

Discovering and Preserving Byzantine Constantinople: Archaeology and Heritage Policies in Istanbul

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Abstract This paper presents an overview of the archaeology and heritage policies in Istanbul focusing on the physical remains of Byzantine Constantinople. The first part discusses the archaeological excavations conducted in Istanbul over the past century, during which the Byzantine archaeology of Istanbul began to be institutionalised as a scientific field and excavations were systematically recorded. A particular focus is given to the recent and lesser-known excavation projects. In the second part of the paper, the local authorities' approaches towards architectural heritage and conservation practices of the Byzantine monuments and architectural remains in Istanbul are analysed in order to scrutinise the contextualisation of this urban architectural heritage and elucidate how they were viewed in the past century by the various politically diverse Turkish governments.

Keywords Byzantine archaeology. Urban rescue excavations. Architectural heritage. Conservation policies. Byzantine Constantinople.

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1 Introduction

Archaeology has played a critical role in materialising Byzantine Constantinople as a physical place, rather than a historical construct. Starting from the late nineteenth-century, there were large-scale projects, such as the fieldworks at the Hippodrome, the Great Palace, the Mangana, Küçükçekmece, Forum of Theodosius, the Churches of St. Polyeuktos, Myrelaion and Kalenderhane that greatly contributed to our understanding of the city's architectural heritage. Nevertheless, Byzantine archaeology in the proper sense of the term – pertaining to a scientific field that adopts a holistic research agenda exploring the past human life and urban history in Istanbul – is nearly non-existent in the city today. Rescue excavations that took over systematic archaeological fieldwork that aims to explore and document sites in a holistic manner rarely lead to large-scale excavations such as the one at Yenikapı (the former Theodosian harbour). As a consequence, physical evidence on Byzantine Constantinople is largely fragmented, and similarly underrepresented.

With respect to the preservation of surviving Byzantine monuments in Istanbul and the Byzantine-period material evidence that archaeology brought to light, the Turkish government has taken varying approaches over the past century. The governmental efforts to promote Byzantine architectural heritage started with Hagia Sophia during the first decades that followed the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Fethiye Mosque (Pammakaristos Church, Fethiye Museum) and Kariye Mosque (Chora Church, previously Chora Museum) were subsequently chosen for restoration projects. Similarly, the 1950s, a period characterised by the transition from the one party regime to the multiparty system, marked a significant period for Istanbul's Byzantine heritage. First of all, a new institution for the management of cultural heritage was established, triggering further developments in the field of Byzantine studies. In the year 1955, Turkey housed its first international Byzantine studies conference in Istanbul, the first academic event of its kind. As a preparation for this event, a number of restoration campaigns were initiated, standing as another key moment for the restoration of the Byzantine built heritage. In the following decades, to this day, the approach towards the Byzantine heritage differed based on changing political circumstances.

This paper presents an overview of the archaeology and heritage policies in Istanbul focusing on the physical remains of Byzantine Constantinople. The first part discusses, in retrospect, the archaeological evidence from Istanbul, which came to light over the past century when archaeology began to be institutionalised and excavations systematically recorded. Due to the vast amount of evidence, particularly on churches and cisterns, it prioritises to provide a full understanding of the nature of the material evidence that archaeolo-

gy yielded in the last years in the shape of major urban elements. By focusing on the most recent archaeological discoveries that remained restricted to a small community of scholars for various reasons, the paper aims to inform a larger audience concerning the new archaeological discoveries in Istanbul. In the second part of the paper, an analysis of the heritage and conservation approaches is presented in order to scrutinise the contextualisation of Byzantine period remains and elucidate how they were approached and viewed by the state. In doing so, this paper seeks to trigger further scholarly debates on the Byzantine heritage of Istanbul, and how this fundamental architectural heritage of the city should be approached in the future.

2 Byzantine Archaeology in Istanbul Over the Past Century

2.1 Civic Architecture

Rescue excavations conducted in Istanbul so far shed light only to a general understanding of the street network of Byzantine Constantinople. The Mese (Divanyolu Caddesi) has been already known to the scholarly community, serving as the major artery of both the Byzantine and Ottoman capitals.¹ A more specific evidence on the street architecture in Constantinople came to light from the recent fieldwork conducted in the former harbour district in today's Sirkeci, where a well-preserved Late Antique street system was revealed together with its pavement, central drainage system and surrounding blocks of buildings, possibly used as aristocratic residences.²

Additional, yet scanty evidence of portico stylobates came from the east of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (hereafter IAM), the courtyard of St. Sophia, the Great Palace excavations at Sultanahmet, the east of the Hippodrome's sphendone, Vezneciler (metro excavation) and Beyazıt.³ Yet none of these presents sufficient evidence to firmly construct the street network of Constantinople.

Of the monumental public squares that the street network connected to, archaeology presents evidence only on the Constantine and Theodosian Fora.⁴ The archaeological excavations of the Theodo-

¹ On the general street layout, see Mango 1985, 27; Berger 2000; Mundell Mango 2001. In 1967, the Milion's remains were found near the Ottoman water siphon at Sultanahmet. For the report, see Fıratlı, Ergil 1969.

² For the architectural remains found in the 'east shaft' at Sirkeci, see Kızıltan 2015. For the ceramic evidence, see Waksman et al. 2009.

³ The fieldwork in Vezneciler was conducted on the junction of Büyük Reşit Paşa and Vidinli Tevfik Paşa Avenues, see Altuğ 2013, 40.

⁴ For a complete consideration of these squares, see Müller-Wiener 1977; Bauer 1996.

sian Forum was conducted in a larger scale, and yielded a more comprehensive understanding of the architecture of this public square concerning its monumental tripartite arch that defined its eastern end and entrance⁵ and a sigma-shaped structure interpreted as a nymphaeum once located in the current plot of Istanbul University's Central Library, as well as the ecclesiastical topography of its surrounding regions (Fıratlı 1951, 163-78; Naumann 1976, 117-41).⁶

The Hippodrome that has served as a major public monument also in the Ottoman period, was the first Byzantine monument to have been explored in Istanbul. In two major campaigns conducted by Charles Newton in 1855 and by the British Academy represented by Stanley Casson in 1927, the bases of the Masonry Obelisk, the Serpent Column and the Egyptian Obelisk, were revealed along with their secondary function as public fountains (Newton 1865, 27; Bardill 2010). Two further fieldworks undertaken by Theodor Wiegand and Ernest Mamboury in 1932, and later by Rüstem Duyuran and Aziz Ogan in 1950, greatly contributed to the understanding of the Hippodrome's architecture, particularly its perimeters, alignment, and overall design (Mamboury, Wiegand 1934, 39-54; Duyuran 1952; 1953).

Baths have played a key role in civic life both in Byzantine and Ottoman Constantinople. Two of the imperial baths (*thermae*) are known through archaeological work, notably the Baths of Zeukippos (Casson, Rice 1929)⁷ and the one found during the construction of an eastern annex to the IAM (tentatively identified as the Baths of Alexander (Fıratlı 1978; Altuğ 2017, 164-5). Additional evidence on a number of *loutra* and *balnea* has been also revealed in the last decades, such as the one adjacent to the Kalenderhane (Striker, Kuban 1971), Anemas (Dark, Özgümüş 2013, 76-7), Gülhane,⁸ and recently in Eyüp by the IAM, being only some of the baths explored over the last decades. The latter - that has remained unpublished - constitutes one of the most interesting examples for a small-scale local neighbourhood bath, designed as a circular hall furnished with a hypocaust system.

⁵ During the same fieldwork, several other miscellaneous walls were found; many of these were later wiped out for the construction project. Mamboury 1936, 236-40; Casson, Talbot Rice 1929; Duyuran 1958, 71-3.

⁶ Some of the monumental architectural sculptures yielded by the excavations are on display on one side of the avenue, other pieces were gathered at the museum organised at Beyazıt Hamam, and others are in the gardens of the University. About the latter, see <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/410002>.

⁷ For further details, see also: Mamboury 1951; Berger 1982, 109. For further discussion on the Zeuxippus, see Guillard 1966; Berger 1982, 144-59.

⁸ This structure was initially identified as the *hagiasma* or the baptistery of the Hodogon monastery, see Demangel, Mamboury 1939, 81-111. More recently, see Ousterhout 2015.

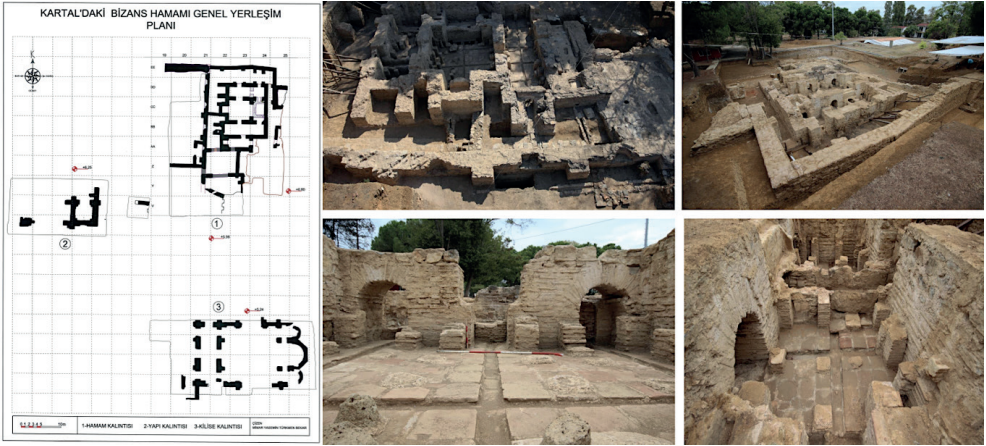


Figure 1 Bath excavated in Kartal, architectural plan and photographs by Sevinç 2014

In Kartal, recent fieldwork conducted in Dragos revealed a massive late antique bath complex [fig. 1] expanding to an area of 588 m² with its wonderfully-preserved apodyterium, frigidarium, tepidarium, caldarium, and sudatorium, expanding our knowledge on the Byzantine-period baths.⁹

The urban features that we only recently have gained insights on are the harbours and anchorage facilities of Byzantine Constantinople. Nearly nothing was known about them as physical spaces prior to the subway constructions. The Theodosian harbour remains one of the most important archaeological projects in Istanbul's history. After a decade of intensive fieldwork in Yenikapı, the excavations yielded evidence on the architecture of this Byzantine harbour, such as fortifications, quaylines and piers in addition to the largest collection of Medieval shipwrecks¹⁰ ever found in the Mediterranean (Gökçay 2010; Kızıltan 2015).¹¹ Of these, the Yenikapı pier [fig. 2], dated to the late eighth century and wonderfully preserved with its timber formwork, presents unique evidence for the field of harbour archaeology, manifesting the continuation of the Roman underwater construction techniques into the Byzantine periods.¹²

⁹ For a detailed analysis along with visuals, see Sevinç 2014. For the previous fieldwork, see Pasinli, Soyhan 1975; 1978; Sevgili 2010.

¹⁰ 37 in number, the Yenikapı shipwrecks reshaped the understanding of medieval shipbuilding technology. For further discussion, see Kocabaş 2013.

¹¹ A general overview of the Yenikapı excavations can be found: Asal, Kızıltan 2014.

¹² For the dendrochronological dating, see Kuniholm et al. 2015. For a recent analysis of the pier, see Ginalis, Ercan Kydonakis 2022.



Figure 2 Yenikapi East Jetty (photograph by Ercan)

Similar harbour structures were also revealed in Sirkeci and Üsküdar, shedding light to the location of the suburban harbour installations (Karagöz 2014; Atik 2007, 58). Various other ports are also being documented in the hinterlands of Constantinople, through a number of survey projects that will hopefully contribute to a bigger picture concerning the maritime network between Constantinople and its hinterlands (Aydingün et al. 2014; Öniz, Kaya, Aydingün 2014).

Structures related to the city's water supply such as cisterns and aqueducts remain the best-understood monuments of Byzantine Constantinople, thanks to the systematic documentation works conducted from the nineteenth century onwards both in Constantinople and its hinterland (Forchheimer, Strzygowski 1893; Crow, Bardill, Bayliss 2008; Altuğ 2017).

On the other hand, archaeological work on the Byzantine-period fortifications both in Constantinople and in its hinterland including Galata¹³ remain quite insufficient. The Golden Gate fieldwork conducted in 1927 by Macridy and Casson (1931) is still one of the most detailed and systematic excavation projects with respect to the defence system of Constantinople, in addition to the fieldwork conducted in the 1990s by Ahunbay and Ahunbay (2000).

Despite the amount of physical evidence on the funerary practices that is being collected from all around Istanbul and its suburbs,

13 On Galata, see Sağlam 2018, 7-171.

there is no single scholarly work that deals with the interpretation of the archaeology of the dead and burial typology.

One of the aspects of urban life in Byzantine Constantinople that we have limited information about is the houses. Archaeological evidence on houses are largely restricted to aristocratic residences of the Late Antique period. As excavations elucidated, a majority of these concentrates in the area west of the Hippodrome, such as Sirkeci, the Palace of Antiochos¹⁴ and the one adjacent to the Binbirdirek.¹⁵ The fieldwork in the Myrelaion complex (Naumann 1966) has also offered evidence on the presence of a monumental *rotonda* lavishly decorated by *opus sectile* pavement and marble reliefs, used as an aristocratic house under the Theodosian dynasty.¹⁶

Concerning the Middle and Late Byzantine period residences, the physical evidence is scarce apart from the tower residences such as the so-called Tower of Isaac II and Mermerkule.¹⁷ One architectural complex that was explored in 1924 during a construction project on Cemal Nadir Street in Sirkeci, was tentatively identified with the Palace of Botaniates (Schreiner 2013). The massive building complex expands on terraces and consists of several interconnected chambers and a bathing facility.¹⁸

The Great Palace as a physical space has come to be known through a series of archaeological projects implemented in the twentieth century. Theodor Wiegand, then a German army officer in Istanbul, launched the first architectural survey in 1918, after the 1912 conflagration that devastated the timber houses in the quarters of Cankurtaran and Ishakpaşa, exposing various Byzantine remains. Paul Lemerle from the French School of Athens conducted the first archaeological excavations in 1936-37 that exposed the remains of a fourth-century colossal wall that he identified with the eastern limit of the Augusteion. These pioneering studies were followed by the archaeological project performed in 1935-38 by Russell and Baxter, and in 1953-54 by Talbot Rice with the support of the Walker Trust, St. Andrews University, in the area between Arasta and the Sultan Ahmed Mosque. These fieldworks explored at a great length the fifth-

¹⁴ Schneider 1943; Duyuran 1952; 1953; Dolunay, Nauman 1964, 19-22. Despite its initial identification as the Palace of Lausus, Bardill (1997, 87-9) demonstrated that the edifice's earlier phase could have been originally part of the Palace of Antiochus.

¹⁵ The exact location is the junction of Peykhane and Klodfarer Streets (Altuğ 2017, 53-4).

¹⁶ Concerning the identification of the domus, see Berger 1997; Striker 1981, 13-16. For a later interpretation of its dating, see Niewöhner 2010, 411-59. On the mosaics dated to the fifth century, see Dalgıç 2008, 148-52.

¹⁷ For an example of Late Byzantine tower residence, see Peschlow 1995.

¹⁸ The IAM archaeologists recently claimed to find further remains of this residential complex: see Baran Çelik, Önder 2022.

century peristyle court, remodelled in the sixth century as an apsed hall with a mosaic floor.

Further clues on the architecture of the Great Palace were revealed during the IAM excavations conducted between 1997 and 2008 on the north of the Old Sultanahmet Prison. On the eastern end of the excavation site, where Mamboury and Wiegand previously located the Magnaura, the fieldwork yielded evidence on the complex's extensive use from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. On the former site of the Old Courthouse, an entrance unit, identified with the Chalke Gate, was also recently uncovered during the IAM excavations (Girgin 2008; Denker 2009).

It is also important to note that the Boukoleon Palace,¹⁹ is currently being excavated by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality after decades of abandonment following the brief fieldwork by Mesguich (Mesguich 1914) and the documentation campaign by Wiegand and Mamboury (Mamboury, Wiegand 1934, 1-20). This fieldwork has so far shed light to the architectural design and chronology of the monument, which will hopefully be shared with a larger audience in the following years upon the completion of the archaeological excavation.

2.2 Ecclesiastical Architecture

Over the last decades, additional evidence has been added to the city's ecclesiastical topography through accidental discoveries made in the course of rescue excavations. For instance, during the construction of an overpass at Saraçhane, one of the most unique monuments of Late Antique Constantinople came to light. Between 1964 and 1969, a splendidly-decorated three-aisled church that was constructed in a massive scale attached to a baptistery/martyrion, identified as the church of St. Polyeuktos commissioned by Anicia Juliana were exposed (Harrison 1989; Mango, Ševčenko 1961; Bardill 2011).

The restoration projects conducted at Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, the Pantokrator, the Pammakaristos, and Vefa Kilise Camii, have similarly provided new findings on these monuments. At Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, the church's crypt built in a cruciform shape with a depth of 1.7 metres was exposed, in addition to its original pavement.²⁰ At the Pantokrator, a 'small chapel' attached to the south church was recorded, along with miscellaneous architectural remains revealed to the north of the katholikon (Özgümüş et al. 2017). At Vefa Kilise

¹⁹ For the Boukoleon's topography, see Mango 1997. For its harbour, see Heher 2016. A brief 'cleaning' work was conducted by Feridun Özgümüş: see Özgümüş 2012.

²⁰ For further details, see <http://mmetingokcay.blogspot.com> and <http://www.envanter.gov.tr>.

Camii, the temenos wall was restored, and excavations revealed two side chapels flanking the katholikon, pointing at a five-aisled floor plan (Mango 1993). Parallel restoration work was carried out at the Pammakaristos, where burial chambers beneath the north aisle were uncovered, in addition to a cistern and the architectural remains of the twelfth-century monastic complex both on the eastern side (Belting, Mango, Mouriki 1978; Çurku, Ülger 2021).

In addition to these key monuments, new discoveries from archaeological excavations and surveys conducted in Istanbul greatly contributed to our knowledge of the ecclesiastical topography of Constantinople. For instance, new architectural units within the previously-documented building complexes were discovered in the recent decades. A complex adjacent to Hagia Eirene, argued to be the Sampson hospital, exposed along the south side of the church constitutes an intriguing find that needs further exploration in this area (Dirimtekin 1962).

As for the hinterlands of Istanbul, archaeological fieldwork is abundant particularly in Rhegion, Damatris, Dragos, Küçükyalı and Aydos. The ongoing excavations near ancient Chalcedon, today's Haydarpaşa have revealed the physical remains of a maritime neighbourhood expanding to the entire area behind the nineteenth century train station. A three-nave building and a rotunda where the church of St. Bassa was previously located by Janin, can be listed among the most significant architectural findings on this neighbourhood.²¹

As this brief overview demonstrates, taking into account the current state of archaeological data collection, Istanbul is above all in dire need of a renewed vision and policy for Byzantine archaeology with established principles concerning recording, preserving and processing data to make the city's urban heritage more visible and accessible to everyone.

Unfortunately, the selective protection of Istanbul's cultural heritage, championing one culture over another, endangers the long-term protection of material heritage, limiting its visibility. Furthermore, careless restoration works offered to construction companies devoid of competent academic supervision, gigantic construction and infrastructure projects, culminate in the overall manipulation of the archaeological and architectural heritage of Istanbul, if not their erasure in perpetuity.

21 Archaeologists recorded a deposit layer dated to the period between the 4th and 7th centuries, with occasional finds from the Middle Byzantine period such as workshops and burials found within a chapel (Asal et al. 2022).

3 Approaching Byzantine Heritage of Istanbul Through Restoration Practices

The level of improvement of Byzantine studies in Turkey is recurrently a subject of discussion in both national and international scholarly circles. This discussion is legitimate to a certain extent, as the interest of the Western travellers and explorers towards the Byzantine heritage of Anatolia goes back to the mid-nineteenth century. The activities of foreign scholars with expertise in Byzantine art, architecture, or history date to the 1930s and 1940s (Kılıç Yıldız 2011, 67). Considering all these scholarly and practical knowledge accumulations, the discussions concentrating upon the level of improvement of Byzantine studies in Turkey sound reasonable.

Despite the emerging status of the scholarly Byzantine studies in Turkey, the attempts to protect, conserve and repair as well as excavate especially the Byzantine heritage of Istanbul, were much more advanced. The first repair at Hagia Sophia after the foundation of the Turkish Republic dates to 1926, while it still was functioning as a mosque. This repair involved changing the lead covers of the domes and the gypsum window frames. The next and more comprehensive repair was undertaken by Thomas Whittemore in 1931 under the auspices of the Byzantine Institute when Whittemore uncovered the mosaics plastered during the Ottoman period. Another repair campaign took place in 1939, which was after the conversion of the monument into a museum in 1934 (Diker 2016, 145-9).

Kariye Mosque (Chora Church) also went under repair in 1945 prior to its conversion to a museum. The works also continued in 1946 and the monument was also added to the work plan with other major Byzantine monuments in Istanbul for the congress mentioned below (Tamer 2003, 121). Another major monument of Istanbul's Byzantine heritage, Fethiye Camii (today's Fethiye Museum, original name Pammakaristos Church) was repaired by the Directorate of Pious Foundations from 1936 to 1938 (Esmer, Ahunbay 2013, 46).

Adding up a pivotal academic event to the arguments of these discussions, the 10th International Congress of Byzantine Studies which took place in Istanbul on 15-21 September 1955, one would expect a more institutionalised, productive, and enhanced environment of Byzantine studies in Turkey during the beginning of the 1950s [fig. 3]. The congress was organised in an academic context where Byzantine studies had been institutionalised only in 1950 at Istanbul University by Philip Schweinfurth, a specialist in Byzantine art (Akyürek 2018, 53). Semavi Eyice, known as the first Turkish Byzantinist, was another important figure in this context. After his high school graduation, he went to Berlin to study Byzantine art. Because of the severe conditions of the Second World War, he decided to return to Istanbul and graduated from Istanbul University Department of Fine Arts in 1948

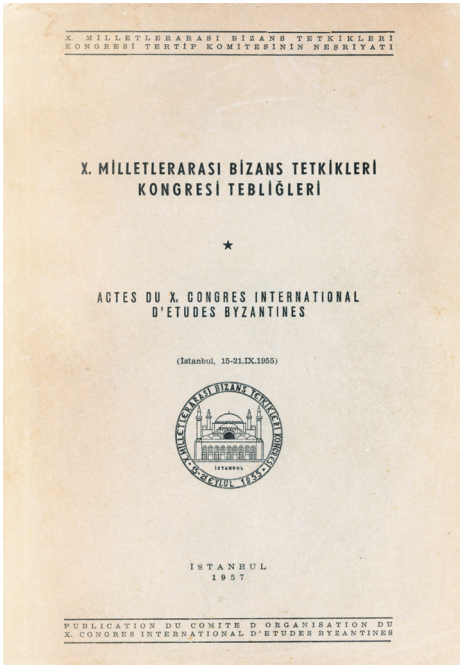


Figure 3
Cover of the *Actes du X Congrès International d'Etudes Byzantines*, printed in 1957

with a thesis on the minarets of Istanbul (Atasoy Yavuzoğlu 2019, 135). Eyice received his PhD from Istanbul University in 1952 with a dissertation titled *Byzantine Monuments in Side*.

After the selection of Istanbul as the venue for the 10th Congress, both the administrative and the financial issues of the event started to be discussed at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. On 30 November 1954, the government proposed the budget for the 1955 fiscal year and allocated 100.000 Turkish Liras for the administrative and publishing costs of the congress. Apart from this amount, 325.000 Turkish Liras were allocated for the repair of the major Byzantine monuments in Istanbul; 200.000 Turkish Liras for Hagia Sophia, 60.000 Turkish Liras for Hagia Irene, 25.000 Turkish Liras for Yedikule Fortress and the Golden Gate, and 40.000 Turkish Liras for Chora Museum, Fethiye Mosque, Fenari İsa Mosque, Bodrum Mosque, and Tekfur Palace. The amounts allocated for the Byzantine monuments were a part of a total budget of 2.500.000 Turkish Liras for both the Ottoman and the Byzantine monuments scattered all around Turkey.²²

²² <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d10/c005/tb-mm10005042.pdf>.

Both from the minutes of the sessions of the Assembly and from other sources, we learn that a committee was established to review the monuments which were included in the repair programme initiated for the congress. This committee was composed of the General Director of the Museum and Antiquities, archaeology professors, directors of the museums in Istanbul (the museums are not specified), a director from the Ministry of Public Works, and Burhanettin Onat.²³

Architect Cahide Tamer (1915-2005), who was working at the Istanbul Surveying Office and at the Permanent Committee of Old Monuments during that period, was also a member of the committee mentioned above. As a member, she was commissioned to prepare the budget estimates and later on became the main figure executing this repair campaign. In one of her interviews, she describes the planned work on the Byzantine monuments as “basic repair”, “protective measures towards the environmental effects” and “not comprehensive restorations” (Başarır 1995, 94-8).

In a short period, Tamer completed the planned repair works and made these monuments ‘ready’ for the congress. She continued to carry out repair or restoration works on some of these monuments during the following years (Tamer 2003, 121). This campaign, initiated by the government and executed by Cahide Tamer contributed to the survival of most of the major Byzantine monuments in Istanbul. As we can trace from Cahide Tamer’s personal archive, some of the monuments she worked on were severely damaged and were left abandoned for long periods. The basic protective measures were followed by comprehensive restoration projects during the following decades by the successors of Tamer and these efforts in total helped these structures to reach to the present day.

One of the long-term projects Tamer has executed occurred at the Land Walls, Yedikule Fortress, and the Golden Gate. Her work at Yedikule Fortress and the Golden Gate started in 1958 and continued until 1970 (Tamer, Kumbaracılar 1996, 49). After the Land Walls were registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality opened a tender in 1986 to document and conserve some parts of the Land Walls. Between 1988 and 1990, conservation activities continued at the northern parts of the monument. One of the extensive and scientifically accurate restoration projects was conducted by a team from Istanbul Technical University from 1991 to 1994.²⁴

After the local elections in March 1994, the current president of the Turkish Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was elected as the may-

²³ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d10/c005/tb-mm10005052.pdf>.

²⁴ <https://istanbul.surlari.ku.edu.tr/en>.



Figure 4 Cahide Tamer, photo of the Church of Monastery of Lips (present-day Fenari İsa Mosque). 1959.
© Cahide Tamer Historic Buildings Restoration Projects Collection,
Suna Kıraç Library, Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey

or of Istanbul and continued to serve as the mayor until December 1997. According to the Municipalities Law dated 14 June 1930, the municipalities were authorised as the legal entities holding the ownership of their city walls (Madran 1996, 66). From 1994 until 2019, when a social democrat party's candidate was chosen as the new mayor of Istanbul, almost no preventive measures or restorations to consolidate the city walls occurred. Within this 25-year period, some parts of the walls collapsed.

One of the major interventions during this period took place at the Palace of Porphyrogenetos (present-day Tekfur Palace). The intervention involved extensive reconstruction, and the monument lost most of its original architectural features. Currently, the monument functions as a museum focusing on its Ottoman period and the ceramic production of that period.²⁵

In February 2021 the new administration of Istanbul introduced a restoration campaign under the supervision of a scientific board, fo-

²⁵ <https://www.tekfursarayi.istanbul/en>.

cusing on the parts bearing a high risk of collapse at the land walls.²⁶ A restoration project started in June 2021 at the Boukoleon Palace, one of the major surviving parts of Constantinople's Great Palace.

Another important part of the Byzantine built heritage of Istanbul, basically, the churches converted into mosques, is administered by the Directorate of the Pious Foundations. After the repairs conducted by Architect Cahide Tamer mentioned earlier, most of these monuments were either left in that state of preservation or witnessed poor interventions. After Istanbul was declared as the European Capital of Culture in 2010, the restorations of the Byzantine monuments in Istanbul gained momentum. This initiative resembles the one taken for the 10th International Congress of Byzantine Studies in 1955.

Apart from Hagia Sophia, which is constantly under restoration or repair, other Byzantine monuments, especially the mid-Byzantine churches such as the Church of Pammakaristos Monastery (present-day Fethiye Mosque), the Church of Monastery of Lips (present-day Fenari İsa Mosque) [fig. 4], the Church of Pantepoptes (present-day Eski İmaret Mosque), the church of Hagios Theodoros (present-day Molla Gürani Mosque) and the Masjid of Şeyh Süleyman are the ones that were restored between 2010 and 2021. As in the example of the Masjid of Şeyh Süleyman, the Directorate collaborated with an Italian team of experts within the framework of Med-Art Project. Apart from positive and successful restorations of the Byzantine monuments of Istanbul, unfortunate cases also occurred. Tekfur Palace went under a destructive restoration in 2015.

There is a settled discourse in the restoration and preservation circles of Turkey, advocating the idea that the Byzantine heritage has been neglected for decades. For certain monuments, such as the city walls of Istanbul, this discourse seems valid. But if we investigate the political approaches, realised restoration projects, and the budgets allocated to this field, we can argue that some aspects are missing in this discussion. It is difficult to assert that the Byzantine heritage is deliberately neglected or badly restored. Because the relatively low scientific quality of the restoration projects in Turkey applies to all monuments, no matter what era they belong to. This degree of quality is closely linked with the legal framework, qualified manpower, social and economic priorities. This paper tries to give a broad overview of the restoration projects of the Byzantine heritage of Istanbul, starting from the early years of the foundation of the Turkish Republic, with a special focus on the latest projects.

²⁶ <https://www.ibb.istanbul/arsiv/37655/imamoglu-yedikule-surlari-onunde-konustu-25-y>.

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