more hundreds of thousands. The Greek Orthodox populations of Istanbul, Imbros, and Tenedos and the Muslims of Western Thrace were exempted from the Exchange (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 1924; Ladas 1932; Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1923; Yıldırım 2007).

²As new nation-states were founded in the region, churches and mosques served as storage spaces, courts, museums, small manufacturing units, and even parliaments. See for example the case of Ragıp Paşa mosque / the first Greek parliament in Nauplion (Amygdalou and Kolovos 2022), Hamza Bey mosque / Alcazar Cinema in Thessaloniki (Kornetis and Poulos 2022) and Hünkâr Hamam / the Parliament Building of Eastern Rumelia in 1878–1879 (Boykov 2013), among numerous other examples.

³The homes of the displaced were supposed to house incoming refugees from the opposite side; however, this proved more difficult than imagined. In Greece, the available housing stock was insufficient for the incoming refugees. In Turkey, where the incoming Muslims arrived later in 1924 and were fewer in number than the available Greek housing stock could have accommodated, many Greek properties were occupied by, or already distributed to, other populations. On the politics of property alienation and appropriation, see Morack 2017.

⁴On the social dynamics of Izmir's vibrant Greek community in the years up to the Population Exchange, see Kechriotis 2005; 2011; 2020. For the 1922 destruction of Izmir and its subsequent reconstruction, see Amygdalou 2014. See also Neyzi 2008 and Kolluoğlu Kırılı 2005.

⁵For the politics of the erasure of the Ottoman past, see also Kolluoğlu Kırılı 2002. The Patriarchate itself was able to survive within the borders of republican Turkey, but faced multiple challenges (Psomiades 1961). Its flock within republican Turkey continued to decline during the twentieth century as Greek-Turkish relations deteriorated in the 1950s and Turkish authorities refused to recognize its ecumenical status (Grigoriadis 2021). The Patriarchate, Turkey's remaining Greek minority, and thousands of communal sites and buildings related to Greek Orthodox presence within the borders of Turkey were caught in a spiral of negative reciprocity and framed as “foreign” and “threatening” rather than incorporated into an inclusive historical narrative. A similar fate awaited Ottoman monuments in Greece and the Muslim minority of Thrace. As shown in this article, the Patriarchate has largely chosen to detach itself from this reciprocity trap.

⁶By lifting its veto in the December 1999 Helsinki European Council, Greece ceased to be the obstacle to the improvement of EU-Turkey relations.

⁷The end of the Cold War, globalization, and the dynamic leadership of Bartholomew, the new Patriarch elected in 1990, provided a propitious environment for the intensification of the Patriarchate's activities inside and outside the borders of Turkey. It also became easier for the Patriarchate to claim its ecumenical role, given that tens of millions of Orthodox Christians who had lived under communist rule were now free to profess and practice their faith.

⁸Special interest was shown in early Byzantine church ruins in ancient cities such as Pergamon (Bergama) and Ephesus (Efes). Benefiting from the steps toward liberalization which transformed the Turkish polity and public sphere in the 2000s, these visits were gradually regularized and intensified.

⁹For example, in November 2015, a new church in Alanya was consecrated, the first case of new construction since the Population Exchange. Also, in Erdek (Artaki or Kyzikos), on the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara, a religious service was held, for the first time in 94 years, on 23 August 2015 at the ruins of Panagia Faneromeni Monastery. This became an annual event that has been observed ever since. In Panagia Soumela at Maçka, near Trabzon, a liturgy took place for the first time in August 2010 and was repeated yearly after that. Religious services were also regularly held in the Hagios Nikolaos church in Demre (Myra), Lycia, and in different sites in Bithynia, in the Bursa province—Trilye (Triglia), Kumyaka (Sygi), Gölyazi (Apollonias), etc.

¹⁰Increasing interest in the Population Exchange and its ramifications was recorded on the Turkish side as well: see Iğsız 2008.

¹¹In Turkey, special attention was given to the tourism sector after 2003. Tourism activities were considered part of cultural activities. In this regard, amendments to the Tourism Promotion Law that was published in 2003 (Act no. 4957) brought forward new terms and categories such as “Culture and Tourism Conservation and Development Areas” (Act no. 8321). In the same year, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was established by unifying two ministries (Act no. 4848) and important developments in Turkey's principal conservation legislation took place. Thus, tourism and conservation activities were connected and increased considerably with the involvement of public, private, national, and international investors (Şahin Güçhan and Kurul 2009, 33–34).

¹²The multiethnic and multireligious character of Izmir's heritage and its spanning of multiple eras, from antiquity to the present, are among the outstanding universal values (OUV) cited for the city's inclusion on UNESCO's World Heritage List. “The Historical Port City of Izmir” was included on UNESCO's tentative list in 2020. For more information, see: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6471/>.

¹³In the early 2000s, the municipalities were given decision-making powers for the conservation of built heritage, and together with the Special Provincial Administration they could initiate participatory conservation projects by involving different local agencies such as “conservation, implementation and control offices” and “project and training offices”: see Special Provincial Administration (SPA) Acts 5302 and 5391, Metropolitan Municipality Acts 5216 and 5393, Greater Municipality Act 5390, and Conservation of Deteriorating Historic and Cultural Property through Renewal and Re-use Act 5366. Thus, new approaches to conservation and new tools for implementation were introduced.

¹⁴These fundamental and innovative reforms in heritage conservation legislation and its institutional framework were part of the EU harmonization process. Increased jurisdiction and financial support were given to local authorities by assigning 10% of the real estate tax (*emlak vergisi*) to be used for heritage conservation. Thus, the local authorities' involvement in conservation activities increased greatly after 2004 (Madran 2011; Şahin Güçhan and Kurul 2009).

¹⁵ After 2011, conservation decisions and decision-making power became more centralized following drastic changes in the institutional and administrative structure. Since then, political affiliations have been invoked in any decision-making process that has created threats to cultural and natural heritage. The role and responsibilities of municipalities and other local agents were limited. Any objection mechanisms were removed. With these changes, the decision-making mechanism was alienated from local actors and evolved toward a centralized system. Multicultural and multireligious heritage has been adversely affected by these changes (Baraldi, Shoup, and Zan 2013; Dinler 2021; Madran 2011).

¹⁶ Turkey's political climate drastically changed after the AKP's election in 2002. Iğsız's article in this special issue relates this to the changing policies of the Erdoğan government over the course of its two-decade term. Iğsız emphasizes that during the first decade, the AKP celebrated neo-Ottomanism through "an imperial model of coexistence" that encouraged multiculturalism and cultural recognition; during the following decade, the AKP acted as "the hegemonic power in Turkey," reshaping neo-Ottomanism by rejecting its liberal aspects and referring to "Islamic civilization" as the culture of Turkey. This affected later decisions on Turkey's multicultural heritage such as the conversion of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia and Kariye (Chora) museums into mosques in 2020.

¹⁷ The building had been built by the first Dutch merchants who arrived in Izmir in the seventeenth century. In 1951, the Greek government rented the church for 100 years for the needs of the city's Greek Orthodox community. The original Hagia Foteini church had been built in 1658. It became the seat of the Orthodox bishop and a symbol of the city's Greek community. It eventually became one of the city's landmarks due to its 33-meter-high belfry that was constructed in 1856. The church was destroyed during and after the great fire of September 1922.

¹⁸ The Church of Hagios Ioannis o Theologos (St. John the Divine) at Selçuk (Ayasuluk) lies near the site of ancient Ephesus where a late Roman and an early Byzantine basilica were built over the tomb of Hagios Ioannis on the summit of a hill on the outskirts of the ancient city. As the population of Ephesus became concentrated in the vicinity of the church in the Middle Ages, it emerged as one of the most important Christian pilgrimage sites in Asia Minor, attracting many pilgrims. When the city of Ephesus fell into ruin so did the church, which slipped into oblivion for many centuries. Eventually, excavations shed new light on the religious landmark. In 2015, the Ecumenical Patriarchate announced its plan to make the religious service on 8 May, the commemoration day of Hagios Ioannis o Theologos, a regular annual event.

¹⁹ The church was erected in the 1830s. In 1923 it was converted into a mosque under the name Pazaryeri Camii. The building was restored between 2009 and 2010 by the Alaçatı Municipality with the support of Special Provincial Administration. During the restoration, frescoes, icons, the altar, and some statuettes were recovered, and a curtain was introduced to separate the iconostasis from the part of the building operating as a mosque (Omaç 2011).

²⁰ In the words of a Greek businessman in Izmir who has been living in the city for nine years: "At the time of Father Kyrillos, the church became the center of the Greek community here in Izmir . . . first of all, it was open 24/7, right? It was open all the time, so . . . if one wanted, for example, to meet a friend downtown, one could use the church as a meeting point; it was the place to meet and then go elsewhere, or even to stay there. The church was where we had coffee, meals, feasts" (Amygdalou and Grigoriadis 2021b). This interview with Greek professionals who have been living in Izmir since 2012 and actively participated in the organization of some of these events, and attended others, took place on 26 July 2021. It is worth noting that the church also welcomed non-Greek Orthodox Christian residents of Izmir such as Syrians, Ukrainians, Russians, etc.

²¹ Erected on the margins of the Greek Orthodox neighborhood of Izmir in 1866–1867, the church had been renovated and expanded in 1899. The church survived, with minor damage, the fire which destroyed large parts of Izmir, including the Greek Orthodox neighborhood, in September 1922. The building served various functions in the Republican era. In 1927, it was renamed the Archaeological Museum of Izmir (İzmir Asar-ı Atika Müzesi). In 1942, its name was changed to İzmir Arkeoloji Müzesi and its collection was expanded. In 1951, a portion of its display collection was transferred to the “Culture Pavilion.” In 1975, it was registered by the Regional Council of the Protection of Cultural Assets. In 1984, following the opening of the new Archaeological Museum of Izmir, the remaining archaeological artefacts were transferred there and the church building was allocated to the Izmir State Opera and Ballet as a rehearsal hall. A fire was recorded during that period. In 2003, the building was assigned to the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality. Between 2004 and 2007, survey, restitution, and restoration projects were prepared by the Department of Architectural Restoration of the Izmir Higher Institute of Technology (IYTE). The building’s restoration was completed between 2008 and 2010, and in 2010 the building was inaugurated as the Hagios Voukolos Church Cultural Center (Serçe 2002a; 2002b; Severoğlu 2019).

²² According to its repair inscription, the church was built in 1805 in the name of John the Baptist (Hagios Ioannis Prodromos) by the order of the Holy Priest of Helioupolis (Ayдын) with the help of Kallinikos from Siphnos and the support of the local Greek Orthodox community, and was repaired in 1832 (Şaşmaz 2012b). It was restored again by the Efes Museum and the American Institute in the 1990s. It has important frescoes depicting Christ in the small niches in its apse. Some parts of the building decayed with the passage of time: the belfry after 1923, the western dome and the vaults in 1980. It was restored in 2015 as a museum, exhibition hall, and auditorium.

²³ The Church of Timios Stavros, also known as Doğanlar Chapel, was built in Bornova in the mid-nineteenth century. After the Population Exchange, the building was used until the mid-1940s as a school, and then as carpenter’s shop and for storage (Severoğlu 2019). The Church of Timios Stavros was registered by the Izmir Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Council in 1995 and included in the Izmir Immovable Cultural Heritage Inventory in 2012. It was restored in 2013–2014 in a project funded by the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality.

²⁴ The Church of Hagios Konstantinos and Helene was erected in the early nineteenth century. It served as the cemetery church and *spitalia* (hospital). After 1923, it was used for storage by the Menemen Municipality, and the cemetery area was eventually erased by urbanization (Altun and Erdağ 2020). The building was restored in 2014 in a project funded by the Menemen Municipality. It was opened for services with the participation of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on 9 May 2015.

²⁵ The Church of Hagios Demetrios was erected in the nineteenth century. After 1923, it was used as a mosque for a while, and during that time the belfry was demolished and a minaret was constructed. It is claimed that some of the materials in the marble floor and stone-paved areas were brought from Isa Bey Mosque and Hagios Ioannis o Theologos Basilica in Selçuk (Şaşmaz 2012a). The wooden panels with frescoes depicting the twelve apostles still remain today. The church was empty and in partially ruined condition for many years until its restoration and repurposing as a museum, exhibition hall, and auditorium in 2015. In the same year, the first liturgy was held there in 93 years (Albay 2015).

²⁶ The establishment of the Greek Orthodox community in Izmir and its environs culminated with the election of bishops to the dioceses of Smyrna, Erythrai, and Vryoula—the first to be appointed since 1922. The holding of a substantial number of the Patriarchate’s events in historical Ionia and the reestablishing of these dioceses should come as no surprise, given

the number of Christian sites in the region, as well as their historic and cultural significance. As for Hagios Charalambos, the church was erected in 1832 on the site of another church that had been built there in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and it served the Greek Orthodox community of the town until 1922 (Gezgin 2013). The building was used as storage space for many years after the Population Exchange. It was registered by the Higher Council of Immovable Cultural and Natural Assets (Taşınmaz Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıkları Yüksek Kurulu) in 1985. It was restored in 1988 by Çeşme Municipality and refashioned as a cultural center. The building was restored again in 2010–2012. The project was funded by Çeşme Municipality and the Special Administration Directorate of the Izmir Governor's Office. Since then, it has been used as a cultural center.

²⁷ The majority of the events discussed here took place during the period when Theodoros Tsakiris was consul (August 2011–March 2016). Tsakiris was preceded by Chara Skolarikou (November 2007–July 2011) and followed by Argyro Papoulia (April 2016–October 2020).

²⁸ It is worth noting that the Basilica of Hagios Ioannis had been modeled on the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, which was heavily damaged in 1204 and then demolished shortly after the Ottoman conquest to be replaced by the Conqueror's Mosque (Fatih Camii).

²⁹ This discouragement affected Turkey's diverse minority communities. Sağlam's article in this special issue shows how the Pontic Greek dialect (*Romeika*) and its toponyms and certain cultural activities were either abandoned, hidden, or performed in "unpublic, elusive, and discreet" ways in remote villages of the Black Sea region. This was mainly due to the fear of "raising suspicion" in the nationalist, conservative, and discriminatory political environment that was to a great extent shaped by "governmental desire to erase non-Turkish heritage from the landscape."

³⁰ According to a different informant, a civil servant at the Directorate of Historical Buildings and Cultural Assets of the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, the opposition initially protested this restoration (Asrav 2021). It is worth noting that the restoration of Hagios Voukolos / Aya Voukla in 2008 was the very first restoration attempt (even earlier than the Alaçatı example) and was close in date to the eventful patriarchal visit to Bergama discussed in the first section of this paper. It seems that none of the following restorations faced objections.

³¹ The case of Hagios Georgios at Özlüce near Bursa, which was initially restored by the municipality of Nilüfer in 2009 but was then claimed by and turned over to the Provincial Directorate of Religious Foundations in 2013 on the grounds that it used to be a mosque in the years after the Population Exchange, appears similar. The building remained out of use, faced severe damages in 2016, and eventually collapsed in 2020 (*Milliyet* 2016; *Gazete Duvar* 2020).

³² See also İğsız's article in this special issue for a reflection on this symbolic conquest. She explains this in terms of the AKP's reframing itself as "Turkey's hegemonic power" and developing neo-Ottomanism into "an imperialist aspiration to lead Muslims throughout the world." She relates the conversion into a mosque of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia to this notion and emphasizes the conversion's symbolic implications by referring to Erdoğan's response to white supremacist terrorist Tarrent's calls for "reconquest" of Istanbul and the choice of the anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne as the date of the conversion.

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