



THE MINARETS THAT FRAME HISTORY

Atatürk, Erdoğan, and the Hagia Sophia

Matthew Yarnall, HIST 498.

“You [my followers] will conquer the city of Constantinople, and the man who does so will be great, and his army will be great.”

-Hadith attributed to the Prophet Mohammad, inscribed on the entrance of the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.

FORWARD: CONQUERING SOPHIA

The Hagia Sophia has dominated the Istanbul skyline for close to 1500 years. Her silhouette is more iconic than that of any structure in the world – “a building as solemnly impressive as it is overpoweringly beautiful.”¹ She has seen empires rise and crumble; indeed, her minarets buttress history itself. Throughout her life, the Hagia Sophia has always made a statement.

The Hagia Sophia (or ‘Church of Holy Wisdom’ in Greek) was built by Byzantine Emperor Justinian I between 532- 537A.D. It was erected as the seat of the Greek orthodox patriarchate – its domination of the city a testament to the glorious power of the Byzantine empire. It was set on the the highest geographical point in the city, the current Sultanahmet (old down) region of the golden horn. From this position, “it soars to a height to match the sky, and, as if surging up from amongst the other buildings, it stands on high and looks down upon the remainder of the city, adoring it, because it is a part of it, but glorying in its own beauty.”² The cavernous interior of its 105-foot dome was adorned with the finest mosaics of the classical world – every face and figure alive beneath myriad filaments of gold and stone.

Its overpowering beauty has made the Hagia Sophia prominent in the mind of imagined communities throughout the world – its numerous names: Hagia Sophia (Greek), Ayasofya (Turkish), and Sancta Sophia (Latin), speak to its universal patronage. The Hagia Sophia is the icon of the legendary city of Istanbul (previously Constantinople and before then Byzantium), whose fame reciprocally amplifies Sophia’s ubiquity in the dreams of men. The profound, universal significance of Istanbul cannot be understated; as French ethnographer Petrus Gyllius wrote in the 16th century: “All other cities are doomed, but I imagine that as long as people exist, Constantinople will exist.”³ To conquer the Hagia Sophia is to conquer Istanbul, and to conquer Istanbul is to conquer the human imagination. A *Hadith* attributed to the Prophet Mohammad shines in golden calligraphy at the entrance of the Hagia Sophia: “you...will conquer the city of Constantinople, and the man who does so will be great, and his army will be great.”⁴ In 1500 years, two men have conquered the city of Istanbul and left their mark on the Hagia Sophia: Sultan Mehmet II and Kemal Ataturk.

In 1453, Sultan Mehmet II of the Ottoman Empire breached the walls of Constantinople. He rode straight to the Hagia Sophia and converted the structure to a

¹ Ceren Katipoglu. "Hagia Sophia 'Museum': A Humanist Project of the Turkish Republic." In *Constructing Cultural Identity, Representing Social Power*, edited by Cana Bisel, Kim Esmark, Niyazi Kzzlyurek, and Olafur Rastrik. 210.

² Procopius De Aedificis. "Introduction; the church of S. Sophia in Constantinople" in *The Buildings of Procopius*, edited and translated by Henry Bronston Dewing, 1940.

³ Angelova, Maria. "11 Quotes about Istanbul That Explain Why Everyone Loves It." 203Challenges. November 10, 2017. Accessed May 03, 2018.

⁴ Umar Farooq. "Voices Grow Louder in Turkey to Convert Hagia Sophia from a Museum Back to Mosque," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 2017.

mosque. He plastered over the byzantine mosaics, defacing the legacy of Justinian I while supplanting his own; the four minarets erected by Mehmet II's successors would frame the Hagia Sophia as a mosque – and the seat of the Ottoman Caliphate – for centuries. On March 31st 1909, Ottoman commander Mustafa Kemal conquered Istanbul and disposed Sultan Hamid II, the ancestor of Mehmet II. Twenty-six years later, Kemal – s the first president of the Turkish republic – secularized the Hagia Sophia by converting it into a museum. He restored the structure's mosaics and opened it to the secular public, the final step in his violent erasure of the Ottoman past. Those in power in Turkey have always conquered the Hagia Sophia to impose a history that serves their present agendas.

INTRODUCTION: THE MINARETS THAT FRAME HISTORY

History is a violent construction of collective identity. Nations look to the past for validation of their present incarnation. This past distills a single continuity from multivalent time; in this distillation it destroys the memory of the individual, supplanting lived experience with a chronicle of what has taken place. History is a narrative conquest of personal identity. Pierre Nora writes: “This conquest and eradication of memory by history has had the effect of a revelation, as if an ancient bond of identity had been broken and something had ended that we had experienced as self-evident – the equation of memory and history.”⁵ History wields such immense power because of its authoritative simplicity: narrative appears uncontested and self evident; even when contested, alternative histories are finite and well articulated compared to myriad, fractured recollections of lived experience. Thus, the illusory simplicity of history breaks these recollections by its very revelation.

The purpose of history then, is to reveal the self of its subscriber – to prescribe an identity in place of the one it shattered. As Nora writes: “It is no longer genesis that we seek but instead the decipherment of what we are in the light of what we are no longer.”⁶ Yet history does not create a novel self. Rather, it elucidates one from an archipelago of fragmented beliefs, pasts, and imagined communities. It then violently drowns and decimates those islands of identity antithetical to its position. Thus, the horizon of the historical self appears timeless, as though the atolls of the present self always protruded, and the wrecks of discarded identity always lay submerged. Such is the belligerent – and deceptive – nature of history.

The violent creation of the historical self is necessary for the formation of collective identity. Narrative creates a ‘we’ which came from somewhere, currently is here, and is going somewhere else – a “cult of continuity.”⁷ Imagined communities require history to rationalize

⁵ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989): 8.

⁶ *Ibid.* 18.

⁷ *Ibid.* 16.

who they encompass and exclude. Nation-states, the political incarnations of collective identities, require history to justify their present and their trajectory into the future. We can understand the agendas of those in power by analyzing the historical selves they violently impose on their nation. Massive shifts in state-sponsored ideologies or social engineering projects must be accompanied by a reframing of the historical self. History must reveal a political and social continuity that serves the present moment. This continuity makes the momentary nation – and its future – an inevitability. Thus, narrative justifies those in power and legitimizes their actions.

To ground this novel continuity, those in power must impose a national heritage upon their populations. Historical monuments are indispensable to this imposition. Nora writes: “Museums, ...[and] monuments, ... are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity. It is the nostalgic dimension of these devotional institutions that makes them...signs of distinction and of group membership in a society that tends to recognize individuals only as identical and equal.”⁸ These ‘identical’ and ‘equal’ individuals are formed through narratives of ‘collective heritage.’ History violently constructs collective identity by dictating that a certain imagined community exists and has always had a specific connection to a given space. It dismantles the nuanced relationships and ‘memories’ individuals have with the space, and in so doing drowns individuality to a point of collective uniformity. Thus, ‘national’ monuments are critical to the imposition of uniform historical selves that fortify the position of those in power.

The Hagia Sophia is a national monument which has been and continues to be indispensable to the imposition of historical selves in Turkey. Ceren Katipoglu writes: The Hagia Sophia “has consistently been used as a medium of propaganda to represent the power of the ruling authorities and to transmit the message they want to convey.”⁹ Its continual exploitation is attributable to its colossal presence in Turkish and global imaginations. The “medium” critical to the imposition of historical selves in Turkey has been the *status* of the Hagia Sophia. When the structure was first built in 537 AD, its status as a church promoted the strength and unity of a Greek orthodox imagined community. In 1453 when the Ottomans conquered Constantinople, its converted status as a mosque promoted the supremacy of a Muslim imagined community over a Christian one. In the past century, the Hagia Sophia has undergone two major conversions. These conversions – like those before them – are indicative of major shifts in the historical self of Turkey, and are informative of the political agendas of the leaders sponsoring them.

The first of these conversions occurred on November 24, 1934. On this date, the Hagia Sophia was converted to a museum by the first president of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Kemal converted the Hagia Sophia to a museum as a statement to promote a novel liberal,

⁸ *Ibid.* 12.

⁹ Katipoglu, *Museum*, p. 205.

western, and secular *Turkish* historical self. This historical self shared cultural heritage and commonality with Greece and the Baltic states, as well as with the larger western world. This historical self supported the Kemalist mission to relegate religious practice to the private sphere, and espouse a scientific, secular identity in the public sphere. The historical self elucidated by the Hagia Sophia museum was indispensable to Kemal's political agendas, which desired a close diplomatic relationship with the western world (specifically Greece), as well as the mitigation of the power of Islamic institutions (the clergy and religious educational institutes) in Turkish politics.

The second conversion of the Hagia Sophia is unofficial, and still ongoing; it serves to counteract the liberal, secular and western historical self promoted by Atatürk. Through various publicity stunts in 2018, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is implicitly converting the structure into a symbol of Muslim victimization and marginalization by the Turkish secular establishment. This symbol of victimization is being used to reframe the Turkish historical self as culturally Islamic-conservative, religiously pious, and non-western. The cultivation of this historical self is necessary for Erdoğan to garner continual support from the Islamic bourgeoisie – a class whose economic resources Erdoğan needs to remain in power at a point when his support is fracturing. Erdoğan is using the Hagia Sophia to not only counteract but dismantle the liberal, secular and western historical self created by Atatürk and perpetuated by Kemalists to the present day.

This work is divided into two 'connections:' one focusing on Atatürk's use of the Hagia Sophia and one focusing on Erdoğan's. Each connection contains three thematic subsections. The work concludes with a discussion of Erdoğan's use of the Hagia Sophia to reframe Atatürk's legacy as a means to serve his political ambitions.

ATATÜRK AND THE HAGIA SOPHA

Mustafa Kemal converted The Hagia Sophia to a museum on November 24 1934 to promote a three-fold political agenda: first, it promoted a protectionist foreign policy involving close diplomatic relationships with Greece and the Baltic states. Second, it involved the removal of religion from of the public sphere of Turkish society (a project known as Kemalist secularization). Third, it involved the espousal of a 'scientific' and 'modern' public sphere coupled with the construction of a Turkish historical self to support these values.

The Hagia Sophia and the Balkan Pact

The conversion of the Hagia Sophia to a museum supported Mustafa Kemal's protectionist, anti-expansionist foreign policy. Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s,

fascist Italy continually expanded its influence into the eastern Mediterranean and Balkans. With the rise of the Third Reich in 1933 and the formation Rome-Berlin Axis, the balance of powers in Europe was crumbling. This instability in Europe led Turkey to search for territorial security. Establishing close ties with the Baltic States to the west of Turkey was thus Mustafa Kemal's primary foreign policy objective.¹⁰

Indispensable to this objective was forging a defensive alliance with Greece. The Aegean state was situated right between Turkey and Italy, providing a buffer against Fascist expansionism in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece, with its expansive Adriatic coastline, had a vested interest in seeking protection from Italy. Turkey and Greece also saw Bulgaria – an expansionist state tentatively allied with Italy – as a secondary threat.¹¹

Yet a Turkish-Greek alliance was not to be easily formed. The population exchange agreements outlined in the Lausanne treaty had exacerbated economic and social problems in both countries. The treaty had uprooted thousands of Greeks and Turks from their homes in a forced relocation policy, which fanned the flames of ethnic and religious tensions between communities of both countries. This tension was exacerbated by numerous territorial disputes between the two countries; Greece claimed many of the lands in the former Ottoman Empire were rightfully Greek, and thus the Turkish retention of them post 1923 constituted an unjustified occupation.

The numerous tensions between Turkey and Greece made it highly unlikely they would be able to form an alliance. Indeed, Degerli writes it was quite possible that “this tense atmosphere might [have] turn[ed] into a Turkish-Greek conflict.”¹² The first Balkan conference was convened between Turkey, Greece, Albania, and Yugoslavia in 1929 to discuss the formation of a protectionist alliance against Italy. The conference spectacularly failed due to a host of disagreements and nationalistic tensions – both between Greece and Turkey and between the various Balkan countries.¹³ Because Mustafa Kemal was orchestrating the Balkan pact meetings, Turkey was responsible for engineering their success. Mustafa Kemal needed to make concessions to get Greece and the other Balkan countries onboard – and fast.

Following the conference, Celal Bayar (a close political ally of Mustafa Kemal who would become the third president of Turkey as a member of the Democrat Party) went to Greece to negotiate in favor of the Balkan pact on behalf of Kemal. He was told by the Greek prime minister: “turning the Hagia Sofia into a museum would convince the other nations to include Turkey in the pact.”¹⁴ Mustafa Kemal replied to the relayed message: “The Director of Foundations was here just earlier. He said that he couldn't find the funds to renovate Hagia

¹⁰ Ezra S Degerli. “Balkan Pact and Turkey.” *The Journal of International Social Research* 2, no. 6 (Winter 2009): 136.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 139.

¹² *Ibid.*.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 141.

¹⁴ Ömer Aymalı, “How Was the Hagia Sofia Transformed into a Museum?” *World Bulletin*, November 24, 2013.

Sofia. It is currently in ruins, neglected and a dump. If we turn the Hagia Sofia into a museum, could we save it from decay? In doing the Greeks this favor, could we also save the Balkan pact? If we can, then we should do so."¹⁵ Thus, Mustafa Kemal believed that converting the Hagia Sophia into a museum could be the perfect concession to Greece in exchange for Greece's cooperation with the Balkan pact. If Greece was onboard, Kemal believed the other Balkan countries would follow suit.

The Greek president's request seemed tenable to Kemal because of the indeterminate status the Hagia Sophia held at this time: it was falling apart and unused for religious practice. Some of the monument's Byzantine mosaics had been restored by an Italian team in the 1830s, while others remained plastered over. This half-restoration resulted in a bizarre piece of architecture that was "neither the Aya Sofya mosque, nor the fully restored Byzantine church."¹⁶ Furthermore, the building had not been structurally reinforced in a century, and was crumbling at its foundations. A cartoon from the weekly satirical newspaper *Akbaba* in 1926 humorously articulates the destitute state of the building:



(Above) Hagia Sophia is subject to the threat of collapse!

(Below) Hagia Sophia: Oh God, grant (me) strength to my foundations, might to my beams, fortitude to my dome.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Robert S. Nelson, "Tourists, Terrorists, and Metaphysical Theatre at Hagia Sophia," in *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, ed. Margaret R. Olin and Robert S. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 69.

¹⁷ *Akbaba*, no. 384, 9 August 1926, page 2. My thanks to Dr. Yasmin Gencer of Indiana State University for providing and translating this cartoon.

The decaying monument had fallen out of regular religious use after the 1924 abolition of the caliphate – for which it had served as seat for centuries. It existed as indeterminate space, the corroding throne of an empire which had ceased to be. It may have nominally been a mosque, but it was not a space of lived religious experience. The Hagia Sophia’s lack of use and need of repair would make its conversion into a museum far easier than if it had been used for prayer by thousands of Muslims on a daily basis.

Despite its destitute state, the structure was alive in the mind of imagined communities stretching from Greece to America. The emotional, religious, and ideological weight of the building to Greeks is expressed in the following folksong (1914):

*God sounds forth; the earth sounds forth; the heavens too sound forth;
and the Great Church (monastriri) of Haghia Sophia sounds forth also
with its four hundred sounding boards [and] sixty two bells,...
The Holy Virgin was seized with trembling and the icons wept tears.
Be silent, Lady and Mistress, do no weep so much:
Again in years to come all will be yours again.¹⁸*

This folksong indicates that Greeks claimed the Hagia Sophia was still a church – even after its 600-year history as a mosque. The church was theirs, and cried to be returned to Christendom. These sentiments are further reflected in a *New York Times* article from 1877:

There is...a belief of long standing – still of force, we are assured among the Greeks of Constantinople, and not altogether discredited by the Turks – to the effect that such a change one day shall take place, and that “Aya Sofia” shall at least be restored to Christianity. [...] Christendom has never completely lost sight of it. Christian emblems remain under the plaster of the walls, and this most marvelous creation will need no reconstruction, and but little refitting, to enable it once more to receive the throne of a Christian patriarch.¹⁹

The fall of the Ottoman empire in 1920 raised significant hopes in Greek communities that a reconversion was possible; the allies would march triumphantly into Istanbul and – in an inverse of the events 600 years prior – plant the cross atop the Hagia Sophia. The 1920 Treaty of Sevres had promised the Greeks much of the western Turkish Territory and “[T]he Greek Megale Idea [a longstanding concept held by the Greek elite that ‘greater Greece’ should encompass much of the Anatolian peninsula] held the conversion of Hagia Sophia as one of its top priorities.”²⁰ Although the Turkish Republic quickly asserted its territorial

¹⁸ Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (New York: Athens Printing Company, 1986), 131.

¹⁹ Katipoglu, *Museum*, p. 210.

²⁰ Robert Ousterhout, “Hagia Sophias: From Museums to Mosques,” *The American Conservative*, March. 11 2014, www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/hagia-sophias-from-museums-to-mosques.

sovereignty, the ‘Hagia Sophia question’ remained open in the minds of Greeks. In this light, the Greek prime minister’s request in 1930 can be seen as a request for a conciliatory gesture. The Treaty of Sèvres and the *Megale Idea* had failed to become reality *because* of the Turkish Republic’s formation – indeed the Greeks had invaded Izmir in 1919 only to be driven out by Kemal himself. Thus the Greeks resented the existence of the Turkish state and felt it owed them reconciliation for the destruction of their national dreams. To capitalize on this Greek sentiment and serve his foreign policy agenda/mitigate Greco-Turkish tensions, Mustafa Kemal agreed to convert the Hagia Sophia to a museum.

Within a year of the Prime Minister’s request, Mustafa Kemal sought a team to repair and restore the Hagia Sophia. Converting the structure back into a church would have been politically untenable for Mustafa Kemal (as the secular ruler of a predominantly Muslim nation), but converting it to a museum (as the Greek prime minister requested) would be tenable due to its indeterminate status. A museum of Byzantine culture would still be understood as a favorable gesture to Greeks, and far easier to sell at home. Mustafa Kemal would be re-opening the iconic structure for the first time in a decade – a service to all Turkish citizens regardless of religion. He could portray a museum as the jewel of the modern Turkish nation while simultaneously making a gesture of respect to Greek communities by restoring its aspects of Byzantine history. Thus, the Hagia Sophia’s conversion represented the perfect, politically tenable act to serve Mustafa Kemal’s foreign policy agendas.

For the job, Mustafa Kemal settled on an American Byzantine specialist named Thomas Whittenmore. Whittenmore – the founder and director of the Byzantine institute of America – was ideal for the job, not only for his archeological expertise but also his resources; he was able to pay for the restoration with his institute’s money rather than relying on funding from the bankrupt Turkish government. He began working in June of 1931.²¹ News of the restoration work spread rapidly throughout western media outlets. A 1933 *New York Times* article writes: “In his task [Whittenmore] has had the constant support of the savants and rulers of the new Turkey. Ghazi Mustapha Kemal, President of Turkey is following the work with keen interest.”²² Another article writes: “Some Moslems object.... However, [t]he more liberal views now taken by Turkey’s rulers in all matters pertaining to religion will surly encourage others to help regardless of race or creed.”²³

This positive press was exactly what Kemal wanted. It displayed a grand, public gesture of respect for the Byzantine past that contributed to the success of Greco-Turkish relations. The Second Balkan conference was held in October of 1931 in Istanbul, four months into Whittenmore’s restoration. Degerli writes: “At that time disagreements between Turkey and Greece were found to a solution which gave them possibility to cooperate for the

²¹ Katipoglu, *Museum*, p. 212.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* 211-212.

accomplishment of the Balkan Union. These two countries which wanted the continuation of status quo in the Balkans were the leaders of this movement.”²⁴ The Hagia Sophia’s restoration was critical to this foreign policy success.

While disputes between other Balkan states prevented the pact’s formation in 1931, the Greco-Turkish alliance had been solidified. In subsequent meetings between Turkey and the Balkan states, most border and population disputes were settled – having Greece onboard was critical for this success. The Balkan Pact and its addition protocol were signed in Athens on February 9th 1934 – by Yugoslavia, Romania, Turkey, and Greece.²⁵ While the economic hardships of the 1930s and ethnic tensions prevented the Balkan pact from forming a coherent military unit, it successfully checked the expansionist aims of Bulgaria. Mustafa Kemal praised the alliance to the Grand National Assembly on November 1, 1934; “... [The] Balkan Treaty is a pleasing document which considers Balkan States to show special respect to each other’s status. It is particularly clear that this has a great value upon the protection of boundaries.”²⁶ Twenty-three days after Kemal’s speech, the Hagia Sophia was declared a museum in the first official document signed “K. Atatürk.” The conversion coincided with the diplomatic visit of Greek president Eleftheros Venizelos, a testament to an alliance that had seemed impossible.²⁷

Secularization and the Religious Private Sphere

The conversion of the Hagia Sophia reinforced and symbolized the Kemalist agenda to secularize the Turkish Republic. Katipoglu asserts: “The conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a museum stood as one of the cornerstones of the broader Republican project grounded on the revolutionary pillars of ‘secularism,’ ‘modernity’ and ‘superiority of science.’...[The conversion] also highlighted that ‘secularism’ was not to be limited to state affairs but to be adopted in all aspects of society.”²⁸ To define the Kemalist ‘secularization’ that Katipoglu is referring to, we can look to Atatürk’s 1935 speech on why the Hagia Sophia was converted to a museum. Atatürk declares: “Fellow countrymen...you must realize that the Turkish Republic cannot be the country of sheikhs or dervishes. If we want to be men, we must carry out the dictates of civilization. We draw our strength from civilization, scholarship and science and are guided by them. We do not accept anything else...[The Hagia Sophia] should be a monument for all civilization.”²⁹

²⁴ Degerli, *Pact*, 141.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 143.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Atatürk’s Conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a Museum,” *Voice of Atatürk*, October 27, 2009, 9. issuu.com/Atatürk/docs/Atatürk_fall2009_final_web.

²⁸ Katipoglu, *Museum*, p. 205.

²⁹ Fergus M. Bordewich, “A Monumental Struggle to Preserve Hagia Sophia.” *Smithsonian Institution*, December 1, 2008, www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/a-monumental-struggle-to-preserve-hagia-sophia-92038218/.

Atatürk's quote is indicative of two primary aspects of the Kamalist secularization agenda. The first of these aspects was the condemnation of reactionary Islam (*Irtica*) and the relegation of religion to the private sphere; this aspect is characterized by Atatürk's rejection of "sheikhs or dervishes." Kemalists viewed the institution of national/community leadership which supported Islamic practice as a political contender to the authority of the Turkish State; Islam was a longstanding cultural and political institution from which the legitimacy of power had been historically derived, and as such was understood by Kemalists as a significant threat to the projects of modernity and nation building. Kemal's condemnation *sheiks* – the leaders of Muslim brotherhoods – exemplifies the Kemalist fear of religious authority figures. Similarly, Kemal's condemnation of the *dervish* – an sufi Muslim practitioner who has taken vows of poverty and austerity – exemplifies the Kemalist view that Islamic practice stood in the path of modernity. Thus, "[the Kemalist fear of perceived 'reactionary Islam'] was the underlying characteristic of secularism in Turkey."³⁰

Kemalists maintained that a history of Islamic uprisings against state-led modernization in Turkey far predated the Republic. Ismet Inonu, Mustafa Kemal's Prime Minister and second president of Turkey wrote that the *Irtica* uprising of March 31 1909 – in which an Ottoman countercoup seized Istanbul in an attempt to abolish the constitution and re-estate the Sultan as the absolute monarch – created "an everlasting atmosphere of insecurity." The countercoup was understood by Kemalists as a move by Islamic fundamentalists acting from the shadows; Inonu further wrote that the execution of the countercoup's leader, Dervish Vahdeti, only "swept that stratum under the carpet."³¹ Given Mustafa Kemal's personal involvement (as an army officer) in putting down Vahdeti's uprising, a suspicion of dervishes as a dangerous, anti-establishment influence was naturally inseparable from Kemalist views of Islam. The Kemalist fear of religion was further engrained by the Menemen Incident of 1930 and Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925 – attacks against the Turkish state which Kemalists also perceived as Islamic reactionary. These latter attacks also served as a propagandistic tool for Kemalists to cast traditional Islam in a negative light – shifting the public's loyalty away from religious authorities and towards the secular, non-bigoted state.³²

The Kemalist view of religious institutions as a threat to the state was in many ways an intentionally self-fulfilling prophecy. The Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925 was far more a *Kurdish* rebellion than an Islamic one as Kemalists maintained. Kemalists characterized secular opposition (like an ethnic Kurdish uprising) as reactionary Islamic opposition to both a) easily discredit this opposition and justify its destruction as a threat to the secular state and b) further cast reactionary Islam in a negative light. While some religious authorities did pose a threat to the state – Dervish Vahdeti and his followers toppled a constitutional government in

³⁰ Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State*, (India: I. B. Tauris, 2010), xi.

³¹ *Ibid.* 15.

³² *Ibid.* 25.

an attempt to install a theocratic monarchy – Kemalists transformed religion into the *primary or even singular* threat to the state. Ironically, through their militant secularism, Kemalists made *everything* about religion; regardless of its reality, religion was the greatest imagined threat to the Turkish Republic.

The Kemalist solution to this imagined threat was to relegate religion to the private sphere. This move was clearly reflected in the secularization of the Hagia Sophia. Azak writes, “[Turkish policy, as] a political doctrine which promoted secularism, ultimately aimed to limit religion to the private sphere by redefining religion as a matter of individual conscience (*vicdan*), a personal affair.”³³ This policy allowed the Islamic threat to be defanged without eliminating religion entirely, (which would have been an impossibility in a country with over a thousand years of Muslim heritage). Religion was not sponsored or supported by the Kemalist state. The Islam that was to be tolerated by the state was – according to Atatürk – to “conform to reason, technology, science, and logic.”³⁴ This Islam was to be practiced quietly and out of sight of the public sphere. ‘Reactionary Islam’ (which as discussed above was a Kemalist label applied to both religious and secular actors perceived as a threat to the state) was to be discredited and destroyed. The privatization of religion mitigated the influence of sheiks and clerical institutions on the Turkish public – an end goal of Kemalist secularism; again, this influence may not have actually been a gargantuan threat to the state, but Kemalists targeted it regardless on the grounds of their perceptions.

For this secularization mission to last, “the elimination of Islamic sources of power and legitimacy was... essential for strengthening political authority in Ankara.”³⁵ In this context the conversion of the Hagia Sophia seems almost inevitable. For six hundred years it had been a symbol of Islamic power and legitimacy; it had represented the union of the state and religion. Furthermore, it had hailed the power of the Ottoman Caliphate, which had been outlawed in 1924. The conversion of this mammoth religious icon was indispensable to the Kemalist mission.

Secularization and the Scientific Public Sphere

The relegation of religion to the private sphere created space for a new ‘scientific’ Turkish self in the public sphere. The creation of this self was the second aspect of the Kemalist secularization agenda, reflected in Atatürk’s quote espousing science and scholasticism as the “dictates of civilization.”³⁶ His quote implies that the Turkish civilization should be based on rationality, science, and education. This opinion is exemplified in a propagandistic article about the Hagia Sophia’s conversion from 25 March, 1935:

³³ Ibid. p. 8.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 14.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 9.

³⁶ Bordewich, *Preserve*.

Since we are aware that our great revolution has generated deep changes in our thoughts, we have considered the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a science museum as a natural outcome and we have expected that [...] scholars in Europe would pay attention to this event. Besides, it is not possible for a scholar not to appreciate the establishment of a museum in Hagia Sophia. Even though Hagia Sophia was once built as a shrine, the name of the great building has dedicated it to Holy Wisdom. In these times, the only ‘wisdom’ that can be recognized as ‘holy’ can be found in ‘science’. [...]³⁷

This article indicates two central Kemalist concepts concerning secular modernity. First, it shows Kemalists wanted their nation to be viewed as a scientific and scholastic by the west. Second, it shows that Kemalists *viewed* the west as a scientific and scholastic civilization. This latter point is key because it shows that Kemalists projected their understanding of what an ideal, rational nation looked like onto the west. ‘The west’ (if such a categorization conveys any meaning) could have its own ideals of what ‘science’ and ‘modernity’ were that were entirely distinct from the Kemalist projection. Thus, the creation of the Hagia Sophia museum – and its marketing to the western world – reveals far more about what Kemalist’s *thought* western modernity was than it reveals about the actual scientific modernization of the Turkish state. The Turks “expected” scholars in Europe would interpret their new museum as a monument to all (scientific) civilization, but this assumption was based upon a Kemalist paradigm – upon an imagined west. This article presumes that the imagined west would uniformly respond to Turkish actions – admitting it membership to the elite club of modernity. In this way, the secularization of the Hagia Sophia reflects a yearning for inclusion in the imagined West.

To attain membership in the imagined West, Kemalists recognized a need to reconstruct the Turkish historical self. Rewriting history was indispensable to the secularization agenda – exemplified in the conversion of the Hagia Sophia. Azak writes: “The Kemalist regime not only attempted to make the nation forget the imperial symbolism of the recent past, but also tried to construct a historical continence in order to shape the psychological reflexes of the citizens... This use of the past has been essential for secularist discourse.”³⁸ The Hagia Sophia’s loss of status as a mosque plays perfectly into this discourse. Baisel writes: “[the conversion] was an expression of the determination of the Republic to break away from the Ottoman history by attacking one of its symbols of power.”³⁹ This point is furthered by the *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, which writes that the conversion “not only turned Hagia Sophia into “an artifact of the past” but rendered it “a site of memory instead of ... a symbol of lived religious experience.”⁴⁰ Thus the conversion was intended to not only

³⁷ Katipoglu, *Museum*, p. 207.

³⁸ Azak, *Secularism*, p. 18.

³⁹ Katipoglu, *Museum*, p. 218.

⁴⁰ Kaya Genc, “Divine Wisdom,” *The Paris Review*, Jan. 8, 2014, www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/01/08/divine-wisdom/.

strip away an outdated historical self, but to defuse (as perceived by Kemalists) a volatile religious one.

Atatürk's closing line "[the Hagia Sophia] should be a monument for all civilization" displays how Kemalists achieved the behemoth disconnect with Turkey's Islamic heritage. Clauss writes: "When perused as top-down [or]...government-mandated practice, Archeology... disenfranchise[s] people from their heritage in real and powerful ways.... This is particularly visible when the archeological record is framed as global culture heritage...that must be shared equally by all."⁴¹ The archeological project of *Byzantine* mosaic restoration – framed within the discourse of global scientific advancement – intended to destroy the personal connection Muslims had with the structure. This act represented a dramatic shift in the Turkish historical self; it told Muslims: not only is this building no longer yours, *but indeed it never was*. It was always a relic of Byzantine culture, and like all relics, it should be museum. Thus not only was the Kemalist present secular, but its past was too. The Hagia Sophia was never a mosque.

Yet this conclusion is not to say that the monument never was *Turkish*. Indeed, Kemalists asserted it always was. The Turkish minister of education in the mid 1930s wrote: "All historic works in Turkey attest to the creativity and culture of the Turkish race, even if they are referred to as Hittite, Phrygian, Lydian, Roman, Byzantine, or Ottoman. Denomination only designates periods. All are Turkish, and hence it is the duty of all Turks to preserve them."⁴² Proponents of this historiography (known as the "Turkish History Thesis") maintained that the Turks greatly influenced cultures of the Aegean Basin, and thus had a role in shaping Greek civilization. Just as the unveiling of Muslim women was intended to reveal their underlying modernity, the unveiling of Sophia's mosaics was intended to reveal Turkey's Hellenistic historical self.

This Hellenistic historical self was shared with the imagined west. Foss writes: "No one could deny [the Greek's] ... key role in developing the western civilization the Turks were so anxious to join."⁴³ Claiming a Hellenic historical self substantiated the Kemalist assertion that Turkey should be included in secular modernity; it showed that the Turks shared (and shaped) the same classical history held by every other nation in the imagined west. Thus, the conversion of the Hagia Sophia to a Byzantine museum exemplified a Kemalist desire for validation as part of, and inclusion in, a civilization in which all nations possessed a classical past, secular present, and scientific future.

⁴¹ Lee Rains Clauss et al., "Transforming Archeology." in *Transforming Archeology: Activist Practices and Prospects*, ed. Sonya Atalay, Lee Rains Clauss, Randall H. Mcuire, and John R. Welch (New York: Routledge, 2016), 9.

⁴² Nur Altinyildiz, "The Architectural Heritage of Istanbul and the Ideology of Preservation." *Muqarnas*, vol. 24, (2007), 291.

⁴³ Clive Foss, "Kemal Atatürk: Giving a New Nation a New History," *Middle Eastern Studies* 5, vol. 50, (June 2 2014): 831.

ERDOĞAN AND THE HAGIA SOPHIA

Today, the Hagia Sophia being used to make a new statement. On March 31 2018, Erdoğan entered the Hagia Sophia and read the opening verse of the Qur'an. Erdoğan dedicated the recitation "to all the souls of all who left us this work as inheritance, especially Istanbul's conqueror." He later said that it was both "difficult and emotional [to speak at the Hagia Sophia, which is] magnificent and holy."⁴⁴

Erdoğan is using the Hagia Sophia to create a Muslim imagined community centered around feelings of resentment for Turkey's secular establishment; the historical self of this community has been targeted and victimized by Kemalists for decades. Emrah Celik writes:

As a populist and talented leader, Erdoğan successfully connects with his electorate, invokes their collective memories of social adversary and cultural victimization, and translates collective symbols (from the headscarf problem to the Palestine Israel conflict) into political support. Moreover, he has a close familiarity with the ideals, problems, and vulnerabilities of the conservative-religious population.⁴⁵

The Hagia Sophia is a quintessential 'collective symbol' that Celik references. Erdoğan is using this symbol in an attempt to keep garner support at a time when base has started to fracture. The key voter base Erdoğan is trying to secure with this symbol of collective resentment is the Islamic bourgeoisie.

Islamic Parallel Modernities and the Rise of the AKP

The economic liberalization policies of Turgut Ozal in the 1980s lead to significant growth amongst religiously conservative businessmen in the Anatolian heartland. With their new economic recourses, these Anatolian businessmen (or Islamic bourgeoisie) increased mobilization around Islamic political issues. Herbert Melin notes: "The [Islamic bourgeoisie] provided financial means to disseminate their message to Ozal's "silent Muslim majority...by financing Islamic-oriented newspapers, television, and radio stations. They have been instrumental in Turkey in the development of a parallel modernity with their own distinct world views and their own life styles."⁴⁶ Such issues included the revocation of the headscarf

⁴⁴ "Turkish President Erdoğan Recites Islamic Prayer at Hagia Sophia despite Historic Link to Secularism." *The Independent*. March 31, 2018. Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁴⁵, Emrah Celik, "Power and Islam in Turkey: the Relationship between the AKP and Sunni Islamist groups," in *Authoritarian Politics in Turkey: Elections, Resistance and the AKP*, ed, Bahar Baser and Ahmet Erdi (Öztürk. London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 110.

⁴⁶, Metin Herper, "Islam, Conservatism, and Democracy in Turkey: Comparing Turgut Ozal and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan." *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 147.

ban, as well as a stronger stance against Israel. Islamist parties before 1980 had forwarded similar agendas, but had lacked the resources to adequately fund their campaigns.

These Islamist parties were popular because of a deep seated Muslim resentment for the Kemalist state, whose secularization agenda was viewed as religiously and culturally repressive of Muslim identity. Bilal Sambur writes: “the majority of Turkish population [felt] alienated and isolated by the state and believe[d] the political establishment [did not] give them opportunity for fulfilling their social, cultural and economic aspirations.”⁴⁷ Nowhere was this resentment stronger than amongst the Islamic bourgeoisie, who, in addition to having their religious freedom impinged, also felt the state was impeding their economic growth through excessive regulations.

Thus the “parallel modernity” forwarded by the Islamic bourgeoisie arose as an alternative to the Kemalist ideals of secular (and implicitly western) modernity. It declared (to varying extents) that Islam had a place in the public sphere and government of the modern Turkish nation. What these declarations *meant* varied considerably between Islamist groups, but an underlying emotional sentiment remained constant: Kemalism had co-opted the country and separated it from an authentic Islamic character. “Parallel modernity” was thus an imagined Turkey in which Islam had taken its rightful place in the public sphere unabated by the forces of secularism. The Islamic groups of the 1980s arose to realize this modernity, to bring Turkey to where it “should” have been had the Kemalists not derailed it.

The Islamist parties failed to realize their parallel modernity, exacerbating resentment for the Kemalist state. This failure occurred for two reasons. First, Islamist groups were fractured; there were numerous regional Islamist parties with overlapping agendas and constituencies. Voters supporting Islamist agendas were split between various parties, preventing a single Islamist party from coming to national power. Second, the Kemalist establishment actively retarded the success of Islamist parties. The state made it difficult for Islamic candidates to get on ballots or register their campaigns, sometimes branding Islamist politicians as extremists and banning them permanently from holding political office.

Erdoğan’s “Justice and Development Party” (AKP) capitalized on this resentment in the 2002 elections, leading to its ascentation to power. The AKP “successfully captured the deep feeling of disappointment and dissatisfaction amongst the majority of the country towards state elites and present[ed] itself as [the] ‘people’s real party’, rather than a part of the state establishment.” As Sambur writes: “AKP for many [was and still is] the voice of society against the state.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷, Bilal Sambur, “The Great Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey: The Case of Justice and Development Party and Erdoğan,” *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 125.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 126.

The AKP articulated its anti-establishment sentiments through the use of personal Islamic language. This trend can be seen in the way Erdoğan commented on the headscarf ban on a campaign rally in 2002: “I live this problem every day in my family” [referring to the fact that his wife and two daughters all wore headscarves] “we should solve it through social reconciliation. Lets not make it a source of political tension.”⁴⁹ Erdoğan’s characterization of the headscarf ban as a “problem” which he deals with *personally* resonated strongly with Muslim voters feeling resentment for the secularist elite.

Despite Erdoğan’s *personal* relationship to Islam, he framed Islamist issues – such as freedom of public religious expression – as secular human rights issues. This was the primary difference between the AKP and earlier conservative Islamic parties. This difference allowed the AKP to appeal to Islamist parallel modernities without causing political tension with the secular establishment – which had a track record of undermining and eventually deposing parties it perceived as perusing overly Islamist agendas; the military coups of 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997 all speak to this phenomenon.

The AKP’s ‘implicit political Islam’ proved invaluable to gaining widespread political support, especially from the Islamic bourgeoisie. Herper writes: “There is close affinity between the world views of Erdoğan/AKP and the [Islamic bourgeoisie], as they both were not proponents of radical Islam but were favorable towards political stability.”⁵⁰ The Islamic bourgeoisie’s desire for ‘political stability’ was a desire not to continue the legacy of military coups that had destabilized Turkey as a result of secular-religious tensions. These coups had always negatively impacted the Turkish economy, and specifically the Islamic Bourgeoisie. Because the Turkish military was closely allied with secularist actors, the period of military governance following a coup often targeted the gains of Islamic businesses through excessive economic regulations.

Thus, the implicit political Islam of the AKP appealed to the Islamic bourgeoisie because it decreased the possibility of direct conflict with the secular military. The AKP claimed not to be Islamist at all; it was secular humanist, and that was good for stability and business. The emotional undertones of the AKP’s language combined with the resources and networks of the Islamic bourgeoisie mobilized constituents from fractured Islamist groups and swept the AKP into office.⁵¹

Resentment and the Hagia Sophia

⁴⁹ Gareth Jenkins, *Political Islam in Turkey: Running West, Heading East?* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 168.

⁵⁰ Herper, “Islam,” 154.

⁵¹ Celik, “Power,” 99.

The mobilization of resentment for the secular establishment has remained a primary tactic of the AKP for gaining political support. This tactic is no better represented than in Erdoğan's PR move at the Hagia Sophia. He confesses that it is "difficult and emotional" for him to speaking.⁵² Implicit in this statement is that it is difficult for him *as a Muslim* to speak at the Hagia Sophia *while the structure is not a Mosque*. This sentiment is potent because the Hagia Sophia carries immense emotional weight in Muslim imagined communities. One AKP voter said in an interview: "...the Hagia Sophia...museum ...[is] a symbol of secularism winning over Islam."⁵³ The Hagia Sophia Museum is seen by many Muslims as symbolic of decades of unjust secular repression of Islamic identity in the public sphere. Over the years, "Thousands of Muslim demonstrators have prayed outside the building, and chanted, "Let the chains break, open Hagia Sophia."⁵⁴ The building is – of course – open to the public, but is still "chained" by Kemalists in the Muslim imagination.

In an interview before the Quran reading, Erdoğan further articulated his resentment of the secular establishment. He remarked pointing at the Hagia Sophia "in the period of single party rule in Turkey alone, more than 300 hundred holy places were destroyed [on Istanbul's historical peninsula] ... [Turkey's secular leaders] destroyed, we built. They are still trying to destroy. We are still trying to build."⁵⁵ The characterization of the Hagia Sophia as "destroyed" by secularists plays into Muslims sentiments that the secular establishment has defiled their right to display public piety.

Erdoğan's characterization of the Hagia Sophia as "magnificent and holy" resonates with Muslim feelings that the building is a divine birthright. On the doors of a side entrance of the Hagia Sophia, a saying attributed to the Prophet Mohammed (*hadith*) is inscribed in intricate gold calligraphy: "You [my followers] will conquer Constantinople, and the leader who does so will be great, and his army will be great."⁵⁶ The head of the youth branch of the Felicity party connects this *hadith* to the Hagia Sophia, saying: "God told us [the Hagia Sophia] is important... We were taught by our prophet Muhammad that Constantinople was an important place, and this was the most important place in the city, so it is dear to our hearts."⁵⁷

Erdoğan's formation of a "holy" or divinely ordained imagined Muslim community around the Hagia Sophia is furthered by his choice of Qur'anic verse:

*In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being,*

⁵² Independent, "Erdoğan."

⁵³ "Voices Grow Louder in Turkey to Convert Hagia Sophia from a Museum Back to Mosque." Los Angeles Times. June 24, 2017. Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁵⁴ "Hagia Sophia, Turkey's Former Cathedral, to Appoint Full-time Imam." CatholicHerald.co.uk. October 26, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁵⁵ "Erdoğan Leads Prayers at Hagia Sophia." Ahval. Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁵⁶ LA times "Voices."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

*the All merciful, the All compassionate,
the master of the day of doom*

*The only way we serve; to Thee alone we prey for succor.
Guide us in the straight path,
The path of those whom Thou hast blessed,
not of those against whom Thou art wrathful,
nor of those who art astray.*

The opening, (Holy Qur'an, 1:1)

'The opening' (or *fatihah*) is as ubiquitous in the Muslim imagination as the Hagia Sophia itself; a saying attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, (Muhammad's cousin/son in law and the first imam of Shiite Islam/the fourth caliph of Sunni Islam) reads: "The whole of the Quran is contained in the *fatihah*." 'The opening' alludes to dichotomous groups which have been "blessed" and "astray." In the context of anti-establishmentarianism, Erdoğan is mobilizing this verse to imply secularists are "astray" from God's path. Turkey is astray from its parallel modernity, and God is wrathful at those responsible. Also implicit in this interpretation is that Erdoğan is himself following "the straight path;" his actions are both democratically and divinely justified.

The "astray" can also be interpreted as the western world – as it exists within the mindset of the AKP. This mindset is elucidated by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who spoke at the first ever "Muslim Minorities Summit" in Istanbul on April 18th 2018: "anti-Muslim sentiment in the West and especially in Europe is rising rapidly...Muslims are seen as scapegoats in the West."⁵⁸ The West is astray from truth by using Muslims as scapegoats, and astray from morality by fostering xenophobic sentiments. Resentment of the west has always been implicit in resentment of the Kemalist establishment; both are seen in the conservative Turkish Muslim mindset as forces which have deviated Turkey from its authentic parallel modernity.

The west is also resented in the conservative mindset due to a hatred of Turkish westernizers. Many pious Muslim Turks resent the Kemalist modernization project: when Turkey's secular leaders strove to emulate the west, a foreign culture which – as conservatives perceive it – is superficial and predatory. Erdoğan elucidates this hatred for western-emulating Turks, speaking at an Istanbul art festival before his Qur'anic recitation: "[those who are] more Western than the West [are] engaged in a fight against the values of the Turkish nation."⁵⁹ The Hagia Sophia *museum* reminds Muslims everyday that the secularists sold out their divine heritage in a pathetic attempt to be included in the West. It symbolizes a

⁵⁸ "Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the Western World and Especially in Europe Is Rising Rapidly." AKparti.org. April 19, 2018. Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁵⁹ Ahval, "Erdoğan"

Kemalist betrayal of Turkey. This perception of the Museum also constructs a binary between imagined communities of religious practitioners and westerners/westernizers— communities which are not inherently in conflict with one another. The feeling of resentment for the West and Turkish westernizers is another powerful emotion which unites the AKP's voter base.

The Faltering of the AKP and Divisions of Muslim Constituencies

Erdoğan is turning the Hagia Sophia into a monument of victimization in an attempt to salvage a fragmenting base. The imagined community of victimization and resentment the AKP has forged is not as unified as it might appear. Beneath the superficial unity of the AKP still lie fragmented Islamist groups with their own political agendas and interpretations of Islam. These groups have numerous conflicting agendas to the AKP, and have acted against the AKP through supporting protests and coups in recent years.

This opposition to the AKP from its fragmented supporters is apparent in the 2013 Gezi protests. During these protests, thousands of secular and religious Turks marched in the streets to protest the AKP's "Islamization of the country [and] the Islamists' attempts to encroach on the lives of people."⁶⁰ Azeri writes that in the fallout of Gezi:

The perceptions concerning Islamism and Islamic actors have shifted for both Islamists and their opponents and made them reconsider their assumptions. They have all seen that Islamic ties are not omnipotent and can be crosscut by other cleavages. Islamic identities are important but they are not necessarily above others....[C]oalitions that include Islamic actors can be formed around mutual political and economic interests and they can be broken in their absence.⁶¹

Indeed, Islam is one of the many fractured identities people in Turkey subscribe to, and it is often not the most important.

This break between the AKP and its Islamic constituents is also apparent in 2016 coup staged by the Gülen movement – Turkey's largest Islamist group which includes a wide range of businessmen, media owners, police and bureaucrats."⁶² The Gülen movement and the AKP share very similar religious outlooks, and had been closely allied since 2002. However, many high ranking Gülen followers supported the secular military's attempt to dispose Erdoğan. The motivations for Gülenist's move had nothing to do with Islam. A prominent reason was likely Erdoğan's increasingly anti-western stance, which has negatively impacted trade

⁶⁰ Siyaves Azeri, "The State of Emergency, Class Struggle, and the State: Political Islam at the Stage of Collapse," Academia.edu, November 6, 2017, 594.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Seda Demiralp, "The Breaking Up of Turkey's Islamic Alliance: The AKP-Gülen Conflict and Implications for Middle East Studies." Rubin Center, April 20, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2018. 2-3.

relations and damaged the economic growth of the Islamic bourgeoisie – many of whom are Gülen followers.⁶³

Although the 2016 coup failed and the Gülen movement was severely crippled by the AKP, it indicated just how superficial Erdoğan's widespread support is. It also indicated that implicit political Islam is insufficient to unify fractured constituencies. Islam is now a weaker cohesive force than it was before the coup. As Azeri writes: “[in the fallout of the failed coup] the ‘moderate’ political Islamist movement in general was weakened owing to the loss of its cadres through massive layoffs of tens of thousands of public employees of different ranks and sectors, that were formerly hired based on their sectarian and political affiliations.”⁶⁴

Two years after the coup, the AKP remains in control. Yet it is unclear if another movement will threaten its position. The AKP's maintenance of a state of emergency since the 2016 coup could indicate that the AKP feels unconfident its power won't be challenged in the near future. In this context, Erdoğan's posturing at the Hagia Sophia can be seen as a needed attempt to rally support. Erdoğan needs an imagined community of victimization to tie together his base, because – as recent years have shown – very little actually ties that base together. Erdoğan is fighting for voters he hasn't had to before.

It is for this reason that Erdoğan has kept his religious language vague and open to interpretation. He is trying to pander to numerous unarticulated sentiments within various constituencies in the hopes of retaining their support. The broadness of his base severely restricts his ability to enact the desired policies of any one constituency. For this reason, the Hagia Sophia will never be converted into a Mosque. While there is an immense emotional desire for a conversion amongst Muslim voters, Erdoğan also has secular and liberal voters to take into consideration. Even amongst Sunni Muslims, controversy would be bound to arise surrounding what sect the mosque's imam would be, and how the conversion would take place. Division and controversy amongst his base is the last thing Erdoğan needs.

Erdoğan also has international considerations. A conversion would devastate Turkish foreign policy, which is already strenuous with the western world. As one might expect, Greece has said a conversion would be an "affront to the international community."⁶⁵ America and other European powers have expressed similar sentiments, with more padded language.⁶⁶ Harming international relations would damage trade, a move which would alienate Erdoğan's most important constituents – the Islamic bourgeoisie.

⁶³ Maximilian Popp, “Turkey's Struggling Economy: Demise of the Anatolian Tiger” *Spiegel online*, March 31, 2017. Accessed May 3, 2018. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/turkish-economy-heading-toward-crisis-under-erdogan-a-1141363.html>

⁶⁴ Azeri, “Emergency.” 595.

⁶⁵ “Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Recites Muslim Prayer at the Hagia Sophia” *The Times of India*, March 31, 2018. Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Yet it serves Erdoğan better that he can't convert the Hagia Sophia to a mosque. The building has already been converted into a collective symbol of resentment and victimization, and as such it serves Erdoğan's political purposes. Erdoğan's use of the Hagia Sophia illustrates the AKP's macroscopic strategy: the party panders to religious and cultural emotions to the extent that they are politically viable. The AKP is not an Islamist party. It is a utilitarian one. Political commentator Savcı Sayan writes: "I dream of the day that the president leads millions in the Friday prayers at the Hagia Sophia. And I am praying for this dream to come true." Over sixteen years, millions have marched behind Erdoğan believing he would realize their dreams, but he never was. The widespread resistance to Erdoğan in recent years indicates the public is realizing he never will.

CONCLUSION PLASTERING THE KEMALIST PAST

Erdoğan's use of implicit political Islam at the Hagia Sophia puts him in conflict with Atatürk and his legacy of secularism. Erdoğan has dealt with this conflict in two ways. First, he has sought to ground the Turkish historical self in the Islamic Ottoman period – a move which downplays the historical and contemporary importance of secularism. As Herper writes, "Erdoğan and other leading members of the AKP are of the opinion that the Ottoman past holds the key to the future of Turkey. Islam is looked upon as an alternative source of identity, as it had been in Ottoman times."⁶⁷ By casting Turkey as a chronological progression of the Ottoman period, Erdoğan can justify his use of Islamic symbols and sentiments as a continuation of Islamic undertones which have always defined Turkish identity.

This phenomenon can be seen in Erdoğan's dedication of the Quranic reading "to all the souls of all who left us this work as inheritance, especially Istanbul's conqueror." This "conqueror" clearly alludes to Mehmet II, the Ottoman Sultan who conquered Istanbul in 1453 and converted the Hagia Sophia to a mosque. Erdoğan's use of "us" implies a connection between the modern Turk and his Ottoman precursor; by leaving the Hagia Sophia as Islamic inheritance, the Ottoman Sultans made a substantial contribution to the modern Turkish nation. Erdoğan's description of the Hagia Sophia as "magnificent" alludes to Suleiman the Magnificent, another famous Ottoman Sultan.

Erdoğan's focus on the Ottoman past mitigates the role of Kemalists in the formation of Turkey. His recitation at the Hagia Sophia comes on the 109th anniversary of the March 31st incident. On this date in 1909, Mustafa Kemal (then an officer in the Ottoman Third Army) lay siege to and conquered Istanbul, disposing Sultan Hamid II and the reinstating of the Ottoman constitution, a document which would form the foundation of the Turkish

⁶⁷ Herper, "Islam." 153.

constitution 12 years later. Erdoğan's choice to exploit the Hagia Sophia on March 31st is a deliberate attempt to override Kemalist history in the public imagination. The Quranic verse Erdoğan recites (the opening or *fatihah*) is the same one he read to his cabinet when he became mayor of Istanbul in 1994. Thus, Erdoğan is replacing Atatürk's conquest of the city on March 31st with his own, while simultaneously casting himself in a larger cannon of Istanbul's Islamic rulers.

In Erdoğan's grand arc of Turkish history, the secularist period is only a small portion, a short-lived deviation from underlying Muslim identity. He declares: "That [Kemalist] period, which began in 1923, is about to end. And that's that." To expedite to this 'end,' Erdoğan has tried to mitigate Atatürk's ubiquitous public presence; his destruction of the Atatürk cultural center – a move which contributed to the 2013 Gezi riots – is a prime example of this phenomenon. Funeral services are sometimes referred to as *fatihah*, (because they mark the opening of one life to another); thus, Erdoğan is utilizing a religious text to mark the death of the secular Kemalist era. In Atatürk's place, Erdoğan is preparing to 'open' a new period, one rooted in the Islamic Ottoman past.

The second way Erdoğan has resolved his conflict with Atatürk and his legacy of secularism is by reinterpreting them. To the extent that Atatürk cannot be written out of Turkish history, Erdoğan has sought to frame Atatürk as a figure in continuity with the Islamic Ottoman past. In line with this agenda, Erdoğan has claimed Atatürk's order to convert the Hagia Sophia to a museum is a fake. *The Orthodox Christian* writes: "Erdoğan [accords with] ... Turkish historian and author Mustafa Armaga [who] has... claimed that Atatürk's signature under the act [to convert the structure] is a forgery, claiming the mosque became a museum due to 'American machinations,' with American diplomats putting pressure on Turkish authorities."⁶⁸ It should go without saying – from the number of public speeches Atatürk made about the museum – that this claim has no basis in reality, but it serves a necessary agenda for Erdoğan. Atatürk still holds an immense presence in Turkey from its currency to its airports; even with his massive following, it is politically untenable for Erdoğan to outright contradict Atatürk's legacy.

Therefore, Erdoğan must reinterpret Atatürk's secularism in such a way that it doesn't undermine the Ottoman Islamic historical self. The AKP has defined secularism as "A principle which allows people of all religions and beliefs to comfortably practice their religions, to be able to express their religious convictions and live accordingly, but which also allows people without religious beliefs to organize their lives along these lines."⁶⁹ As discussed in connection one, this was definitively *not* the Kemalist understanding of secularism; Atatürk strove to relegate religion to the private sphere as well as strictly control how religion was

⁶⁸ "Turkish president Erdoğan to Read Muslim Prayers in Agia Sophia on Holy Friday," *The Orthodox Christian*, April 10, 2017. <http://orthochristian.com/102594.html>.

⁶⁹ Jenkins, *Islam*. 168

practiced (stressing only scientific and modern religion was acceptable). Erdoğan and the AKP have attributed this disconnect in ‘secular’ definitions to the Kemalists’ misunderstanding of Atatürk’s secularist intentions. The AKP has said it “rejects the interpretation and distortion of secularism as enmity against religion.”⁷⁰ Implied in this quote is that the *Kemalists* have distorted secularism into “enmity against religion.” It is – of course – ironic that Erdoğan is arguing Atatürk’s intentions were distorted by those who came after after him.

Yet this assertion, however superficial, allows the AKP to proclaim it not only authentically represents Turkey’s people and past, but its secular founder as well. The AKP can mobilize Atatürk’s image to the extent it is politically useful, while simultaneously rendering that image irrelevant. Erdoğan is using Atatürk just as he is using the Hagia Sophia: to dismantle history and serve the present moment.

The Hagia Sophia has never had agency in her own conquest. Like the history she imposes, she is only a passive tool of those who exploit her. She has no voice of her own, because the past has no voice of its own. There is no objective truth beneath the torrential waves of history. Thus, the Hagia Sophia is a church, mosque, and museum all at the same time, and none of them, and some amalgamation in between. She, like the past, exists solely in the imagination of man.

Yet man is only mortal. Every emperor, sultan, and president that has exploited the Hagia Sophia has inevitably passed away. Their agendas and imaginations have faded with time, leaving only a residual past to be exploited by their successors. Through it all the immortal Sophia has reticently remained. She has remained the slate upon which the history of future can be written, plastered over, and written again. She will always make a statement.

AFTERWORD: BELITTLING SOPHIA

Seven miles from the Hagia Sophia lies a conurbation of minute curiosities. The “Miniaturk” park contains over a hundred 1/25 scale recreations of famous buildings from across Turkey and the former Ottoman Empire. A plaque at the ticket booth espouses the tiny world: “Miniaturk is ideal for people, who wish a ‘Speeded up’ tour through Turkey; in other words[, it] is the ‘showcase’ of Turkey! We wish you a good time...” The park casts itself as a streamlined tourist destination, each building’s plaque distills centuries (or even millennia) of history into four or five lines of factual, scientific text: date of construction, commissioner, architect, location; narrative pasts and historical details are ignored to expedite the visitor’s journey. These sanitized descriptions make Miniaturk to bland to be controversial.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The park consists of a winding path which threads between mimics of architectural wonders from the Hittite, Byzantine, Ottoman, Turkish, and Greek civilizations. Buildings are often juxtaposed with no regard for their time or geographical relationship: The Turkish parliament (built in the 1970s in Ankara) is not ten feet from the temple of Artemis (built 550 B.C. in Izmir).

At the edge of this jumbled metropolis, a little Hagia Sophia diminutively sits. Its dome is barely five feet high, its minarets are hardly thicker than saplings. Like the rest of the park, the little Hagia Sophia is entirely uncontroversial; the plaque in front of the miniature sterilizes the Hagia Sophia's history:

“Built in 537, Hagia Sophia is situated in Sultan Ahmet Square. Hagia Sophia [was] built during the reign of Justinian I and is the most splendid work of Byzantine [architecture built] in Istanbul during the eastern Roman Empire period. The thin stone minaret [was] built during the reign of Byzit II. The thicker stone minarets were added by Master Sinan. The tombs of Selim II, Murat III and Mehmet III are situated in the courtyard.”

This textual description entirely omits the Hagia Sophia's most powerful aspect—its status. It is not described as a church, or as a converted mosque/ seat of the Ottoman caliphate, or as a museum. It is mitigated to a superficial object, a mound of bricks added to over time. This mitigation is not a secularization of the monument—as described in connection one the conversion to a museum maintained the immense ideological weight of the Hagia Sophia and only altered its propagandistic mission—rather, it is a neutering of the monument's purpose. The little model strips the Hagia Sophia of a mission and justification for existence. It implies that the Hagia Sophia has never made a statement.

As tourists meander through Miniaturk, the little Hagia Sophia is hardly payed any attention. A family of four stops to take a few pictures, but the five or six year-old children appear far more interested in the “Miniaturk Airline” plane that crawls across the tarmac of the adjacent little Atatürk international airport. The mother yells something in Turkish at the children, and the family moves on; they spent at most 30 seconds in front of the model. Two older Caucasian women approach the little Hagia Sophia, speaking French; they take the time to read the plaque, take an iPad photo, then continue walking at a snail's pace. A veiled woman stops in front of the miniature for a few minutes to have a conversation with the man next to her, but hardly pays the model itself much attention; she spends more time looking at the little Blue Mosque, but still seems preoccupied with conversation. The little Hagia Sophia is the antithesis of the masterpiece it imitates: it seems like the least notable, least emotionally-charged structure in the world.

Yet the differences between these Hagia Sophias are hardly as solid as their foundations. Apart from size they appear identical— indeed, one cannot discern whether the image of the Hagia Sophia on the the Miniaturk park ticket is the authentic structure or its doppelganger. What distinguishes the structures then, is not any intrinsic characteristic, but rather the eye of perceiver. The individual visitor bestows meaning and weight to one Sophia and not the other. We might say that temporality definitively distinguishes the structures—one has existed for fifteen years while the other has existed for fifteen hundred— but even temporal reality exists in the mind. Both Sophias live in our present perception—we subscribe to their ages and histories, but ultimately these details are imaginary, as they exist in our imagination.

The little Hagia Sophia brilliantly elucidates the true nature of the original: it is hollow, nondescript, and silent. Inanimate things don't make statements. Our belief that they do makes the difference between a monument of "overpowering beauty" and an insipid imitation not seven miles away.

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