

Religious Appropriation and Restoration of Empire: Hagia Sophia and Erdogan's Neo-Ottoman Ambitions

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The "Great Conquest Mosque"

It is no small irony that across the globe the edifice and image most widely associated with Turkey, Istanbul, and even perhaps Islam, is a sixth-century Orthodox Christian church—the magisterial Cathedral of Hagia Sophia, or “Holy Wisdom.” Built by some 10,000 workers between 532 and 537, its patron, Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, inaugurated the construction of Hagia Sophia in the imperial capital of Constantinople with the proclamation that the Church of the Holy Wisdom would be a cathedral like “one that has never existed since Adam’s time, and one that will never exist again.”¹

Remarkably, Justinian’s boastful claims proved to be as accurate as they were visionary. For virtually a millennium, Hagia Sophia was Christendom’s largest, most revered and awe-inspiring church. Hagia Sophia was the unrivalled ecclesial hearth of the Christian Church before the Western schism, the physical epicenter of the Orthodox Christian world, and the wondrous, breathtaking symbol of Byzantine grandeur and purpose. Indeed, for both contemporaries and historians, Hagia Sophia constituted the greatest achievement of late ancient and medieval architecture, an enduring masterpiece that embodied Byzantine civilization’s quintessential, sophisticated respect and quest for symphony and balance between the ethereal and the physical, majesty and beauty, place and boundlessness, science and mystery, creative genius and humility.² Despite Hagia Sophia’s present diminished and abused condition, it is not difficult for even today’s visitor to appreciate the description found in a famous Russian ambassadorial report sent from Constantinople in 987 to Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, of what one encountered upon entering the great cathedral: “We did not know where we were, on heaven or on earth.”³

When Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, virtually all of the city's surviving cathedrals and churches were—after being desecrated and thoroughly plundered—forcibly seized and turned over to the Turks' religious establishment to be converted to mosques and used as Muslim properties. The conquering sultan, Mehmet II, personally oversaw the conversion of Hagia Sophia. Crosses were demolished and exchanged for crescents, altars and bells were destroyed, icons were burned or hacked to pieces, mosaics and frescoes depicting Christian imagery were plastered over, and most of the cathedral's priests were killed or enslaved.⁴ In time, four colossal minarets were erected to surround Hagia Sophia, producing the iconic image that has come to be globally associated with Ottoman Constantinople and Turkish Istanbul.

Mehmet took great pride in his belief that he had fulfilled Mohammed's prophecy articulated in the *Hadith*, "Verily you shall conquer Constantinople. What a wonderful leader he will be, and what a wonderful army will that army be!" Thereafter, Constantinople and Hagia Sophia represented for the Ottoman Turks much more than merely their empire's capital and preeminent mosque, respectively. The conquest of Christianity's greatest city and church was understood by Mehmet and his successors as divine proof of the leading role in the Muslim world to which the Ottoman Empire was entitled, a belief also manifested by the Turks' subsequent relocation of the Islamic Caliphate to Constantinople.⁵

Indeed, the purpose for the construction of the massive minarets that now tower over Hagia Sophia was to project to the world Islam's triumph over Christendom's greatest empire, city, and church. The capture of Hagia Sophia confirmed and symbolized in the Ottomans' imagination their belief in the superiority of their state and faith over all other nations and all religions, a putative affirmation of their providential role and destiny in history.⁶ Hence, the Ottoman Turks formally dedicated their greatest, most celebrated single piece of loot—Hagia Sophia—as Great Fatih Mosque, or "Great Conquest Mosque."

Despite the Turks' conviction that their mastery over the great, coveted prizes of Constantinople and Hagia Sophia signaled their inevitable conquest of the remainder of Christian Europe, the Ottoman state showed signs of weakness by the sixteenth century and by the seventeenth century began a long, miserable decline and recession that culminated in the complete dissolution of their empire in the early twentieth century. Led by the Turkish nationalist, Mustafa Kemal, the Republic of Turkey, which emerged in the early 1920s to succeed the Ottoman Empire and to abolish the Caliphate, was premised on secularism. Kemal's modern Turkey was a rejection of the Islamic theocratic system that he and his modernizing nationalists held responsible for the collapse of the old Ottoman order.⁷

Kemalist Turkey did not, however, decouple Islam from its nation-building project. The Kemalist state's efforts to create a homogeneous Turkish society included assigning a prominent role to Islam as a defining cultural feature of Turkish national identity, or "Turkishness." In short, official "secularism" involved the use of Islam by the state as an instrument to impose conformity to a uniform model of "Turkishness."⁸

The Unity of Church and State

In modern Turkey, secularism has produced neither freedom for all faiths nor separation of church and state.⁹ Instead, Turkish secularism has meant state control of religion through official policies carried out by the Diyanet (the State Directorate of Religious Affairs), the governmental institution responsible for centralizing, regulating, and directing Islam in Turkish society.¹⁰ Likewise, the Kemalists' non-Western, non-democratic version of secularism has also meant that Turkey's non-Islamic religions and communities, inasmuch as they are regarded as impediments to universal "Turkishness," are to be viewed with suspicion, treated with hostility, and subjected to a policy of steady, systematic persecution, with the goal being their final elimination.¹¹ Indeed, following the Turkish nationalists' genocide and population expulsions of Christian Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks between 1914 and 1923, the Kemalist republic inaugurated the *Eritme Programmi* (Dissolution Program), which has been continued by every successive Turkish government and that aims to ethnically cleanse all remaining non-Muslim communities in Turkey.¹² The Turkish state's implementation of this policy has included the targeted use of violence, intimidation, punitive taxation, property expropriation, and countless forms of discrimination and persecution, all intended to create unbearable conditions for Christians and Jews in order to produce their exodus from Turkey.¹³

The Turkish state's claims purporting its embrace of Western democratic and secular principles have not at any time aligned with Turkey's actual record of practice. Recognizing the need to produce the appearance of a secular, democratic state and society when neither existed meant that secular symbols and symbolism became very important to the Kemalist nation-building project. It was, consequently, neither a surprise nor a move that produced any resistance when Mustafa Kemal, presiding over Turkey's one-party "secular democracy," closed Hagia Sophia to Muslim worship in 1931 and reopened the historic structure as a museum in 1935. Just as Sultan Mehmet in the fifteenth century appreciated the symbolism of converting Hagia Sophia, the grandest of Christian cathedrals, to an Ottoman mosque for the furtherance of his imperial ambitions, President Kemal in the 1930s understood the symbolic value of transforming Hagia Sophia from a mosque—the quintessential iconographic symbol of

the Ottoman Islamic past—to a Turkish museum for the advancement of his modern secular nation-building project at home and for the promotion of his country's Westernizing image abroad.

Until the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) to political prominence in Turkey, the Kemalist system, even when repeatedly required to rely on military force to maintain the existing order, had remained unchallenged within the country's mainstream political establishment. This changed with the stunning landslide election victory that swept Erdogan and the AKP into power in 2002, producing enormous excitement and hope inside Turkey and abroad for genuine democratization, religious freedom, pluralism, and progressive reform.¹⁴

This initial optimism has disappeared as Erdogan and the AKP have expanded and cemented their dominance over Turkey. The old nationalist, officially secular authoritarianism that defined Kemalist republican Turkey has been systematically undermined and transformed under Erdogan. However, militant Kemalism has not been replaced by genuine democracy and pluralism. Instead, it has been superseded by a new nationalist Islamist authoritarianism that cautiously continues to pay homage to Kemal while it increasingly, and more and more openly, draws its greatest inspiration and aims from an idealized version of the Ottoman imperial past.¹⁵

Restoring Imperial Greatness Through Islamism

President Erdogan's neo-Ottoman vision—encapsulated in the phrase, "Turkey: From Sarajevo to Baghdad," repeatedly invoked by his chief advisor from 2003 to 2009, minister of foreign affairs from 2009 to 2014, and prime minister from 2014 to 2016, Ahmet Davutoglu, an academic and politician who is widely regarded as the ideological architect of the AKP's foreign policy grand strategy—has as its goal Turkey's return to its former imperial stature as a world power, a project Erdogan himself is leading.¹⁶ Unlike Kemal and his fellow secular nationalists who saw the Ottomans' Islamic theocratic system as the root of their empire's inability to survive in the modern world, Erdogan regards the Turks' drift away from their Islamist foundations and principles as the cause of the empire's decline and dissolution. Consequently, although Islam under the AKP has remained an instrument to be utilized by the state, it is increasingly less restrained by the conventions of the once prevailing Kemalist secular order.¹⁷ Under Erdogan, Islam is steadily becoming the core of a reimagined Turkish identity, historical consciousness, and driver for state policy and purpose.¹⁸ According to the neo-Ottoman agenda, Islam, through its expanding public role, will be more and more revered and privileged by the AKP state, while it will also

be harnessed to help restore Turkey to its rightful place as a global force and as the leading state within the Islamic world.¹⁹

Like Sultan Mehmet and President Kemal, Erdogan, who many observers describe as a president who acts like a sultan, recognizes the importance of symbols and symbolism for forging Turkey's Ottoman revival. Much like Mehmet who used Hagia Sophia to showcase the superiority of Islam and the Ottoman Empire, or Kemal who employed Hagia Sophia to demonstrate the secularization and modernization of republican Turkey, Erdogan has steadily exploited Hagia Sophia to promote neo-Ottomanism and to mark the state's public embrace of Islam and, through Islam, the promise of a return to Turkish greatness and power.²⁰ In this sense, the gradual re-Islamization of Hagia Sophia should be understood as a deliberate signal by Erdogan to the masses of his Islamist supporters of his commitment to realize a future in which Turkey, with Islam at the center of its public life, reigns supreme once more as a regional hegemon, a world power, and the leader of the Muslim community of nations.

Given Turkey's neo-Ottoman orientation and its earlier provocations against the status of Hagia Sophia as a museum, the only thing surprising about the Erdogan government's recent use of the historic Christian structure for Muslim religious purposes was that it produced any surprise at all. The AKP's consolidation of political power and its steady transition to Islamist authoritarianism has been accompanied by a corresponding campaign of incremental measures and steps aimed at the eventual conversion of Hagia Sophia from a museum to a mosque. In November 2013, Turkey's deputy prime minister and AKP co-founder, Bulent Arinc, informed reporters that Hagia Sophia would be used again as a mosque, opining that "We currently stand next to Hagia Sophia Mosque...we are looking at a sad Hagia Sophia, but hopefully we will see it smiling again soon."²¹ In 2014, the Turkish parliament produced a trial legislative motion calling for the conversion of Hagia Sophia to a mosque, and held exploratory discussions on how to change the status of the structure in the future.²² In response, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom condemned the Turkish parliament's culturally insensitive encroachment on Hagia Sophia, or what some observers have characterized as a creeping conversion.²³ Simultaneously, United Nations officials expressed their disapproval over statements made by Turkish officials that threatened the integrity of Hagia Sophia's status as a UNESCO World Heritage site museum.²⁴

Unconcerned with international disapproval, Erdogan's government continued its provocative actions towards Hagia Sophia. This new phase of operations also witnessed a series of deliberate measures intended to insult and humiliate Turkey's Greek Orthodox Christians. On April 11, 2015, one day before Orthodox Easter Sunday, coinciding that year with the date believed by many to be Mohammed's birthday, and

marking the opening of a new exhibit, "Love of the Prophet," a *Quran* recitation, sanctioned by the Diyanet, took place inside Hagia Sophia, for the first time in nearly 85 years.²⁵ In late October 2016, the Turkish authorities appointed a permanent imam to Hagia Sophia, and disclosed to the public that Muslim prayers would be heard from all four conquest minarets five times a day, every day thereafter on a permanent basis.²⁶ The Diyanet's announcement of the imam's appointment was made just as Turkey's Orthodox Christians prepared to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the enthronement of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I. News of the imam's appointment electrified AKP supporters and Erdogan's admirers. Pinar Tremblay, political scientist and columnist for *Al-Monitor's* "Turkey Pulse," reported "political commentator Savci Sayan, who is known for his adoration of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, tweeted, 'I am dreaming of the president leading the Friday prayer at Hagia Sophia.' Another citizen tweeted, 'Now there is an imam for Hagia Sophia. The next order of business should be to open Hagia Sophia for believers. The hashtag 'Open Hagia Sophia and let the world be green with envy' also tweeted that Istanbul cannot be free as long as Hagia Sophia remains a museum."²⁷

The AKP's actions enjoy widespread popular support in Turkey. Every May 29, increasingly extravagant and frenzied celebrations of the conquest of Constantinople, as well as endless barrages of television programs aimed at children and adults alike, depict Greek Christians as treacherous and evil, provoking Turkish nationalist and self-righteous expressions of entitlement to Hagia Sophia as a mosque.²⁸ This sort of carefully stoked public "conquest mania" produced a mass rally of Muslim activists who gathered outside Hagia Sophia on May 29, 2016, to demand the building be converted to a mosque.²⁹ A crucial step in that direction was taken on June 1, 2016, when the Diyanet announced that state television would broadcast a program, highlighted by readings from the *Quran*, from Hagia Sophia every day during the month of Ramadan. The first guest of the television program was Mehmet Gormez, the president of the State Directorate of Religious Affairs, who discussed the spectacular dome crowning Hagia Sophia and, with considerable imagination and invention, explained to a nation-wide audience of tens of millions the dome's importance in Islamic history. Gormez's televised appearance in Hagia Sophia was aired on July 2, 2016, and featured a broadcast, recorded the previous day, of the first Muslim call to prayer that had taken place inside Hagia Sophia since 1931.³⁰

Despite the annual revelries in May that celebrate the 1453 Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and the August and September commemorations that glorify the 1922 Turkish victory against Greece and the Entente Powers, as well as Turkey's successful and unpunished genocidal erasure of Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Christians from Asia Minor, Turkish nationalists claim victim status.³¹ Perhaps not surprisingly Hagia

Sophia has come to symbolize Turkey's victimhood narrative. In the view of Turkish nationalists, especially Islamist nationalists, the Ottoman Empire was a veritable paradise destroyed by Western imperialists and their Christian toadies within the empire. Furthermore, because of the post-Ottoman Kemalist state's eagerness to be accepted into the modern Western community of nations, it was supposedly cowed or coaxed by Turkey's erstwhile European enemies into transforming Hagia Sophia into a museum.

This nationalist myth concludes with the assertion that this mendacious maneuver by the Western Great Powers aimed to ensure Turkey's subservience to the Christian West by denying the Turkish people the freedom to exercise their will over the most visible symbol and reminder of Turkish greatness and triumph: the Great Fatih, the "Great Conquest," Mosque. This popular narrative has most recently been expanded to incorporate a newly manufactured deception claiming Kemal never actually ordered the conversion of Hagia Sophia from a mosque to a museum and that the document and Kemal's signature appearing therein initiating this action are forgeries, a proposition Erdogan himself has publicly applauded.³²

In coordination with the AKP, Salih Turhan, the head of the ultranationalist Anatolian Youth Association, which has collected over 15 million signatures in support of the campaign to convert Hagia Sophia to a mosque, summarizes this thinking: "Keeping Hagia Sophia closed is an insult to our Muslim population...it symbolizes our ill-treatment by the West."³³ Voicing an alternative, even if declining, Turkish perspective, in June 2016, a Turkish scholar, who, fearing retribution from nationalist quarters, asked to remain anonymous, observed in an interview with *Al-Monitor* that, "the matter of Hagia Sophia has been manipulated shamelessly in the last decade. They [Erdogan and the AKP] are feeding the dream of an Ottoman revival...for pious Muslims everywhere, it is really sad to watch this opportunistic propaganda."³⁴

Widespread popular acceptance of these inventive victimhood narratives has contributed to a commonly held nationalist view that Turkey's actual sovereignty is suppressed by the Western powers and that Turkey's freedom, *ipso facto*, cannot be realized until Hagia Sophia is converted once more to a mosque.³⁵ According to this perspective, only then can Turkey become truly independent and fulfill its destiny, meaning only then can Turkey regain both the glorious Ottoman inheritance and neo-Ottoman future to which it is entitled and has been denied by the West. Hence, in Turkish society, Hagia Sophia has become an uncompromising symbol, an icon and tool to mobilize Turkish nationalism and legitimize neo-Ottomanism. Proceeding from this reality, the conversion of Hagia Sophia is the logical next step in the inexorable re-Islamization of Turkey, and the essential precondition for achieving the country's rightful destiny.³⁶ Invoking the glorification and inseparable nature of Islam, conquest,

and Turkey's national providence, Erdogan, before a huge Istanbul rally in 2014 on the anniversary of the fall of Constantinople, proclaimed, "conquest means the removal of shackles on people's hearts."³⁷ As Salih Turhan has asserted, "Hagia Sophia is a symbol for the Islamic world and the symbol of Istanbul's conquest...without it, the conquest is incomplete."³⁸ Of course, predicating Turkey's national identity, foreign policy, and worldview on the glorification of war, conquest, and expropriation, as well as notions of ethnic supremacy, religious superiority, and divine destiny is no more likely to produce positive outcomes for Turkey and its neighbors in the future than it did in the past.

Continuing this escalating trend, Ramadan, in June 2017, was marked by a tangible increase in the aggressive use of Hagia Sophia by Turkish officials for Muslim religious and state purposes. Abiding by the well-established practice of Western appeasement towards Turkey, most European governments and Christian religious establishments remained silent. Only Greece's Foreign Ministry, the United States Department of State, and UNESCO issued serious rebukes against Ankara for its provocative actions.³⁹ Conversely, Germany, the only EU state with any potential influence in Turkey, appeased Erdogan and Ankara by expressing its support for the view that the status of Hagia Sophia is entirely a domestic matter to be determined exclusively by the Turkish state authorities—a somewhat awkward position given Germany's own peculiar history of state interest and intervention in the affairs of select religious communities, their properties, and their patrimony.

Notwithstanding, no international reaction followed the decision made by Turkey's highest court, the country's Constitutional Court, on September 13, 2018, to reject a private application to convert Hagia Sophia to a mosque. The lack of response was due to the fact that the court's decision was not determined on the basis of any substantive legal or constitutional arguments to allow or prohibit a change in the status and use of Hagia Sophia, but on a procedural technicality that rendered the request inadmissible. In short, the Constitutional Court's action did nothing to stop the current re-Islamization of Hagia Sophia, while at the same time it left the door open to the possible conversion of the building in the future.⁴⁰

The re-Islamization of Hagia Sophia, like the re-Islamization of Turkish society and state, does not merely represent a simple partisan contest between secularists and Islamists for the control of Turkey. Likewise, the plight of Hagia Sophia constitutes more than yet another example of Turkish nationalist contempt for non-Muslims and their history, a perennial feature of Turkish rule, whether secular or religious. Instead, the importance and meaning of the current battle for Hagia Sophia can be fully understood only if one recognizes what the Great Fatih Mosque symbolically embodies for Turkish Islamist nationalists: the most powerful, visible reminder of Ottoman

Turkey's might and glory; a rallying standard for a return to that former greatness; and a national icon to help forge neo-Ottomanism and to inspire Turkish society as its government moves forward to fulfill the Turks' ambitions and destiny in Europe, the Middle East, and the world. In that sense, the Turkish state's exploitation and use of Hagia Sophia stands as a bellwether, one the international community should not continue to ignore.

¹ This exclamation, like so many other pronouncements attributed to Justinian on the occasion of both the inauguration and blessing of Hagia Sophia, is most probably apocryphal in nature. An often cited account states that Justinian, at the moment of Hagia Sophia's consecration, was so overwhelmed by his achievement that he proclaimed, "Glory be to God Who considered me worthy of this task! O Solomon, I have outdone thee." See John W. Baker, *Justinian and the Late Roman Empire* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 182-183.

² For a brilliant study that examines the Orthodox Christian aesthetic principles, spiritual outlook, and theology expressed through the design, architecture, and art of Hagia Sophia, see Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017). A rigorous and diverse collection of essays that explore, through the interconnectedness of art and religion, the essential unifying role of Orthodoxy in Byzantium, and offer contextualization of Hagia Sophia as religious, cultural, and historical Christian patrimony, is to be found in Linda Safran, ed., *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). Of additional interest is Elizabeth Jeffreys, ed., *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization: In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³ The foremost authoritative scholarship on a critical phase of the rich and complex cultural and ecclesiastical relationship between Byzantium and early Russia remains John Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzanto-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For two magisterial works that discuss the civilizational diffusion of Byzantium throughout Eastern Europe, consult the following two works by Dimitri Obolensky: *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971); and *Byzantium and the Slavs* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994).

⁴ The classic account of the Ottoman capture and devastation of Constantinople and its people, as well as the Turks' desecration of Hagia Sophia, is found in Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

⁵ Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 208-210. The Turks' belief that they had replaced the Arabs in fulfilling Allah's intention to spread Islam through holy war and conquest was crystalized into a formal historiographical dogma by the highly influential seventeenth-century Ottoman mufti, Vani Mehmed Efendi. The religious confidant and court preacher of the

Ottoman sultan, Mehmed IV, Vani Mehmed Efendi authored an important *Qur'anic* commentary in 1679-1680, which established the Ottoman historiographical rationale for Turkish primacy and leadership in the Muslim world.

⁶ Ekrem Bugra Ekinçi, "A Church, a Mosque and Finally a Museum: The Nearly 1,500-Year-Old Story of the Hagia Sophia," <https://www.dailysabah.com/feature/2015/05/23-a-church-a-mosque-and-finally-a-museum-the-nearly-1500-year-old-story-of-the-hagia-sophia> (May 22, 2015). For a fascinating study that explores the Turks' imagined narrative that world civilization and the progress of humanity was dependent on, and set into motion by, the Ottomans' conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and how that narrative has been both reflected and constructed through the evolution of the commemorations of May 29, see Gavin D. Brockett, "When Ottomans Became Turks: Commemorating the Conquest of Constantinople and Its Contribution to World History," *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (April 2014): 399-433.

⁷ For the most influential and historically significant study of its kind—widely revered among Kemalist scholars as an intellectually sacrosanct work—that also played a crucial role in helping to build the postwar West's distorted narrative about modernity, democratization, and secularism in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic, see Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). This renowned work has been republished several times since it first appeared in 1961, with each new edition reflecting the author's successive efforts to adjust or expand the text in order to buttress the Kemalist narrative in response to changing conditions in and outside Turkey.

⁸ Stephen Vertigans, *Islamic Roots and Resurgence in Turkey: Understanding and Explaining the Muslim Resurgence* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 42-45. Many scholars who fail to recognize the ideological and historical fact that the Kemalist brand of secularism does not conform to dominant Western norms of secularism—predicated upon actual separation of church and state—have either ignored or distorted the crucial and inseparable ties between Islam and the state in Turkey, thereby contributing to the popular, uncritical labeling and discourse of Turkey as a genuinely secular state. See the chapter, "Islam and the Nation," in Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 24-53.

⁹ For a sophisticated, synoptic analysis of the historic Kemalist secular dogmatic ideology, the new Islamist model—which officially claimed to advance pluralism and democracy, promoted by Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party—and the consequences and implications, respectively, of both for the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey, see Elizabeth H. Prodromou, "Turkey Between Secularism and Fundamentalism?: The 'Muslimhood Model' and the Greek Orthodox Minority," *The Brandywine Review of Faith & International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2005): 11-22.

¹⁰ For an informative book-length study of the Diyanet, which is, unfortunately, impaired by an interpretive framework that depicts the State Directorate of Religious Affairs as largely an anodyne institutional mediator caught between the "Islamic traditions of the Turkish population" and an officially secular state, see Emir Kaya, *Secularism and State Religion in Modern Turkey: Law, Policy-Making and the Diyanet* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2018).

¹¹ See Rifat N. Bali, "The Politics of Turkification During the Single Party Period," in Hans-Lukas Kieser, ed., *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2013), 43-49. An inquiry into Turkish society's and the Turkish state's intense hostility towards Christians is found in Esra Ozyurek, "Christian and Turkish: Secularist Fears of a Converted Nation," in Berna Turam, ed., *Secular State and Religious Society: Two Forces in Play in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 94-119.

¹² For two local community case studies that examine this policy, as well as persecution of minorities in Turkey more generally, see Uzay Bulut, "Ethnic Cleansing of Jews in Turkey: How a Population Dropped to Two," <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4937/turkey/ethnic-cleansing-jews> (December 15, 2014); and Alexi Alexandris, "Imbros and Tenedos: A Study in Turkish Attitudes Toward Two Ethnic Greek Island Communities Since 1923," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 7, no. 1 (1980): 5-31. A detailed analysis of Turkey's instrumentalization of its own minorities for use in its foreign policy strategy can be found in Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations, 1918-1974* (Athens: Center for Asia Minor Studies, 1983).

¹³ For the most thoroughly researched and expansive study of the Dissolution Program, focusing on the most notorious single large-scale, state-planned action undertaken by the *Eritme Programmi*, see Speros Vryonis, *The Mechanism of Catastrophe: The Turkish Pogrom of September 6-7, 1955, and the Destruction of the Greek Community of Istanbul* (New York: Greekworks.Com, Inc., 2005).

¹⁴ Prodromou, 16-18. On the rise of political Islam and the electoral success of the Justice and Development Party, see Henri J. Barkey and Yasemin Congar, "Deciphering Turkey's Elections: The Making of a Revolution," *World Policy Journal* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 63-73; Kayhan Delibas, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey: Urban Poverty, Grassroots Activism and Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd.; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); R. Quinn Meham, "From the Ashes of Virtue, a Promise of Light: The Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2004): 339-358; and Angel Rabasa and F. Stephen Larabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008).

¹⁵ For a useful study of how the steadily coalescing currents of state-directed neo-Ottomanism and popular culture Ottomania have appropriated and distorted historical memory and record in order to rehabilitate and glorify the Ottoman past, see Murat Ergin and Yagmur Karakaya, "Between neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania: Navigating State-Led and Popular Cultural Representations of the Past," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 56 (May 2017): 33-59.

¹⁶ For background information on Davutoglu and an early interpretation of his foreign policy schema, see James Traub, "Turkey's Rules," <https://nytimes.com/2011/01/23/magazine/23davutoglu-t.html> (January 20, 2011). For more recent and more scholarly studies, see Bulent Aras, "Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 4 (2014): 404-418; Zeynep Arkan, "Enabling 'Ambitious Activism': Davutoglu's Vision of a New Foreign Policy Identity for Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 17, no. 3 (2016): 381-405; and Matthew S. Cohen, "Ahmet Davutoglu's Academic and Professional Articles: Understanding the World View of Turkey's Former Prime Minister,"

Turkish Studies 17, no. 4 (2016): 527-543. Erdogan's neo-Ottoman vision for the Balkans and the Middle East is incompatible with international law, including respect for existing borders and the sovereignty of other states. Ankara's region-wide revisionism directs its most active, aggressive hostility towards Greece, whose territorial integrity is often challenged and even threatened with war by Turkey's president and countless officials in his government. Erdogan's witticism that "the legal borders are different from the borders of the heart" shows unambiguously that Turkey's neo-Ottoman ambitions imply territorial expansionism. See Nicos Panayiotides, "Erdogan's Re-Election and His Neo-Ottoman Foreign Policy," <http://www.atimes/erdogans-re-election-and-his-neo-ottoman-foreign-policy/> (July 2, 2018). For more information on Erdogan's neo-Ottoman territorial vision for a future, expanded Turkey, see Burak Bekdil, "Erdogan's Neo-Ottoman Plans," <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/9254/erdogan-irredentism> (November 3, 2016); Uzey Bulut, "Why Turkey Wants to Invade the Greek Islands," <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/11954/turkey-threats-greek-islands> (February 28, 2018); Nick Danforth, "Turkey's New Maps Are Reclaiming the Ottoman Empire," <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/23/turkeys-religious-nationalists-want-ottoman-borders-iraq-erdogan/> (October 23, 2016); and Robert Kaplan and Reva Bhalla, "Turkey's Geographical Ambitions," *Stratfor* (August 12, 2014): 1-4. For a useful distillation of Erdogan's plans to establish Turkish domination in the Middle East and beyond — championed at the 2012 Fourth General Congress of the AKP under the slogan, "A Great Nation, A Great Power" — see Hillel Fradkin and Lewis Libby, "Erdogan's Grand Vision: Rise and Decline," *World Affairs* 175, no. 6 (March/April 2013): 41-50.

¹⁷ See Menderes Cinar, "The Justice and Development Party and the Kemalist Establishment," in Umit Cizre, ed., *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 109-131.

¹⁸ See M. Hakan Yavuz, "Erdogan's Ottomania," <http://bostonreview.net/politics/m-hakan-yavuz-erdogan-ottomanophilia> (August 8, 2018).

¹⁹ Particularly useful in understanding the multiple dimensions of Erdogan's foreign policy objectives and political uses is the section entitled "Use of Foreign Policy for an Agenda of Domestic Transformation" found in Burhanettin Duran, "The Justice and Development Party's 'New Politics': Steering Toward Conservative Democracy, A Revised Islamic Agenda or Management of New Crises," in Cizre, 80-106.

²⁰ For an informative discussion of the how both Kemalists and Islamists have used Hagia Sophia as a potent symbol to advance their own respective brands of Turkish nationalism, set against the backdrop of the Turkish state's overall neglect of the building's physical maintenance and preservation needs, see Fergus M. Bordewich, "Fading Glory: A Monumental Struggle to Preserve Hagia Sophia," *Smithsonian Magazine* 39, no. 9 (December 2008): 54-64.

²¹ Jacob Resneck, "Turkish Leaders Want to Convert the Hagia Sophia Back into a Mosque," *The Washington Post* (December 4, 2013). See also Dogan News Agency, "Deputy PM Expresses 'Hope' to see Hagia Sophia as Mosque," <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-deputy-pm-expresses-hope-to-see-hagia-sophia-as-mosque-57998> (November 16, 2013).

²² Nat da Polis, "Motion to Transform Hagia Sophia Into a Mosque: Conquest of Constantinople a National Holiday and the Rise of Erdogan," <http://www.Asianews.it/news-en/Motion-to-transform-Hagia-Sophia...Constantinople-a-national-holiday-and-the-rise-of-Erdogan-30984.html> (May 5, 2014).

²³ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "Turkey: Statement on Hagia Sophia" (Washington, D.C.: USCIRF Press Release, May 21, 2014). The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), established by unanimous vote in both Houses of the US Congress in 1998, is an independent, bipartisan body, which monitors the universal rights to religious freedom outside the United States. The USCIRF has repeatedly noted in its official annual reports that the Turkish government engages in systematic and egregious limitations on the freedom of religion or belief that affect all religious communities in Turkey, and particularly threaten the country's non-Muslim religious minorities. See, for example, USCIRF, *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: March 2012 (Covering April 1, 2011-February 29, 2012)* (Washington, D.C.: US Commission on International Religious Freedom, April 2012), 199-227. For more information, see Thanos Davelis, "Turkey's 'Creeping Conversion' of Hagia Sophia," <https://medium.com/@HellenicLeaders/turkeys-creeping-conversion-of-hagia-sophis-f0b84a99b082> (June 23, 2017); and Robert Jones, "Turkey Converts Hagia Sophia to Mosque," <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/9292/hagia-sophia-mosque> (November 9, 2016).

²⁴ Hagia Sophia was inscribed to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985. For a meticulous study that examines the disjuncture between managing Hagia Sophia as both a museum and as a religious space, and the deficiencies inherent in the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism's—the government body that oversees the structure—current methods for administering the building as a living heritage site, see Eve Avdoulos, "Istanbul's Hagia Sophia: Challenges of Managing Sacred Places," in Alicia Castillo Mena, ed., *Second International Conference on best Practices in World Heritage: People and Communities* (Madrid: Complutence University of Madrid, 2015), 180-203.

²⁵ See "Pope's Remarks to Accelerate Hagia Sophia's Conversion into Mosque," <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/popes-remarks-to-accelerate-hagia-sophias-conversion-into-mosque-81128> (April 16, 2015), which identifies the date of the recitation as April 10 in lieu of April 11.

²⁶ See "Turkey Appoints Imam for Hagia Sophia," <https://www.worldbulletin.net/art-culture/turkey-appoints-imam-for-hagia-sophia-h178946.html> (October 21, 2016).

²⁷ In the same report, Tremblay wrote, "Turkish media outlets showed a great deal of interest in the new imam. He became a celebrity overnight as details about him spread, including his interest in kickboxing and karate and his love of music. Islamist news outlets did not hesitate to lead their newscasts with a photo of the imam wearing boxing gloves. Dini Haberler's caption read, 'Against the Christian Crusaders, we now have a boxing imam.'" For extended quotes and additional information, see Pinar Tremblay, "Is New Imam Answered Prayer or Impending Doom for Hagia Sophia?" <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/10/turkey-greece-hagia-sophia-gets-its-own-imam.print.html> (October 28, 2016). Erdogan undertook this

provocative action against Hagia Sophia at the same time that he threatened Greece's territorial integrity by publicly attacking the 1923 Lausanne Treaty that defined the borders between Greece and Turkey. For the immediate regional security implications of Erdogan's use of Hagia Sophia for his policy of neo-Ottoman strongman posturing and territorial revisionism, see "Hagia Sophia gets Permanent Imam as Tensions Rise in Aegean," <http://www.ekathimerini.com/213059/article/ekathimerini/news/haghia-sophia-gets-permanent-imam-as-tensions-rise-in-aegean> (October 22, 2016).

²⁸ On the annual conquest mania celebrations, as well an interesting, concise examination of the nearly universal view in Turkish society of the bloody capture of Constantinople in 1453 as a virtuous act of moral good, see Constantine Tzanos, "The Conquest of Constantinople, Hagia Sofia and Turkey-EU," https://huffingtonpost.com/constantine-tzanos/the-conquest-of-constantinople_b_5500136.html (June 25, 2014; updated August 25, 2014).

²⁹ Although such conquest gatherings had taken place before, the recent large-scale Islamist-driven annual rallies were set into motion in 2014, when, at the end of May of that year, 40,000 people assembled in front of Hagia Sophia in an organized protest calling for the structure to be converted to a mosque. Susan Seligson, "Sacred Wisdom: An Archaeologist Becomes a Guardian of Turkey's Past, and Future," *Bostonia* (Fall 2014): 50-53.

³⁰ See "First Call to Prayer Inside Istanbul's Hagia Sophia in 85 Years," <http://hurriyetdailynews.com/first-call-to-prayer-inside-istanbuls-hagia-sophia-in-85-years-101161> (July 2, 2016). The 2016 media event has since become a regular television program, showcasing a rotating cast of Turkish academics and Muslim religious scholars whose efforts have focused on promoting an Islamist narrative of Hagia Sophia and its history. See Umar Farooq, "Voices Grow Louder in Turkey to Convert Hagia Sophia from a Museum Back to a Mosque," *Los Angeles Times* (June 24, 2017).

³¹ One of the most influential architects and exponents of the Turkish victimhood myth is the notorious Armenian Genocide denier, Justin McCarthy. The views posited in his many publications on the Ottoman Empire and Turkey are indistinguishable from, and are completely loyal to, Turkish nationalist propaganda and the Turkish government's official positions on history. For representative examples of the Turkish historical victimhood narrative, see the following books by McCarthy: *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995); *The Turk in America: Creation of an Enduring Prejudice* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2010); *The Ottoman Turks: An Introductory History to 1923* (London; New York: Longman, 2013); *Turks and Armenians: A Manual on the Armenian Question* (co-authored with Carolyn McCarthy) (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Education, Assembly of Turkish American Associations, 1989). In 2006, the International Association of Genocide Scholars formally admonished McCarthy, stating that his "books engage in severely selective scholarship that grossly distorts history...we believe it is important to note that in serving the Turkish government, Mr. McCarthy and others like him bolster a government with a long-standing history of abusing minorities, intellectuals, and the principle of free expression." For the full text, see International Association of Genocide Scholars, "An Open Letter Concerning Historians Who Deny the Armenian Genocide" (October 1, 2006).

³² The leading academic authority of this farcical thesis is the prominent archivist, scholar, and virulent Armenian Genocide denier, Yusuf Halacoglu, a former University of Marmara professor of history, Chairman of the Turkish Historical Society from 1993 to 2008, and, since 2011, a member of Turkey's parliament, belonging to the ultranationalist Pan-Turkism "Good Party." See Kaya Genc, "Divine Wisdom," *The Paris Review (The Daily)*, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/01/08/divine-wisdom> (January 8, 2014); and "Turkey's Nationalist Party Seeks Prayers in the Hagia Sophia," <http://hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-nationalist-party-seeks-prayers-in-the-hagia-sophia-57632> (November 9, 2013).

³³ Ayla Jean Yackley, "Hagia Sofia: Thousands Pray for Istanbul Landmark to Become Mosque," https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/26/hagia-sofia_n_1548019.html (May 26, 2012; updated July 26, 2012).

³⁴ Added excerpts of the interview are found in Pinar Tremblay, "The Battle for Hagia Sophia in Istanbul Escalates," <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/turkey-greece-hagia-sophia-battle-escalates.html> (June 15, 2016).

³⁵ For a concise articulation of this view, see the comments of Turkish historian Mehmet Celik in Thomas Seibert, "Turkey's Government Wants to Convert Hagia Sophia Into a Mosque," <https://www.thedailybeast.com/turkeys-government-wants-to-convert-hagia-sophia-into-a-mosque> (December 15, 2013).

³⁶ See Owen Matthews, "Islamists and Secularists Battle Over Turkey's Hagia Sophia Museum," <https://www.newsweek.com/2015/06/12/battle-over-hagia-sophia-338091.html> (June 2, 2015). Owen notes that Erdogan, invoking the glorification of the Islamic conquest of Constantinople and Hagia Sophia, as well as revealing apparent disregard and contempt for the more than millennium-long highly sophisticated, vibrant culture and civilization of the Christian Byzantine Empire, bellowed before a May 29, 2014, public rally that, "Conquest means the removal of shackles on peoples' hearts. With conquest came civilization."

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Turkey Rejects Greek Criticism of Hagia Sophia Prayers," <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-rejects-greek-criticism-of-hagia-sophia-prayers-114671> (June 23, 2017); "US State Department Calls on Turkey to Preserve Hagia Sophia's Special Significance," <http://orthochristian.com/104633.html>; "US State Department Urges Turkey to Respect Historic Significance of Hagia Sophia," <http://ekathimerini.com/219516/article/ekathimerini/news/us-state-department-urges-turkey-to-respect-significance-of-hagia-sofia> (June 23, 2017).

⁴⁰ The Constitutional Court was responding to an application made by a private organization, the nationalist Turkish Heritage Association, claiming that the current status of Hagia Sophia as a museum is a violation of its Muslim members' freedom of religion and belief. The court did not hear arguments and dismissed the application on the basis of its incompatibility with the procedural requirement that the applicant have cause as "a victim of the events or measures in

question.” See “Demand for Hagia Sophia to be Opened for Prayer ‘Inadmissible,’ Says Top Court,” <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/demand-for-hagia-sophia-to-be-opened-for-prayer-inadmissible-says-top-court-136815> (September 13, 2018).

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