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**READING HAGIA SOPHIA THROUGH ITS EVERYDAY
SPATIAL EXPERIENCE**

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**READING HAGIA SOPHIA THROUGH ITS EVERYDAY
SPATIAL EXPERIENCE**

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DECLARATION ON RESEARCH ETHICS AND PUBLISHING METHODS

I, SARE NUR AVCI; hereby declare

- that this Master of Science Thesis that I have submitted is entirely my own work and I have cited and referenced all material and results that are not my own in accordance with the rules;
- that this Master of Science Thesis does not contain any material from any research submitted or accepted to obtain a degree or diploma at another educational institution;
- and that I commit and undertake to follow the "Kadir Has University Academic Codes of Conduct" prepared in accordance with the "Higher Education Council Codes of Conduct".

In addition, I acknowledge that any claim of irregularity that may arise in relation to this work will result in a disciplinary action in accordance with the university legislation.

Sare Nur Avci

21/07/ 2023



*To My Grandmother Gülşen
And My Aunt Berfinaz...*

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ABSTRACT

Hagia Sophia was inaugurated in July 2020 as the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. With its conversion into a mosque it has been discussed over its political, social, and religious values by states, institutions, and congregations. Relevant professional groups have followed the spatial interventions to the cultural heritage monument. On the other hand, the new place Hagia Sophia transformed into has not been studied much in terms of the spatial program of the site and the experience of the place. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature and explores how Hagia Sophia works as a place in its everyday life. How is Hagia Sophia constructed as a place with its spatial order, management, and visiting rules? How does the new function as a mosque come together with its museum and church pasts? What is the relationship between the mosque that is presented in the official discourse of the conversion and the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque? How do visitors with different backgrounds and genders, who come with different purposes, experience the place? In this thesis, I aim to provide a comprehensive view of Hagia Sophia after its conversion into a mosque. For this, inspired by Kim Dovey's approach to place, I look at the spatial program and the discursive constructions of place, and the ways its users experience it. First, in order to illuminate the conversion process, I research the official discourse regarding the conversion of Hagia Sophia and analyze the first displays of the monument as a mosque. I also examine the media coverage and reactions to the conversion from scholars, states, and communities. In this research, I conducted a fieldwork between October 2022 and March 2023 using the participant observation method. The fieldwork consisted of site visits at different times, particularly during prayers, and interviews with the visitors of Hagia Sophia. Based on my observations from the fieldwork and the perspectives of the interviewees, I try to explore the everyday life and experiences of this new place.

Keywords: Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, mosque, museum, conversion, place experience, interviews, participant observer

ÖZET

Ayasofya, Temmuz 2020'de Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi olarak ibadete açılmıştır. Camiye çevrilmesi ile, devletler, kurumlar ve cemaatler tarafından siyasi, sosyal ve dini değerleri üzerinden tartışılmıştır. İlgili meslek grupları, kültürel miras anıtına yapılan mekânsal müdahaleleri takip etmiştir. Öte yandan, Ayasofya'nın dönüştüğü yeni yer, mekânsal programı ve yerin deneyimi açısından çok fazla çalışılmamıştır. Bu tez, literatürdeki bu boşluğu ele alarak Ayasofya'nın gündelik yaşamda bir yer olarak nasıl işlediğini araştırmaktadır. Mekânsal düzeni, yönetimi ve ziyaret kuralları ile Ayasofya bir yer olarak nasıl inşa edilmektedir? Yeni cami işlevi, müze ve kilise geçmişiyle nasıl bir araya gelmektedir? Dönüşüme ilişkin resmi söylemde sunulan cami ile Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi arasındaki ilişki nedir? Farklı amaçlarla gelen, farklı arka planlardan ve cinsiyetlerden ziyaretçiler mekânı nasıl deneyimlemektedir? Bu tezde, Ayasofya'nın camiye dönüştürüldükten sonraki hali üzerine kapsamlı bir bakış sunmayı amaçlıyorum. Bunun için Kim Dovey'in mekâna yaklaşımından esinlenerek, mekânsal programına, yerin söylemsel inşalarına ve kullanıcıların yeri deneyimleme biçimlerine bakıyorum. Öncelikle, dönüşüm sürecini aydınlatmak için Ayasofya'nın dönüşümüne ilişkin resmi söylemi araştırıyorum ve anıtın cami olarak ilk gösterimlerini analiz ediyorum. Ayrıca, dönüşüme akademisyenler, devletler ve topluluklardan gelen tepkileri ve medyada yer alan haberleri inceliyorum. Bu araştırmada, Ekim 2022 ve Mart 2023 tarihleri arasında katılımcı gözlem yöntemini kullanarak bir saha çalışması gerçekleştirdim. Saha çalışması, başta namaz vakitleri olmak üzere farklı zamanlarda gerçekleştirilen saha ziyaretleri ve Ayasofya'nın ziyaretçileriyle yapılan görüşmelerden oluşmaktadır. Saha çalışmasından edindiğim gözlemlere ve görüştüğüm kişilerin bakış açılarına dayanarak, bu yeni yerin gündelik yaşamını ve deneyimlerini keşfetmeye çalışıyorum.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Ayasofya, İstanbul, cami, müze, dönüşüm, yer deneyimi, görüşmeler, katılımcı gözlemci

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
ABSTRACT	vii
ÖZET	viii
LIST OF IMAGES	x
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The Site: Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque	3
1.2 Aim of the Study	6
1.3 Theoretical Approach	7
1.4 Methodology	10
1.5 Thesis Structure	11
2. THE STORY OF THE CONVERSION	13
2.1 Debut of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque	18
2.2 Reactions to the Conversion of Hagia Sophia	24
2.3 Refurbishment Plan and Management of the Site	27
3. THE FIELDWORK IN THE HAGIA SOPHIA GRAND MOSQUE	30
3.1 My Position in the Field	34
3.2 My Own Experience of the Site: A Walkthrough	36
3.3 Interviews and Themes of Discussion	49
3.3.1 Co-existence: Exhibiting the intertwining layers	50
3.3.2 Conversion: Mosque, church, museum, and in between	69
3.3.3 Rules and manners: “Adap”	81
3.3.4 Categorization: Scenarios & fragmentation in place	95
3.3.5 Gendered perspectives: The cage and the camera	115
4. CONCLUSION	126
BIBLIOGRAPHY	130
APPENDIX A	139
APPENDIX B	141

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1.1 The Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque	4
Image 2.1 The area around Hagia Sophia during the opening ceremony	19
Image 2.2 The Seraphim Angels, calligraphic roundels, and the restoration Scaffolding	20
Image 2.3 The main space filled with the male congregation	20
Image 2.4 The women’s section during the ceremony	21
Image 2.5 The Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque in the TRT documentary	22
Image 3.1 Example of a field note from December 2022. A similar map was provided to the interviewees as a guide	34
Image 3.2 Decorations adorning the North wall of Hagia Sophia	37
Image 3.3 Aerial view showing Hagia Sophia’s immediate surrounding	38
Image 3.4 The police checkpoint for exit from the Ayasofya Square	39
Image 3.5 The walkthrough plan	39
Image 3.6 The site plan of the Hagia Sophia Complex	40
Image 3.7 The waiting line to enter Hagia Sophia along the Square	40
Image 3.8 Visitors passing through the X-ray security gate	41
Image 3.9 The small kiosk selling scarves and coveralls for visiting Hagia Sophia....	41
Image 3.10 Theodosius Church ruins at the courtyard	42
Image 3.11 Fatih’s tughra and firman; Abdülmecid’s tughra; and the 2020 Presidential decree on the walls of the Outer Narthex	42
Image 3.12 The Leon Mosaic above the Emperor Gate, and the Apse Mosaics Inside	43
Image 3.13 The border between two zones as the prayer time closes in: men enter and women exit zone 2	44
Image 3.14 The South Side Nave during for prayers: Men stand in the front and women at the back	45
Image 3.15 The women’s section	45

Image 3.16 The men’s section is surrounded by red tape separators. Some women pray sitting at the edge of the border	46
Image 3.17 Zone 2	46
Image 3.18 Ayasofya Madrasa	48
Image 3.19 The information banners adorning the outer walls of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque	52
Image 3.20 An information panel from Hagia Sophia: “A Prophetic Hadith: ‘You shall conquer Constantinople. What a wonderful army will that army be, and what a wonderful commander will that conqueror be”	53
Image 3.21 Another information panel from the Panorama Museum	53
Image 3.22 The calligraphic roundels, Seraphim Angel, and the veiled Apse mosaics under one dome, in one frame	55
Image 3.23 The cross motifs at the vaults	57
Image 3.24 The Tympanum mosaics are seen below the windows.....	61
Image 3.25 The Byzantine sarcophaguses at the Northern end of the Outer Narthex surrounded by folding barriers, red tapes, and a sign of “No Entry	63
Image 3.26 The Omphalion behind railings	63
Image 3.27 The Turbe Courtyard	64
Image 3.28 The Sweating Column, behind double-barriers, can not be touched, but is a popular photography point	66
Image 3.29 A thumbnail for the Galleries	68
Image 3.30 Look towards the Galleries, the Empress Lodge. The layers in Hagia Sophia are not limited with Christianity and Islam. Below the cross panel, the marble panels feature the pagan symbols of Poseidon’s trident and dolphins	69
Image 3.31 The entrance is marked by the green marble plaque on the outer walls	70
Image 3.32 A maqsura in the South Side Nave	76
Image 3.33 The signs at the Inner Narthex suggesting "No entry with shoes"	83
Image 3.34 The border between zone 1 and 2	84
Image 3.35 The dress code for men and women for visiting the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque	87
Image 3.36 The line on the right is for the visitors, and on the left is for the prayers ...	96

Image 3.37 The baby strollers parked in front of ancient walls	98
Image 3.38 The spatial order by November 2021	99
Image 3.39 The spatial order by October 2022	99
Image 3.40 The spatial order by December 2022	100
Image 3.41 The spatial order by March 2023.....	100
Image 3.42 The Friday congregation outside.....	104
Image 3.43 The male Friday congregation inside	105
Image 3.44 Those who remain in zone 1 during the prayer time	105
Image 3.45 The female congregation gathering at the South Side Nave.....	106
Image 3.46 The men’s section surrounded by women taking photographs.....	107
Image 3.47 Diagram showing the accessibility and visibility in the space during the Friday noon prayer	108
Image 3.48 Diagram showing the accessibility and visibility in the space during the regular prayer time	109
Image 3.49 Diagram showing the accessibility and visibility in the space during the visiting time	111
Image 3.50 Inside the women’s section	115
Image 3.51 The main section full of male congregation during the Friday noon prayer as seen from the women’s section, through the eye holes the barriers	117
Image 3.52 Women with their cameras taking photographs of the other side	117
Image 3.53 A man - on the left - and women - on the right - praying in the South Side Nave	121
Image 3.54 Men in zone 2 during the prayer time	122

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	The distribution of site visits to the days and daily prayer times (The last column represents the days in which interviews were conducted. The coloring of the days represents the grouping: the weekends; Fridays; and remaining weekdays.)	31
Table 3.2	The origin country / city of the interviewees	32
Table 3.3	The age distribution of the interviewees	32



1. INTRODUCTION

"Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi" was opened on the 24th of July 2020 with a grand ceremony. Its conversion from a museum to a mosque was the beginning of a new phase in the long adaptation history of Hagia Sophia. Historically, during the exchanges between the Byzantine, Ottoman, and Republican rulings, the power figures used Hagia Sophia as a sacred ground to assert their political power and influence. Its conversions between the church, mosque, and museum statuses significantly transformed the place's composition, function, and experience. Each transformation also reproduced the cultural, religious, and political representations of Hagia Sophia, imbuing the place with a profound symbolism that often surpassed its use as a "place" in everyday life. When it became a museum in 1934, it still held cultural, religious, and political significance for different nations and congregations. While its status as a museum seemed to provide a neutral ground, discussions around the shared and contested meanings of Hagia Sophia continued. Various groups within Turkey demanded its reconversion into a mosque. The recent transformation in 2020 resulted from this long-pursued demand.

"Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque"¹ was first put on public display during the inauguration ceremony, which contained many propaganda elements and brought much criticism. Not surprisingly, the conversion from a museum into a mosque has attracted significant attention in the national and international sphere from institutions, scholars, politicians, and congregations. First, the discourse and symbolism behind this splendid ceremony were the centers of attention. For instance, what was communicated to the nation and abroad as the President of Religious Affairs delivered the prayers with a sword in hand? How did the provoking sermon address the secular Republican values

¹ Considering that in its rich and eventful history, multiple images and meanings of it were produced, in this thesis, I use different names to refer to different periods and perceptions of "Hagia Sophia". Regarding the Ottoman and early Republican times when it was a mosque, I will use the name the "Ayasofya Mosque". To reflect it as an object of nostalgia or desire of the Islamist-nationalist circles in Turkey, I find it best to use the Turkish version of the name: "Ayasofya". In 2020, it was recently renamed the "Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi". I will refer to this name, or the English translation, "The Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque," for the main subject of my research.

and the new political agenda of Turkey? The political aims and consequences of the conversion in international relations were also discussed. Various articles and studies discussed what the conversion into a mosque represented for Greece and Orthodox Christian communities and its importance in Turkey's relations with Europe and Islamic countries. Thus, especially the political meanings and symbolic values of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque were extensively reviewed.

Besides the political implications and symbolism of the conversion, some authors drew attention to the use and experience of Hagia Sophia under the new title of "Grand Mosque." For example, a significant comment by Esra Akcan (2020) pointed out the issues of experience and inclusiveness in Hagia Sophia. Examining the opening ceremony through its spatial and architectural clues, she addressed the ambiguous future of the monument. Regarding the promised set of interventions the conversion entailed, acknowledging the traditional uses of mosques in Turkey, she asked, "How will the experience of visiting the building remain the same, especially for women and non-Sunni populations around the world?" (Akcan, 2020). Thus, among many discursive readings, her comment drew attention to the function and lived experience of Hagia Sophia in its new status. How can it be used and experienced as the "Grand Mosque"?

After the heat of the moment in 2020, in the post-conversion period, Hagia Sophia as a place remained out of focus except for a few works that revisited it. For example, the blog by Sevil Enginsoy Ekinci, "Ayasofya Günlüğü" [Hagia Sophia Diary] (n.d.), was created as a platform where she shared information about the monument's rich history and meaning, accompanied by her observations and visits to Hagia Sophia after 2020. Umut Azak, at the end of a conference presentation (2022), presented her visit to Hagia Sophia in detail. She depicted it "as a place with clearly defined boundaries, more vibrant, and alive" (Azak, 2022, p.35). Berin Gür, in an academic presentation (Institute for Comparative Modernities Cornell University, 2022), mentioned how the experience of the Grand Mosque resulted in a theatrical spectacle with the unintended consequences of the conversion. Thus, these authors portrayed the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque through their subjective experiences.

Inspired by them, I became particularly interested in how Hagia Sophia works as a place after the conversion. Beyond its political and ideological representations, what is the lived experience of the converted monument? How is Muslim worship performed inside a heritage monument or a former church? How are the historical layers of Hagia Sophia exhibited in its status as a mosque? What is the experience of a visitor in Hagia Sophia? What kind of a place has Hagia Sophia become by the conversion?

1.1 The Site: Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque

The story of Hagia Sophia started with the building of the "Megálē Ekklēsiā" (360 AC) in place of the pagan temples at the city's Acropolis (Taraz, 2014, pp. 20-44). In the Byzantine period, this sacred ground was repeatedly readjusted for the following Theodosius (415 AC) and Justinianus (537 AC) churches (Taraz, 2014). Today's monument is the third Hagia Sophia, built by Justinianus, which underwent countless renovations and repairs. Being the largest Christian edifice in the world until the 16th century, the third Hagia Sophia represented an interface between the late Roman and Byzantine architecture traditions (Magdalino, 2010; Kuban, 2021, pp.131-137). Originally consecrated as an Orthodox Church, it became a Roman Catholic church during the Latin Crusaders' occupation between 1204 and 1261. The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 converted it into the imperial "Ayasofya Mosque" (Kleinbauer, White & Matthews, 2004).

Through its "adaptive reuse" history (Necipoğlu, 1992, p.225), Hagia Sophia became a respected monument for the late Roman, Byzantine, Latin, and Ottoman civilizations and pagan, Christian, and Islamic beliefs. Precious *spolia* were gathered in this architectural marvel due to their symbolic significance (Barsanti & Guiglia, 2019). During the Ottoman stewardship, its architectural beauty was recognized, and the Byzantine mosaics outside the *kiblah* direction were left untouched until the 17th century (Necipoğlu, 1992). Also, the tourist gaze was employed in the monument long before 1934, since the Byzantine period, through diplomatic tours and spectacles (Steiner & Neumeier, 2021). As Gülru Necipoğlu says, the custodians of the monument sought to create an ambiance that embodied both the "divine will and imperial power" (1992, p.200). On the other hand, Edhem Eldem (2015) suggests that the political

representations of and power struggles over Hagia Sophia often transcended its function as a place of worship.

In 1934, the collection of historical layers in Hagia Sophia was dedicated to a different function through deconsecration. The modern Republic transformed the "Ayasofya Mosque" into a museum. During 86 years, Hagia Sophia Museum became a prominent cultural landmark of Turkey, serving as a site for tourism, heritage, and research. While it was functioning as a museum, the Islamist-nationalist groups in Turkey advocating for the "Ayasofya Cause" demanded to restore its religious function and open it as a mosque once again (Azak, 2014). This demand grew stronger over time, and in 2020, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque (Image 1. 1).



Image 1. 1: The Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. (Photograph by the Author, October 2021)

After the opening ceremony of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque in July 2020, the physical entity of Hagia Sophia did not transform much. As it appeared in the media, the primary novelties were the removal of the ticket booth, the veiling of the mosaics, and the turquoise carpets on the ground. Overall, the blueprint and outlook remained the same; no permanent structures and spaces were in question except for the foldable, moveable, temporal arrangements, which kept changing to the date this thesis was written. Then, the word "opening" unfolds in arguable readings: Is it a new place that was opened?

The decision-makers of the conversion called it a reclaiming of the old, almost expectant place that was reconverted to its "original state" (Ak Party Foreign Affairs, 2020, p.6). The phrase "original state" referred to Fatih's (Mehmed II) *firman*² issued after the conquest of Istanbul, which established the Hagia Sophia's status as a mosque for eternity. To quote the official discourse of the conversion, the period after the closure of the Ayasofya Mosque for religious worship was an "86-year break" (Directorate of Communications, 2020, p.7). Then, opening Hagia Sophia as a mosque again could restore the Ayasofya Mosque.

For the ones who desired its opening to prayer, Hagia Sophia was often idealized as the mosque of conquest in 1453 or the imperial mosque of the 16th century, the golden age of the Ottoman Empire (Batuman, 2020). Therefore, the opening ceremony was embellished with "neo-Ottoman, neo-imperial gestures", and "fueled by anachronic nostalgia" (Harmanşah, 2020). Nevertheless, one wonders if the conversion could reenact this idealized Ottoman Mosque. In other words, was the discourse on recreating the 'Ayasofya Mosque' kept in the post-conversion period?

Hagia Sophia was a highly revenue-generating heritage site and a world-renowned, prestigious landmark of Turkey while functioning as a museum. Therefore, during the conversion, official discourses advertising Hagia Sophia as a mosque needed to maintain some of its museum qualities. Eldem described that this change in the discourse of the conversion resembled "a process of negotiation or bargaining" between

² For Fatih's (Mehmed the Conquerer) firman [decree] issued after the conquest, and the controversy on its legal status, see Akgündüz, Öztürk & Baş, 2006; Akan, 2020

the state and the international institutions (2021, p.244). After the conversion, this change in the discourse became apparent in the experience and the new program of the place. For example, through her observations in Hagia Sophia, Gür stated that since the symbolism of the conversion was "even more important than its function as a mosque," Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque today "serves more like a museum" (Institute for Comparative Modernities, Cornell University, 2022).

1.2 Aim of the Study

After the conversion, Hagia Sophia has been used as an active place of worship where large congregational prayers were held. Along with them, a notable tourist influx and attention to the cultural significance of the monument have also continued. These instances indicate the ambiguities in Hagia Sophia's conversion into a mosque.

The conversion was presented as the restoration of the Ayasofya Mosque that is in the conservative imagination. Nevertheless, the new place, Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque, brings new questions about the conversion. To understand this new place, in this thesis, I focus on exploring the everyday life of Hagia Sophia.

Extensive research has been conducted on the discursive readings and political representations of the conversion. Nevertheless, studies focusing on the spatial program and experience of the monument have remained limited. While the studies of Enginsoy Ekinci (n.d.), Azak (2021), Eldem (2021), and Gür (2022) are significant in drawing attention to Hagia Sophia after the conversion, they do not present an in-depth investigation into how it works as a place in its everyday life. This thesis aims to close this gap in the literature by understanding the new program and experience of the place through its everyday life. Drawing on this perspective, this thesis dwells on the following questions:

- What kind of a spatial program does the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque have after the conversion? What is the spatial order like during prayer, visiting time, etc.?
- What formal events, daily activities, and incidents are accommodated in the place? What is the daily, weekly, etc., rhythm of it?

- What are the patterns of movement look like? What can we say about the use of space?
- How do its users experience the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque?

1.3 Theoretical Approach

The main inspiration for this research stems from the architectural and urban critic Kim Dovey's discussion on place (2007; 2010). Dovey argues that "Place is at once experienced, structured, and discursively constructed" (2010, p.13). This view describes the architecture and urban space as "multiple 'framing' wherein representations are framed by spatial structures that are in turn infused with narrative interpretations" (2010, p.46). Dovey suggests that we should avoid reducing the place to a mere text or form or over-emphasizing its experiential and sensual aspects. Instead, place needs to be analyzed and interpreted with a pluralistic approach considering the multiple dimensions of experience, meaning, and spatial structure (2010).

In "Framing Places" (2007), Dovey's primary focus is on the relationship between power and place and how power is mediated in dimensions of place. The ideology "constructs place experience and design process at all levels" (Dovey, 2007, p.45), and power is mediated in the spatial, experiential, and representational dimensions of place. The mediation of power in built form is through practices of force, coercion, manipulation, domination, seduction, and authority. These practices can generate complex buildings in which embedded ideologies cannot be recognized (Dovey, 2007, pp.9-16). Dovey states that the less seen the practices of power in place are, "the less questionable they become" (2007, p.2). To uncover how they are mediated in place, he draws on tools from phenomenology, discourse analysis, and Space Syntax analysis. He argues that places can be interpreted comprehensively with the integration of these tools of analysis (Dovey, 2007, p.3).

To make power visible in the spatial program, Dovey refers to the Space Syntax methods and tools of spatial analysis developed by Hillier and Hanson in the 1980s (1984). In Dovey's terms, Space Syntax aims to map the "'social logic' of architecture to reveal ideology embedded in architectural genotypes" (Dovey, 2007, p.3). Space Syntax explains the spatial structure and reveals the "ordering of relations between people" in

space (Hillier & Hanson, 1984, p.2). Hillier and Hanson use building plans to illustrate the qualities of space, such as depth/shalowness and control/ringiness (1984). In his case studies, Dovey draws on Space Syntax analysis to understand the spatial program of places (2007; 2010). For example, in the case of the Parliament House in Canberra, Dovey produces diagrams showing the building's entries, rooms, and visiting rules to interpret its spatial program. He analyzes the accessibility, control, and visibility in space. He observes that these are experienced differently by the users, such as visitors, Parliament members, and press members, and interprets the ways democracy and authority are embodied in the architecture of the Parliament Building. (2007, p. 87-103). While employing the Space Syntax analysis, Dovey also draws attention to some problems he observes. First, he states that this method better applies to the cellular analysis of interior spaces, "and many contemporary buildings defy" clear enclosure and segmentation (2007, p.25). Most importantly, Dovey argues that although Space Syntax analysis looks at the users' movement in space to understand the social logic of space, it still prioritizes the physical and formal aspects of place over its social and cultural dimensions (2007, p.25). Therefore, he supports Space Syntax analysis with other methods and tools.

Media narratives, official discourses, and cultural representations and symbols shape our experience and interpretation of place. Dovey employs discourse analysis to unveil these ideologies, values, and meanings attributed to places. He claims that discourse analysis greatly contributes to decoding practices of power in place, but it can also strengthen them or make the place "available for appropriation into new codes of domination" (2007, p.38). Thus, discourse analysis alone is insufficient for understanding place (Dovey, 2010, p.4). On the other hand, the everyday experience of place can be a ground where the dominant discourses are tested and challenged. Thus, looking at the lived experience or sense of place in the analysis of place is important.

Dovey argues that the everyday sense of place is mostly taken for granted (2010, p.4). Drawing on thinkers like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and the phenomenological philosophy, he explains that lived experiences, senses, and actions are our primary relation to place compared to its abstract conceptions (2007, p.39-41). On the other hand,

he also notes that the experience of place is connected to the ideologies it is constructed through. Phenomenology alone "can involve a certain blindness to the pronounced effects of social structure and ideology" (Dovey, 2007, p.44). For this reason, it is also required to understand how ideology frames the built environment and daily experience of place.

In both "Framing Places" (2007) and "Becoming Places" (2010), Dovey presents case studies in which he interrogates the relationship between built form and power. In these, he tests his approach to analyzing places through the dimensions of discourse, spatial program, and experience of place.

Dovey's first-hand interaction with the places he studies is noted as one of his major contributions to the study of place (Morton, 2000). He explains his inquiries about how places 'work' as follows: "I am also interested in understanding the ways in which specific places work: the morphologies and socio-spatial networks of boundaries and segments; the flows of everyday life; the narratives that are expressed through them; and the desires, hopes and fears that are invested in them." (2010, p.13). For this, he engages with the place and observes it through various mediums. He starts his case studies by informing about the history and development of the particular urban space and building typology (Dovey, 2007; 2010). Then, he begins to explore the place and its routines and depicts his experiences in walkthrough narratives and photographs. Based on his site observations and drawing on the methods of Space Syntax, he produces maps and diagrams to analyze the spatial program of the place. In some of the case studies, he also interviews users, designers, and planners to gain insights into the everyday life of the place. He identifies patterns from these conversations, official discourses, and materials like advertisements. He also refers to the symbols and semiotic references found in the place. Then, he makes a discourse analysis to understand the ideological and cultural representations of the place. In the end, he develops a comprehensive understanding of the place by investigating its multiple dimensions.

1.4 Methodology

This research aims to read Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque as a place through its everyday life. For this, I examine a period starting with its transformation into a mosque in July 2020 and extending to the present day. Besides, I analyze a more specific period between October 2022 and March 2023 through the fieldwork I conducted at Hagia Sophia.

In this research, I approach Hagia Sophia inspired by Dovey's theoretical and methodological approach to understanding place (2007; 2010). In his works, Dovey deals with place from a pluralistic perspective encompassing its constructed meanings, spatial program, and daily experience (2007; 2010). In this research, I aim to follow a similar path in interpreting Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque as a place. After the conversion in 2020, Hagia Sophia was primarily examined in terms of the political implications of the transformation and less as a living place. To fill this gap in the literature, in this research, I mainly deal with the daily experience and spatial program of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque.

To understand how Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque works as a place in its everyday life, I conducted fieldwork employing the participant observation method. The fieldwork comprised site visits and interviews with the visitors to Hagia Sophia. Between October 2022 and March 2023, I visited the site on different days of the week, particularly at prayer times. I examined the daily incidents, visitors, and management of the space during prayer and visiting times. I recorded my experiences and observations through field notes, photographs, and maps. I produced diagrams on Hagia Sophia's floor plan by tracing the patterns of visitors' mobility, access and use of space, and the spatial order within the site. During the semi-structured interviews, I tried to identify the users' experience and view of the place. Through my own experience of the site, diagrams, and interviewees' narratives, I aimed to reach a comprehensive understanding of the spatial program and experience of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque.

Besides the fieldwork, I researched the history of Hagia Sophia and the conversion process by drawing upon perspectives from architecture, heritage, and politics. I tried to

identify the meanings constructed for Hagia Sophia in the official discourses, academic studies, and media.

To summarize, I observed the place in its everyday life through its lived experience, analyzed its spatial program, and investigated its constructed representations. From this pluralistic approach, I tried to understand how the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque works as a place.

1.5 Thesis Structure

Following the introduction, in Chapter 2: The Story of the Conversion, I try to unfold the process of Hagia Sophia's conversion into a mosque in 2020. First, I present an outline of the history of the Hagia Sophia, its museumification, and demands for its conversion into a mosque. Coming to recent history, I provide a view of the official discourse regarding the conversion in 2020 and the official displays of the new place. For this, I refer to official sources such as the Directorate of Communications, Presidency of Religious Affairs, Ak Party Foreign Affairs, and Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye. I also look at the official news agency of Türkiye, Anadolu Agency, state television, TRT, and different independent newspapers to follow the events in the conversion and post-conversion periods. The other sources of information I examine are international institutions like UNESCO, World Heritage Center, and ICOMOS. Besides these, I research how scholars, institutions, and political actors have evaluated the official discourse and symbolism of the conversion and the program, function, and experience of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. For this, I draw on various articles, reports, open letters, and blog posts.

In Chapter 3, I present the fieldwork I conducted in the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque between October 2022 and March 2023. I start with a walkthrough in Hagia Sophia to introduce the experience of the place from my site visits. Then, I focus on the interviews I conducted on the visitors' experiences of Hagia Sophia. Also, I present the diagrams of analysis that I produced drawing on Kim Dovey's and Hillier & Hanson's (1984) understanding of the spatial program of place. I discuss my observations, analyses, and interviewees' narratives under five discussion themes. In "Co-existence: Exhibiting the

Intertwining Layers”, I focus on the presentation and exhibition of the multi-layeredness of Hagia Sophia in the mosque status. In “Conversion: Mosque, Church, Museum, and in Between”, I look at how the place is experienced and viewed at the interface of a museum, church, and converted mosque. In “Rules and Manners: “Adap”, the interviews reveal specific rules of visit and manners in the experience of the place. The fourth theme, “Categorization: Scenarios & Fragmentation in Place”, is where I examine the spatial order and management in detail through the interviews and spatial analysis diagrams. Lastly, in “Gendered Perspectives: The Cage and The Camera”, I look at the experience and management of the place through the gender perspective.

The thesis concludes with a chapter in which I discuss the results of my fieldwork with reference to the existing literature on the conversion and the theoretical framework I employed during my research. I suggest that the multi-layeredness and shared identities of Hagia Sophia are significant aspects of the perception, management, and experience of the place. On the other hand, in terms of heritage presentation, it is promoted mostly on its Ottoman-Islamic identities. Still, the tourist flow and its recognition as a multi-layered monument render its mosque title different. Despite its designation as a place of Muslim worship, it continues to be experienced and perceived at the intersections of the museum, church, and mosque. Regarding the use of space and mobility within the site, strict manners and increasingly controlling site management are in play. On the other hand, the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque is especially distinct regarding transforming traditional and gendered spatial order of mosque spaces and accommodating unconventional practices. Ultimately, in its everyday life, Hagia Sophia offers vignettes where it significantly transforms from the constructed mosque of conversion.

2. THE STORY OF THE CONVERSION

In 1934, Hagia Sophia was gifted to humanity as "a unique architectural monument... [that] will gratify the entire Eastern World and will cause humanity to gain a new institution of knowledge" (Özmen, 2002, as cited in Katipoğlu & Caner-Yüksel, 2010, p.214). The museumification process began in 1931 when the government permitted the Byzantine Institute of America to conduct research and restoration in Hagia Sophia (Katipoğlu & Caner-Yüksel, 2010). As a museum, it would be recognized as a prestigious cultural heritage site and used for scientific studies and tourism. Also, the religious and nationalist conflicts in Hagia Sophia were hoped to resolve on the neutral ground of a secular museum (Akcan, 2020).

The conflict on the shared values of Hagia Sophia has a long history. First, as Robert Ousterhout shows (2020a; 2020b), in the 19th and 20th centuries, some Western political groups and philhellenist lobbies started to demand the reconversion of Hagia Sophia into its origin, an Orthodox Christian church. Later with the First World War and the Turkish Independence War, especially in the Greek and Turkish perceptions, appropriating Hagia Sophia became a more pronounced goal (Aykaç, 2018; Yerasimos & Akalın, 1997). Ultimately, the contested identities of Hagia Sophia created fear, resistance, and conflict between congregations and nations (Akan, 2020; Çekiç, 2022).

In this tense period, after the founding of the new Republic, its museumification in 1934 aimed to distance Hagia Sophia from both the church and mosque statuses. This decision also aligned with the modern Republic's desire to disentangle from the Ottoman past (Necipoğlu, 1992, p.225). On the other hand, the Islamist nationalists believed that its conversion into a museum represented the loss of the "Ayasofya Mosque" and the victimization of the Turkish-Muslim community of the young Republic. They aspired to relocate this heritage back to its origin, a mosque. However, these voices remained weak until the end of the single-party regime in the 1950s. Then, the "Hagia Sophia Cause" [Ayasofya Davası] supporters expressed their demands of reconversion more visibly. They worked on rebuilding the Ottoman and Islamic

character of Hagia Sophia with the literary works produced and public demonstrations like Conquest celebrations (Azak, 2014). These campaigns were ultimately motivated by the idea of the re-conquest of Istanbul (Azak, 2014; Gür, 2023). In conservative literary works, Ayasofya was a feminized monument, “a hostage” (Kafesçioğlu, 2014, p.6), waiting to be conquered and Turkified by the reconversion into a mosque (Karakaya, 2021). For the Cause, Hagia Sophia was respected not because of its Byzantine roots but despite them (Karakaya, 2021).

Between the 1950s and the 1990s, no concrete steps were taken to fulfill the conservative desire to restore Ayasofya as a mosque (Tarhan, Uriarte & Catoni, 2022). Yet, the Cause was kept alive in the political campaigns and during several incidents. The two significant events were the 1967 Pope's service in Hagia Sophia and the corresponding mass Muslim prayer organized in front of the museum. After the 1960s, public demonstrations and events with Ayasofya at the center gained momentum and amplified. After 1953, the Conquest celebrations started to be conducted each year on the 29th of May (Azak, 2014). Gür (2023) states that these demonstrations have reproduced the loss of Ayasofya, although the monument was already inside the national borders of Turkey. She describes this attitude through the concept of melancholia which has kept alive the Cause (Gür, 2023).

Between the 1980s and the 1990s, Turkey was in the process of accession to the European Union and adopting a new liberal economic model (Soysal, Çürümez & Diner, 2015, p.103-106). The heritage field was also affected by this turn in politics and the economy (Avdoulos, 2015). In 1985, Hagia Sophia was inscribed in UNESCO World Heritage List as part of the Historic Areas of Istanbul (World Heritage Convention, n.d.). As Atakuman (2010) illustrates, Istanbul's promotion for the listing primarily focused on multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. It maintained that "Ottomans and Turks had continued to preserve the Byzantine remains since the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul in 1453, at a time when Europeans hadn't the slightest notion of the universal ideals of tolerance and diversity" (Atakuman, 2010, p.116). This comparison with the West is noteworthy as it continued to be relevant in the following years and reemerged in the conversion of Hagia Sophia in 2020.

The period after the 1990s was characterized as a time of neo-liberalism and the rise of political Islam in Turkey, with Istanbul attaining a global role (Aykaç, 2018; Keyder, 1999, pp. 17-21). During this period, there was a revival of cosmopolitan motifs from the Ottoman era, seen as a means to pursue accession to the European Union and global markets (Göktürk, Soysal & Türeli, 2010; Öncü, 2010). Hagia Sophia was a suitable platform to showcase Istanbul and Turkey's multi-layered history and multicultural fabric. For example, it was one of the highlights of an official publication released for the 2010 Istanbul European Capital of Culture. Here, Kuban illustrates the city of Istanbul as a "universal place" where "historical meetings and historical continuities" (2010, p.19). Hagia Sophia, an ancient Byzantine church and Ottoman mosque, stands as the greatest testament of these qualities (Kuban, 2010). Later, in 2013, Hagia Sophia appeared in a campaign related to Istanbul's bid for the 2020 Olympics logo. Here, Hagia Sophia (Museum) and Sultanahmet Mosque stood side by side, symbolizing secularism and Islam, West and East, respectively, and Istanbul was their crossroads (Avdoulos, 2015). In the future, this rhetoric about Istanbul being a crossroads merged with other themes and continued to render Hagia Sophia a source of national pride.

It is argued that the neo-liberalist turn in the 2000s showed a change in heritage and identity politics, especially in the last decade of the ruling party JDP and after the Gezi protests in 2013. This shift involved a transition from reflecting the cosmopolitan elements of Ottoman society to selectively glorifying the Turkish-Islamic traces, described as neo-Ottomanism (Aykaç, 2018; Dorroll, 2015). The return to the Ottoman legacy influenced the built environment as well. Monumental mosques in Çamlıca and Taksim and public buildings abroad signaled the homogenization of the nation and Turkey's political ambitions in the region (Avcıoğlu, 2020; Batuman, 2018b). Another area where the state's neo-Ottomanist approach was recognized was in the field of heritage. As İpek Türeli (2018) points out, the Panorama 1453 History Museum in Istanbul was a platform where the national identity was reproduced in line with the state neo-Ottomanism. In this museum, heritage interpretation materials educated visitors about the Conquest of Istanbul in 1453, while representing a contemporary re-conquest ideal (Türeli, 2018, pp. 183-191).

The neo-Ottomanist heritage ideology has been particularly evident in Istanbul, the old imperial capital. As Aykaç (2019) shows, the core and museum display of the ancient Byzantine and Ottoman pasts of Istanbul, Sultanahmet, was at the center of these changes. The Sultanahmet Area has undergone substantial reconstruction, re-framing, and presentation for tourist consumption, influenced by neo-Ottomanism. Aykaç argues that the layers of history in this area were treated through a selective "cultural ideology" aiming "to reassert the district's Ottoman identity by diminishing its late-Roman and Byzantine past" (2019, p.165). Ultimately, Hagia Sophia would also have its share of this ideology with interventions that primarily emphasized its Ottoman-Islamic layers, such as the opening of the Imaret as a Carpet Museum and the reconstruction of the Ayasofya Madrasa (Aykaç, 2019).

In another study, Aykaç introduces several "Ayasofya" conversions across Anatolia, shedding light on the selective approach toward Byzantine heritage in Turkey (2018). The Iznik, Vize, and Trabzon Hagia Sophias are Byzantine churches converted to Ottoman mosques and later became museums in the Republican period. In this regard, they share many points with each other and Istanbul Hagia Sophia and Chora³. In 2018, Aykaç argued that reopening these sites to prayer between 2007 and 2013 could be a precursor for Istanbul Hagia Sophia. She addressed Deputy Prime Minister Arınç's speech in 2013 regarding this matter (2018). In 2013, when the Hagia Sophia Imaret opened as the Carpet Museum, mentioning the conversions of the Iznik and Trabzon Hagia Sophias, Arınç expressed hope for seeing the "sad" Istanbul Hagia Sophia "smiling" ("Ayasofya bize bir", 2013).

It is seen that towards the end of its museum period, Hagia Sophia was subject to discussions surrounding its function, management, and social and political representations as a museum. The boundaries between its sacred and secular perceptions became blurred. For example, Avdoulos (2015) explains that although the secular museum status rendered Hagia Sophia "unlived" (p.187), it was alive for "many

³ The Chora (Kariye) Museum was converted to a mosque on August 21, 2020 by another presidential decree. The mosque is closed to prayer by 2023 due to ongoing restoration works (Bulovalı, 2022; Türetken & Gündüz, 2020).

Muslims and Christians who recognize this building as part of their religious histories" (p.189). These congregations' emotional engagement with Hagia Sophia's sacred qualities continued visibly in the Museum's management and daily operations. Hagia Sophia became a museum where the *azan*⁴ was recited from the *minarets*⁵, and - Christian and Islamic - religious souvenirs were sold inside. These aspects put Hagia Sophia as a museum in a challenging position and called for alternative approaches to its heritage management (Avdoulos, 2015). Like Avdoulos, Bigelow (2018) states that while it was presented as an open and universal museum operating under the UNESCO regime, the neo-Byzantine and Islamist groups claimed to appropriate Hagia Sophia through its sacred identities. Due to this contest, she argues that making Hagia Sophia an active religious site again someday was not a remote possibility (Bigelow, 2018).

In 2014, Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu responded to the demands of reconversion into a mosque from a perspective which reminds of Akcan's comment (2020) above. She addressed that, during its functioning as a mosque and church, the spatial order and experience of Hagia Sophia was shaped by "religious and gender hierarchies" (2014, p.7). Thus, its transformation into a mosque would entail that "not every gender and religious believer would be fortunate enough to experience"⁶ the multi-layered history and meanings of Hagia Sophia under its magnificent dome (Kafesçioğlu, 2014, p.8).

In this context, some interventions in Hagia Sophia further complicated the situation regarding its sacred and secular identities. As the study of Tarhan et al. (2022) demonstrates, by 2017, programmatic changes such as the opening of the Hünkar Kasrı [Sultan's Pavilion] to prayer and holding Qoran recitations and religious programs within the Museum gradually granted it some Islamic character.

Apart from these physical and programmatic interventions and public statements, the museum status of Hagia Sophia was called into question on legal grounds as well.

⁴ The Islamic call to prayer.

⁵ A minaret is a tower adjacent to a mosque used as a platform for reciting *azan*, the Islamic call to prayer.

⁶ "Ayasofya camiye çevrildiği takdirde ne tür bir mekan düzenlemesine sahne olacağını hayal edebiliriz. Kanımca insanı İstanbul tarihinin olağanüstü çok boyutluluğu ile karşı karşıya getiren, bu tarihin bir parçası kılan deneyimlerden biridir bu kubbenin altında durmak. Camiye çevrilmiş olan Ayasofya'da bu deneyimin herkese, her cinsiyete ve din mensubuna nasip olmayacağını söylersek fazlaca şüpheli davranmış olmayız" (Kafesçioğlu, 2014, p.8)

Lawsuits were filed against the 1934 decree, citing alleged legal irregularities such as forged signatures and non-compliance with Fatih's endowment on Hagia Sophia (Akan, 2020; Akgündüz, Öztürk & Baş, 2006). Lastly, the legal process starting with a lawsuit brought by Sürekli Vakıflar Tarihi Eserlere ve Çevreye Hizmet Foundation, first in 2005 and later in 2016, came to an end in 2020. Based on the decision of the 10th Chamber of the Council of State, the 1934 decree on transforming Hagia Sophia into a museum was canceled. The Presidential decree on converting the Hagia Sophia and Chora Museums into mosques was issued on July 10th (Dal & Karadağ, 2020). Defter-i Hakani⁷ building near the Ibrahim Paşa Palace in the Sultanahmet Square was designated as the new museum to house the historical artifacts from Hagia Sophia (“Ayasofya'daki eserler için”, 2020). The inauguration ceremony for the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque took place on 2020 July 24th.

2.1 Debut of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque

The “Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi” opening ceremony was broadcast live on several national TV channels and Youtube (Yeni Şafak, 2020). Throughout the 3 hours long ceremonial prayer, the Ayasofya Square was filled, and the Divanyolu, Atmeydanı, and Yerebatan streets were closed to traffic. The ceremony was attended by a crowd of 350,000 individuals (“Ayasofya'da kaç kişi”, 2020) (Image 2. 1). While men dominated the congregation, there were two areas designated for women near the tomb of Sultan Ahmet and at the Mehmet Akif Park (Usubaliev, 2020).

Many Islamic motifs and references to the Ottomans were visible during the ceremony. Some attendants were in Ottoman-era costumes, holding Palestine and Ottoman flags. The *azan* was recited simultaneously by four muezzins from the four *minarets*, creating a sublime atmosphere. Inside, President Erdoğan recited verses from *Qoran*. The President of Religious Affairs, Ali Erbaş, ascended the *minbar* with a sword to reenact the Conquest scene from 1453 (Yeni Şafak, 2020). He started his highly disputed *khutbah* [Friday sermon] by thanking all who had served Ayasofya to date: the Ottoman sultans and architects, Islamic figures, and Islamist philosophers and writers.

⁷ Today's the 2nd Regional Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre. It was built by architect Vedat Tek in 1910.

Mentioning Fatih's firman and Hagia Sophia's eternal status as a mosque, he also reminded the audience of Sultan's curse for those who violate his endowment. After this, Erbaş thanked the state officials, especially President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who made it possible to re-open Hagia Sophia for prayer after 86 years of break. Finally, he portrayed Turkey as a model of tolerance, freedom of faith, and humanity due to its historical devotion to Hagia Sophia (Presidency of Religious Affairs, 2020a).



Image 2. 1: The area around Hagia Sophia during the opening ceremony. [Image]. Adapted from "CANLI YAYIN | Ayasofya Camii'nde Cuma Namazı" by Yeni Şafak (2020), Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCQLrDiR_Kc

The ceremony was both a spectacle for political messages and the debut of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. Some of the spatial interventions brought by the transformation into a mosque, such as the curtain system on the mosaics, were shown. The mosaics inside Hagia Sophia were planned to be closed with curtains in times of prayer and exposed during visiting time. In the opening ceremony, one example of this was on the *kiblah*⁸ wall: the veiled *Apse* mosaics were shown quickly in a few shots. On the other hand, the non-figurative ornaments, the *ayat* inscriptions on the dome, and the calligraphic roundels from the Ottoman period were abundantly displayed (Image 2. 2). Another highlight of the show was the *Seraphim* figures on three *pendentives* with masks on their faces. Coincidentally, the fourth Seraphim figure was hidden behind the restoration scaffolding⁹ (Yeni Şafak, 2020).

⁸ Kiblah refers to the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, which is the direction towards which Muslims face during prayers.

⁹ The restoration scaffolding was set in Hagia Sophia since 2013. When the scaffolding was removed in November 2020, the fourth Seraphim Angel would surprise the visitors with its open face (Türetken, 2020).



Image 2. 2: The Seraphim Angels, calligraphic roundels, and the restoration scaffolding. [Image]. Adapted from "CANLI YAYIN | Ayasofya Camii'nde Cuma Namazı" by Yeni Şafak (2020), Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCQLrDiR_Kc

The ceremonial prayer and the mosque's atmosphere were captured in long shots. Beautifully lit under chandeliers, the main space was filled with the male congregation (Image 2. 3). The prayers - inside - gathered within precautions against the pandemic. The custom-made turquoise carpets covered the marble floor except for the *Omphalion*, the imperial coronation area. Behind wooden separators, some part of the *North Side Nave* was designated for women. There were pinkish carpets in different shapes and sizes on the floor instead of turquoise ones (Image 2. 4). The First Lady and the female protocol members were praying there (Yeni Şafak, 2020).



Image 2. 3: The main space filled with the male congregation. [Image]. Adapted from "CANLI YAYIN | Ayasofya Camii'nde Cuma Namazı" by Yeni Şafak (2020), Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCQLrDiR_Kc



Image 2. 4: The women's section during the ceremony. [Image]. Adapted from "CANLI YAYIN | Ayasofya Camii'nde Cuma Namazı" by Yeni Şafak (2020), Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCQLrDiR_Kc

Another display of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque after this first debut is also noteworthy. The TRT documentary¹⁰ “Gizemli Tarih: Ayasofya” was released on November 2020. The documentary focused on the mysterious history of Hagia Sophia with anecdotes from science and history, and legends. It also announced the conversion to the audience, stating "the ancient temple which had stayed as a museum and was opened to prayer on 24th of July 2020” (TRT Belgesel, 2020).

The Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque shown here slightly differed from the one on the opening day. For instance, this time, the mosaics were shown in more detail. The Virgin Mary and Child and Gabriel mosaics at the *Apse* were half visible through the fabric pieces. The Offer mosaic above the Emperor Gate was fully closed with a curtain (TRT Belgesel, 2020).

There were some brand-new sights as well. For example, some parts of the documentary were filmed on the gallery floor, which was not shown during the opening ceremony. There were information boards in front of the mosaics here, but it was unclear if this floor was in use. Another change was seen in the women's section. The North Side Nave - behind the restoration scaffolding - was not covered with carpets. Instead, there was felt on the ground. From this detail, it was understood that the North Side Nave was not in use yet. On the opposite side, the South Side Nave was segregated from the main space with wooden barriers and designated for women. The main space

¹⁰ The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) is Turkey's national public broadcasting corporation.

was a free area where men were praying and strolling (Image 2. 5) (TRT Belgesel, 2020).



Image 2. 5: The Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque in the TRT documentary. [Image]. Adapted from "Gizemli Tarih: Ayasofya | TRT Belgesel" by TRT Belgesel (2020), Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eltgqziRWWg>

Besides these two shows displaying Hagia Sophia after the conversion, several official publications were released between 2020 and 2022. The "Hagia Sophia Mosque: The Trust of Fatih Sultan Mehmed Khan, The Common Heritage of Humanity" was published by the Directorate of Communications in 2020. Including the President's speech on the conversion and the official refurbishment plan for Hagia Sophia, this publication can be considered a source for the official discourse. Its history chapters covered the conquest of Istanbul and Fatih's firman on the Ayasofya Mosque in detail. While a particular focus was on the Ottoman period, there were very few mentions of the Byzantine past of Hagia Sophia. It incorporated a new discourse that outshined the rhetoric of the crossroads and cosmopolitanism. Here, Hagia Sophia symbolized the tolerance and diversity experienced in the Ottoman peace "climate" (Directorate of Communications, 2020, p.105). The book was prepared in three languages - Arabic, English, and Turkish - and distributed to the attendants during the opening ceremony. Derived from its chapters, an official website, "ayasofyacamii.gov.tr," was created. Also, the Foreign Affairs branch of the ruling party JDP published an online book in English (Ak Party Foreign Affairs, 2020). This book focused on the legal basis of the conversion and the state policies on preserving non-Muslim religious sites in Turkey.

Next year, on May 29, for the 568th anniversary of the Conquest of Istanbul, and on June 15, for the commemoration of the coup d'état attempt in 2016, light show

programs were organized in Galata Tower and the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque¹¹ (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı, 2021a; 2021b). Later on June 24th, the Directorate of Communications released a video to mark the first anniversary of the conversion. The video included the views of citizens visiting Hagia Sophia after its reopening for worship. The visitors expressed the sense of spirituality and history felt inside the mosque and their contentment with the free admission. Views inside the mosque showed it as a place of worship actively used by men and women, foreigners, and locals (Communications Türkiye, 2021).

In 2022, the Directorate of Communications published two books and released a documentary for the second anniversary of the conversion. One of the books focused on the architecture, while the other was a compilation of citizens' posts about Hagia Sophia submitted through the Presidential Communication Center (CIMER) ("İletişim Başkanlığından Ayasofya'ya", 2022). Meanwhile, the Governorship of Istanbul also prepared a documentary for the second anniversary of the conversion. It was announced as an exciting development that the number of visitors to Hagia Sophia surged, with expectations of reaching 17-18 million by the end of 2022 (T.C. İstanbul Valiliği, 2022).

While this increase in the number of visitors was generally seen in a positive light, there were also unfortunate situations that arose as a result of the crowd. In April and May 2022, the visitors harmed the Emperor's Gate, the historical water chamber, and the ancient walls (Arkeofili 2022a; 2022b). These events attracted considerable media attention, and the responsible authorities quickly sought to restore the monuments. In an open letter written, the Association of Greek Archaeologists (2022) asked UNESCO to "intervene strongly to reverse the current situation" against this "destructive management". The official proclamations stated that these accidents were not resulted from a security weakness as the monument was protected by 154 security cameras, 68 security guards and tourism police (Arkeofili 2022a; 2022b).

Besides the official publications and shows, between 2020 and 2023, religious activities took place in the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. For example, congregational prayer

¹¹ For the spectacles held in Hagia Sophia during the Conquest celebrations, see Gür, 2023.

programs were held in Hagia Sophia on religious and national holidays, commemoration days, the new year, Fridays, and other special days¹². These prayers were led by state officials such as the governors, the President of Religious Affairs, and the President¹³. Also, in 2023, the Ramadan program of TRT was broadcast from Hagia Sophia ("TRT 1'den Ramazan Ayına", 2023). Ultimately, the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque became an official place of worship and a stage for public statements and media events.

2.2 Reactions to the Conversion of Hagia Sophia

Since 2020, institutions, scholars, politicians, and congregations have shown their interest in the conversion of Hagia Sophia from various fields. From the fields of architecture and art history, Batuman (2020) and Avcıoğlu (2020) noted that revitalizing the Ottoman Ayasofya Mosque not only fulfilled the long-awaited aspiration of conservatism in Turkey but was also part of the JDP's neo-Ottomanist agenda on the built environment like the contested Çamlıca and Taksim Mosques. The neo-Ottomanist ideology was also criticized for privileging the Ottoman period while neglecting the "multiple and complex past(s)" of Hagia Sophia (Blessing & Yayıoğlu, 2021, p.197). Italian Association of Byzantine Studies published an open letter (2020) stating that the conversion was an intolerant "gesture of re-conquest" threatening the shared heritage of Byzantine and Ottoman civilizations¹⁴. Some suggested an innovative approach for its presentation "taking into account its entire history, with all its functions, is possible within the mosque" (Blessing & Yayıoğlu, 2020).

Another open letter was published by Friends of Hagia Sophia (2020), which was a platform formed upon the conversion with members from Byzantine historians, architects, and heritage experts. The letter stated that the ongoing politically-motivated

¹² In 2023, prayer programs were held in Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque for the earthquake victims in the month of February ("Vatandaşlar Miraç Kandili'ni", 2023), and during the election campaigns in the month of May ("Erdoğan, seçim programını", 2023).

¹³ The prayer programs are often announced through social media. Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque has social media profiles on Instagram, Tiktok, Facebook, Twitter, and Twitch, and a Youtube channel active since February 2021 (Ayasofya Camii, n.d.).

¹⁴ The International Association of Byzantine Studies (AIEB) postponed the 24th International Byzantine Studies Congress in Istanbul in 2021 after the conversion of Hagia Sophia ("Byzantine Studies Congress", 2020).

conflict was “a war of words”, and Hagia Sophia was already functioning as both “a museum and a mosque”. It suggested openly discussing solutions for responsible conservation and management of the monument in its new state (Friends of Hagia Sophia, 2020). Tanyeri-Erdemir (2020) and Akcan (2020) particularly expressed concerns about how securely the spatial arrangements, such as the veil mechanisms and carpets, were installed in the ancient monument without threatening its architectural integrity.

In internal politics, Sofos (2021) described the conversion as another "emotionally loaded project" realized by JDP through mobilizing masses with narratives of "people's will" and anti-elitism (p.3). Several statements published by pro-government foundations and institutes support this argument. For example, an open letter published by The Institute of Islamic Thought (2020) highlighted the emotional aspects of the conversion claiming that it was reconciling act ending the museum period which "caused great bitterness [...] and frustration in our society, and a source of ever-widening unrest in it". In the pro-government press, the conversion was shown as a move that corrected a historical mistake and uplifted the nation and Islam (Mısırlı & Erdoğan, 2021). Its success in symbolizing the re-conquest of Istanbul was evident from the reaction of the West, particularly Greece (Özdikmenli Çelikoğlu, 2022). Drawing on these statements, several authors argued that from the conservative perspective, the museumification of Hagia Sophia was a past trauma that could only be cured by a second conquest (Arıboğan, 2021; Naz, 2021; Gür, 2023).

According to the opposition press, Hagia Sophia was instrumentalized within the government's anti-secular and anti-Republican agenda (Mısırlı & Erdoğan, 2021). Some claimed that the timing of the decision in the middle of the pandemic and economic crisis demonstrated that Hagia Sophia was utilized for voting support (Dressler, 2021). On the other hand, Eldem stated that even "the members of the political opposition who did not openly approve of the move were very cautious in voicing criticism", and instead of focusing on the religious and cultural sentimentality the conversion provoked, they criticized its timing (2021, p.244).

Hagia Sophia was also discussed in relation to its neighbor, Sultanahmet Mosque. Due to their proximity, its transformation into a mosque was considered unnecessary and purely motivated by politics. The President's public speech from 2019 was evoked where he replied to those who demanded converting Hagia Sophia, "First, fill Sultanahmet Mosque" (Yetkin, 2020). Some authors argued that the conversion was incompatible with the pluralism and tolerance promoted by Islam and followed by Fatih (Yılmaz, 2020; Pentcheva, 2021). Few "marginal voices" suggested converting Hagia Sophia back into an Orthodox church (Dressler, 2021, p.209). Meanwhile, the minorities in Turkey, especially the Greek Orthodox community, could not express their concerns regarding the Christian heritage and values of Hagia Sophia and remained silent compared to the international public opinion (Dressler, 2021).

The church leaders and Greece and Cyprus condemned the decision considering it a threat to the Christian civilization ("Turkey and Greece", 2020). A comment from the European Parliament claimed that the conversion violated the "symbol of peaceful co-existence and of the secular character of the Turkish Republic" (Branislav, 2020). As a response, official statements by the government asserted that the decision on Hagia Sophia was a domestic affair not to be intervened by international institutions and other countries ("Erdogan rejects global", 2020). The conversion was advertised as a demonstration of Turkey's national sovereignty and increased power against Western influence (Adar, 2020).

On the other hand, the President of Religious Affairs sent letters to the Muslim countries' leaders, expressing his hope to pray in Hagia Sophia together (Presidency of Religious Affairs, 2020b). Among the Islamic countries, some supported that the conversion elevated the status of Islam, while some recognized it as the exploitation of religion (Öztürk, 2020). Similarly, for Rahimov (2021), the conversion deteriorated Turkey's reputation as "a distinctly European-style, secular Muslim democracy", and strengthened Islamophobia (p.285). Jamaledine (2020) remarked that the official discourse of the conversion targeted the international audience in Muslim and Western countries differently. He addressed that Turkey sought to legitimize the conversion by

comparing Hagia Sophia with the religious monuments across Europe (Jamaledine, 2020).

2.1 Refurbishment Plan and Management of the Site

Before the inauguration day on the 24th of July, a protocol was issued on the 16th of July to share the conservation and religious services of Hagia Sophia between the Ministry of Culture and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Usul, 2020). Accordingly, a "Hagia Sophia Administrative Board" was formed with members from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Presidency of Religious Affairs, and General Directorate for Foundations. The conservation projects for the mosque would be prepared and implemented by the General Directorate of Foundations after the scientific review of the Scientific Advisory Board ("Ayasofya'da koruma ve geliştirme", 2020; Kayayerli, 2022).

On the 24th of July, "The Hagia Sophia Al-Kabeer Refurbishment Project" was submitted to UNESCO by the Conservation Board (UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, 2021). The changes by the refurbishment project included the following:

- “Visitors routes are determined. The property will be open for both worshippers and visitors;
- Worship and visiting areas are separated;
- Only during the prayer times, the apse mosaics on the *mihrab* in the worship area, the Imperial Gate Mosaic, and the southwestern entrance mosaic (the vestibule mosaic) will be closed with a folding curtain system, the remaining mosaics and frescoes will be kept as they are;
- Felt is laid over the ground of the worship area and it is covered with a carpet;
- The imperial coronation area [Omphalion] within the main area (naos) is separated with esthetic barriers;
- Works will be carried out in order to make the First Mahmut Fountain usable within the courtyard.” (UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, 2021)

Some of these changes were applied before being reported to UNESCO and were visible during the ceremony. UNESCO's official response to the conversion decision was "deep regret" (2020) as it was uninformed throughout the process, which would bring substantial changes to Hagia Sophia as a World Heritage Site¹⁵. ICOMOS and ICOM called attention to the fact that conservation and accessibility must continue "to be at the heart of the management of Hagia Sophia, regardless of its future function and jurisdiction" (ICOMOS, 2020).

Turkey's reaction to the international institutions and political leaders was to claim that any intervention in Hagia Sophia was a matter of the sovereignty of Turkey (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020). For the official discourse, keeping Hagia Sophia as a mosque was outdated and was as unreasonable as demanding the Vatican to be closed to worship and serve as a museum. Opening Hagia Sophia as an active religious site was a respectful act to the religious heritage as opposed to the treatment of al-Aqsa Mosque and Cordoba Mosque-Cathedral abroad (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). It was also in line with the Turkish-Islamic tradition of preserving the non-Muslim heritage (Ak Party Foreign Affairs, 2020). Thus, the opening of Hagia Sophia as an active religious site was defended against the international audiences in assertive claims.

On the other hand, different official proclamations sought to balance these aggressive statements. For example, there were comparisons to the examples from the Christian world like the Notre Dame, Sacre-Coeur, and Cologne Cathedrals, in which the tourism and religious services co-exist (Ak Party Foreign Affairs, 2020, p.22). Turkey tried to convince international institutions that Hagia Sophia's status as a World Heritage Site would be sustained. It declared that the conversion of Hagia Sophia aimed at "ensuring the preservation, development and sustainability of the historical, cultural, social, and spiritual values that are represented by (the) World Heritage Site and to duly address the aesthetic concern" (UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, 2021, p.56). The official discourse stated that the Outstanding Universal Value of Hagia Sophia as a World Heritage Site would sustain its importance in its new status. The monument would be

¹⁵ In 2020 and 2021, Advisory Missions (expert visits) were conducted to Hagia Sophia (see, UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, 2021; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

"open to all kinds of scientific studies as it was before" (Kıran, 2020, p.70). Also, "the presence of [Christian art] paintings [would] not be any hindrance to prayers and [would] be open to regular visitors, whoever wants to go and see those mosaics" (Ak Party Foreign Affairs, 2020, p.11). It was claimed that "being opened as a mosque does not detract in any way from Hagia Sophia's position as a museum" (Ak Party Foreign Affairs, 2020, p.7). In its new status, Hagia Sophia would be like "all our mosques": open to all "in a much more sincere and original way" (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020).

I argue that these statements are important since they address the new function of Hagia Sophia. As seen before, the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque was primarily understood and promoted as the ultimate product of the neo-Ottomanist ideology. According to this, the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque would finally fulfill the demand of the conservative-nationalist "Cause". It would be re-appropriated as a mosque highlighting its Turkish-Islamic character. By this, the representation of Hagia Sophia as a secular museum or universal heritage would change. However, it is understood that, owing to being the focus of diplomacy, scholarship, and tourism, the state eventually adopted alternative discourses in presenting the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque.

Through this change in the official discourse, the spatial program of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque was advertised to be inclusive and welcoming. The access of non-Muslims and foreigners to the monument was guaranteed. It was promised that the interventions entailed by the conversion would recognize and present Hagia Sophia as a common heritage. Instead of simply reenacting the Ayasofya Mosque in the conservative imagination, a more complex place was portrayed. Nevertheless, this new place was not yet apparent in the ceremonial prayer and the official displays. In this regard, I maintain that in order to explore how the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque works as a place, it is necessary to observe its everyday life.

3. THE FIELDWORK IN THE HAGIA SOPHIA GRAND MOSQUE

This chapter is on the fieldwork I conducted at the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque with the aim of exploring the everyday life of the place. To do this, I employed participant observation methods along with interviews with visitors on the site. I conducted 17 site visits on different days and conducted 49 interviews between October 2022 and March 2023.

During this fieldwork, I aimed to explore the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque and immerse myself in the monument's life. I had the opportunity to witness various daily occurrences and special events in Hagia Sophia. In October 2022, I introduced myself to some policemen at the entry as a researcher, explaining my regular visits to the site. Nevertheless, I did not request (from them or other managers of the site) access to normally inaccessible areas or bypass the waiting line to enter faster. Each time, I chose to get in line with the visitors and patiently waited my turn. Being a 'regular visitor' enabled me to witness the incidents and engage in conversations during the line as well.

After a while, I had the advantage of knowing the peak times and the quiet times of Hagia Sophia as a regular visitor. To observe such differences, I designed and followed a timetable showing the days of the week and regular prayer times - noon, afternoon, evening, and night (Table 3. 1). Then I grouped the four weekdays together, set Friday apart, and placed the weekends in another group. Observing both the quiet and crowded moments, the times of prayer and visiting, and special occasions such as the holy Ramadan days, I could gain a comprehensive view of life on the site.

Table 3. 1: The distribution of site visits to the days and daily prayer times. (The last column represents the days in which interviews were conducted. The coloring of the days represents the grouping: the weekends; Fridays; and remaining weekdays.)

DATE	DAY	Noon	Afternoon	Evening	Night	Interviews
07.10.2022	Friday	+				
11.10.2022	Tuesday			+	+	+
16.10.2022	Sunday	+	+			+
18.10.2022	Tuesday			+	+	+
26.10.2022	Wednesday	+	+			
30.10.2022	Sunday			+		+
31.10.2022	Monday			+	+	+
04.11.2022	Friday	+	+			+
10.11.2022	Thursday		+			+
11.11.2022	Friday	+	+			+
03.12.2022	Sunday	+				
10.12.2022	Saturday		+			+
11.12.2022	Sunday	+				+
17.12.2022	Saturday	+	+			+
18.01.2023	Saturday	+				
08.03.2023	Wednesday	+	+			
14.03.2023	Tuesday	+				+

During the site visits, I would wander through every corner accessible to the visitors. This way, I could document how the place evolved over time and observe the activities of restoration and changes in the accessibility of the areas and visiting rules. I also did my best to talk to different users of the place such as the guards and personnel of Hagia Sophia, food vendors around Ayasofya Square, and people waiting in the line. These daily, spontaneous conversations along with the more formal interviews provided me with valuable information on the daily life of the place.

As a worldwide known tourist site, Hagia Sophia houses many foreign and Turkish visitors every month of the year. Becoming especially famous after the conversion in 2020, it is also a popular destination for people who want to perform worship. As a result, during my site visits, I encountered almost an equal proportion of visitors from Turkey and abroad who visited Hagia Sophia for sightseeing and praying (see Appendix A). Of the 24 interviewees from Turkey, 14 were based in Istanbul and the rest were from other parts of the country. Twenty-five interviewees were foreign visitors who

visited Istanbul for vacation, work, education, or migration purposes (Table 3. 2). Among the interviewees, 19 were male, and 30 were female. The age range of the interviewees varied from 17 to 71, with the majority falling between 25-49 (Table 3. 3).

Table 3. 2: The origin country / city of the interviewees.

MEN FROM TURKEY	7	24 14 ISTANBUL 10 OTHER CITIES
WOMEN FROM TURKEY	17	
FOREIGN MEN	12	25 13 WESTERN EUROPE 3 USA 3 ASIA & AFRICA 3 ARABIC COUNTRIES 3 EASTERN EUROPE
FOREIGN WOMEN	13	

Table 3. 3: The age distribution of the interviewees.

AGE GROUPS	0-24	25-49	50-
Number of Interviewees	20	22	7

I conducted the interviews in person and on-site, and voice recorded them with the interviewees' consent. I contacted two interviewees from the Havle Women's Association¹⁶. Four interviewees, who learnt about the research through acquaintances and social media, contacted me to participate. We made an appointment to meet at Hagia Sophia after they visited the site. I did not share with them any information regarding the research more than I did with my other interviewees. The remaining interviewees were encountered on-site during their visit.

¹⁶ Havle Women's Association is a feminist solidarity network in Turkey. They define their mission as "speaking out from a feminist perspective against the patriarchal interpretations of Islam" (Havle Women's Association, n.d.). One of their organizations, Women in Mosques [Kadımlar Camilerde], organizes collective prayers in mosques to increase public awareness regarding the gendered spatial order in mosques (Nas, 2021).

Some of the interviews were as short as 5 minutes, where I could gather information only about their hometowns and general impression of Hagia Sophia. Some interviews took as long as 30 minutes, during which the interviewee told me about their visit to other mosques in Turkey or their extensive knowledge of Hagia Sophia in the Ottoman period.

The interview questions (see Appendix B) started with general information regarding the age, gender, occupation, home city or country, accommodation in Istanbul, and length and purpose of stay in Istanbul. Next were open-ended, semi-structured questions. These questions covered the details of their visit to Hagia Sophia, asking about their transportation route, the people who accompany them, and the time spent in the immediate environment. I asked questions about their time in the site, starting from their time in the waiting line to enter the Hagia Sophia Complex¹⁷. As a guide, I provided them with the plan of Hagia Sophia when needed (Image 3. 1). I asked the interviewees about their experiences and mobility in the site and particular incidents they witnessed during their visit, if there were any. Aiming to explore their view of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque as a sightseeing place and heritage site, I asked how they perceived the layers of history, architecture, and art in Hagia Sophia. Last but not least, I asked them to evaluate the visiting rules, restrictions, and communication with the personnel to see their view about the management of the place. Overall, I aimed to achieve a holistic view of the visitors' experience regarding the different functions on the site, visiting rules, and spatial order.

While exploring the everyday life of Hagia Sophia, this research partially dwells on the experience of a mosque space. For this, refraining from asking about the interviewees' beliefs - unless they explicitly mentioned them - I focused on their familiarity with the mosque spaces and practices. From this perspective, most foreign visitors from [Western and Eastern] Europe and America described themselves as being unfamiliar with mosque spaces and practices, even if they visited mosques before. Some individuals from these countries defined themselves as Muslims and stated that they

¹⁷ To refer to the area remaining inside the outer walls, I use the word Complex. In its current condition, Hagia Sophia Complex consists of multiple buildings including the Madrasa, Imaret, tombs, etc, besides the mosque.

were familiar with mosques. Similarly, individuals from the countries in the Arab world, North Africa, and Asia mostly identified themselves as Muslims and expressed their familiarity with mosques. Lastly, the interviewees from Turkey indicated their familiarity with mosques.

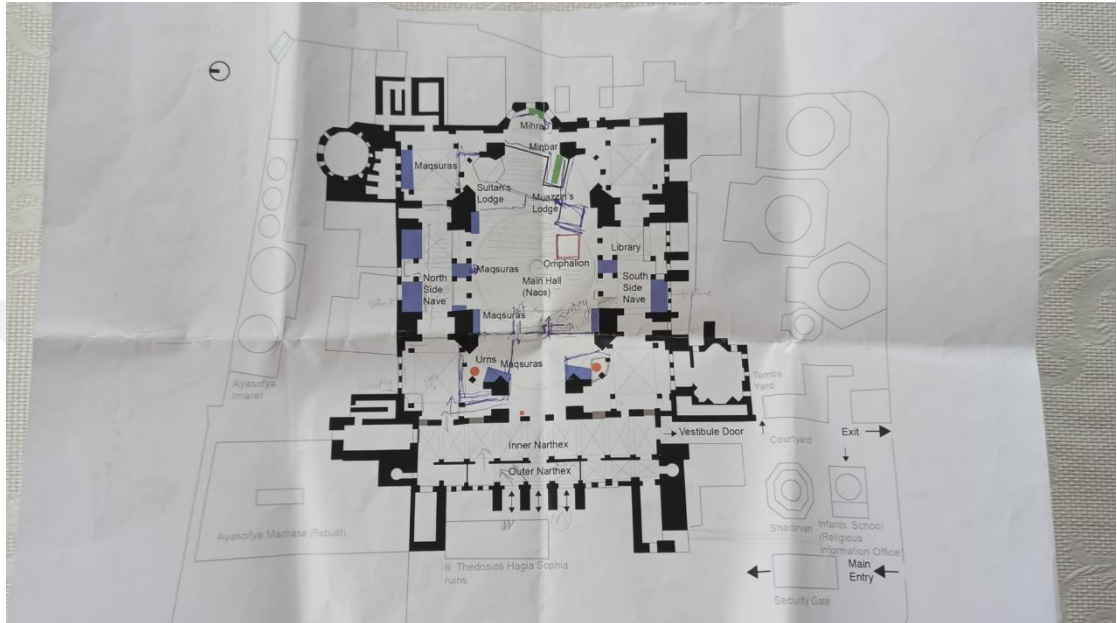


Image 3. 1: Example of a field note from December 2022. A similar map was provided to the interviewees as a guide.

3.1 My Position in the Field

My relatively young age and role as an architect and researcher may have positively influenced the conduct of the fieldwork. Fortunately, both foreign and Turkish individuals rarely declined to be interviewed and were willing to share their experiences with me. In certain instances, after concluding the interviews, I would share with them my knowledge of the architecture and history of the monument, and they would be happy with the outcome of our interaction.

A limitation during the interviews was that I could only conduct them in Turkish and English. This posed a challenge since a significant portion of the tourists in Hagia Sophia were Arabic and Russian speakers, who often did not communicate comfortably in these languages. As a result, the distribution of the nationalities of the interviewees was shaped according to this limitation.

I was generally treated as an insider by the interviewees from Turkey and in the daily conversations with the personnel of Hagia Sophia. The conversion process and the significance of Hagia Sophia were subjects well known to both of us. Due to this insider view, when explaining the purpose of my research, I occasionally received inquiries on whether there were any political questions in the interviews. In response, I made sure to emphasize that my research primarily focused on the everyday life within the site and it did not require prior knowledge about the history and architecture of Hagia Sophia or delving into politically charged issues. In the end, the interviewees from Turkey were willing to share their views, even if they were initially hesitant.

As a woman, while I had the advantage of accessing the women's section, I also lost the right to enter the men's section. This has been a significant aspect of my experience in Hagia Sophia. Initially, I perceived this limitation as an obstacle, but I still had the opportunity to observe, if not physically visit, both gendered sections. Due to certain sociocultural norms and religious teachings, the women's section was considered a more intimate part of the mosque. Enclosed by barriers, this section was hidden in the real sense as well. Thus, I was advantaged to easily access the women's section. My site observations and interviews with women here proceeded more comfortably. This might be due to establishing an interesting bond based on our shared gender and the shared experience of being in this closed, private space. While in the women's section, there were moments when other women would adjust my scarf or try to teach me how to follow the Imam during the congregational prayer. Also, the gendered spatial order - which was evident in the space we shared - and the dress code became important subjects of our conversations, particularly with young women.

In the end, I have felt the aspects of my nationality, gender, and role as a researcher in various dimensions of the fieldwork. These factors had an impact on my interactions with the interviewees and the place. As much as the diverse experiences of the interviewees, my experience in Hagia Sophia was also part of the narratives presented in this research.

3.2 My Own Experience of the Site: A Walkthrough

I conducted the fieldwork between October 2022 and March 2023, but before that, in October 2021, I visited the site for the first time. I was a sightseer Turkish woman curious about the architectural interventions coming from the conversion. Then, the first clue about the life of the Grand Mosque was the signboards at the buffets across the Ayasofya Square: "Here is your scarf for your visit to Hagia Sophia".

As my visits continued, several events and changes took place in Hagia Sophia. Between October 2021 and March 2023, the usable doors and accessible areas changed multiple times. New guards and barriers kept coming and going. Besides witnessing these changes, I was particularly interested in some daily events which demonstrated the unique place-making in Hagia Sophia. For example, while it was proudly used as an official mosque with the *mahya*¹⁸ lights between its *minarets*, in December 2022, there were New Year decorations set on its outer walls, at the side looking towards the Soğukçeşme Street and luxury hotels (Image 3. 2). At the same time, it was possible to see the visitors using the space contingently and challenging the barriers and visiting rules. Some visitors adapted the place to scenarios that were unforeseen by the managers of the site, such as conducting engagement ceremonies in Hagia Sophia.

¹⁸ Mahya refers to illuminated patterns displayed on buildings, particularly to convey religious or festive messages.



Image 3. 2: Decorations adorning the North wall of Hagia Sophia. (Photograph by the Author, December 2022)

Due to the complexity of the program and experience of the place, in this chapter, before dwelling on the interviews, I present an overview of the site. This walkthrough narrative of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque is based on my own experiences from December 2022:

Hagia Sophia and its neighbor Sultanahmet are on the two edges of Ayasofya Square. The Square is a park surrounded on the West by Divanyolu Street and on the South by Sultanahmet Park. Entry to the Square is through police checkpoints at various locations. From Divanyolu Street, The shortest way to access Hagia Sophia is from the entry checkpoint near the Sultanahmet Tram Station (Image 3. 3 & Image 3. 4).



Image 3. 3: Aerial view showing Hagia Sophia's immediate surrounding. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Adapted from a Google Maps satellite view captured on May 2023, displaying Sultanahmet in Istanbul)

At the Ayasofya Square, a waiting line extends from the South gate of Hagia Sophia (Point 1)¹⁹ (Image 3. 5 & Image 3. 6) to the Hürrem Sultan Baths. The line consists of large tourist groups and sightseers, and the ones who come to pray in Hagia Sophia. It can take up to 40 minutes to enter the Hagia Sophia Complex (Image 3. 7). While waiting to enter Hagia Sophia, people usually stop by the buffets and food vendors around and occupy themselves by eating some boiled corn, roasted chestnut, or *simit*. Meanwhile, tourist guides walk along the line and look for potential customers. Then the line ends and we reach the courtyard. We pass an X-ray security gate and are finally safely inside to start our visit (Image 3. 8) (Point 2). To remind us of the clothing rules, a kiosk and vending machine that sell scarves, and a mirror are provided (Image 3. 9).

¹⁹ See the walk-through plan in the Image 3.5 to follow the numbered points.

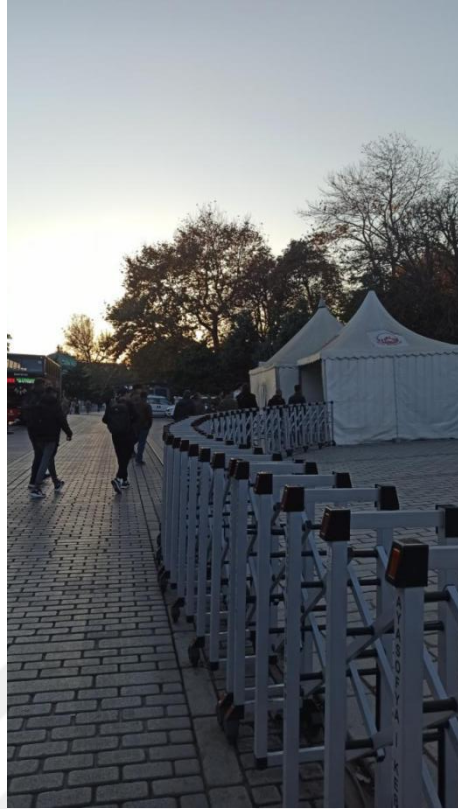


Image 3. 4: The police checkpoint for exit from the Ayasofya Square. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)



Image 3. 5: The walkthrough plan. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Adapted from the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)

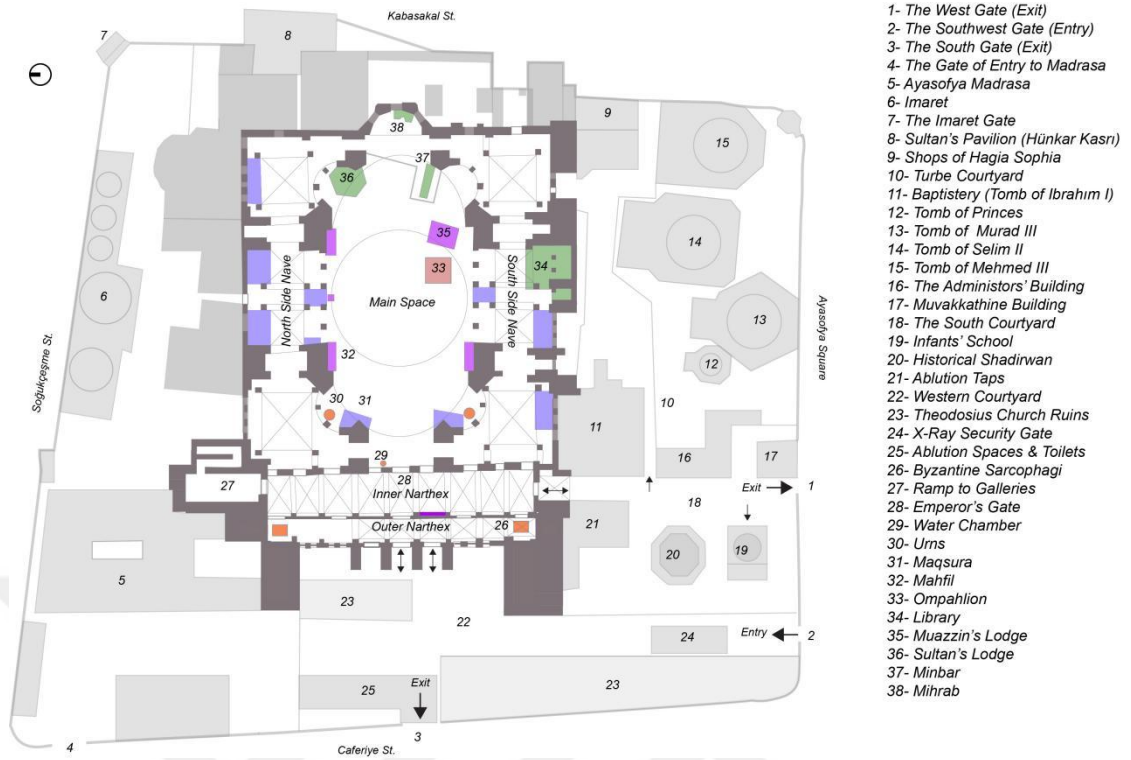


Image 3. 6: The site plan of the Hagia Sophia Complex. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Adapted from the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)



Image 3. 7: The waiting line to enter Hagia Sophia along the Square. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)



Image 3. 8: Visitors passing through the X-ray security gate. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)



Image 3. 9: The small kiosk selling scarves and coveralls for visiting Hagia Sophia. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)

The visiting route takes us directly to the main building, the mosque. At the West courtyard, we walk between the Theodosius Church remnants without knowing what they stand for (Point 3) (Image 3. 10). There are three gates on the west side of the building, and two of them are in use. They are mixed entries, which means that men and women enter from the same gate except for Friday noons.

Inside, the Outer Narthex walls (Point 4) welcome the visitors with Fatih's *firman*, Abdülmecid's *tughra*²⁰, and the Presidential decree on the conversion in 2020 (Image 3. 11). The Empress Sarcophagus, Synod Tablets, and other Byzantine remnants are on

²⁰ Tughra is the calligraphic signature used by the Ottoman sultans.

the two ends of this corridor. They stand behind the barriers without any informative inscription next to them.

At the Inner Narthex (Point 5), this time, the walls are covered with shoe cabinets. Guards warn people not to step on the carpet with shoes. There are nine doors from the Inner Narthex to the main space, but which ones are open can vary constantly. Above the one in the center, the Emperor's gate, we see the Leon Mosaic. On it, a curtain system was planned to hide and reveal the mosaic according to prayer times. Nevertheless, the Leon and Offering Mosaic at the Vestibule (Point 13) are always open. On the contrary, the Apse mosaics inside are always veiled (Image 3. 12).



Image 3. 10: Theodosius Church ruins at the courtyard. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)



Image 3. 11: Fatih's tughra and firman; Abdülmecid's tughra; and the 2020 Presidential decree on the walls of the Outer Narthex. (Photograph by the Author, April 2022)



Image 3. 12: The Leon Mosaic above the Emperor Gate, and the Apse Mosaics inside. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

Inside, the main space is far from being spacious due to the crowd and the folded barriers in the middle. The personnel uses the barriers to close half of the area when the prayer time is close. In the end, the main space is divided into two: a temporary prayer area which I call “Zone 2”, and a free area, “Zone 1”. During prayer time, the line of barriers is supposed to divide the worshipers and tourists. Yet, in practice, it is more like a border dividing men and women (Image 3. 13).

“Zone 1” (Point 6) is like a threshold between the outside - the Inner Narthex - and the main space of the mosque. Here, worshipers and tourists are together. Moreover, the two genders are together. Men and women can perform their worship at any corner without any concrete separators in between.



Image 3. 13: The border between two zones as the prayer time closes in: men enter and women exit zone 2. (Photograph by the Author, January 2023)

When looking towards the Apse, the South Side Nave is on the right (Point 7). This part is favored by worshipers for its peacefulness and by photographers for the beautiful sunlight it offers. In addition, men and women can pray together (Image 3. 14). Its darker counterpart, the North Side Nave (Point 8), is designated for "the women's section" (Image 3. 15). The borderline here is a wooden barrier that resembles a cage. Women inside can see the main space through the cage. From the other side, the women inside look like moving silhouettes. This section of the mosque often remains hidden and unknown to visitors.

Here I will turn to a more general discussion on the women's sections. The women's sections in mosques in Turkey provide seclusion for women and designate private spaces for them, particularly during prayer times. While the male congregation - which usually makes the majority - covers the main area, women draw back behind the male congregation, preferably in a manner that prevents males from seeing them. The women's sections in mosques in Turkey are often situated in upper galleries or at the rear wall, separated by partitions, or at an entirely different room, such as the basement (Dişli & Özcan, 2020). By this, women are disconnected from the mosque's main space and the prayer's focal point - the *kiblah* wall. In this regard, there are discussions in Turkey and abroad that note that for some women, being far from these places influences their experience and sense of spirituality in the mosque (Batuman, 2018a; Mohammed, 2022; Nas, 2021; Şenel, 2022).



Image 3. 14: The South Side Nave during for prayers: Men stand in the front and women at the back. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)



Image 3. 15: The women's section. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

Returning to Hagia Sophia, we encounter the other gendered area, “the men’s section”, in front of the *mihrab* wall²¹ (Image 3. 16) (Point 9). Red tape separators are set around this section to prevent women from entering. Women can not step in here, no matter how many people are praying inside. Nevertheless, there are always women surrounding the separators, trying to look upon and photograph the fabulous *mihrab*, *minbar*²², and the veiled Apse mosaics from afar.

Before arriving at the *apse* or *mihrab*, we pass through the border (Point 11) to zone 2 . Some of the specificities of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque I witnessed are evident most in zone 2 (Point 10). Zone 2 hosts large numbers of tourists and worshipers at the

²¹ The *mihrab* indicates the direction of prayer and is where the Imam leads the prayer.

²² The *minbar* is the pulpit from which the Imam delivers the sermons.

same time (Image 3. 17). Children and cats run and play all over the space freely, and pigeons fly under the dome. Men and women can worship without separators as long as women are at the edges and unseen corners. In this zone, before the Library, religious lectures are held on Saturdays. There are also small stands called “Information Centers,” in which Presidency of Religious Affairs personnel inform visitors about Islam with free books and brochures. The tourist groups gather mostly in Zone 2 and enjoy the place sitting on the turquoise carpets. The calligraphic roundels from the Ottoman period, Seraphim Angels, and the central dome are among the most attractive features of Hagia Sophia, and they are best viewed in Zone 2. Visitors capture similar photographs: under the middle chandelier or with the veiled Apse mosaics in the frame.



Image 3. 16: The men's section is surrounded by red tape separators. Some women pray sitting at the edge of the border. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

To continue our tour outside, we take our shoes back from the shoe cabinets in the Inner Narthex. There are two exit ways: one through the Vestibule or the one we entered from. The exit on the West leads to Caferiye Street (Point 12). Exiting from the Vestibule, we arrive at the South courtyard. Visitors gather and take pictures around the historical *Shadirwan*²³ for the last time before leaving Hagia Sophia (Point 14). Before 5 pm, the Turbe Courtyard is also open to visitors. At the Turbe Courtyard, together with the old Baptistery building, there are five *turbes*²⁴ of Ottoman Sultans and their families. This

²³ The Shadirwan is a decorative fountain used for ablution. The historical Shadirwan of Hagia Sophia was built in the 18th century (Dursun, 2011,).

²⁴ Turbe is the Turkish word for “tomb”.

part of the Complex is managed by Istanbul Türbeler Müze Müdürlüğü [Directorate of Turbe-Museums], and there are very detailed information boards for the visitors.



Image 3. 17: Zone 2. (Photograph by the Author, December 2022)

Aside from the Infants School, many areas in the courtyard are not in use, such as the ablution taps and *Muvakkithane*²⁵. The Infants' School [Sıbyan Mektebi] from the Ottoman period is a small building that was once used as the office and lodgement of the museum (Akgündüz et al., 2006, p.209). After the conversion, it became a Religious Information Office where personnel informs the visitors about Islam by delivering presentations.

At the end of our tour, before returning to Ayasofya Square from the South Gate (Point 15), there are some other significant buildings inside the Complex to be noted, such as the *Imaret*, Sultan's Pavilion, and the Ayasofya Madrasa. *Imaret* functioned as the Carpet Museum for six years before closing in 2020. Since then, its destiny remains unknown. An official statement promised that it would return to its origin, a public kitchen (Özdener, 2020).

Hünkar Kasrı - the Sultan's Pavilion - adjacent to the Eastern wall of Hagia Sophia was built in the 19th century by Fossati Brothers²⁶ (Dursun, 2011, p.64). It was opened to

²⁵ The *muvaqqithane* building was built by Fossati Brothers in the 19th century, for the public to learn the prayer times. During the museum period, it was used as an office (Dursun, 2011).

²⁶ During the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit, an extensive renovation was done by Swiss architects Gaspare and Giuseppe Fossati between 1847-1849. Fossati Brothers and Salzenberg uncovered and documented

prayer in 1991 as the only part used for worship in the Hagia Sophia Museum (Tarhan et al., 2022). Since the conversion, it is not used as a masjid or accessible to visitors.

To the North of Hagia Sophia, there is the Ayasofya Madrasa which is a very young building compared to others (Image 3. 18). The first *madrasa* in Hagia Sophia was built by Mehmed II in the 15th century as an educational institution. In the 19th century, a new building was built by Fossati Brothers, but it was eventually demolished due to its deteriorating condition in 1936 (Dursun, 2011, p.47). In 2022, a new building was reconstructed on the previous building's foundations. The rejuvenated Madrasa opened in April 2022 with a President-led ceremony. To stay faithful to its origin, it was named the "Ayasofya Campus" of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University (Alyanak, 2022; Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2022). Today, religious concerts and events are held in the building. Entry to the Ayasofya Madrasa is not possible from Hagia Sophia.



Image 3. 18: Ayasofya Madrasa. (Photograph by the Author, April 2022)

many mosaics in Hagia Sophia that were until then hidden under plaster with Sultan's permission (Dursun, 2011; Necipoğlu, 1992).

3.3 Interviews and Themes of Discussion

Since my initial visit, I have had specific inquiries in mind from my observations of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. Later, they occurred in the interviews I conducted with users of the place as well. In this chapter, I will focus on the site through the interviewees' perspectives and try to explore those inquiries under five themes of discussion.

My first observation was witnessing people performing their *namaz*²⁷ under the presence of open cross motifs scattered throughout the space. This was one of the instances where I noticed a certain ambiguity in the new program of Hagia Sophia. The coexistence of mosaics, curtains, and worshipers created unique scenes that I consider part of Hagia Sophia's specificity. Now bearing the mosque title, the monument displayed its historical layers in complex ways. As I conversed with the interviewees regarding their experiences within the monument, I discovered that they also had diverse interpretations of this specificity. In the sub-chapter "Coexistence: Exhibiting the Intertwining Layers", I focus on the presentation of the various layers of time and meaning in Hagia Sophia.

The conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque has been a well-known event in Turkey and abroad. However, the new spatial features of the place and the outcomes of this functional transformation have attracted less attention than the change in its title. During my visits, I observed that the everyday experience of Hagia Sophia was often imbued with ambiguity as it was experienced simultaneously as a mosque, church, and museum. The interviews I conducted with the visitors of Hagia Sophia also revealed questions regarding the conversion and the addition of the title "Grand Mosque". The ambiguity in the function, management, and experience of Hagia Sophia under the new title of the mosque is discussed in the sub-chapter "Conversion: Mosque, Museum, Church, and in Between".

The ambiguity stemming from the co-existence of layers and functions in Hagia Sophia poses a challenge to its management. The place is simultaneously experienced as a

²⁷ Islamic worship.

tourist destination, historical monument, mosque, and public place, under a complex set of rules. Some of these rules were developed specifically for the Grand Mosque by the site managers and are controlled by the personnel of Hagia Sophia. Besides, some cultural and religious practices seek to locate - and preserve - the monument as a mosque, national landmark, and heritage. As some of my interviewees noted, 'the place should have manners'. In "Rules and Manners: "Adap", I try to explore how these rules affect Hagia Sophia's experience.

In the next sub-chapter, I focus on the rules and practices developed for Hagia Sophia by the management of the site. To illustrate, the space is fragmented into zones, and visitors are categorized and designated within them. Within this spatial order, the place is experienced differently by visitors from diverse backgrounds. For example, a Turkish female tourist can follow a separate path in Hagia Sophia, receive different treatment from the personnel, and experience a different scenario from an American or male visitor. I dwell on these differences in "Categorization: Scenarios & Fragmentation in Place".

Within these visit rules, spatial order, and scenarios, the experience of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque is significantly influenced by the gender of visitors. Since this was a significant aspect of my own experience and reappeared in many interviews, I reserve a particular sub-chapter for the dimension of gender. In "Gendered Perspectives: The Cage and The Camera", I present the stories and experiences of the visitors, particularly from the perspective of gender.

3.3.1 Co-existence: Exhibiting the intertwining layers

As noted before, I visited the site for the first time in October 2021. During that time, the entrance and exit were made through the gate on the south opening to Ayasofya Square. At the Square, I came across an open-air exhibition organized by the Istanbul Electricity, Tramway, and Tunnel General Management (IETT), an organization affiliated with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. A small group of people, forming a relatively short line to enter Hagia Sophia, were glancing at the historical buses

exhibited at the Square. It seemed that the cultural significance of the Sultanahmet area and Hagia Sophia continued to be utilized after the conversion.

In April 2022, the cultural campaign surrounding Hagia Sophia took a new direction. Overlooking Ayasofya Square, banners were displayed on the outer walls, welcoming visitors to Hagia Sophia. The banners extended from the outer walls to the South courtyard, covering the walls of the *Muvakkithane*. From then on, they became the only sources of information within the site, accompanying visitors in their new experience of Hagia Sophia (Image 3. 19).

The information conveyed through these banners included the history and legends of “Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami.” They particularly emphasized the religious significance of the Conquest of Istanbul and the subsequent conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, featuring references like the *hadith* of the Prophet (Image 3. 20). Although the banners were not arranged in chronological order, they placed the birth of Hagia Sophia in the pre-Islamic era. They noted the significant role of the prophets Adam, Hızır, and Solomon in making Hagia Sophia a sacred temple. One of the banners established a connection between Hagia Sophia and Solomon's great temple based on the rumor that Emperor Justinian exclaimed after completing this magnificent temple, "Solomon, I have surpassed you!" This legend was one of the few mentions of the Byzantine past of Hagia Sophia in the banners.

The banners tended to provide minimal factual information. Historical facts were often embellished and transformed into narratives adorned with old Ottoman Turkish words and poetic elements. The Conquest of Istanbul in 1453, the personality of Fatih Sultan Mehmed, his deep affection for Constantinople, and the religious tolerance displayed by the Ottomans to the Byzantines were also presented in this ornate language. These narratives accompanied miniature drawings and aged engravings that portrayed the former Ayasofya Mosque. In summary, the banners signified the Ottoman-Islamic identity of Hagia Sophia, overlooking the Byzantine-Christian values it holds. I relate this presentation to the heritage ideology noted by Aykaç (2018; 2019).

I found the banners at the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque interesting not only for their content but also because they bore a resemblance to the information panels at the Panorama Museum (Image 3. 21). As mentioned earlier, İpek Türeli (2018) examines the Panorama 1453 History Museum in the context of neo-Ottomanist narratives. Türeli explains how the Panorama Museum, from its location to the design of the "panorama", supports the Islamist narratives of the Conquest of Istanbul: it demonstrates the victory of Fatih and Islam over the Byzantines and Christianity with a nationalist tone. She also argues that through the Museum, the state presents "a new golden age" in which Turkey continues to rule the Ottoman geography "at least in the culture and politics" (2018, p.190). Considering the similarity with the information banners at the Museum, and the highlight on the Ottoman-Islamic identity of Hagia Sophia, it is possible to interpret how these banners introduce Hagia Sophia. The only information source on the history of Hagia Sophia within the site presents it to foreign and local visitors as the heritage of the Conquest of Istanbul and hints at Turkey's contemporary neo-Ottomanist agenda.



Image 3. 19: The information banners adorning the outer walls of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)



Image 3. 20: An information panel from Hagia Sophia: “A Prophetic Hadith: ‘You shall conquer Constantinople. What a wonderful army will that army be, and what a wonderful commander will that conqueror be’”. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)



Image 3. 21: Another information panel from the Panorama Museum. (Photograph by the Author, March 2022)

Hagia Sophia is a site of great controversy. The conversion of Hagia Sophia in 2020 heightened the sentiments on its heritage value and religious and political representations. Within this context, the information banners above offer only a glimpse into the embedded ideologies in it. I suggest we delve deeper into the space to understand better how the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque is presented. Inside the outer walls, what does Hagia Sophia present to its visitors? How do the different layers of Christianity, Byzantine history, and Ottoman heritage continue to coexist within the

mosque? What are visitors' impressions of the presentation of the multi-layered character of the place?

During the interviews, one statement that consistently emerged was the admiration for the ancient architecture of Hagia Sophia: different layers coexisted in a remarkably harmonious and aesthetically pleasing manner. Many interviewees especially cited that while gazing at the magnificent dome, they were astonished by how the calligraphic roundels from the Ottoman period beautifully complemented the vibrant Byzantine mosaics and Seraphim Angels (Image 3. 22). For example, an American art teacher who visited the place for the second time after his first visit in 2010, expressed deep admiration for the beauty and harmony he experienced within the monument:

"I thought before that, you know, those brown ones with the calligraphy on it [shows the calligraphic roundels], it would look like it clashes, but it looks normal, it looks fine. [...] But before I would think they don't look like they belong. But now that I'm in here, it makes sense. [...] when you're here with the light being the soft glow, it looks like part of it."
(07_M, Male, 35, Art Teacher, USA)

Thus, he pointed out that while experiencing the place, the Ottoman additions complemented the Byzantine church and that this sense was different from the one conveyed in the photographs of Hagia Sophia. Not only he but many interviewees mentioned that the beauty of the place came from the coexistence of those different parts and layers of time. This coexistence was described at times as “juxtaposition”, at other times as “harmony”, and occasionally as a “clash”.



Image 3. 22: The calligraphic roundels, Seraphim Angel, and the veiled Apse mosaics under one dome, in one frame. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

Some interviewees had a more profound knowledge of the history, architectural features, and artistic qualities of Hagia Sophia. They could identify the distinct layers within the monument and the influences of the Byzantine and Ottoman eras. For them, photography was a significant part of their experience of place. Sometimes they showed me their photographs and sketches in which they captured the points where traces of history converged. For example, an American tourist who was knowledgeable about Ottoman history and architecture said the following:

"It was really cool over this window over here, you can see a cross kind of like fading through [points at the cross at the vaults]. I have a picture. But I thought that was really cool and I was specifically looking for little pieces like that.[...] And culturally, because it's like this place where everything's coming together, that's what's nice about Istanbul in my mind, it's like a crossroads. [...] It's kind of like an ancient New York [laughs]." (14_M, Male, 34, Sales Manager, USA)

He interpreted that the co-existence of layers in the building recalled the city's history, multi-culturalism, and cosmopolitanism. Like him, some individuals drew connections between Hagia Sophia and the history of the city of Istanbul. In the interviews, the East and West, Ottomans and Byzantines, Islam and Christianity, etc, were among the most frequently recurring topics while situating Hagia Sophia within world history. Foreign visitors usually emphasized the coming together of different cultures in the place. Hagia Sophia, for them, was a "nice" or "cool" example of harmony and universality.

Similarly, for the interviewees from Turkey as well, the concept of a "crossroads" seemed to hold positive connotations. They had a sense of awe towards the monument's antiquity and viewed the Byzantine legacy with a mindset of openness mixed with tolerance. In their descriptions, the symbols of Christianity and Islam were "so close to each other", "side by side", or "interlocked" in Hagia Sophia (Image 3. 23). Some individuals tried to discern the layers that belonged to "us" and "them" from this intricate puzzle. A journalist from İzmir who had visited Hagia Sophia multiple times showed the visible layers of Christianity present in the monument one by one, such as the Seraphim Angels, Apse mosaics, and cross motifs. She noted that these assets survived until today owing to the religious tolerance and the idea of revitalization [ihya etme] exhibited by the Ottoman civilization - something different than what Latin Crusaders did to Hagia Sophia:

"Every sultan built something here, always as a contribution. Later on, as you know, Hagia Sophia was looted. It was looted by the Crusaders and so on, this is an earlier date, by the way. The treasure that existed here was completely destroyed and smuggled abroad. [...] when you look at Hagia Sophia from an architectural perspective, all the characteristics of an Orthodox church are clearly visible. [...] Hagia Sophia was founded on the thought and mentality of Fatih Sultan Mehmet, "I did not come to change your religion", yes.[...] These are already one of the finest examples of the logic of Islam, "We did not come to change anything. We preserve and continue what already exists, and add to it." I think Hagia Sophia is a beautiful example of that logic."²⁸ (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

²⁸ "Her padişah bir şeyler yaptırmış yani buraya, hep bir katkı olarak geçmiş. Daha sonra biliyorsunuz yağmalama Ayasofya'da. Haçlılar'ın yağmalanmasına vesaire uğruyor, bu daha önceki bir tarih bu arada. Burada var olan hazine tamamen tahrip ediliyor ve yurtdışına kaçırılıyor. [...] Ayasofya'da zaten mimari olarak baktığımızda bir Ortodoks kilisenin bütün alametleri ayan beyan ortada. [...] Fatih Sultan Mehmet'in o "Ben sizin dininizi değiştirmeye gelmedim" düşüncesi, zihniyeti üzerine, evet, Ayasofya



Image 3. 23: The cross motifs at the vaults. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

Most of the interviewees from Turkey deeply valued the presence of Hagia Sophia in Turkey, considering it an ancient cultural heritage and a trust. Some noted that its preservation throughout centuries was possible by the contributions made during the Ottoman period. They mentioned that contributions indicated the respect and tolerance shown to "others" by the Ottoman civilization. Another Turkish individual, an architect, added another dimension to this discussion. According to her, keeping the Christian motifs exposed in the current mosque was almost consistent with the Ottoman tradition, which did not erase but added on and sustained the traces of the "other". Drawing from this, she drew connections between the contemporary conversion and what she perceived to be the Ottomans' attitude to built environment and heritage:

kurulmuş.[...]Bunlar zaten İslam'ın, hani, "Biz bir şeyleri değiştirmeye gelmedik. Biz zaten varolanı koruruz ve devam ettiririz, üzerine ekleriz" mantığının en güzel örneklerinden biri bence Ayasofya." (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

“Well, it seemed interesting to me, and at the same time, I liked it. Because, you know, when we look at Ottoman history, they didn't have a philosophy of destroying structures after conquests and completely erasing the culture or religious elements of that place to build their own new buildings. On the contrary, they showed respect for many things and continued them by adding their own touches throughout the years. And, you know, it feels like this is a part of that tradition. We have some respect for its past. And now that its function has changed, we're showing the necessity of this in the areas of prayer.”²⁹ (36_F, 24, Female, Architect, Aydın, Turkey)

In contrast, some interviewees believed that the exhibition of the mosaics in the mosque did not resemble the respect and tolerance that the Ottomans showed towards the “others”. For example, the American man who described Hagia Sophia as a crossroads due to the co-existence of its historical layers said he wished that “[...] it was still a museum because then it would be the ultimate” symbol of universality (34, Sales Manager, USA). Another comment in relation to the museum past of Hagia Sophia by a Turkish interviewee seemed to merge its universality with the perceived Ottoman tradition of tolerance and respect for others. An expert from the General Directorate of Foundations from Ankara who was knowledgeable about both the museum and mosque statuses of Hagia Sophia stated that being a museum better reflected this Ottoman tradition:

“We can't say that it was very successful as a museum, but it was still better. It was being visited and explored. Because it's a common heritage, not just something for Muslims. When Mehmed the Conqueror conquered this place and converted it into a mosque, he did so as both the leader of Muslims and as a Roman Emperor. He accepted and defended both aspects. [...] Considering that it is an important place for both Christianity and the Muslim world, it should have been handled accordingly.”³⁰ (11_M, 38, Waqf Expert, Male, Ankara, Turkey)

²⁹ “Yani, bana ilginç geldi, bir yandan da hoşuma gitti. Çünkü yani şeyi de biliyoruz aslında, Osmanlı tarihine bakınca, böyle fetihten sonra yapıları yıkıp tamamen o kültürü ya da dinin, dine ait şeyleri yıkıp kendi yeni binalarını inşa etme gibi bir felsefeleri yok. Tam tersine, bir çok şeye saygı duyup aslında üzerine eklenerek sürdürmüşler yıllar boyunca. Ve hani, bu sanki onun bir parçasıymış gibi. Yani öncesine de biraz olsun saygı duyuyoruz. Şu anda da fonksiyon değişti, bunun gerekliliğini, dini amaçla kullanılan ibadet kısmında gösteriyoruz gibi görünüyor.” (36_F, 24, Female, Architect, Aydın, Turkey)

³⁰ “Müze olarak son derece başarılı diyemeyiz ama gene de daha iyiydi. Gezilip görülüyordu. Çünkü ortak miras, yani sadece Müslümanlar'ın bir şeyi de değil. Hani, Fatih Sultan Mehmet burayı fethettiğinde de, camiye çevirdiğinde de bunu hem Müslümanlar'ın o çağdaki lideri, hem de bir Roma İmparatoru olarak burayı açmıştı. İkisini birden kabul ediyordu, ikisini birden savunuyordu. [...] Yani hem Hristiyanlık hem Müslüman dünyası için önemli bir yer olduğunu düşünürsek, ona göre yapılması gerekiyordu yani. [...]” (11_M, 38, Waqf Expert, Male, Ankara, Turkey)

According to this comment, the museum status represented the common heritage better and aligned more with the religious tolerance exhibited by Ottomans. I argue that such references to the common heritage and universality by foreign visitors and the waqf expert resonate with the rhetoric of Istanbul as a crossroads, which was prevalent in advertisements during the early 2000s and the campaign for Istanbul as the 2010 European Capital of Culture. On the other hand, another rhetoric views the monument as an excellent example of the Ottoman's tolerance to non-Muslims, and revitalization of the heritage of others. This is mostly embraced by the visitors from Turkey and aligns more closely with the official discourse of the conversion in 2020. To quote this discourse, the conversion was a respectful act towards the common heritage value of Hagia Sophia: the interventions, such as veiling the mosaics only during prayer time, matched with the Islamic-Ottoman traditions of respecting and preserving non-Muslim heritage. Turkish architect from Aydın, upon seeing the interventions on the monument by the conversion, thought that “we have some respect for its past”. Thus, she seemed to recognize the results of the official rhetoric of conversion in the space.

Returning to the theme of the coexistence of layers, the exhibition of the artifacts of ‘others’ was not encountered positively by all interviewees. Some saw the presence of the figurative motifs and layers of Christianity in a Muslim place of worship as a contradiction. For an architect from Izmir, Hagia Sophia was a unique architectural wonder in housing motifs of two religions together. On the other hand, she expressed her confusion to see that these layers were still visible in Hagia Sophia now that it was a mosque:

“Honestly, it seemed strange to me. Because after attributing this place to one religion, it is strange that the symbols belonging to another religion are still sustained. I questioned this. Does the presence of these symbols here create a problem? It made me question that.”³¹
(37_F, Female, 24, Architect, İzmir, Turkey)

It is acknowledged that, in Islamic places of worship, the person should not face human figures while praying. In the case of Hagia Sophia, there were plans to veil three

³¹ “Bana açıkçası garip gelmişti, çünkü burayı şu anda bir dine atfettikten sonra başka bir dine ait sembolleri hala yaşıyor olması garip gelmişti açıkçası, sorguladım yani. Bunların burada olması bir sorun yaratıyor mu? Bunu sorgulamama sebep oldu.” (37_F, Female, 24, Architect, İzmir, Turkey)

mosaics on the ground floor during prayer times. However, these plans were not consistently followed. In practice, the mosaics located outside the main prayer place - the Leon Mosaic at the Inner Narthex and Offering Mosaic at the Vestibule Door- are always open. The Apse Mosaic, located in the direction of prayer, *kiblah*, is always veiled. There are also mosaics of Church Fathers at the North *Tympanum* (Image 3. 24), and crosses on the vaults at every corner. The Seraphim Angel's face at the *pendentive* near the *kiblah* wall is visible to those who pray (Image 3. 21). These are not closed or veiled despite remaining within the boundaries of the main prayer space. Many of the interviewees did not dwell on this situation. Some interviewees like this student from Istanbul, however, were aware of it and still content:

“It was strange to see its [the Seraphim Angel] face uncovered. However, I don't see it as illogical or contrary to religion. Because in the past, it was already a church, and they used it that way. I think it's beautiful as a unique feature.”³² (05_F, 20, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

Some interviewees presumed that the direction of prayer did not actually coincide with the Christian figures. One interviewee from United Kingdom with Indian and Muslim origins, and who has been to various parts of the Middle East, explained his view on this by making comparisons between Hagia Sophia and mosques in different Islamic countries:

“26_M: [...] I was really looking on the left and the right, like, the second floor. And see some of the ancient sultans, or someone [Tympanum Mosaics]. They're still there, [they are] not covered. I don't know why.

Author: Yeah. Do you think it's a problem?

26_M: Well, they are not facing towards us when we are praying, so it's kind of like, maybe okay. Because if this country is, like, in the Middle East, for example like Saudi Arabia, they won't let the images or whatever they created there, they might be closing it.” (26_M, 26, Male, Engineer, United Kingdom)

³² “Onun yüzünün açık olması tuhaftı. Ama mantıksız ya da dine aykırı olarak görmüyorum ben bunu. Çünkü eskiden zaten kiliseymiş, yani onlar öyle kullanmışlar. Bence o da bir farklılık olarak güzel.” (05_F, 20, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

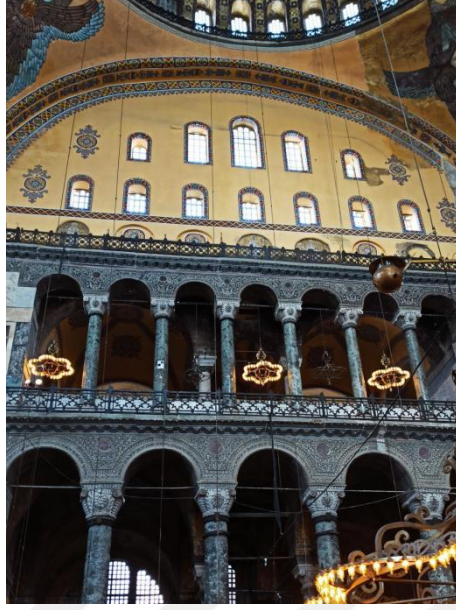


Image 3. 24: The Tympanum mosaics are seen below the windows. (Photograph by the Author, March 2022)

Another interviewee shared similar concerns regarding the exposed figures in the prayer space. This woman from Istanbul had possible explanations in mind, yet still remained unconvinced on why certain mosaics and figures were exposed and some were veiled:

“Well, it seems a bit illogical to me... And there was also a picture of Jesus in the front, which they covered, but they couldn't cover that [Seraphim] angel. I mean, it could be that both of them were... I don't know, maybe the reason for not covering the angel is because we do not to see it while praying. [...] But if they cover it, it seems that something will be harmed, like the texture of that place, so maybe they can't cover it. I don't know exactly... Either both will remain uncovered, or... None of them should be covered [laughs].”³³ (06_F, 20, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

Overall, the comments on the exposed Christian figures and their compatibility with the religious function of Hagia Sophia were mostly done by people from Turkey and a few foreigners who identified themselves as Muslim. In these comments, the interventions to the figures were seen “contradictory”, “strange”, or as a beautiful sign of the “uniqueness” of Hagia Sophia.

³³ “Ya ama şey bana biraz mantıksız geliyor... Bir de önde Hazreti İsa'nın falan resmi var, onu kapatmışlar, ama o meleği kapatamamışlar. Yani, ikisini de o zaman... Bilmiyorum, meleği kapatmama sebepleri namaz kılariken görmemek. [...] Ama kapatırsa da oranın bir şeyi zayıfmış galiba, dokusu, o yüzden kapatamıyorlarmış sanırım. Bilmiyorum tam olarak... Ya ikisi de açık kalacak, ya da... Hiç biri kapanmasın [güler].” (06_F, 20, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

Another significant issue raised by the interviewees was about the presentation of Hagia Sophia on the site after the conversion. Many individuals stated that there needed to be more information available on the site. Despite being a significant historical monument with a museum past, Hagia Sophia's rich cultural inventory was inadequately presented. Very few information boards dating back to the museum times remained in place only because they were fixed on the walls. As mentioned in the walkthrough section, many of the Byzantine artifacts were left without any information board or tag around them. Among them were the ruins of the Theodosius Church in the courtyard, *Omphalion*³⁴, and the Byzantine artifacts at the Outer Narthex (Image 3. 25 & Image 3. 26). As a Turkish tourist told me about the Theodosius ruins, numerous parts of Hagia Sophia remained unknown to visitors, with no information available, causing them to simply “pass by and move on”³⁵. A Danish tourist who seen Hagia Sophia as a museum before, expressed that the Byzantine-Christian heritage, according to her, was less emphasized after the conversion:

“I'm interested in the architectural part of it, and the last time, there [was] a lot of emphases on the stuff prior, when it was a church and how the changes [were] made. And that was very interesting to walk around and see, so. [...] You know, you can see angels, and there's angel, or there [are] Christian motifs that you wouldn't notice now, because nobody is explaining to you now the differences[...]" (43_F, Female, 32, Doctor, Denmark)

³⁴ The "omphalion" refers to marble section of floor symbolizing the center of the world. It is typically found in Byzantine churches, and in Hagia Sophia, it served as a significant point of religious and ceremonial importance such as coronation ceremonies.

³⁵ “Avludaki kalıntıların ne olduğunu bilmiyorduk, bilgilendirici bir yazı da yoktu, önünden geçip gittik.” (01_F, 23, Female, Architect, Mersin, Turkey)



Image 3. 25: The Byzantine remnants at the Northern end of the Outer Narthex surrounded by folding barriers, red tapes, and a sign of “No Entry”. (Photograph by the Author, December 2022)



Image 3. 26: The Omphalion behind railings. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

For those seeking information about Hagia Sophia, there were “voluntary guides” who were religious officials assigned by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Maltepe Mufti’s Office, 2020). These guides usually stood near the “Information Centers” in the main space to inform about the religion of Islam and Hagia Sophia’s significance for it. The only option left for those who did not have a tourist guide with them was to read the information banners in the courtyard. For this reason, some interviewees expressed disappointment with the lack of information and presentation materials in Hagia Sophia. For example, a tourist from Saudi Arabia, who has been to Hagia Sophia before and after the conversion many times, complained about this. In her account, in its changed

status, the spatial order was complex, information materials were inadequate, and the personnel were not professional. Instead, she found the management of the Turbe Courtyard more successful in giving information about the *turbes* (Image 3. 27):

“Yeah, we need more information. You see, when I come, first [at the] line, they put, like, information [in] Arabic, English, and Turkish. This one, it’s good [turbe information boards]. Why [didn’t they] put some people inside talking Arabic, English, Turkish, you know?” (33_F, 25, Female, Chemist, Saudi Arabia)



Image 3. 27: The Turbe Courtyard. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)

The Danish interviewee commenting on the diminishing emphasis on the Byzantine layers of Hagia Sophia had a similar concern with the information materials. She proposed that there could still be exhibitions provided within the mosque in order to present the history of the place:

“The perfect combination would be that they keep this like this, and then there could be a separate place where there could be an exhibition. So you could have both when you visit Hagia Sophia.” (43_F, 32, Female, Doctor, Denmark)

Some other interviewees also suggested alternative ways of exhibiting the history of Hagia Sophia. However, the American art teacher believed that the absence of information boards in the space also enhanced the overall experience of place and allowed for personal interpretation. Therefore, he suggested that a better solution could be the virtual smartphone tours:

“It's more open and... Because sometimes the signs are in the way and then they only tell you one way to think about it. But then, if you're looking around and getting your own feeling and then you have your own information, it's sometimes better.” (07_M, 35, Male, Art Teacher, USA)

Hagia Sophia as a heritage site was not explored only through the information materials. The experience of the place, including the opportunity to see and have access to various parts of the site and artifacts therein, was also valued by many interviewees. One of the most recurring subjects in these conversations was the Sweating Column. Due to its religious, cultural, and tourist significance, Sweating Column is considered one of Hagia Sophia's popular parts. For example, a tourist from Malatya, who has been to the museum before, mentioned that, although he did not notice any significant difference between the museum and the mosque, he was only curious about the new state of the Sweating Column:

“[...] For example, talking to you reminded me of something, that thing, I don't know where the marble with the hole on it is right now. It's the one I used to rotate my finger on...”³⁶
(31_M, 42, Male, Teacher, Malatya, Turkey)

The “Sweating”, “Weeping”, or “Wishing” Column is originally located in the North Side Nave of Hagia Sophia. After the conversion in 2020, this part was designated as the women’s section and, as a result, the Column remained somewhat hidden. The women’s section was divided into two in October 2022. From then on, men could access the first part of the women's section where the Column was located (Image 3. 28). However, the Column was surrounded and protected by multiple barriers. Thus, the popular practice of rotating one’s finger on the hole on its base and offering prayers could no longer continue.

Another visitor also mentioned Sweating Column and expressed her concerns about the information materials and access to some of the artifacts in Hagia Sophia. She was a Muslim tourist from the United Kingdom who has been to Hagia Sophia Museum

³⁶ “[...] Mesela şeyi ben sizinle konuşunca hatırladım, o şey, delik mermer nerede bilmiyorum şu an. Parmağımı çevirdiğim...” (31_M, 42, Male, Teacher, Malatya, Turkey)

before. She stated that in her current visit to the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque, she felt sorry for her partner since he could not “get the full experience” as she did before:

“35_F: 2017. So it's a lot different. It was more open when I came. So you could go upstairs. You had more... You could see a lot more. Whereas here, now you're more restricted. [...] Do you live here? Because when we... Before they turned in, they had like... You could touch something, wasn't it? [Sweating Column] Yeah. You press your finger against it and you pray it. Yeah. Is it still there?

Author: Yeah. But you can't touch it.

35_F: Yeah. Because it's restricted? Because I'm not quite sure. Okay, it's still there.”

(35_F, 36, Female, Beauty Expert, United Kingdom)

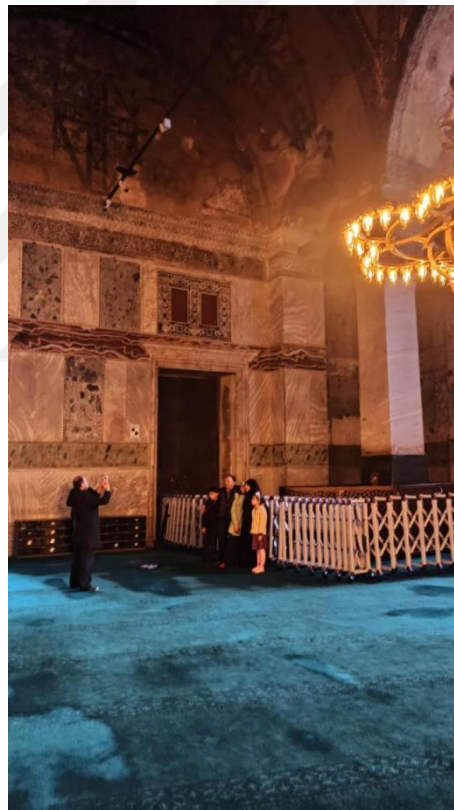


Image 3. 28: The Sweating Column, behind double-barriers, can not be touched, but is a popular photography point. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)

While many individuals expressed their disappointment about the issue of inaccessibility, they did not directly criticize it as something brought about by the conversion from a museum to a mosque. Two last comments that I will quote from the journalist woman from İzmir, however, were more critical of this:

“For example, here is the column of Hızır Aleyhisselam after the conquest, yes, [Sweating Column]. Now, when I was in the museum here, everyone was lining up there, all the people of other religions were trying to rotate their fingers on it. It became a mosque, and now it is closed [laughs]. They supposedly took that area under protection. If you were going to take it under protection, why didn't you do it before? Why didn't you do that when it was a museum?” (23_F, 40, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)³⁷ (23_F, 40, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

The issue of access was elaborated in the conversations about the galleries as well. In fact, almost all interviewees expressed their desire to go to the upper galleries and see the mosaics there. The upper galleries of Hagia Sophia house the important wonders of Hagia Sophia. The access to galleries from the ground floor is through a ramp located at the Northern end of the Inner Narthex. Today, there stands an information panel before the door, showing a glimpse of what is upstairs: Empress Lodge, Marble Door, and several mosaic panels (Image 3. 29 & Image 3. 30). The galleries are inaccessible to visitors due to restorations that started in 2020, the year of the conversion. The closing of the galleries was a source of disappointment for almost all interviewees. The woman from İzmir raised a question on this issue as well:

“Why can't we go up to the same floor that we could access when it was a museum, now that it is a mosque?”³⁸ (23_F, 40, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

I argue that these last two questions not only dwell on the access and exhibition of the monument but also lead to other questions regarding the changes brought by the conversion. Yet, before dwelling on them, I will summarize this chapter.

In this chapter, the presentation of the cultural heritage and artifacts in the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque is examined. One main inquiry on the experience of the site was on the presence of Christian figures and mosaics in a Muslim place of worship. Connected to this, there were different interpretations of the co-existence of the layers from the

³⁷ “Mesela şurada Hızır Aleyhisselam'ın fetihten sonraki, evet, sütun var [Terleyen Sütun]. Şimdi ben buraya müzeyken herkes orada sıraya girer, bütün diğer dine mensup insanlar parmağını sokup çevirmeye çalışıyor. Cami oldu, orası kapalı [güler]. O alanı, güya, akıllarınca koruma altına almışlar. Yahu madem koruma altına alacaktın, daha önce niye almadın? Müzeyken niye bunu yapmadın?” (23_F, 40, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

³⁸ “Müzeyken çıkabildiğimiz kata camiyken neden çıkamıyoruz?” (23_F, 40, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

Byzantine and Ottoman periods. The presentation of the multilayeredness of the monument was perceived as a contradiction resulting from the conversion or a beautiful specificity of the place. Besides, mentioning it as the crossroads of the East and West and the epitome of the Ottoman tradition of revitalization was central to the interviewees' understanding of Hagia Sophia. These points in the interviews recalled the discourses examined in Chapter 2 and demonstrated how they manifest in the experience of place. Also, the interviewees raised concerns about the inaccessibility of the wonders of Hagia Sophia and the lack of information about its Byzantine layers. Some criticized these issues as aspects of the place brought about by the conversion.

In the end, discussions on the presentation of the layers of Hagia Sophia lead to questions on how the function of worship mediates in this magnificent heritage site after the conversion. Which spaces and uses did the conversion bring and take from the place? How was the new “Grand Mosque” title incorporated into Hagia Sophia, which was once a museum and church? I elaborate on these points in the following section.



Image 3. 29: A thumbnail for the Galleries. (Photograph by the Author, October 2021)

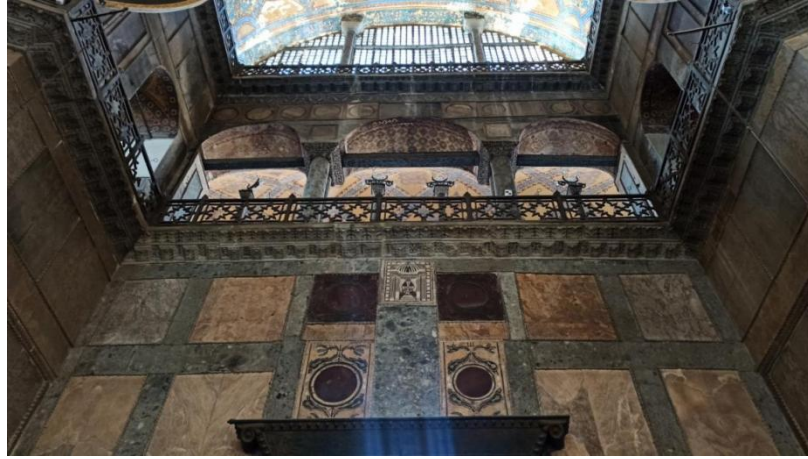


Image 3. 30: Look towards the Galleries, the Empress Lodge. The layers in Hagia Sophia are not limited with Christianity and Islam. Below the cross panel, the marble panels feature the pagan symbols of Poseidon's trident and dolphins. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

3.3.2 Conversion: Mosque, church, museum, and in between

The conversion in 2020 created significant reverberations in Turkey and abroad. As mentioned before, the social, religious, and political controversies it revealed were discussed in various mediums by scholars of architecture, heritage, sociology, history, and religious and political leaders. The relevant professional groups followed the spatial changes brought about by the conversion.

Fast forward to October 2022, two years after the conversion, Hagia Sophia was a popular site for prayer and continued attracting many tourists. The new plaque in front of it, bearing the inscription "Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi", was one thing that people took photos of when entering the site (Image 3. 31). The name "Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi" [Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque] dated back to the old name that appeared on the controversial title deed of 1934, which initiated the process of conversion. The folding barriers placed throughout the Square, courtyard, and inside the monument also bore this name. Alternative abbreviations such as "Ayasofya Cami" [Ayasofya Mosque] were not used. It seemed that the authorities aimed to establish this long, classical Ottoman phrase as the official name in people's minds.



Image 3. 31: The entrance is marked by the green marble plaque on the outer walls. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)

Despite all this attention and controversy, interviews conducted during the fieldwork revealed that not everyone was aware of the news of the conversion. Remarkably, some foreign visitors arrived at the site expecting to find the Hagia Sophia Museum. They anticipated encountering a ticket booth and being able to wander around the magnificent marble floor in casual attire freely. For example, a woman from Morocco who had been to the Museum in 2019 told her moment of realization of the new status of Hagia Sophia:

I told him [her boyfriend] earlier, “It’s just changed for me”, because, I mean, I didn’t have to wear the hijab or anything as well [...] I literally just told him: “Maybe now they use it as a mosque?” (10_F, 28, Female, Architect, Morocco)

According to the interviews, neither the X-ray gate at the entrance nor the presence of police and guards around Hagia Sophia were enough to indicate that Hagia Sophia was no longer a museum. Some women, like this Moroccan architect, stated that they

became aware of the change in the function when the personnel warned them about the requirement to wear headscarves before entering the building.

Some people heard about the news of the recent conversion before but were confused about the history of the "conversions" of Hagia Sophia. The monument's history, which started as a church and became a mosque and then a museum, was often misunderstood. This confusion was mostly experienced by foreign interviewees, but the comment of a Turkish man was particularly interesting. This old man stated that his first encounter with Hagia Sophia was in 1993 when he participated in the "conquest celebrations"³⁹. Yet, he was the only interviewee from Turkey who thought that before the conversion, Hagia Sophia was not a museum. When I asked him if he could recognize the different layers of history in Hagia Sophia, he said:

"32_M: [...] Of course, there [shows the Seraphim Angel]. Right. They were all closed during the Ottoman period. Later, when it was converted into a church during the Atatürk period, they were opened again.

Author: When it was turned into a museum?

32_M: Right. When it was converted into a museum. They said, "This will remain as a museum, and then church". Then thank God... No matter how much we thank our God, it's never enough, but thanks to Tayyip, he came and did this."⁴⁰ (32_M, 56, Male, Tradesman, Istanbul, Turkey)

Apart from him, the interviewees who were confused about the history of conversions of Hagia Sophia were mostly foreigners. Some believed that the recent conversion transformed Hagia Sophia from a church into a mosque. In one interview, the American art teacher took on the role of explaining the history of Hagia Sophia to her confused mother:

³⁹ By 1993, the conquest celebrations [Fetih Kutlamaları] were events organized by "Islamist-nationalist conservative groups": "Each May 29, these groups have organized their separate conquest celebrations in public demonstrations and the performance of the 'conquest prayer' in front of Hagia Sophia, with the participation of thousands of people" (Gür, 2023, p.9). Today, official events are organized by the government (Gür, 2023) and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

⁴⁰ "32_M: [...] Tabi, orada [shows the Seraphim Angel]. Tabi. Onların hepsi Osmanlı döneminde kapatılmıştır. Sonradan Atatürk döneminde kiliseye çevrilince tekrardan açıldı.

Author: Müzeye çevrilince?

32_M: Tabi. Müzeye çevrilince. Onlar dedi ki "Bura müze olarak kalır, sonra kilise". Sonra şükür Allah'ımıza... Allah'ımıza ne kadar şükretsek az da, sağolsun Tayyip geldi, şey etti." (32_M, 56, Male, Tradesman, Istanbul, Turkey)

08_F: So it was a Byzantine church first? And then it's... then converted to a mosque?

07_M: Built in 500s. Within the 500, the dome collapsed. They rebuilt the dome. They add the ribs to make the dome stay there for longer. And then 1453. Then the Ottomans take over and they take it to the mosque.

08_F: So before 1453, it was a Byzantine church?

07_M: Yes. Because the Byzantine Empire lasted until then.

08_F: So then? There was a museum? Or what happened? And then recently last year... I don't understand.

07_M: During the Republic, they turned it to museum, when Turkey became a republic. And then after last year, they turned it back into a mosque.

08_F: Why did it turn into a museum?

07_M: They turned it into a museum for excavation and all that stuff. You see all these, like, mosaic, not mosaic, the frescoes and stuff. A lot of those were covered up by plaster because you're not supposed to have human figure drawings and stuff. So they covered a lot of that up. So they took it off the plaster to reveal it.

08_F: They removed the plaster to reveal the Christian figures? But why did they do that?

(08_F, 71, Female, Retired Engineer, USA)

07_M: So they could understand what's going on. To see it. It's cool." (07_M, 35, Male, Art Teacher, USA)

The American art teacher appreciated the transformation into a museum by the Republic, yet did not criticize the recent conversion into a mosque: "I don't really care [laughs]. We can see it. We can use it. People can use it. That's great". Coming with the intention of sightseeing and sketching Hagia Sophia as an art monument, he was even content with some of the changes brought about by the new status. For instance, he noted that the previous price of a ticket to see the museum, "20 Euro or something", was too high. Additionally, he remembered that the security control and purchasing a ticket were time-consuming. Overall, he thought that Hagia Sophia was more "open" now. Another foreign interviewee from Russia thought that it was more "accessible" now (27_M, 32, Male, Russia).

Among the interviewees, I observed that foreigners from Europe and North America were careful to distinguish their experiences from others. Sometimes they called themselves "we tourists" (22_M, 35, Male, Manager, Germany). In general, they tended

to refrain from openly commenting on the conversion. Some stated that it was a matter of national and democratic decision of Turkey. On the other hand, they expressed their satisfaction with being granted permission to access the monument. Besides the advantages of free entry and shorter waiting times, they appreciated standing in the same line with Turks and those who came to pray in Hagia Sophia. Being inside the mosque during prayer times and observing people were special events for them. Ultimately, the accessibility, easy entry, and the mixed crowd were regarded positively by foreign visitors.

The American sales manager, acknowledging these advantages, appreciated that “[...] everyone's allowed to come still and that they're not, you know, preventing anyone” (14_M, 34, Male, Sales Manager, USA). However, based on his knowledge of the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey, he thought that Atatürk, who transformed Hagia Sophia into a museum, would be disappointed by this recent conversion decision. He believed that the return from the museum status went against “what the original foundation of Turkey was meant to be: a secular society, republic for everyone, coming together”. He was also knowledgeable about some other mosque conversions, such as Chora, and was disappointed since he could not visit it. Thus, as the conversion marked a certain state ideology in the space, no matter how accessible it was, in his view, the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque was still an "exclusionary" place.

The engineer from the United Kingdom with Muslim and Indian backgrounds knew the history of the conversions of Hagia Sophia. He was pleased with the conversion into a mosque but could also guess there might have been controversies around its museum and church statuses. To learn about this, he asked me if there were plans to convert Hagia Sophia back into a museum or church:

“Do you think it's going to convert something... To convert this to a museum again? Because I think 100% they might... It will be hard for them to change to the church, because all the things inside is fully Arabic, religious to God and Prophet Muhammad. And if they try to change it, it might going to take, like, two or three years again. I mean, if they are changing to church. But I don't think that's going to happen, because the majority of people over here are Muslims. They only leave to make them, like, a Muslim mosque. I

don't think they're going to change to [a church]. Maybe they might go to change it to a museum." (26_M, 26, Male, Engineer, United Kingdom)

He even commented on Sultanahmet Mosque, stating that since it was very close, it could be used for worship if Hagia Sophia turned into a church or a museum. Yet, he thought that since Sultanahmet - which was under restoration by then - was not as accessible as Hagia Sophia, this would not be reasonable. Overall, it was interesting that he shared similar concerns with the people from Turkey debating whether the Sultanahmet Mosque was adequate for worship.

For the engineer from the United Kingdom and Moroccan architect who had Muslim backgrounds, reconversion to a mosque was in continuity with the character of Hagia Sophia and transformed it from a museum into a more used and "productive" place. Moroccan architect compared it with historical mosques in Morocco and stated that she guessed conversion established Hagia Sophia as a national landmark and a "huge part of the identity of the people" (10_F, 28, Female, Architect, Morocco).

The following two interviewees were not unhappy with the mosque status. Yet, in their experiences of Hagia Sophia, it was a place more than just a mosque: it was "both a mosque and a museum", and "a mosque or a church". One of them, an Indonesian student, had an education in arts, and she possessed some knowledge about the history of Hagia Sophia. However, she was surprised upon hearing the question about the conversion in 2020:

"25_F: Wait, so it was a mosque? Now it's a museum, right? Well, I always thought that the two coexist. You know, it's a mosque that also can be seen as a museum. I always see it that way. I always thought it was that way. Just two years ago? Well, so... So, previously, what [did] people do? [...] So it changes from... like what? Church to a mosque, to a museum, and then to "mosque and museum"?"

Author: Yeah. Now, mosque.

25_F: Mosque and museum right now. They coexist like, like the mosque and the museum. They are... they have always been that way. That's what I thought." (25_F, 23, Female, Student, Indonesia)

In the end, despite my explanation, it seemed like the situation remained unclear for her. Yet, it can also be that she preferred to continue perceiving Hagia Sophia as a combination of a museum and mosque based on her personal experience with it.

The other interviewee was a Ukrainian woman whose relationship with Hagia Sophia led her to a slightly different perception of the status of the place. She said that she deeply admired the atmosphere in Hagia Sophia, and expressed a particular fondness for the Seraphim Angels, noting, “It’s our Christian religion” (28_F, 30, Female, Lawyer, Ukraine). She shared with me that during her stay in Istanbul, she visited Hagia Sophia every day and prayed for her occupied country. Despite her personal connection to the values that Hagia Sophia represented for her religion, she was not critical of its conversion into a mosque. She appreciated it as an ancient place of worship and thought that it could not be known if it was a mosque or a church:

“Maybe. So, history, [changes so much]. So, we don't know, [...] Many many years. Maybe it's [a] church. Maybe it's [a] mosque.” (28_F, 30, Female, Lawyer, Ukraine)

During my site visits, I encountered instances where other people like this Ukrainian woman were performing their non-Muslim prayers in Hagia Sophia. I witnessed this in the *maqsura*⁴¹ areas (Image 3. 32) and zone 2. Apparently, this took the attention of two Turkish interviewees as well, who told me that they witnessed individuals whom they presumed to be non-Muslims engaged in prayer or meditation. One of them was a Turkish tourist guide who has been conducting tourist guiding in Spanish and Portuguese for a long time. From his experiences with the foreign tourists he accompanied, he said:

“Of course, that happened. Many ladies, families, my guests, ladies, they were like, "Give us 10 minutes and we'll pray in a corner". Of course, we do not go into the more private, like, what do they mean by praying? Therapy or meditation? Or Christian motivation, or Muslim? We don't ask this. But that would happen.”⁴² (44_M, 42, Male, Tourist Guide,

⁴¹ Maqsura refers to an elevated and screened platform in mosques which can be used by a special group such as the ruler, or can be used for purposes of meetings and lectures.

⁴² “Tabi tabi, oldu. Bir sürü bayan, aile, misafirlerim, bayanlar, işte, “Bize bir 10 dakika zaman ver de bir köşede dua edelim”. Tabi daha da özeline girmiyoruz, dua etmekten kastettiği ne? Terapi mi, meditasyon

Istanbul, Turkey)

This tourist guide believed that the “Christian visitors” were drawn to pray and worship in Hagia Sophia since Christianity and Islam “intersected on the belief of monotheism”⁴³. He thought this was comparable to a Muslim worshipping in a church and was worthy of appreciation. According to him, these instances were “nice” vignettes that showcased the intersection of faiths in Hagia Sophia.



Image 3. 32: A maqsura in the South Side Nave. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

On the other hand, for the journalist woman from İzmir, the act of non-Muslims praying in Hagia Sophia carried a deeper significance. She had emphasized already that Hagia Sophia represented the epitome of religious tolerance rooted in Ottoman culture and the tradition of Islam. While she believed that the recent conversion to a mosque aligned with this spirit, she recognized that not everyone accepted the current status of Hagia Sophia as a mosque. She interpreted the presence of “Orthodox Christians” praying in Hagia Sophia as a potential form of “provocation” (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey). She used the same comparison with the tourist guide, asking whether the opposite of what happened in Hagia Sophia could be witnessed in a Christian church. However, she asserted that these experiences would not be equivalent at all. To support her viewpoint, she cited the example of the Cordoba Mosque-Cathedral, noting that

mu? Veya Hristiyan motivasyonu mu, veya Müslümanlık mı? Bunu sormuyoruz. Ama oluyordu.” (44_M, 42, Male, Tourist Guide, Istanbul, Turkey)

⁴³ “Yani, Hristiyanlarla ibadetlerinde ortak bir noktamız var yani, monoteizm anlamında tek tanrımız var Hristiyanlarla.” (44_M, 42, Male, Tourist Guide, Istanbul, Turkey)

Muslims encountered trouble practicing their beliefs there. “But such a situation is not the case in Hagia Sophia.”⁴⁴, she said.

While she suspected that non-Muslim prayer in Hagia Sophia could be a provocation in response to its recent reconversion, she also believed Turks should not be overly concerned about it. To counter the unfavorable attitude exhibited towards Muslims in Europe, she suggested embracing the religious tolerance, which she believed was at the core of “our civilization”:

“[...] Well, no one said anything. So, does anyone need to say anything? Yes, I think we shouldn't say anything. [...] Now, the logic of 'Europeans treat me this way, so I should treat them the same way, an eye for an eye' is not right, in my opinion. But of course everyone should know their limits when it comes to this.” (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)⁴⁵

Although this issue took place in only two interviews, the perspectives of these two individuals demonstrated differing opinions regarding the perception and use of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque as a non-Muslim place of worship. Non-Muslims praying in Hagia Sophia was either a controversial or peaceful demonstration of the multi-layered nature of Hagia Sophia. Either way, this case occurring in Hagia Sophia is noteworthy. I argue that it can be considered part of the distinctiveness of Hagia Sophia stemming from its history as a church and museum. Similar to Muslims praying with Christian symbols around, non-Muslims praying in Hagia Sophia contribute to the monument's complex and occasionally confusing atmosphere. Also, it is seen that seemingly simple acts like worshipping can give rise to discussions on the religious and political meanings of Hagia Sophia.

In the interviews, there were some other issues which were deeply intertwined with the social and political meanings of Hagia Sophia. Above all, the experience of the mosque could not be easily separated from the conversion itself. During the interviews, two

⁴⁴ “Ama Ayasofya'da böyle bir durum söz konusu değil” (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

⁴⁵ “[...]Yani hiç kimse de herhangi bir şey demedi. Demememiz mi gerekiyor? Evet, bence demememiz gerekiyor. [...] Şimdi, “Avrupalılar bana böyle davranıyor, ben de onlara böyle yapmalıyım, kısasa kısas uygulamalıyım” mantığı çok doğru değil bence. Tabi ama herkes de bu konuda sınırları bilecek.” (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

questions were directly on the conversion: “Did you know that in 2020 Hagia Sophia was converted to mosque from a museum? Can you tell about your opinions on this?” and “Upon this conversion, the monument was prone to some spatial transformations. Do you know what are they? Can you tell about your opinions on this?”. Some interviewees from Turkey declined to answer these questions, stating that they considered the questions to be about politics, although I emphasized that the primary focus of the research was on the experience of the converted monument.

Still, most interviewees answered these questions based on their observations and personal experiences in Hagia Sophia following its conversion. Some people wished Hagia Sophia remained as a museum, while some were quite pleased with the conversion. Also, some interviewees did not criticize the conversion based on their experience but through their view of its social, religious, or political representations. For instance, a Turkish student who had lived in Istanbul for seven years but had never visited Hagia Sophia before, was against the conversion. He stated that he preferred that "such places" remained as museums rather than becoming a center for a single religion. However, when asked about his experience in the place, he expressed that he did not perceive the mosque status as having a notable negative impact on his experience. For him, Hagia Sophia was a distinct mosque. He observed that the freedom of tourists and children, in particular, set Hagia Sophia apart from others. He also noticed greater visibility of women and felt they might be more comfortable in Hagia Sophia than in other mosques. In the end, reminding me of two women who described Hagia Sophia 'both a mosque and a museum', or 'a mosque or a church', he concluded: "So, it's not like a regular mosque, that's for sure"⁴⁶ (47_M, 24, Male, Student, Istanbul, Turkey).

Like him, the status as a mosque did not impact the experience of another Turkish tourist either. She stated that she did not perceive a clear distinction between the mosque and museum statuses during her time in Hagia Sophia. Although disappointed by the closed galleries, she was satisfied with the remaining accessible areas. In her opinion, one could still enjoy Hagia Sophia as a museum:

⁴⁶ “Yani, normal bir cami gibi değil bir kere.” (47_M, 24, Male, Student, Istanbul, Türkiye)

"Even if it is a mosque now, it still carries the essence of being a museum... Yes, it still does... Because it has such a rich history, in my opinion. This place is not just... Yes, you can pray here, but it has its own unique texture, and it feels like you are immersed in history. Worship, the religious purpose, [are] in a separate realm. But seeing the history, seeing the arts, seeing everything [...], it's impressive. It is actually beautiful from both sides, in my opinion. [...] "As I said, I do my worship here and see my history. It is a great experience for me to be able to come here, to see this place. [...] It made me happy in every way. There is no difference for me."⁴⁷ (41_F, 21, Female, Receptionist, İzmit, Turkey)

Unlike her, some visitors were disappointed by the inaccessibility of the artifacts and some areas. Another Turkish tourist was a fine arts student interested in seeing the Christian mosaics and figures in Hagia Sophia. He described his experience as "restricted"⁴⁸, and hesitantly commented that he viewed the conversion negatively (29_M, 20, Male, Student, Bursa, Turkey).

In the account of some interviewees, their experience of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque was negatively impacted by the management of the place. For instance, a student from Istanbul who before commented that the display of Christian artifacts in a place of Muslim worship was "illogical", observed the behavior of visitors in Hagia Sophia. She thought foreign tourists, especially, behaved very comfortably for a place of worship. This was an unpleasant aspect of her experience:

"I think there were some unpleasant things, for example, some foreign tourists lying on the ground. I don't know, it is a bit disrespectful behavior. After all, this is a place of worship, I don't think it was nice for them to lie down like that. They behave a little more comfortably. For example, when we go to the mosque, we act a little more respectful, we cover our heads. But they... As for the church, yes, we behave respectfully. When we go there, they say, "Don't take pictures", and we don't take pictures. I mean it is free here of course, but... I mean, we are acting in accordance with the rules as much as possible but here they are

⁴⁷ "Şu an cami olsa bile o müze olduğu zamanın hala şeyini yaşıyor... Evet, hala... Çünkü çok büyük bir tarih hani, bana göre. Burası sadece... Evet, burada ibadet yapılıyor ama buranın kendine has bir dokusu var ve zaten sanki tarihle içiçeymişsin gibi hissediyorsun. İbadet ayrı bir yerde kalıyor, hani, dini amacın ayrı bir yerde kalıyor. Ama, nasıl desem, o tarihi, sanatları görmek [...], her şeyi görmek insanı etkiliyor. İki taraftan da aslında çok güzel, bana göre. [...] Dediğim gibi, ben burada da ibadetimi yaparım, tarihimi görürüm. Benim için çok büyük bir deneyim, buraya gelebilmek, burayı görebilmek. [...] Her türden, beni mutlu etti yani. Benim için hiç bir farklılığı olmaz." (41_F, 21, Female, Receptionist, İzmit, Turkey)

⁴⁸ "Dönüştürülmesi, yani... Gerçekten burayı gezmek isteyen ve yani incelemek isteyen biri için bir tık kısıtlayıcı oldu. Yani kötü oldu." (29_M, 20, Male, Student, Bursa, Turkey)

behaving too comfortably, lying on the floor and such. I don't know, it was strange, I mean, their behavior was very comfortable. Yes, there are a lot of tourists. So of course they should see this place, but..."⁴⁹ (06_F, 20, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

An architect woman from Mersin initially chose not to respond to questions about the conversion, citing it as a "political matter". However, toward the end of the interview, after discussing various aspects of her experience and observations at the site, she criticized the status of Hagia Sophia as a mosque more extensively than the other interviewees:

"It's disappointing. I think it's fine to use it as a mosque because it's in our country and it used to be a mosque,; however, it should only be used as a mosque on special occasions. It may not be able to withstand the intensity and vibrations during every prayer. There are cracks and openings in the columns. Now it has been converted, okay, let's keep it that way. But it should have been maintained. There is a high density of visitors. Okay, it is an economic and cultural value for our country, but it should be more organized. There are people practicing yoga, sitting on the columns, stepping on the carpets with bare feet. First of all, there should be hygiene. Also, a tourist woman was taking photos of worshippers, which is not nice."⁵⁰ (01_F, 23, Female, Architect, Mersin, Turkey)

These two women highlighted the aspects they disapproved of regarding the management of Hagia Sophia. The first one did not explicitly state whether she preferred Hagia Sophia as a mosque or a museum, but she expressed her dissatisfaction with its current way of management. The second one criticized the recent conversion while valuing its national and Islamic significance as a mosque. As an architect, she also pointed out many issues regarding the maintenance of the historical place. Ultimately,

⁴⁹ "Bence hoş olmayan şeyler vardı, mesela bazı yabancı turistlerin yerlerde uzanması filan. Bilmiyorum, biraz saygısızca bir davranış. Sonuçta burası bir ibadethane, öyle yatmaları falan bence hoş değildi. Biraz daha rahat davranıyorlar. Biz mesela camiye gittiğimizde biraz daha saygılı davranıyoruz, başımızı falan kapatıyoruz. Ama onlar... Kilise için de biz, evet, saygılı davranıyoruz. Oraya gittiğimizde "Fotoğraf çekmeyin" diyorlar, fotoğraf çekmiyoruz. Yani burada serbest tabi ama. Yani olabildiğince kurallarına uyuyoruz ama burada oldukça rahat davranıyorlar, yerlerde yatıyorlar falan. Bilmiyorum, değişikti, yani çok rahattı tavırları. Evet, çok turist var. Yani tabi ki görmeleri lazım da..." (06_F, 20, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

⁵⁰ "Hayalkırıklığı. Ülkemizde olması ve eskiden de cami olması nedeniyle bence cami olarak kullanılması sorun değil; ama sadece çok özel günlerde cami olarak kullanılmalı. Her vakit namazında bu kadar yoğunluk ve titreşimi kaldıramayabilir. Sütunlarda çatlaklar, açılmalar var. Şimdi dönüştürüldü, tamam, böyle devam edelim. Ama bakımlarının yapılması gerekirdi. Ziyaretçi yoğunluğu var. Tamam, ülkemiz için ekonomik ve kültürel bir değer, ama daha düzenli olması gerekir. Yoga yapan, sütunlara oturan, çıplak ayakla halılara basan insanlar var. Bir kere hijyen olmalı. Ayrıca bir turist kadın ibadet edenlerin fotoğraflarını çekiyordu, bu da hoş değil." (01_F, 23, Female, Architect, Mersin, Turkey)

both women expressed that the operating Grand Mosque failed to meet their expectations regarding adhering to the required rules and manners of a mosque, such as respectful attitude and hygiene.

Similar comments on the management and visiting rules were made during the rest of the interviews as well. The proper care and management of the monument, for example, were considered important by the visitors as they admired both the architectural integrity and sacred values of Hagia Sophia.

In this section, some interviewees believed that the experience of ‘this mosque’ was distinct from others. The confusion on the history of Hagia Sophia's conversions and daily incidents such as non-Muslim worship in a 'mosque' pointed out the ambiguous status brought about by the conversion. Interviews indicated that Hagia Sophia, after the conversion, continued to hold meanings of a church, museum and mosque, and function at their interface.

I argue that this was not only because it resembled a museum or had continued popularity as a sightseeing place. The last two interviews indicated that Hagia Sophia sometimes deviated from the widely seen practices and rules of visit in mosques in Turkey and abroad. In the rest of the interviews as well, there were some recurring mentions of rules and appropriate behaviors, which, drawing on my interviewees' accounts, I call manners, or "adap" in Turkish. The everyday experience of Hagia Sophia was influenced by the absence or presence of such manners, together with the management of the place. Then, what are the expectations associated with being in a place of worship? Do “practicing yoga, sitting on the columns, stepping on the carpets with bare feet” suit the “adap” of Hagia Sophia? How can it be ensured that the tourists show respect for the ones who pray, or vice versa? The next section is on these questions.

3.3.3 Rules and manners: “Adap”

Between noon and afternoon prayer times were the most crowded time of Hagia Sophia during the day. The line at the entrance would stretch across Ayasofya Square, reaching

the museum information point at its Eastern end. Inside Hagia Sophia, the Inner Narthex was full of people trying to enter the main space through the historical gates. Here, the security guards would control the flow of people and introduce to them the two essential rules: “Lady, your hair!”, and “No shoes!”. Women, if they did not before, would wear their shawls, hoodies, or scarves they bought from the vending machine in the courtyard. The visitors' shoes would overflow from the shoe cabinets. Some people, worrying that their shoes could be stolen, which is not rare in mosques in Turkey, would want to enter the main space with galoshes on their feet. However, as the signs all over the ground suggested, stepping on the carpet with shoes was forbidden (Image 3. 33). Even the guards, during cold, rain, and snow, wore soft slippers at most. The only option was to carry one's shoes in hand. The Turkish student, who had not been to Hagia Sophia in the seven years he had been in Istanbul, had a memory with this on his first visit:

“Well, I thought my shoes would get stolen. We could enter the main place with our shoes in hand, without putting them anywhere or entrusting them. But when I found out that you can't enter the prayer section with shoes in your hand, I gave up going in. It was already the prayer time, the azan had started. So I preferred to see the surroundings.”⁵¹ (47_M, 24, Male, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

It was possible to carry shoes in hand until zone 2 that is tagged as “the prayer area”. It can be guessed that the rule aimed to respect the people praying in this area. Yet, zone 1 is also a prayer area in practice. This student preferred to stay at this part, by the border (Image 3. 34), and spectate the whole space from there.

As much as the guards were concerned about stepping on the carpet with shoes, some interviewees complained about those who took off their shoes. ‘Walking barefoot on the carpets’, as noted by the architect from Mersin, recurred in many interviews as a complaint, along with issues related to socks, smell, and perceived lack of hygiene in Hagia Sophia. Some foreign visitors were already familiar with mosque spaces and the rule regarding shoes, but they did not express such complaints. This issue was pointed

⁵¹ “Şöyle, ayakkabımın çalınacağını düşündüm. Ana mekana girerken elimizde ayakkabıyla girebiliyorduk, herhangi bir yere koymadan ya da emanet etmeden. Yalnız namaz bölümüne elde ayakkabıyla da girilmediğini öğrenince ben de içeri girmekten vazgeçtim. Zaten tam namaz saatiydi, ezan başlamıştı. Dolayısıyla etrafı görmeyi tercih ettim.” (47_M, 24, Student, Male, Istanbul, Turkey)

out mainly by the Turkish interviewees. In their account, the issue of hygiene and smell not only affected the atmosphere and experience of the place but also violated the manners of the place. For example, the waqf expert from Ankara, who was very knowledgeable of the changes in Hagia Sophia brought by the conversion, shared many observations on this point:

“[...]Well, it was heard that the doors were eaten [laughs]. Excuse me, the mosque stinks. It's foot odor. Because people just don't know. Most people enter barefoot. I mean, they shouldn't do that. He should step on the stone with his shoes on. So it's the same in here as it is outside.”⁵² (11_M, 38, Male, Waqf Expert, Ankara, Turkey)



Image 3. 33: The signs at the Inner Narthex suggesting "No entry with shoes". (Photograph by the Author, December 2022)

⁵² “[...]İşte, kapıların yendiği duyuldu [gülür]. Çok afedersiniz, cami kokuyor. Ayak kokusu işte. İnsanlar çünkü şey işte, bilmiyor ki. Çıplak ayakla giriyor çoğu kişi. Girmemeli yani. Ayakkabıyla taşla basmalı. Dışarıda nasılsa burası da öyle yani.[...]” (11_M, 38, Male, Waqf Expert, Ankara, Turkey)



Image 3. 34: The border between zone 1 and 2. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)

The waqf expert believed that the problem with the shoe rule and smell was the responsibility of the site managers. He suggested solutions such as laying carpets only during prayer times, installing indoor air cleaners, or selling socks to visitors. On the other hand, the proper care and a good experience of the place also depended on how conscious the visitors were, he thought:

“Of course, the profile of the tourists also determines it. You say European tourists, but some of them go right into the middle, like me, they look, but roll over [on the floor], like, they act against the rules of this place. [...] I observed that it was mostly Russian tourists. [...] It has nothing to do with glorifying Europeans as such, but because they are more articulate people, they at least read, look. “This is how it should be done”. They obey the rules more. But Russians, Arabs, Pakistanis, etc...”⁵³ (11_M, 38, Male, Waqf Expert, Ankara, Turkey)

⁵³ “Tabi [...] turistin profili de belirliyor. Avrupalı turist diyorsunuz ama, bazıları da tam ortaya geçiyor, işte benim gibi, bakıyor ama, yuvarlanıyor, işte, buranın adabına aykırı hareket ediyor. [...] Daha çok Rus turistlerde olduğunu gözlemledim. [...] Avrupalıları da tabi öyle yüceltmekle ilgisi yok da, onlar daha müze bilir insanlar oldukları için en azından okuyorlar bakıyorlar. “Böyle yapılması gerekiyor”. Kurallara daha çok uyuyorlar. Ama işte Ruslar, Araplar, Pakistanlılar falan...” (11_M, 38, Male, Waqf Expert, Ankara, Turkey)

Two phrases he used here were repeated by some of my other Turkish interviewees. The ‘tourist profile’ was one of them. As the foreign visitors from Europe and North America called themselves “we tourists”, Turkish people saw them and the visitors from other countries as “tourists”. Nevertheless, Turkish interviewees’ perception of ‘Europeans and North Americans’ was more tolerant. Since these foreign tourists were presumed to be unfamiliar with the mosques, the visitors from Turkey appreciated when they adhered to the rules of visit. In this regard, the teacher from Malatya thought that the presence of tourists in Hagia Sophia led to a “cultural amalgamation”, and appreciated their “adaptation” to the rules of visiting a mosque, such as wearing a headscarf (31_M, 42, Male, Teacher, Malatya, Turkey).

Another teacher from Mardin, while telling about the visiting rules she observed in Hagia Sophia, expressed her opinions as follows:

“There is the headscarf requirement, but do we wear it properly? Of course not. I can imagine that the tourists find it very strange. Because even I find it strange. Taking off shoes, wearing a scarf...[...] Because these things didn't exist when it was a museum. I mean, I didn't come then, but they didn't exist, I know. I empathized with them for a moment, it may seem strange. For us, there is no problem”⁵⁴ (15_F, 32, Female, Teacher, Mardin, Turkey)

This woman from Mardin thought that the rule with headscarves and shoes was strange, considering that Hagia Sophia was a museum, and these practices were not expected before. Although she expressed her confusion in this regard and even doubted whether she correctly applied the rule with the headscarf, she quickly accepted these, saying, “There is no problem” for “us,” the visitors from Turkey. Instead, she thought that the confusion experienced by foreigners would be even greater.

⁵⁴ “Örtü zorunluluğu var ama usülünce takıyor muyuz? Değil tabi. Turistlerin çok garipsediğini tahmin edebiliyorum. Çünkü ben bile garipsiyorum. Ayakkabının çıkarılması, örtü takılması...[...] Çünkü müzeyken bu şeyler yoktu. Yani ben gelmedim ama yoktu, biliyorum. Onlar açısından bir an empati kurdum, garip geliyor olabilir. Bizim açımızdan problem yok.” (15_F, 32, Female, Teacher, Mardin, Turkey)

The majority of the ‘non-European’ tourists, on the other hand, were not confused since they already had a familiarity with the rules of visit in a mosque. Especially those with a Muslim background could recognize many of such rules in Hagia Sophia and make comparisons with other mosques. The most frequently mentioned rules were related to gender segregation, taking shoes off, and hijab, which they considered to be the same in every mosque.

Some noted that the women’s section in Hagia Sophia was not as opaque as it is in some other Muslim countries. For example, the engineer from the United Kingdom stated that in the Middle East, the separators between men and women would not allow them to see each other. He noticed that, in Hagia Sophia, women's silhouettes could be noticed through the barriers, but he did not believe that this spatial arrangement violated the religious rules. He thought that the manners of worship already did not let men to watch women through the barriers:

“[Here] they have a specific barriers which the people don't want to jump and go. But there is no fully protected, [...] Like, in Middle East, basically, there is separate concrete walls. So we will not going to seeing any females on the right side, praying. But in here we can see. [...] I mean, if a person is too religious and Muslim, they won't really look on the left and right and they will pray on straight.” (26_M, 26, Male, Engineer, United Kingdom)

The architect from Morocco, who dwell on the rule with the hijab before, defined herself “a little bit” advantageous since she knew how to visit a mosque:

“Oh, the hijab. The shoes. Well, respectful attire. So, that's super normal for me. But my boyfriend, not really. I'm a Muslim and he's not. So for me... I'm used to these things. But I would assume he's not. [...] I feel like I have a little bit advantage because I'm used to that kind of... I know it a little bit.” (10_M, 28, Female, Architect, Morocco)

Even the last three comments demonstrate that the most commonly mentioned rule among the visiting protocols was the rule of wearing a headscarf. The rule was well-known among almost all visitors: foreign and local, non-Muslim and Muslim. Although the rule indeed encompassed a modest dress code for both men and women (Image 3. 35), its most ‘visible’ and prominent part was perceived to be women’s headscarves. In

practice, too, almost all men and many women would adhere to the dress code less strictly regarding the length of the clothes or covering the body parts. However, both the guards and - male and female - visitors of Hagia Sophia were exceptionally careful about if and how women stuck to the headscarf rule. Thus, it was understandable that the woman from Mardin doubted herself whether she wore the headscarf appropriately.

The rule of wearing a headscarf was discussed in almost all interviews. While some only noted it among the visiting protocols, some women shared their experiences. For example, a Turkish women explained that guards warned her and her friend to cover their hair by hand signals:

“Not communication with security but [laughs]... They kept doing this from afar [makes the gesture of covering her hair].”⁵⁵ (02_F, 22, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)



Image 3. 35: The dress code for men and women for visiting the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)

⁵⁵ Güvenlikle iletişim değil de [laughs]... Böyle yapıp durdular uzaktan [makes the gesture of covering her hair]. (02_F, 22, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey).

I was also warned a few times. Once, I was in the women’s section—another time, at the main space. Here, I was warned that my scarf did not cover my hair "properly". Besides wondering how “properly” I could wear it, I was also surprised that this warning was in English. I assumed that the personnel thought of me as a non-Turkish woman, unaware of the headscarf rule.

An interviewee that I contacted through Havle Women’s Association was a female student from Istanbul. She has been to Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque many times, especially with the purpose of showing her friends and family members see around. She told that in one of her visits, her friend who did not wear headscarf normally, was harshly warned by the personnel:

“Well, I came with a female friend of mine. She doesn't wear a headscarf. But, like, she was going to wear the headscarf, but she wanted to wear it when she entered the mosque, when entering. But, well, the security said, “Cover your head,” in a harsh way. There's that too, for example. I don't know... This is Hagia Sophia, but I remember things from, like, the previous ones... You know, my experiences at the big mosques like Sultanahmet, Süleymaniye. The headscarf was not such a thing before, you know... It was not a compulsory thing. [...] I mean, they want women to cover their heads when entering the mosque. Okay, they can want this, I understand that. But it sounded too harsh to both of us. Well, it was something she was going to do anyway. If he'd waited a little bit [laughs], there would have been no need for the security to make this warning, actually.”⁵⁶ (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

This woman thought that the rule with headscarf was more strict in Hagia Sophia than in other historical and touristic mosques like Sultanahmet and Süleymaniye Mosques. However, she didn't think applying this rule so strictly was necessary since it was already known as a general rule for visiting mosques. On the contrary, another interviewee believed that the headscarf rule was not strictly and followed adequately in

⁵⁶ “Şey, bir kadın arkadaşımın gelmişti. O başörtü kullanmıyor. Ama işte, başörtüsü takacaktı ama camiye girince takmak istiyordu, girme anında. Ama, şey, sert bir şekilde “Başınızı kapatın” dedi güvenlik. O da var mesela. Bilmiyorum, ben... Bu Ayasofya şey değil ama önceki mesela şeyleri hatırlıyorum... İşte büyük o Sultanahmet, Süleymaniye gibi o cami deneyimlerimi. Başörtü önceden bu kadar böyle şey bir durum değildi hani... Zorunlu bir durum değildi. [...] Yani camiye girerken hani kadınların başını kapatmasını istiyorlar. Tamam, bu istenebilir bir şey, bunu da anlarım ama o çok sert gelmişti ikimiz için de yani. Hani, zaten de yapacağı bir şeydi yani. Biraz bekleselerdi [gülür], bu uyarıyı yapmasına da gerek kalmayacaktı aslında güvenliğinin.” (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

Hagia Sophia. This comment was made by the journalist woman from İzmir who believed performing non-Muslim worship in Hagia Sophia was a potentially provocative act against the conversion in 2020. She had a similar view on the headscarf as well. She witnessed that some women “who are members of other religions” were not following the dress code. From my site visits, I was also aware that some foreign and Turkish women and men did not adhere to the rules. They were mostly warned by the guards. Yet, it was this journalist woman who warned a foreign woman in one of her visits:

“[...] Now, there is a rule of entry to our places of worship, right? So, even if you are Muslim, even if you are unveiled [...] This is our general rule. This is the same no matter which mosque you go to. [...] Now, for example, Christians who do not comply with this... I shouldn't say Christians, sorry. I have seen a lot of people who are members of other religions who do not comply with this. However, in many places there are warnings, in many places the people in charge tell us, outside as well... After that, even scarf sales points have been set up for this. This is especially being monitored. Oh, is it done this way on purpose, I mean, is it done intentionally? Did they say, “No my friend, if it's a mosque, what does it matter to me? It doesn't concern me, this is a church for me” and enter? [...] We already told the personnel. [...] we said, "Look, if there is a rule, it applies to everyone, and these people must adhere to this rule". They said "Yes". So, okay, it might be overlooked. It's very crowded, everybody is visiting. I mean, they took advantage of a loophole and went in. But this does not mean that they will not comply with this rule. They definitely should.”⁵⁷ (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

Although this woman witnessed the opposite, at least as expressed in the interviews, the foreign people were hesitant to violate the rules of visiting a mosque. As I noted in the previous chapter, most foreign visitors from Europe and North America distinguished

⁵⁷ [...] Şimdi, bizim ibadet yerlerimize girişin bir kuralı var değil mi? İşte, siz Müslüman bile olsanız, başınız açık bile olsa [...] Bu bizim genel kuralımız. Hangi camiye giderseniz gidin bu bu şekildedir. [...] Şimdi, mesela ben buna uymayan Hıristiyanları da... Hıristiyan demeyeyim, pardon. Ben buna uymayan diğer dine mensup olan insanları da çok fazla gördüm. Halbuki birçok yerde uyarı yapılıyor, birçok yerde görevli arkadaşlar söylüyor, ama dışarıda... Ondan sonra, bunun için hatta eşarp satış yerleri oluşturulmuş. Özellikle kontroller yapılıyor. Ha, bile bile mi bu şekilde, yani özellikle mi bu şekilde yapılıyor? “Hayır arkadaş, cami, bana ne. Beni ilgilendirmez, burası benim için bir kilise” deyip mi girdi? [...] Biz görevlilere zaten söyledik. [...] dedik ki “Bakın, eğer bir kural varsa herkes için geçerli bu kural, ve bu kişiler de bu kurala uymak zorunda”. “Evet” dediler. Yani, bu, tamam, gözden kaçmış olabilir. Çok kalabalık, herkes ziyaret ediyor. Olabilir yani, bir boşluktan yararlanıp içeri girmiş olabilirler. Ama bu onların bu kurala uymayacakları anlamına da gelmiyor. Mutlaka yapmalılar.” (23_F, 40, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

their experiences from those from Turkey and those who came to Hagia Sophia for worship. They expressed that they wanted to conform to the rules of a mosque and exhibit respect during their time in Hagia Sophia. Some of these individuals did not have familiarity with mosque spaces and practices. Yet, they explained that in their interaction with local people and Hagia Sophia, they tried to follow certain rules which they thought applied to any place of worship. Some of them were modest attire, being respectful and silent, and keeping a distance from the worshipping people. A German tourist, for example, told about his experience with the barrier between zone 1 and 2 as follows:

“Well, [in] the big hall, most are restricted. But for me, it was totally okay. Because at the very front, they were worshipping, and then there was, like, a barrier where there was nobody. And there were we tourists. And I regarded this quite respectful, because yeah, people are a bit noisy. And so the people who took part in the ceremony weren't disrupted.”
(22_M, 35, Male, Manager, Germany)

Another attitude that these foreign visitors tried to maintain was about photography. In a tourist attraction like Hagia Sophia, photographing the place and people was an important part of the visitors' experience. Most visitors would wander around with cameras in their hands, recording the whole space. Many people also shot TikTok videos (11_M, 38, Male, Waqf Expert, Ankara, Turkey). Photography was an essential medium for people to record their experiences and demonstrate their presence in Hagia Sophia. Nevertheless, it could be challenging since Hagia Sophia was quite crowded and mixed at times. Although it was not written anywhere that photography was prohibited, not violating the privacy of the worshipping people through photography and maintaining respect for them were delicate issues. Therefore, an interviewee said that the experience of Hagia Sophia should not have been through photography but spectating the place (38_M, 24, Male, Mathematician, Finland).

In one interview, a tourist from the United Kingdom was telling about his desire to visit the upper galleries with his partner to “look down from above to actually get the scale and size” (30_M, 56, Male, Retired, United Kingdom). When I asked him if he wanted to take pictures as well, he said:

“Yeah... It's kind of tricky because, as I say, is it a museum or is it a place of religious worship? If it's religious worship, I feel [like] I don't want to take photographs. I can't take photographs. So again [...] it's for my memory rather than... And there will be a photographer who's taken a better photograph of it than I will. [...] Well, for us [...] it's more a museum. But [we're] just trying to be respectful of the fact that this is a mosque and a place of religious worship.[...] So, yeah, we're perfectly happy and comfortable with the rules for attending a mosque.” (30_M, Male, 56, Retired, United Kingdom)

This interviewee stated that photographing the space as a mosque was disrespectful and unnecessary, but the place was more like a museum. Ultimately, they were trying to adhere to the rules of visiting a mosque in a museum-like place. To draw conclusions from this mixed comment, photographing indicates the entanglement of the co-existence of worship and sightseeing in Hagia Sophia. A Turkish interviewee added another dimension to this discussion, saying that the co-existence of the functions posed a problem regarding mobility in the space as well:

“Well, since there were people praying inside, I was a little bit like, ‘Am I bothering them? Would I bother them if I get too close and all that?’ For example, doubts formed in my head.”⁵⁸ (37_F, 24, Female, Architect, İzmir, Turkey)

Moving in the space by worshipping people was a concern also for the old Turkish man who was once in Hagia Sophia during the conquest celebrations. He was very grateful and happy that Hagia Sophia was a mosque now. He thought that the only problem was the limited space designated for prayers, meaning the men's section: “One wishes that those who pray could come all the way here [showing zone 2]”⁵⁹ (32_M, 56, Male, Tradesman, Istanbul, Turkey). His concern was that since people were moving freely in zone 2, they could pass by the worshipping people, invalidating their prayer. This is an unfavorable behavior in mosques in Turkey.

⁵⁸ “Yani içeride ibadet eden insanlar olunca ben birazcık hani “Acaba rahatsız ediyorum mu? Edecek bir şey yapar mıyım fazla yaklaşırsam vesaire?” gibi çekinceler oluştu yer yer kafamda mesela.” (37_F, 24, Female, Architect, İzmir, Turkey)

⁵⁹ “Gönül isterdi ki namaz kılan ta buraya çekilsin.”(32_M, 56, Male, Tradesman, Istanbul, Turkey)

Besides the discussions on whether Hagia Sophia was more like a mosque or museum, another ambiguity was on what kind of a mosque it was. Many interviewees acknowledged its distinctiveness from other mosques. In doing so, they compared it with its neighbor Sultanahmet and other historical mosques in Turkey and abroad. Loose or strict, popular or sacred, Hagia Sophia as a mosque was described in various manners in the interviews. For some, entering the site from an X-ray gate and the presence of police all around were not compatible with the character of a sacred place (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey). A Turkish woman considered it strange to 'sell' scarves and dresses in vending machines since the general practice in Turkey is to provide them for free while entering the mosque (41_F, 21, Receptionist, İzmit, Turkey). On the other hand, for others, allowing foreign and Turkish, Muslim and non-Muslim, all visitors, free of charge, fitted with the welcoming attitude expected from a mosque.

While these can be considered examples concerning the management of the place, there were also observations on some practices which were exclusively witnessed in Hagia Sophia. For example, the Moroccan architect, who was Muslim, came to Hagia Sophia with her non-Muslim boyfriend. She appreciated and found it “super respectful” that a place was left for “people who will not use the space for its functionality: so, prayer”. She witnessed in Sultanahmet Mosque that people who were not going to pray were asked to leave the space during prayer time (10_F, 28, Female, Architect, Morocco). For the interviewee from Finland, Hagia Sophia was not very strict in following the manners of a mosque when compared with other mosques he visited in Turkey: “Bursa was stricter. Like, I don't think you were able to speak. At least people didn't speak, so.” (38_M, 24, Male, Mathematician, Finland).

Especially the interviewees from Turkey evaluated the distinctiveness of Hagia Sophia in means of the visitors' behaviors and the visiting rules controlled by the personnel. They looked at how the conventional practices expected from mosques in Turkey applied in Hagia Sophia.

An old Turkish woman told that she observed some behaviors in Hagia Sophia, which were, in her view, running against the manners, or "adap", of the mosque: children running around freed of their parents' control, people interrupting others from taking photographs, people lying on the floor, and the mixed crowd in general. Looking at these, contrary to the foreign visitors, she interpreted that 'accessibility' or 'openness' were not necessarily positive changes brought about to Hagia Sophia by its conversion into a mosque:

“Well, it's nice in terms of visiting rules. Anyone can enter here. But frankly, I can't see the comfort here in any other mosque. I mean, things were done as if someone wanted to plunder [Hagia Sophia]. I wish they hadn't opened it, I'll say. [...] Everything has its manners. So, I don't know. I did not expect such a thing in Hagia Sophia. As I was saying, go to Sultanahmet, they can't do any of these there. It's like as if it's a different mosque here. However, this is a mosque, too, if that's the case. But unfortunately, this place doesn't get that much respect. It left such an impression on me, I'll say.”⁶⁰ (09_F, 55, Female, Housewife, Istanbul, Turkey)

This Turkish woman used the word “adap”, like the waqf expert from Ankara, to explain that the place had manners that were supposed to restrain the visitors in the context of a mosque. She regarded them as requirements of showing respect to a historical mosque like Hagia Sophia. If Hagia Sophia was a valuable place to be reconverted into a mosque, why did it receive a different treatment from other mosques such as Sultanahmet?

In another interview, Hagia Sophia was compared with Süleymaniye Mosque. The other interviewee I contacted through Havle Women's Association, a female student from Istanbul, thought that since it had a “more open observation and visiting area”, Hagia Sophia was a less strict mosque than Süleymaniye:

⁶⁰ “Valla ziyaret kuralı olarak güzel. Herkes buraya girebilir. Ama buradaki rahatlığı hiç bir camide göremiyorum açıkçası. Yani sanki talan edilmek istercesine bir şeyler yapılmış. Keşke açmasalarmış, öyle diyeyim geldi. [...] Her şeyin bir adabı var. Bilemedim yani. Ayasofya'da böyle bir şey ben beklemiyordum. Diyorum ya, Sultanahmet'e git, bunların hiç birini yapamazlar. Sanki orası ayrı burası ayrı bir camiymiş. Halbuki burası da cami, madem öyle. Ama o saygıyı burası görmüyor maalesef. Öyle bir intiba bıraktı bende, diyeyim sana.” (09_F, 55, Female, Housewife, Istanbul, Turkey)

“[In Süleymaniye Mosque] I had not wandered around this much. But I think it wasn't this comfortable, that's how I remember it. Because if it was, we would wander around. We sat at the ladies' section for a while and left.”⁶¹ (48_F, 22, Female, Student, İstanbul, Turkey)

During the interview, this interviewee especially elaborated on her experiences with the women's section and gender segregation. She said the women had more accessibility in Hagia Sophia than in conventional neighborhood mosques and Süleymaniye. The conventional practice would be that women and men would not leave their own sections. She thought that Hagia Sophia was “more mixed” in terms of gender:

“48_F: When I was coming here from the ladies' section, I felt, you know, I thought I would be the only woman or I would be sparse. But this place is full of women, both tourists and us, indeed. [...] Well, [normally] it is not so mixed.

Author: Mix of what?

48_F: I mean, men and women. I mean, the sections are separate and you can't pass through the sections. Of course, they allowed it here because it's more of an open and touristic place. You know, the female population was very high here. And there were men in the women's section, although they were in the minority.”⁶² (48_F, 22, Female, Student, İstanbul, Turkey)

In my site observations, too, there were large numbers of women. They could sometimes reach the areas outside the women's section. I also witnessed women praying in the middle section, which was a ‘mixed’ area during the visiting time, as this woman noted. Nevertheless, certain rules of mobility controlled these ‘mixed’ situations, just like in the headscarf rule.

In this section, certain rules and manners of visiting Hagia Sophia were discussed through the lens of foreign and local visitors. The foreign visitors tried to maintain respect in interacting with it as a place of Muslim worship, but some recognized that it

⁶¹ “[Süleymaniye Cami’nde] Bu kadar da gezememiştim. Ama bu kadar rahat değildi sanırım, öyle hatırlıyorum. Çünkü öyle olsaydı gezerdik. Biz hanımlar bölümünde biraz oturup çıkmıştık.”(48_F, 22, Female, Student, İstanbul, Turkey)

⁶² “48_F: Ben hanımlar bölümünden buraya gelirken hani, kendimi şey hissettim, normal cami düşündüm. Hani herhalde tek kadın ben olurum ya da seyrekte mi kalırım diye. Ama burası da pekala gerek turist, gerek bizden çok kadınla dolu. [...] Ya, bu kadar karma olmaz.

Author: Ne karma?

48_F: Yani kadın erkek olarak. Yani bölümleri ayrıdır ve bölümlerine geçilmez. Tabi bu daha ziyade açık ve turistik bir yer olduğu için almışlar. Hani burada da kadın nüfusu çok fazlaydı. Hanımlar kısmında da erkekler çok azınlıkta olmakla beraber vardı.” (48_F, 22, Female, Student, İstanbul, Turkey)

was a more comfortable mosque than the ones they visited. They appreciated that it was open to visitors who were not praying, the 'tourists', as well. Yet, some practices like photographing revealed the ambiguity brought about by the co-existing functions of worship and sightseeing. Foreigners with Muslim backgrounds stated that they had familiarity with mosque spaces and practices. For them, Hagia Sophia was distinct in allowing the non-prayers in, and this was a positive aspect of its experience. Also, gender segregation was less strict, but this did not pose a problem to their view of it as a Muslim place of worship. The visitors from Turkey had a more complex view of Hagia Sophia. The interviewees from Turkey stated that the place had manners that applied to issues like hygiene, dress code, and respectful attitude. With this understanding, some experienced it as a more strict place, while to some, it was way more comfortable than it should have been compared to other mosques such as Süleymaniye, Sultanahmet, and conventional neighborhood mosques. The mix of genders and functions of worship and sightseeing rendered Hagia Sophia a distinct mosque, challenged and transformed some of the manners expected from a mosque, and had an impact on the management of the place.

Among the visiting rules mentioned in this section, the gendered sections and the border between zones dividing the prayers from others were two embodied signs of the management of the place. The following sub-chapter explores the remaining borders, zones, and the spatial order of Hagia Sophia.

3.3.4 Categorization: Scenarios & fragmentation in place

The mixed crowd in Hagia Sophia, that is, its visitors, was one of the significant aspects of the everyday life of the place. During my site visits, I encountered people from various parts of the world. Their colorful clothes and sounds in different languages added to the vibrant atmosphere. The tourist groups were easily identified by flags, sticks, and umbrellas carried by their guides. Tours organized by municipalities, large student groups, and extended families were also present. Among the smaller groups and individual travelers were the backpackers from Western Europe; large families from Central Asia and Gulf countries; migrant Turks from France, Belgium, and Germany; and 'locals'.

Of course, it was not feasible to assign each visitor in this mixture to a specific group. The purpose of each person's visit and background could not be easily identified. During most of my visits, this mix of people would stand in the same waiting line and enter Hagia Sophia together. Later, they would separate in different directions. Only on Fridays, which was a remarkably crowded time due to the holy Friday noon prayer, would the guards ask the visitors in the entry: "Are you visiting or going to pray?"⁶³

A significant change occurred in March 2023 when the waiting line was divided into two: the "prayer entry" and the "visitor entry" (Image 3. 36). Half an hour before the prayer, the 'visitors' would start forming the latter one. There was a noticeable difference between the two lines. The 'prayers' category would move swiftly, while the visitor line would extend towards the Hürrem Sultan Baths. However, outside of prayer times, the two lines were nearly equal. People were less cautious about adhering to a specific category and getting into the correct line. When I asked to a policeman about the practicability of this rule, he replied "We don't know how long it can be sustained, so..."⁶⁴



Image 3. 36: The line on the right is for the visitors, and on the left is for the prayers. (Photograph by the Author, March 2023)

⁶³ "Namaz mı kılacaksınız, ziyaret mi ediyorsunuz?"

⁶⁴ "Ne kadar sürdürülebilir bilmiyoruz, o yüzden..."

This situation in the entry would only mark the beginning of the confusion experienced during a visit to the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. Once inside, the lines and divisions like this were more apparent in space.

In Hagia Sophia, the ‘prayers’ and ‘visitors’ often experience the place in different scenarios. The reason for this is that the prayer and sightseeing functions are held in accordance with the regular prayer times. The visiting and praying times mark the settling of some spatial arrangements which fragment the space into zones. The visitors are divided into categories and then designated into those specific zones. Order is made possible by the spatial arrangements and the personnel of Hagia Sophia that monitor the flows of people between zones and categories.

One example for the mediation of the spatial order through zones, barriers, and personnel was the border between zone 1 and zone 2. This border, a long line of folding barriers set across the main space, divided the main area into two. During the visiting time, passing between zone 1 and zone 2 was possible. When it was close to prayer time, however, personnel would intervene in the visitors' passing through this border. During the prayer time, zone 2, which was normally tagged as “the prayer area”, was only for men. Men could cross from zone 1 into zone 2 through the gap in the middle, which acted as a checkpoint with guards standing by it. Women and those who aren't praying were removed from zone 2 to zone 1, and waited there until the end of the prayer. Then, the border would open, and the guards' control would be removed. People could disperse into the space as before.

It is noteworthy that the spatial arrangements underwent many transformations during my visits to Hagia Sophia. The graphics below show the spatial order in Hagia Sophia between my initial pilot site visits in October-November 2021, during the start of the fieldwork in October 2022, and the latest visits in December 2022 and March 2023 (Image 3. 38 & Image 3. 39 & Image 3. 40 & Image 3. 41). A comparative view reveals that, during this period, the change in the barriers, borders, and zones, resulted in a gradually increasing control and fragmentation of the space. Some of these changes included the change of the entries to the mosque and dividing the women's section into

two. By March 2023, large parts of the mosque, including the Eastern and Western ends of the South Side Nave, and the Northern end of zone 1 and zone 2 were closed to visit by folding barriers. Along the *narthexes*, the ancient brick and marble walls were surrounded by red tape separators for visitors to not touch them. The area in between was used for parking baby strollers and wheelchairs (Image 3. 37). Near the Byzantine *sarcophagi* at the Outer Narthex and the Sweating Column, there were more aggressive measures of double and triple lines of barriers. However, these changes were not explicitly made public. The logic behind the interventions remained unknown. In the end, Hagia Sophia became a more restricted and hard-to-visit place.



Image 3. 37: The baby strollers parked in front of ancient walls. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)



Image 3. 38: The spatial order by November 2021. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Diagram is produced on the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)



Image 3. 39: The spatial order by October 2022. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Diagram is produced on the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)

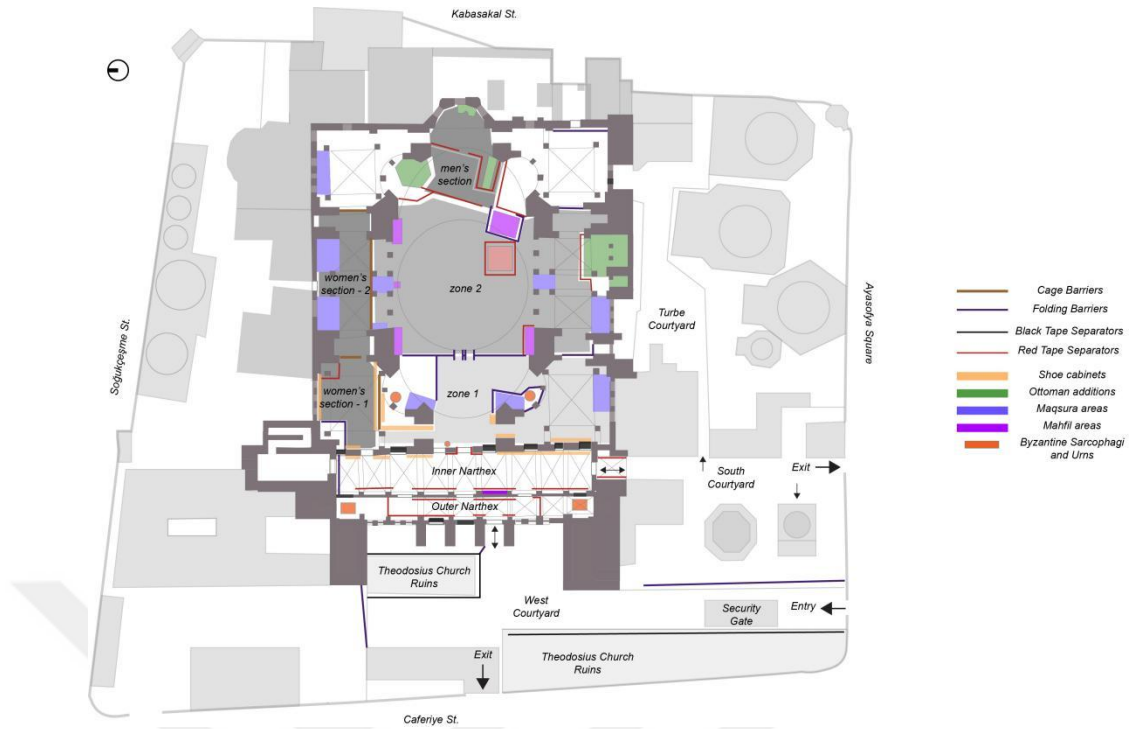


Image 3. 40: The spatial order of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque by December 2022. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Diagram is produced on the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)

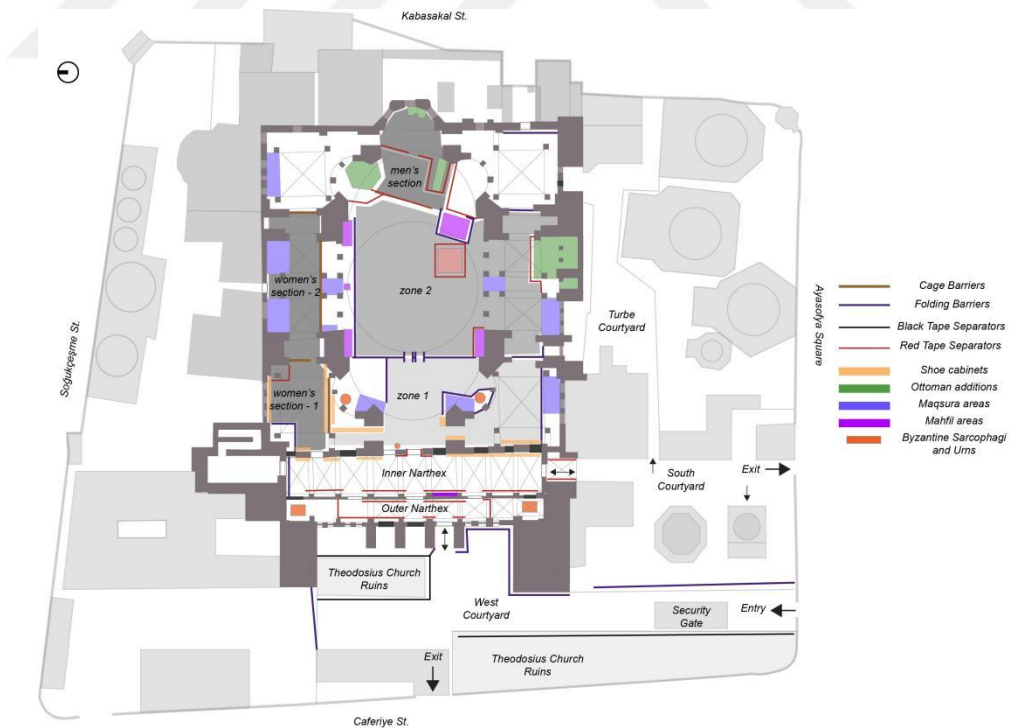


Image 3. 41: The spatial order of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque by March 2023. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Diagram is produced on the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)

Although the rule did not change, the border between zones 1 and 2 was also prone to some transformations. In October 2021, the default situation was that, during the visiting time, the main space was a continuous whole. As the prayer time closed, the personnel would unfold the folding barriers to create the line between zones 1 and 2. After the prayer, they would fold them back and open the space again. In November, the border was a permanent element, and zones 1 and 2 were separate. There was a gap in the middle for the passage between zones. Until October 2022, the border was in the form of a straight line. In October and December 2022, the spatial arrangement of the border gradually became more complex. By March 2023, there were two gaps, one serving as the entry and the other as the exit between zones. During this time, the signboards and guards standing by the border also increased, resulting in more advanced control over the passages between zones.

In each type of arrangement, moving between zones was an incident that repeated at every regular prayer time. Sometimes, announcements were made inside the mosque to announce the “visiting” and “prayer” times. Nevertheless, most visitors could not witness it since their stay in Hagia Sophia was for a limited time. I interviewed people who, due to this border, thought that they were not allowed inside; thus, they spent their time only in zone 1 and left earlier. Others who witnessed this movement which often resembled a choreography, would be surprised and try to understand the logic behind the border. Having a familiarity with the mosque spaces, the Moroccan architect was not surprised. During our interview that was conducted in zone 2, when we coincided with the preparations for the prayer time, she could easily understand the conduct of the rule:

“Announcement (in Turkish): Dear Visitors...

10_F: Is it prayer time?

Announcement (in Turkish): Due to the approaching prayer time, our visits have come to an end. It is kindly requested that our male congregation who will pray keep in line by advancing towards the front of our mosque; our female congregation who will pray move to the area reserved for them on the left side of our mosque; and our guests who will continue their visit remain in the middle part until the end of the prayer.

10_F: [Moving from zone 2 to zone 1 upon the announcement] Women are exiting, men are only permitted to pray here. Right?

Author: Yeah, yeah. In that place. Did you see the women's section?

10_F: No, not yet.

10_F's Boyfriend: Is it small and tiny?

10_F: Not tiny, but definitely not as big as this space. I would say men are more, usually, even in my country, like, usually are the ones who leave the house for mosque to pray."

(10_F, 28, Female, Architect, Morocco)

She explained to her boyfriend that we left zone 2 since, during the prayers, only men were allowed to stay and pray there. She guessed that the border separated praying men from women.

I heard various interpretations regarding this border in the rest of the interviews. The border was an indicator of the invisible categories of "men and women", "foreign and Turkish", and "sightseer and prayer". Most of the time, the first thing that caught the eye was the lack of women in zone 2. Thus, some interviewees thought of zone 2 as the men's section. In this case, female interviewees would not even attempt to enter there to explore the space. Some people assumed that zone 2 was the prayer area and zone 1 was for tourists. Then, it was the - foreign and Turkish - tourists who would not take their chances of entering zone 2. For example, the engineer from the United Kingdom who came to Hagia Sophia to pray was hesitant to enter zone 2, thinking that the guards might not recognize that he was Muslim:

"They didn't say anything. I thought they were going to ask me if I... When I was entering into the praying area. But it's Friday, so it's... All the areas [are] open. So no one didn't really care about it. But I think that is okay because Friday, they really need to, you know. But I don't know how do they manage, like, understand which is Muslim and which is the other to get in for the Friday." (26_M, Male, 26, Engineer, UK)

A Turkish man who came with the intention to only sight-see, on the other hand, had a different experience. He was the person who, in the previous sub-chapter, wanted to pass from this border to enter the main space with his shoes in hand. He explained his process of comprehending the rule related to categories as follows:

"First of all, as I understand it... The women who were already trying to go inside [zone 2], I think they were told that only men can pray? [...] So I thought that there was no entry. Yet,

I learned that I can enter because I am a man, but after I learned that we could not enter with the shoes on our hands, I did not prefer to enter.”⁶⁵ (47_M, 24, Male, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

Like this Turkish man, an American tourist also did not take the chance to enter zone 2 using the advantage of his gender. As a foreign tourist, he was unsure if he had the right to enter zone 2 without pretending to be Turkish:

“So I was actually kind of confused about that, because they seemed like they were keeping women and people who weren't praying behind this little gate here [barrier]. And then people were just, like, walking through and taking pictures. So I wasn't really quite sure what was going on. But obviously, there were a bunch of people over there praying. I was right over at the gate because I wanted to go through, but they kept saying “no”. But then, like, people would just walk right through, so I don't know what I was doing. So men were entering? Yeah. So, yeah, there were some guys, like, sitting over here taking pictures and stuff. I guess I wasn't bold enough [laughs]. No, no, I didn't use my Turkish looks, right?” (14_M, 34, Male, Sales Manager, USA)

Another interviewee was not bothered with her being non-Turkish. Being a Muslim, she thought that zone 2 was for praying people. This woman from Saudi Arabia came to Hagia Sophia with her husband. They wanted to pray together in the main space, but were unaware of the gender dimension involved in the rule regarding the border:

“We came inside before the salah, 10 minutes or 15 minutes. I wanted to go inside more. You know, the mihrab, yeah. But they said “No, no”. Why no? I didn't understand them. “Because the salah”. If they said to me “Because only men, they can go there to pray”, I will understand and I will stop [for them] to finish the salah, and I will go there. But inside no one talks English, no one talks Arabic. They said only “No, no”, “men, men”. How [will we] understand this? This is my point.” (33_F, 25, Female, Chemist, Saudi Arabia)

Once the “salah” ended, the spatial arrangement would change. I noted above that in Hagia Sophia, the spatial order and visiting rules were held in accordance with the

⁶⁵ “Öncelikle anladığım kadarıyla... Zaten içeriye [zone 2] girmeye çalışan, sanırım kadınlara, sadece erkeklerin namaz yapılabileceği mi söyleniyordu? [...] Dolayısıyla ben de içeriye girilmediğini zannediyordum. Yalnız erkek olduğum için girebileceğimi de öğrendim, yalnız elimizdeki ayakkabıyla giremeyeceğimizi öğrendikten sonra girmeyi tercih etmedim yani.” (47_M, 24, Male, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

regular prayer times. During the visiting time, the main section was a free space used by both men and women, prayers and sightseers, and foreigners and Turkish visitors. There was also a special case for Friday noon prayer. Only people who intended to pray inside would remain, and sightseers needed to leave the place. In the end, I observed three distinct scenarios in the daily and weekly rhythm of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque.

On Fridays, the guards would select the 'prayers' and 'regular visitors' at the entrance or facilitate the exit of regular visitors with announcements. In the end, the mosque would be full of people who would perform worship. A massive crowd of men and women would perform their worship outside, in Ayasofya Square⁶⁶ (Image 3. 42), or surrounding mosques. Inside the mosque, the main section, including zone 1 and zone 2, and the South Side Nave were designated for men (Image 3. 43). Women and men would enter the mosque from separate gates and not mix in any area. This special situation would last for about an hour, covering the Friday sermon and prayer and some extra time before and after it.



Image 3. 42: The Friday congregation outside. (Photograph by the Author, March 2022)

⁶⁶ Fatih Municipality provide straw mats and prayer rugs for the worshippers.



Image 3. 43: The male Friday congregation inside.(Photograph by the Author, March 2022)

The 'regular' routine of Hagia Sophia during the prayer times was more nuanced. The visit rules were not set considering only praying people; and the space was divided into more zones. In a regular daily prayer time, some time before the *azan*, zone 2 was reserved for men. While some men would remain in zone 1 to perform their prayer, most of them would enter zone 2 through the border. They could stay in zone 2, or go further into the men's section. A large number of people including women, visitors who didn't intend to pray, and large tourist groups would remain in zone 1 (Image 3. 44).



Image 3. 44: Those who remain in zone 1 during the prayer time. (Photograph by the Author, March 2023)

Meanwhile, some women who intended to pray could go to the women's section reserved for them, which conforms to the general practice seen in mosques in Turkey. On the other hand, some women would stay in zone 1 and look for a place to pray without being disturbed. As I observed during my site visits, the most favored corner by

visitors in Hagia Sophia for this was the quiet and calm South Side Nave. During the prayer times, sometimes I would see a female congregation that contingently gathered here (Image 3. 45). While there was no particular function or gender designated to this area, seeing women worshipping, men would habitually move from there. I suppose that the third way followed by women is far from the general practice witnessed in mosques in Turkey: some women would perform their prayers in the open, by the border. Through these instances, zone 1, which was initially planned as a visiting area, was reproduced as a gender-mixed prayer and visiting area.



Image 3. 45: The female congregation gathering at the South Side Nave. (Photograph by the Author, November 2021)

After zone 2, the men's section was at the Eastern end of the mosque. Near the *kiblah* wall, this area housed some artifacts and popular photography subjects of Hagia Sophia, such as the *mihrab*, *minbar*, and the veiled Apse Mosaics. Red tape separators surrounded this area which women were not allowed to enter (Image 3. 46). Some women would request men they were together with to enter inside and take pictures for them. Once, I witnessed a group of women who did not have a male companion. They

found the solution by asking a favor from the security guard there, requesting him to record a video of the *kiblah* wall.



Image 3. 46: The men's section surrounded by women taking photographs. (Photograph by the Author, October 2022)

In order to explain these scenarios for Friday and regular prayer and visiting times, below, I provide diagrammatic plans of Hagia Sophia. In these plans, I am inspired by Kim Dovey (2007; 2010), who, adapting some methods of the Space Syntax by Hillier and Hanson (1984), creates diagrams of the places in his case studies. In the diagrams, he uses the floor plans of buildings to analyze the spatial segmentation and interprets the properties such as access, control, and visibility (Dovey, 2007; 2010). Similarly, I aim to depict the spatial order and examine the access and visibility in the space through these diagrams.

In the following diagrammatic plans, I juxtaposed the barriers, separators, and zones I observed in my site visits with the floor plan of Hagia Sophia. I traced the patterns of use of space and the mobility of men and women between the spatial segments. The interior of Hagia Sophia is a space that is not much divided with solid means such as walls and rooms. Although it is composed of structural columns, vaults, and *naves* as corridors, it can be perceived as an open plan. Thus, the segments I sketched in the diagrams are mostly the zones formed by the barriers and some architectural spaces, such as the *narthexes*. The barriers and the personnel control the mobility between these segments. To depict the segmentation and mobility more clearly, besides the maps, I produced diagrams that represent the accessibility and visibility of the areas in the experience of men and women.

The floor plan diagram in Image 3. 47 explains the Friday noon routine of Hagia Sophia. From the entry to the Inner Narthex, men and women are clearly segregated, and no mixed areas exist. Women use the last door at the Inner Narthex and enter the North Side Nave. Sections 1 and 2, the two parts of the women's section, are for only women. On the other side of the barriers, the area that men occupy is more than four times larger than that of women. Men enter the main space from the doors at the center. They can move across the space from zone 1 to the men's section, the mosque's end.

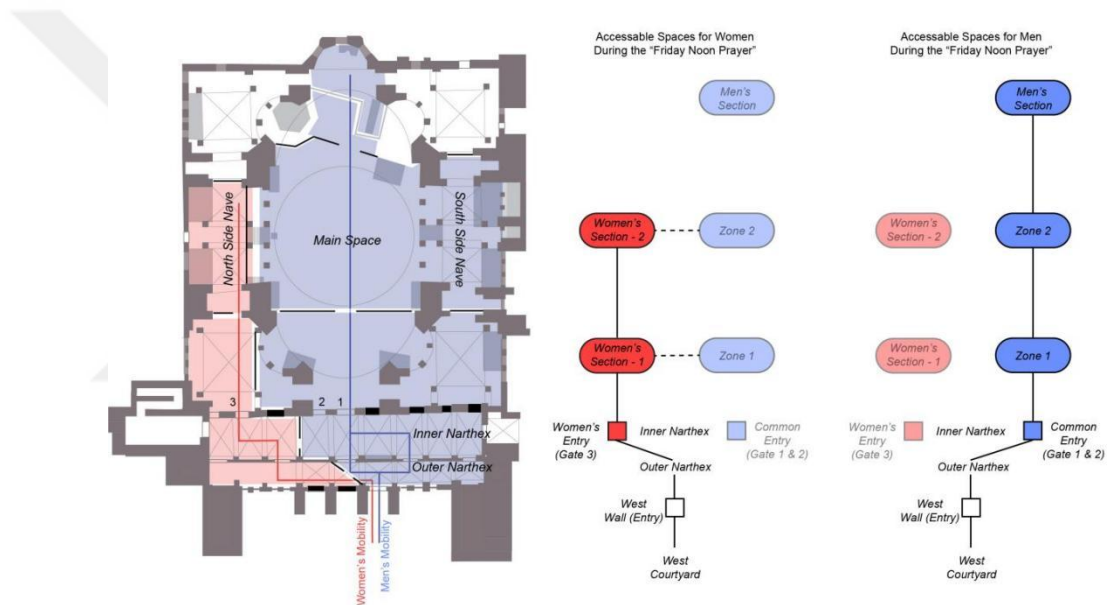


Image 3. 47: Diagram showing the accessibility and visibility in the space during the Friday noon prayer. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Diagram is produced on the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)

The diagram in Image 3. 47 shows that, starting from the entry, the space is clearly segregated for two genders. In the larger area designated to them, men can reach deeper segments than women. Women enjoy only some part of the North Side Nave. The area designated for one gender is entirely inaccessible to the other, and both can not cross the division line at any point. However, in practice, women can see the male's section

through the barriers. The only area outside the women's field of vision is the men's section due to the angle, and the objects and architectural elements on the way.

The floor plan diagram in Image 3. 48 represents the regular prayer time routine. Unlike Friday noon, here, the entry from the *narthexes* is not segregated for genders. However, the last door in the Inner Narthex, marked 3, can be used only by women. For this reason, although there is no border in between, in practice, men do not prefer to enter from the last doors in the *narthexes*. As I mentioned above, zone 1 is a gender-mixed area during prayer time. Also, it accommodates both tourists and worshipers. Zone 2 and the men's section are the "praying areas" for men. Women remain in zone 1, behind the border. From here, they can view the men's section and zone 2, which are inaccessible to them. Men cannot enter or view the women's section.

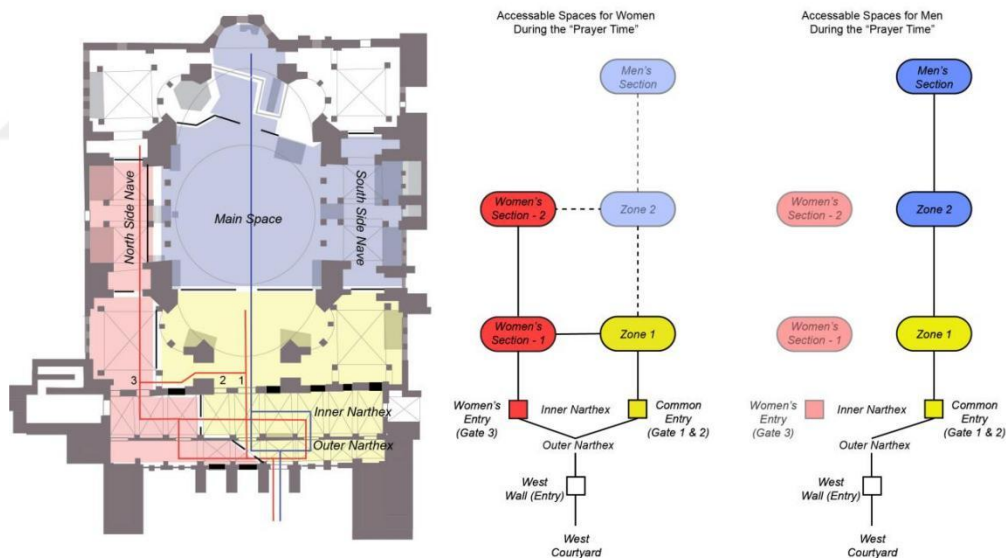


Image 3. 48: Diagram showing the accessibility and visibility in the space during the regular prayer time. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Diagram is produced on the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)

The diagram in Image 3. 48 shows that women can directly enter the women's section from door 3 or the mixed entries, while men can enter from the mixed entries only. For

women, moving between the women's section and gender-mixed zone 1 is possible. Men can not access the women's section but have the chance of moving further in the space, to the end of the mosque. Women have visual access to these areas from zone 1, but it is not possible to see the men's section from the women's section.

Image 3. 48 represents a scenario during regular prayer time. Yet, the areas and mobility shown here are not exclusive to a praying person. Unlike the Friday noons, where sightseers are not allowed to enter the mosque, there are both sightseers and worshippers. Accessibility of the areas is not determined according to whether a person intends to pray. In other words, female tourists, Turkish and foreign, can reach the same areas as the praying women. In fact, I observed that the women's section was often an area where women entered to rest, chat, or take care of their kids who were dependent on their mothers. Similarly, sightseer men can enter the same areas as the praying men. For example, the two interviewees above, the Turkish man worried about losing his shoes, and the American man who thought that only Turkish men were allowed inside, had the right to enter zone 2. Nevertheless, for both men and women, there are differences between their experiences during praying and visiting times. To explain this, I will refer to the third scenario: the visiting time.

In Hagia Sophia, the mix of functions, visitors, and genders become especially apparent during the visiting times. For example, large tourist groups, extended families, and student groups gain greater access to the inner parts of the mosque. Just nearby them, men and women perform their worship. The mix of genders, functions, and visitors manifests in the spatial order as well. First, as the border between zones 1 and 2 is inactive, the main space is experienced. Across a large area, it is possible to encounter people engaged in prayer, reading Qoran, sketching, or photographing the space. Opening of the border also means that the gender-mixed area extends from zone 1 into zone 2. Like in zone 1, I witnessed women performing prayer far from the area designated for them, the women's section. The extent of this relative freedom of women inside the mosque extends – again - until the men's section. Here, the scenery of women surrounding the men's section remains unchanged. On the other hand, the first part of the women's section is open to men's visits.

As the diagrams in Image Image 3. 49 show, during the visiting time, a distinct change is in the extent of the gender-mixed area shown in yellow. Also, the passages between the gendered areas increase. Women gain access to zone 2 but remain only visually connected to the *kiblah* wall and men's section. However, men's mobility extends to some part of the women's section and sustains the gender hierarchy in the experience of Hagia Sophia.

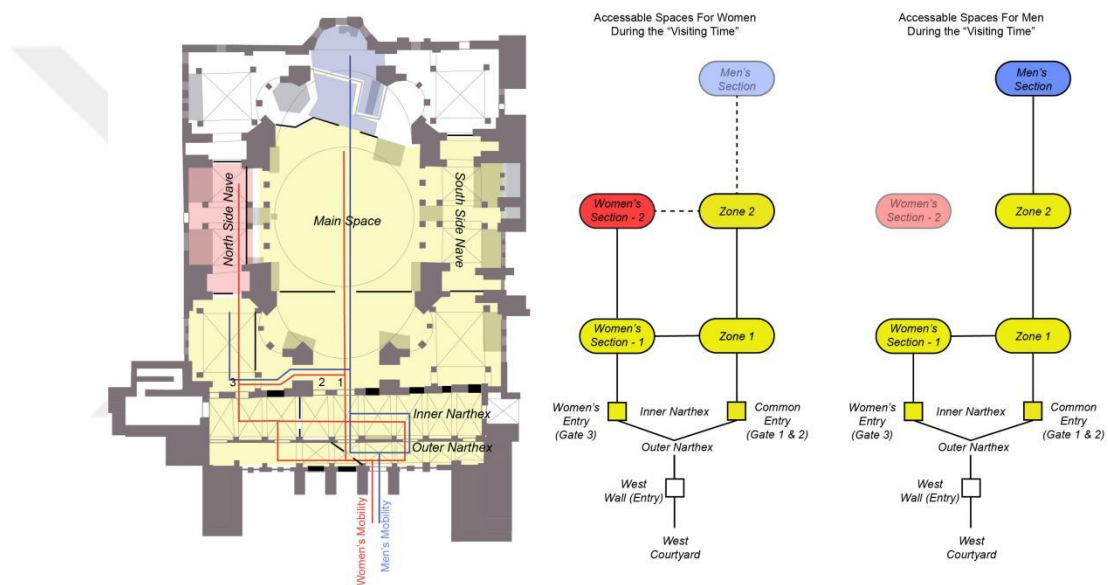


Image 3. 49: Diagram showing the accessibility and visibility in the space during the visiting time. (Diagram by the Author, May 2023. Diagram is produced on the original image sourced from: <https://bilimveaydinlanma.org/content/images/pdf/rapor/ayasofya-siyasi-tartismalarin-ortasindaki-emanet.pdf> Accessed: November 2021)

As I noted before, the visitors' experience of Hagia Sophia is for a limited time, and they can not always witness the changes in the order of the space. If they visit Hagia Sophia only once, it is likely that their experiences were similar to one of these three scenarios: the Friday prayer, regular prayer time, and visiting time. Also, tourists, prayers, sightseers, locals, Turkish citizens, foreigners, and different genders, have different experiences. They adhere to the rules of the categories they are designated to. As a result, they reside in different places at different times. Finally, their background,

familiarity with the mosque spaces, and personal views of the conversion and Hagia Sophia are among the factors that influence their experiences. Thus, their viewpoints on the same set of visiting rules and spatial arrangements were diverse in the interviews.

For example, a tourist from the Netherlands and her partner stayed long enough in Hagia Sophia to witness the opening and closing of the border and experience both zone 1 and 2 (03_F, 39, Female, Film Producer, Netherlands). Nevertheless, a Turkish woman who had been to Hagia Sophia before thought that the rule regarding the border was new. She guessed that setting a border in the middle of the space was due to a special event that was not in the routine of Hagia Sophia:

“Really, I don't know if it is specific to today or not. That part was completely closed [between zone 1 and women's section], we were kept in this part [zone 1], men prayed in that part [zone 2]. But a lot of people were in this part [zone 1]. But I don't know if there was anything special about today. You know, maybe someone would come. Because there was a female police officer there.”⁶⁷ (09_F, 55, Female, Housewife, Istanbul, Turkey)

From the professional standpoint of the tourist guide, the division of space for particular groups and times was positive:

““Let me be frank: it became easier for us, the guides. Because Istanbul is a busy city, the programs are busy. It is good to open and show all parts, but in a sense, it can be negative for us. From a cultural motivation point of view, it is lacking. The guests want to see, they want to visit. But from the point of view of a guide, it became more practical for us for a person to go and see for a short time. A pragmatic answer, though. But, like, Topkapı, Hagia Sophia, Sultanahmet, Basilica Cistern, Hippodrome and Grand Bazaar... It is difficult in the density of this city. [...] That's why I said, imagine that the upper floor is open. The person who enters will leave later and pray. Things will be even more busier.”⁶⁸ (44_M, 42,

⁶⁷ “Valla bugüne has mı değil mi onu bilemiyorum. Şu kısım tamamen kapatılmıştı [zone 1 ile Kadınlar Bölümü arası], bizler şu kısımda bekletildik [zone 1], erkekler şu kısımda namaz kıldılar [zone 2]. Ama bir çok insan bu kısımdaydı [zone 1]. Ama bugüne özel bir şey mi vardı bilemiyorum. Hani, birisi mi gelecekti bakımından. Çünkü orada kadın polis falan vardı.” (09_F, 55, Female, Housewife, Istanbul, Turkey)

⁶⁸ Yani, açık konuşayım, bizim için daha kolay oldu, rehberler için. Çünkü İstanbul yoğun bir şehir, programlar yoğun. Her tarafı açıp göstermek iyi, bir anlamda da bizim için negatif olabiliyor. Olayın kültürel motivasyonundan bakınca, eksik. Misafir görmek istiyor, gezmek istiyor. Ama bir rehber gözüyle bakınca da, bizim için bir insanın kısa süre gidip görmesi için daha pratik oldu. Pragmatik bir cevap ama. Ama yani şimdi Topkapı, Ayasofya, Sultanahmet, Yerebatan Sarnıcı, Hipodrom ve Kapalıçarşı... Bu şehrin yoğunluğunda zor. [...] O yüzden dedim yani, üst katın açık olduğunu düşünün. Giren insan daha

Male, Tourist Guide, Istanbul, Turkey)

Nevertheless, some of the interviewees stated that movement between zones was time-consuming, and made their experience "confusing" or "chaotic". A Turkish woman who was not supporting the conversion into a mosque told her concerns as follows:

“So, now, they are saying ‘evacuate’, I think time is limited. One can walk around very comfortably, in more detail. I mean, when one performs worship, it takes most of her time, there is not much time to see around inside. Duration [of visit] can be longer. In other words, one has to run around... Because it is a place that needs to be visited for a longer period of time. I think if you come once, you should come two or three more times... You can come, but you want to see it in more detail at once, [details] can slip one’s attention, you want to examine it more. Duration is limited in my opinion, it is not really enough.”⁶⁹
(17_F, 58, Female, Housewife, Istanbul, Turkey)

One interviewee from Havle Association stated that besides moving between zones, the separators and barriers also influenced her experience of Hagia Sophia. She particularly dwelled on the barriers around the women’s section and expressed that they made her experience of the place “less like a mosque”:

“[...]But there's a lot of barricades all around, and then... Well, there are screens. But this is the first time I've seen these barricades [shows the North side of zones 1 and 2]. And it's very circuitous like that, for example, the entrances and exits [at the border] as well, you can't enter directly. It's like you're entering from an entry thing, exiting from an exit. I don't know, and it doesn't give me the feeling of a mosque. I mean, this is a place of worship, and you know, with linear logic, you're praying. But the entry is multi-stage. I may think that

geç çıkacak ve namaz kılacak. Olay daha da yoğun olacak.” (44_M, 42, Male, Tourist Guide, Istanbul, Turkey)

⁶⁹ “Yani, şimdi boşaltın diyorlar, süre bence kısıtlı. İnsan çok rahat, daha detaylı dolaşabilir. Yani, ibadet yapıldığı zaman zamanının çoğunu alıyor, gezmek için çok vakit kalmıyor içeride. Daha uzun süre olabilir. Yani insan bir koştur koştur... Çünkü orası daha uzun süre gezilmesi gereken bir yer. Bir kere gelen bence iki üç kere daha gelirse... Gelinir ama bir seferde daha detaylı görmek ister insan, gözünden kaçabiliyor, daha incelemek istiyor. Süre bana göre kısıtlı, çok yeterli değil.” (17_F, 58, Housewife, Istanbul, Turkey)

places of worship should not have so many stages.”⁷⁰ (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

Her account of the barriers was also applicable to her experience in the women's section. She described how the spatial arrangements and rules in the men's section and women's section differed, and expressed that this influenced her "sense of the mosque" in her experience of Hagia Sophia.

As I showed in the maps and diagrams, the space was fragmented into zones where the use of space and mobility within and access to space were conducted through specific rules and controlled by the personnel of Hagia Sophia. Also, the visitors were divided into categories of tourists and prayers, locals and foreigners, and men and women. During the Friday prayer, regular prayer, and visiting times, different sets of rules were applied in space, and this influenced the experience of the users. During Friday prayer, gender segregation was the most apparent, and sightseers or tourists were not allowed inside. During regular prayer time, the tourists and prayers were designated into specific zones. Other times, the space was more mixed except for the two gendered sections. The spatial arrangements transformed many times, but the rules of visit remained largely the same, except for the division of waiting line to enter Hagia Sophia into two. Nevertheless, these changes made the experience of the place gradually more restricted and controlling.

While the space was fragmented into these categories, gender was especially important in the conduct of certain rules and practices in Hagia Sophia. In many of the interviews as well, gender was found to be influential in visitors' experience of the place. I visit these gendered experiences in the following pages.

⁷⁰ Ama her tarafta çok barikat var, bir de... Şey, paravan var. Ama bu barikatları ben ilk defa bu sefer gördüm. Ve böyle çok dolambaçlı olmuş, mesela giriş çıkışlar da, doğrudan giremiyorsun. Bir giriş şeyine giriyorsun, çıkarken çıkıyorsun gibi. O da, bilmiyorum, bana çok cami hissiyatı vermiyor. Yani burası bir ibadet yeri, ve hani, düz mantık ibadet ediyorsun yani. Ama giriş çok aşamalı. Bence ibadethaneler bu kadar çok aşamalı olmamalı diye düşünüyorum olabilirim.” (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

3.3.5 Gendered perspectives: The cage and the camera

The women's section in Hagia Sophia is located at the North Side Nave. When the Northern Wall was restored in the Ottoman period by Architect Sinan, the buttresses closed some of the openings here. Lacking windows and sunlight, North Side Nave is a rather dark and cold area compared to other sides of the mosque (Image 3. 50).



Image 3. 50: Inside the women's section. (Photograph by the Author, December 2022)

My interviewee from Havle Association, who mentioned about the “sense of mosque” in the previous section, stated that the women's section in Hagia Sophia remained behind, and was dark. She thought that the this part was far from the “spiritual sense” of the mosque. She pointed out the barriers closing the Northern end of zones 1 and 2, and the barriers enclosing the women's section, and portrayed the place as such:

“[...] And there are always barricades in front of you. So there is not a single barricade or screen. There are two screens back to back. You know, it's like a wall is built. Those woods

[cage barriers]. In some places, those woods are getting more frequent.”⁷¹ (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

Due to these separators, most people would miss the presence of the women's section in Hagia Sophia. Some people would ask me during the interviews about where exactly the women’s section was. A Turkish architect woman shared her experience with the this area as follows:

“Frankly, I didn't notice it [laughs]. We saw that side later, as we were exiting. We looked at it to see what was there. In fact, we walked quite a bit. There was another screen. At first, I thought it was not possible to go beyond that screen because it seemed very closed. It turns out that there was a very small gap, and from there, one passes to the back side [women’s section - 2]. I mean, if you didn't come for that purpose; if you weren't looking for it, it wasn't a place you would see and go when you entered. It's like it remained vacant compared to the rest of the place.”⁷² (36_F, 24, Female, Architect, Aydın, Turkey)

These separators were different from the folding barriers and red tape separators. They were long wooden barriers of human height. With Islamic geometric patterns on them, they were similar to ‘cage’ [kafes], a traditional spatial element of the vernacular Turkish house that is today found in the contemporary settings of gender segregation. They were opaque enough to prevent men from seeing inside. Through the eye holes, women could see the other side (Image 3. 51). Nevertheless, this was not a very comfortable experience to view the mosque.

In Hagia Sophia, cameras were important tools in not only recording the experience but also reaching the inaccessible areas - virtually -. For example, the woman from Saudi Arabia who could not pass to zone 2 during prayer, requested her husband to take pictures of the place for her. Another example where cameras were tools for women

⁷¹ Ve önünde sürekli barikatlar var. Yani tek bir barikat, paravan da yok. İki tane paravan arka arkaya var. Hani, baya bir duvar gibi çekilmiş yani. O ahşaplar. Bazı yerlerde o ahşapların durumu da sıklaşıyor.” (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

⁷² “Açıkçası ben farkına varmadım [gülür]. Sonradan, yani çıkmaya yakın o tarafı gördük. Ne varmış diye baktık. Hatta ilerledik. Bir paravan daha vardı ilerleyince. O paravandan öteye geçilmiyor zannetmişim ilk başta, çünkü çok kapalı görünüyordu. Meğersem çok küçük bir aralık varmış, oradan arka tarafa da geçiliyormuş. Yani çok böyle hani o amaçla gelmediyseniz, orayı aramıyorsanız içeri girdiğinizde, görüp de gideceğiniz bir yer değildi. Biraz atıl kalmış mekanın geri kalanından sanki.” (36_F, 24, Female, Architect, Aydın, Turkey)

was the men's section, as I mentioned above. In the women's section, too, women used their cameras to see across the separators. During Friday noons, especially when the rest of the space was closed for about an hour, women would try taking pictures of the main section. To take photographs, they would reach the top of the separators with the help of their cameras (Image 3. 52).



Image 3. 51: The main section full of male congregation during the Friday noon prayer as seen from the women's section, through the eye holes the barriers. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

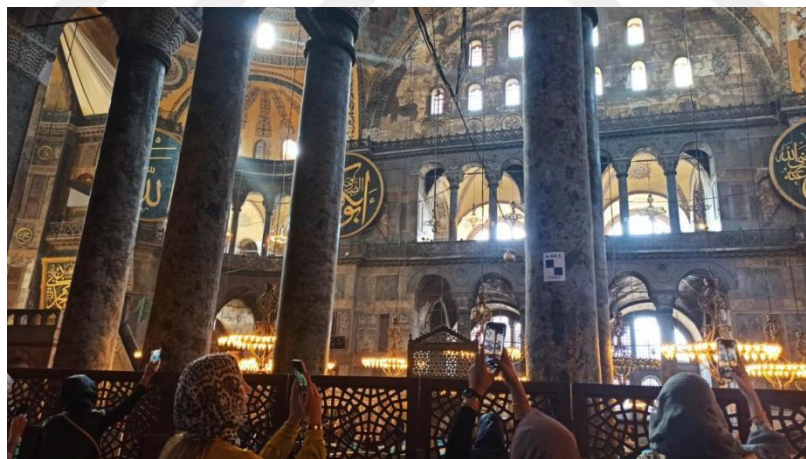


Image 3. 52: Women with their cameras taking photographs of the other side. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

Hagia Sophia's architectural layout, dominated by columns and *naves*, provides easy movement and a rather open sense of the place. Another uniqueness of the place is that the women's section is not located at the rear wall or upper gallery but is in the North Side Nave, parallel to the main space. Connected to this, both the nature of the main section and the experience of the women's section are different than in many other

mosques. For example, looking to the main section from the women's section, fixed artifacts such as the *mahfils*⁷³, and the continuous line of separators brought by the conversion interrupt the connection and vista to the main space. Also, as seen in the floor plan (Image 3. 40), since the side *naves* go parallel with the main section - middle nave -, the view from the women's section to some part of the main section, including the men's section, is blocked due to the angle. The two places can be perceived as disconnected, such that, once, while I was in the women's section, two foreign women asked me about the direction of the *kiblah*.

Both by my personal experience in the women's section and witnessing the women's attempt to reach the main section through the separators, I was reminded of the discussions on the women's experience and 'sense of mosque' by authors like Batuman (2018a), Mohammed (2022), Nas (2021), and Şenel (2022). For example, my interviewee from Havle Association had a concern about the sense of spirituality in the women's section. She said above that the barriers there didn't give her "the feeling of a mosque". She told about her experience with the women's section as follows:

“49_F: Today, for example, I came from the women's section. First I saw there, I entered there. From there, for example, when you first enter, you must make a decision immediately. So, are you going to stay there [women's section 1] for prayer or are you going to go inside? I walked and walked. There were different things in the women's section; there were a lot of screens. But for example, from this women's section, you can exit to this middle area only from where you first enter: that women's section [women's section 1]. Other than that, they didn't give you any other entrance.

Author: So would it have been better to have it in the middle, in between?

49_F: Exactly. For example, I think they could put some [gaps] in between. But still, I don't like those screens in mosques anyway. I don't know, for example, it doesn't seem realistic and logical to me in a religious sense either. You know, while praying, there is no specific thing as... There is no such a thing like while praying, the woman should be behind the man, the man should not see the woman [...]"⁷⁴ (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

⁷³ Mahfil refers to an elevated area in the mosques used for purposes like delivering sermons, reciting the Quran, or leading congregational prayers.

⁷⁴ “49:F Bugün mesela gelirken ben kadınlar kısmından geldim. İlk defa orayı gördüm, oraya girdim. Oradan mesela şey, ilk girdiğin zaman doğrudan, hemen karar vermen gerekiyormuş. Yani şey, orada mı namaz kalacaksın yoksa içeri mi gireceksin? Bayağı ilerledim, ilerledim. Kadınlar kısmında da farklı şeyler vardı, paravanlar vardı baya çok. Ama mesela bu kadınlar kısmından, sadece ilk o kadınlar kısmına girerken dışarı çıkabiliyorsun, bu orta alana. Onun dışında başka bir giriş yeri sana vermemiş yani.

Like her, the other interviewee from Havle Women's Association also believed that the separators and strict gender segregation were unnecessary. When I asked her about her opinion on the women performing prayer in the open in zone 1 and 2, she took it naturally, and said:

“48_F: I think they might be unable to provide that restriction because it's so crowded. Maybe women don't know about such a [women's] section. They entered through the main entrance; they said, "Let's pray in that corner." I think so. So that's what I expected already. So big and different... You know, in a place where people from different religions and views visit... You know, I wasn't expecting to have the same experience as in other mosques I've been to for worship. I was even surprised when I saw the ladies' section; let me put it that way [laughs].

Author: When you saw that it existed?

48_F: Yes.

Author: How would you expect it to be?

48_F: You know, like, men in the front and women in the back. You know, I thought there would be such a spontaneous interaction, not a direct, formal division into this section and that section.

Author: So do you think it would have been better that way? Do you find it successful, this system?

48_F: No, I think it was pretty good. I did not come across a very absurd image. I mean, when I say absurd, I personally don't mind if a man and a woman pray side by side. But I haven't seen anything to the contrary. You know, even in that square [main section], there were ones praying, but more in the corner, more open, creating their own space.”⁷⁵ (48_F,

Yazar: Yani ortada, aralarda da olması daha mı iyi olurdu?

49_F: Aynen. Mesela aralarda da koyabilirlerdi bence. Ama gene de ben camilerde o paravanları da sevmiyorum yani. Hani, bilmiyorum, mesela o dinsel anlamda da bana o gerçekçi ve mantıklı gelmiyor. Hani, namaz kılariken ille de... Namaz kılariken işte kadın erkeğin arkasında olmalı, ama işte kadını erkek görmemeli gibi bir unsur yok [...].” (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey)

⁷⁵ “48_F: Çok kalabalık olduğu için sanırım o kısıtlamayı sağlayamıyor olabilirler sanırım. Belki öyle bir bölümden haberdar değilim. Ana girişten girdiler, şu köşede kılalım dediler. Öyle diye düşünüyorum. Yani beklentim zaten bu yöneydi. Bu kadar büyük ve bu kadar farklı... Hani farklı dinden, farklı görüşten insanların ziyaret ettiği bir yerde bu kadar... Hani, diğer ibadet için gittiğim camilerdeki tecrübeyi edinmeyi düşünmüyordum. Hatta hanımlar bölümünü görünce şaşırırım bile, öyle diyeyim [gülür].

Yazar: Olduğunu görünce mi?

48_F: Evet.

Yazar: Nasıl olmasını bekledin?

48_F: Hani, erkekler daha önde, kadınlar daha arkada diye. Hani böyle direk resmi, şu bölüm şu bölüm diye bir ayırım değil de, hani, kendiliğinden gelişen böyle bir etkileşim olur diye düşünmüştüm.

Yazar: Peki öylesi daha mı iyi olurdu sence? Bunu başarılı buldun mu, Bu sistemi?

22, Female, Student, İstanbul, Turkey)

These two women believed that the traditional gender segregation means were not necessary in a mosque place. From this perspective, the first one thought that the spatial experience of the women's section, due to the barriers and inaccessibility of the area, did not resemble the 'sense of mosque' that she expected and appreciated. The second woman thought was surprised to see the women's section, as she imagined a more flexible and open spatial arrangement. She found it understandable that many women were praying in the open since the place was very crowded and touristic. Despite not having any prejudice towards this matter, she did not encounter "an absurd image" where men and women prayed side by side. Nevertheless, I witnessed instances where men and women were performing worship 'together', without separators. Sometimes, they were side by side, keeping a distance in between (Image 3. 53). Sometimes, if men formed a congregation and started to pray first, women would pass behind them and pray. Thus, they would form small congregations contingently. Before the two *maqsuras* near the rear wall were closed in October 2022, I witnessed an interesting case there as well. *Maqsura* on the right was held by women, and the other by men. In the following prayer, new people came in, and I saw that two genders switched places.

48_F: Yo, gayet iyiydi bence. Çok öyle absürt bir görüntüye denk gelmedim. Yani, absürd derken, şahsen benim için bir sakıncası olmaz bir kadınla erkeğin yan yana namaz kılmasında. Ama bunun aksi bir şey de görmedim. Hani, şu meydan da bile kılan vardı ama daha köşede, daha açık, kendi alanını oluşturarak." (48_F, 22, Female, Student, İstanbul, Turkey)

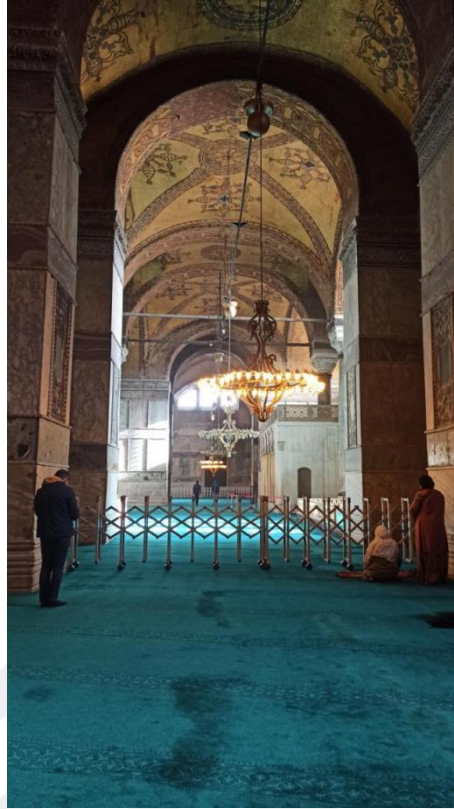


Image 3. 53: A man - on the left - and women - on the right - praying in the South Side. (Photograph by the Author, November 2022)

My observations from the site visits suggest that, in Hagia Sophia, women have particularly more access to the main section than in many mosques. Nevertheless, this seems to be a temporary situation. I observed many women praying along the edges and corners of the main space. Individually or by forming female congregations, they would pray in the open as men did. The tourists, children, and men would pass by and around as they continued their prayer. Yet, this freedom had some spatial and practical limits. For example, women preferred specific zones, such as the hidden edges and *maqsura* areas surrounded by low fences, or “creating their own space”, as my interviewee said. Also, it was only during the visiting time that gender segregation was temporarily suspended. When prayer time was close, personnel would strictly follow women out of the border.

I already mentioned that the border in the main space allowed the male congregation to enter zone 2 during prayer times. Nevertheless, if it were not a noon prayer, zone 2 would be mostly empty. The praying men would not stay near the border but get closer

to the *mihrab* by adhering to the tradition of ‘closing the ranks’. In the crowded prayer times, half of zone 2 was occupied at most. Other times, zone 2 was empty and male tourists would pass there to take photographs and wander around (Image 3. 54). My interviewee from Havle Association told about her observation of this as follows:

“For example, only men can pray in the front, and that part is very clearly separated. So a woman cannot pray there, even if her religion is Muslim. I don't think this should happen. And there, for example... It's empty right now, I mean. [...] During the prayer times, that is, when the imam leads, okay, men can pray there, but other than that, I think women should also be able to use the whole place entirely during off-peak hours. But I don't know, for example, how much can women use the space here?”⁷⁶ (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey).



Image 3. 54: Men in zone 2 during the prayer time. (Photograph by the Author, March 2023)

This woman who believed that the strict rules of gender segregation should not have operated in Hagia Sophia suggested that zone 2, or even the “whole place”, could be used by women. She even put a limit in her suggestion, adding that this could happen “during the off-peak hours” and outside the regular prayers when Imam leads the prayer. Nevertheless, in practice, women could not pray or pass to zone 2 during prayer times. The journalist from Izmir shared her wish to pray in zone 2 as follows:

⁷⁶ “Mesela ön kısımda sadece erkekler namaz kılabiliyor, ve orası çok net bir şekilde ayrılmış durumda. Yani orada bir kadın namaz kılamıyor, dini Müslüman olsa bile. Bence bu olmamalı. Orada da mesela... Şu an boş mesela, yani.[...] Ezan vakitlerinde, yani imamın kıldıracağı vakitte, tamam orada erkekler kılabilir ama bence onun dışında çok yoğun olmayan saatlerde mekanı tamamen kadınlar da kullanabilmeli bence. Ama bilmiyorum, burada mesela kadınlar ne kadar kullanabiliyor yani?” (49_F, 23, Female, Student, Istanbul, Turkey).

“For example, the biggest chandelier right under the dome is sacred to me; you see it there now. It is said that Khidr Aleyhisselam prayed under that chandelier. [...] Now, for me, for example, it is sacred, but I have never been able to pray there for example. For example, I want to pray there. I mean, it is said that Khidr Aleyhisselam prayed there, and it really strengthens the memory [...] So this is a real case. It is a case that has been experienced, and then the results have been positive. For example, I want to experience such an event there as if I went back to that day. But when I wanted to pray in that section, due to the current visits, unfortunately, I could not do it because everyone passes in front of you or because I was exposed to shouts like "There are predominantly men here; you cannot pray here.”⁷⁷ (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

She valued the sacred meaning the central dome and chandelier held and wanted to perform worship there. Yet, she was not allowed to pray in the open in zone 2 since men were passing by. In this regard, her experience indicates that women’s relative freedom to access and pray in zone 2 is limited to some spatial conditions, such as remaining at the edges and unseen corners. This journalist woman from İzmir also told about her experience in another inaccessible area, men’s section. This time the issue was not about being a female prayer, but about being a female sightseer:

“Yes, sometimes they may not take the ladies, especially to the place where the mihrab and minbar are. Before, I had a discussion on this subject as well. I came from Izmir, and since I live there... And of course, then Hagia Sophia was newly opened as a mosque when I came. Of course, they have taken a strict security measure, naturally. Everyone wants to have their photos taken there; there is great interest, a great deal of interest. Yes, I can empathize and understand at this point, but I can't understand at the other point. I came from outside, yes, Hagia Sophia is a very sacred place for me. I came here especially for this place. And I want to go up to the mihrab and minbar section, to examine it, to look at it architecturally; because I have knowledge about history, I want to proceed in its direction. But unfortunately, I couldn't get there because they put up a barrier. Then we had an

⁷⁷ “Mesela benim için kutsaliyet arz eden şu kubbenin tam altındaki en büyük o avize, görüyorsunuz zaten şimdi burada. O avizenin altında Hızır Aleyhisselam'ın namaz kıldığı söylenir. [...] Şimdi benim için mesela bir kutsallık arz ediyor ama ben mesela orada hiç namaz kalamadım. Mesela kılmak istiyorum. Yani Hızır Aleyhisselam'ın namaz kıldığı söylenen ve gerçekten hafıza güçlendiren [...] Yani bu gerçekten yaşanmış bir vaka. Yaşanıp daha sonra da sonuçları olumlu alınmış bir vaka. Ben mesela böyle bir olayı orada sanki o güne gidirmişçesine yaşamak istiyorum. Ama mevcut ziyaretlerden dolayı o bölümde namaz kılmak istendiğimde, işte, herkes önünüzden geçtiği için, ya da “Burada ağırlıklı olarak erkekler var, siz burada namaz kılamazsınız” şeklinde nidalara maruz kaldığım için maalesef bunu gerçekleştiremedim.” (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

argument with the officer there. First, I expressed it beautifully. That is, I said, “Look, I come from outside, and this is why I came”, after that, he said, “This is the rule with us, I am a servant, and since this was presented to me in this way, I have to do my duty” and I was not allowed in any way. Of course, at that time, I reacted quite a lot. My reaction was actually not to the person who was the servant there, but to the person who set this rule, I already told him in this way. But in my later visits, I somehow managed to get to the section with the minbar and mihrab.”⁷⁸ (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

Again, she was particularly motivated by the sacred meaning of the artifacts and the spatial experience of Hagia Sophia. Yet, this time, she also challenged the rules of visiting, and even the management of the space, by arguing with the personnel to enter an area where women were not allowed: the men’s section. This woman had argued with the personnel and visitors of Hagia Sophia over another gendered rule: the headscarf. However, in the case of accessing and praying in the areas where women were not allowed, she had a different approach. She was not concerned with adhering to rules set by the site managers. There were also no rules of manner specifically created based on gender and for mosque spaces in her mind.

Another woman who challenged the spatial order and gender hierarchy in her own terms was the architect from Mersin. She told me why the *kiblah* wall was the most impressive part of her experience in Hagia Sophia as follows:

⁷⁸ “Evet, bazen bayanları özellikle mihrap ve minberin olduğu yere almayabiliyorlar. Daha önce bu konuyla ilgili bir tartışmam da söz konusu olmuştu. Ben İzmir'den geldim, orada yaşadığım için... Tabi bir de o zaman Ayasofya'nın ilk cami olup açıldığı zamandı ben geldiğimde. Tabi sıkı bir güvenlik önlemi almışlar, doğal olarak herkes böyle orada fotoğraf çektirmek istiyor, çok yoğun bir ilgi var, çok yoğun bir alaka var. Evet, bu noktada empati kurup anlayabiliyorum, ama şu noktada anlamıyorum. Ben dışarıdan gelmişim, evet, Ayasofya benim için çok çok kutsallık arz eden bir mekan. Özellikle de bu mekan için buraya gelmişim. Ve ben mihrap ve minber bölümüne çıkmak, incelemek istiyorum, mimari olarak bakmak istiyorum, çünkü tarih, hakkında bilgi sahibiyim, onun doğrultusunda ilerlemek istiyorum. Ama bir bariyer koydukları için oraya maalesef geçemedim. Sonra oradaki görevliyle bir tartışma durumumuz oldu. Öncelikle güzel dille ifade ettim. Yani, “Bakın ben dışarıdan geliyorum ve bu bu sebepten geldim” dediğimde, ondan sonra, “Bizde kural bu, ben emir kuluym ve bu bana bu şekilde lanse edildiği için ben görevimi yapmak zorundayım” dedi ve hiçbir şekilde alınmadı. Tabi o zaman baya tepki gösterdim. Tepkim aslında oradaki emir kulu olan insana değil, bu kuralı koyan insanaydı, ona da zaten bu şekilde belirttim. Ama daha sonraki ziyaretlerimde bir şekilde minber ve mihrap olan bölüme geçebildim.” (23_F, 40, Female, Journalist, İzmir, Turkey)

“I wanted to stand closest to the mihrab, to see the stained glass window there. It's very impressive. Also, because we couldn't get close to there, I wanted to be there.”⁷⁹ (01_F, 23, Female, Architect, Mersin, Turkey)

In the end, it was seen that women's experience of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque was heavily influenced by gender segregation and hierarchy, which were embedded in the management of the space during prayer and visiting times; the spatial sense, as in the women's section; and the spatial practices such as the use of space and mobility. On the other hand, there were also incidents in which these physical and practical barriers were transgressed. For example, praying outside the women's section was seen as something specific to Hagia Sophia. Also, women praying next to men, forming congregations, and occupying spaces contingently, were special cases. Although many practices and behaviors, such as the rule with the headscarf or lying on the floor, were criticized in the interviews, these vignettes from women's interaction with the mosque space were not disapproved. Also, the last few comments in which the spatial order was challenged referred to the more extensive discussions on the women's experience and 'sense of mosque'. Most importantly, they indicated that Hagia Sophia could become a place to accommodate unconventional practices, no matter how 'strictly' it operated over women's experience of the place.

⁷⁹ “Ben mihraba en yakın kısımda durmak istedim, oradaki vitrayı görmek için. Orası çok etkileyici. Ayrıca oraya yaklaşamıyor olmamız yüzünden de orada olmak istedim.” (01_F, 23, Female, Architect, Mersin, Turkey)

4. CONCLUSION

In this work, I tried to explore how the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque works as a 'place'. Before my first visit, I did not expect to see the daily life of a mosque in Hagia Sophia. I was more curious about how the veil mechanism over the mosaics worked or whether the visit to the museum artifacts at the upper galleries was free or with tickets. Like most interviewees, I was disappointed that the galleries I had last seen when I was ten years old were closed. About the mosaics, I was in a state of mixed thoughts. I was disappointed for not being able to see the mechanism working, which I imagined as a theatrical event. Also, I was happy and surprised to see many mosaics, cross motifs, and symbols all over Hagia Sophia. At the end of the building - above the mihrab or in the Apse - the Virgin Mary and Child and Gabriel were under veils. Partially seen through the veils, the mosaic was an object of mystery for us visitors. It was a lasting image constantly reminding us of what the place had gone through about a year ago. Looking at them, I questioned whether Hagia Sophia was convincingly transformed into a mosque. Could it become a mosque? Could it remain as a museum? Could it tell us that it was once a church?

As I followed the events leading to and after the conversion, the main discussions in the literature on Hagia Sophia could not always respond to these questions. Most of the advertisements and reactions related to the conversion were focused on an almost classical issue with Hagia Sophia: its symbolic values and political representations. Its conversion into a mosque or remaining as a museum was linked to Turkey's national and international political agenda and heritage ideology. With the conversion, Hagia Sophia was relocated among its Christian/Byzantine, Islamic/Ottoman, and secular/Republican meanings. I could not overlook the discursive constructions of Hagia Sophia -the rhetoric of 'crossroads' and 'tradition of tolerance', for example, reappeared in my fieldwork as well. Yet, to understand if and how these discursive constructions occurred in the place, I suggested looking at its lived experience.

I consider my fieldwork in the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque as the main contribution of this thesis to the literature on Hagia Sophia and its conversion. As I elaborated in the themes of discussion, the multiplicity of different layers of time, civilizations, and beliefs in Hagia Sophia was part of not only its heritage significance but also its everyday life. Its conversion reopened the discussions on its past titles, and mostly predicted a certain future for the monument as a political instrument in the form of a revived mosque. Nevertheless, during the fieldwork, the place was often viewed at the intersections of a museum, church, and mosque. The rules expected from a mosque did not always apply or became too controlling. Its mosque title was ambiguous and not convincing for everyone. Thus, the lived experience of the place resulted in comments that deviated from the larger discursive discussions on the conversion. In its everyday life, the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque surpassed its designation as the mosque of the conversion.

Hagia Sophia did not have a regular prayer congregation, yet during my visits, I encountered similar groups of people: ones who could visit it only once in a lifetime, or those who came only after it has been converted into a mosque. Then, I found that the signboards for “visitors” and “prayers” were not accurate since my interviewees were always already ‘visitors’. In other words, Hagia Sophia was not only as a place of worship, but more of a destination. Accommodating daily incidents not commonly found in other mosques, the ‘sense of the mosque’ was transformed in the daily experience of Hagia Sophia. This way, the official title, "Grand Mosque," was often bypassed. I witnessed that it became a public place not only as a state building -an ‘official mosque’- but also as a shared social place prone to be challenged and transformed by its users. I believe that my interviewees defined it as a 'distinct' mosque for these reasons.

During my many site visits to this 'distinct' mosque, after a while, the charm and weight of the site I felt due to its sacredness and popularity evolved in a different direction. For me, Hagia Sophia was a colorful, lively, and enjoyable destination as an everyday place. Yet, it still carried some set of rules and perceptions, which can be understood as the mediation of ideology in place. One example of this was when I tried to converse with

my interviewees on the conversion. This subject was fragile, and their comments were more inclined toward their political stances than their lived experience within the site. Later they opened up about their interaction with the place and their impression of its management. Then, they contributed to understanding the place through its experience, program, and meanings, confirming the pluralistic perspective I tried to employ in the research.

Another example of the ideology in place was related to my gender: being a Turkish woman in a mosque. The management of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque involved a strict gender hierarchy. It was also part of my own experience of the site. Having visited many mosques in Istanbul and Turkey, I first anticipated being subject to a series of rules of mobility, spatial segregation, and dress code. Surprisingly, in Hagia Sophia, women's experience was less foreseeable. On the one hand, there was a significant women population, and we could use the place more extensively than in a conventional mosque or even other touristic mosques in Turkey. On the other hand, this freedom had limits. When the gendered borders, rules, and manners were transgressed, the warnings and evacuations by both the personnel and other visitors would burden women with anxiety. It was as if being a man or woman was the first and the most visible criteria for the rules of visit to Hagia Sophia. Still, women found ways to challenge these rules and make space for themselves. One example was from my experience with the men's section. After a Friday noon prayer, when the male congregation was dissolving, I tried my luck and attempted with some other women to take pictures of the kiblah wall and apse. We were not visible to the personnel or surrounding men in this crowded time. It was the only time I set foot in the men's section. The mixture of functions of worship and sightseeing, and the exclusive sacred perception and popularity of Hagia Sophia made way for this incident which was not prescribed in the program of the place or its political readings.

This thesis takes the everyday experience of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque as a research subject; however, I accept that it is impossible to fully separate it from the ideological constructs that render Hagia Sophia a political representation stage, nor did I aim to do so. Spending considerable time in Hagia Sophia enabled me to notice the

change in the space from a calm, open, and simple-to-visit mosque to a closed, much crowded, and restricted environment. This was, on the one hand, the result of the increased control and barriers all over the place, which were measures put against the overuse and damage Hagia Sophia has been suffering daily. On the other hand, the state-led congregational prayers, celebrations, and official addresses continued. These performances were preoccupied with reproducing the conversion against its shortcomings and intensifying the ideological load over Hagia Sophia.

In this research, only 50 viewpoints - including my own - contributed to the understanding of the everyday life of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. I did not have a chance to contact the responsible actors in the mosque's management or include the experiences of the personnel working in Hagia Sophia in the interviews. Further research can incorporate these agents and propose frameworks for improving the sustainability and inclusiveness of its site management. I hope this research, which became a re-visit to the place after the conversion, opens a view of Hagia Sophia for us to embrace and take care of it so that it will remain in our lives for years to come.

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APPENDIX A

Table regarding the interview information

Interviewee	Gender	Residency	Age	Occupation	Interview Date
01_F	Female	TR, Mersin	23	Architect	11.10.2022
02_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	22	Student	11.10.2022
03_F	Female	Netherlands	39	Film Producer	11.10.2022
04_M	Male	Netherlands	44	Chemist	11.10.2022
05_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	20	Student	16.10.2022
06_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	20	Student	16.10.2022
07_M	Male	USA	35	Art Teacher	16.10.2022
08_F	Female	USA	71	Retired/ Engineer	16.10.2022
09_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	55	Housewife	18.10.2022
10_F	Female	Morocco	28	Architect	18.10.2022
11_M	Male	TR, Ankara	38	Waqf Expert	26.10.2022
12_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	29	Teacher	26.10.2022
13_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	24	Banker	26.10.2022
14_M	Male	USA	34	Sales Manager	26.10.2022
15_F	Female	TR, Mardin	32	Teacher	26.10.2022
16_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	60	Housewife	30.10.2022
17_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	58	Housewife	30.10.2022
18_F	Female	Malaysia	17	Student	31.10.2022
19_M	Male	Morocco	17	Student	31.10.2022
20_F	Female	Austuria	28	-	31.10.2022
21_F	Female	TR, İstanbul (Cameroon)	22	Student	31.10.2022
22_M	Male	Germany	35	Manager	31.10.2022
23_F	Female	TR, İzmir	40	Journalist	04.11.2022
24_M	Male	Paris	24	Aeronautical Engineer	04.11.2022
25_F	Female	Indonesia	23	Student	04.11.2022
26_M	Male	UK (Indian)	26	Engineer	04.11.2022
27_M	Male	Russia	32	-	04.11.2022
28_F	Female	Ukraine	30	Lawyer	10.11.2022
29_M	Male	TR, İstanbul	20	Student	10.11.2022
30_M	Male	UK	56	Retired	10.11.2022
31_M	Male	TR, Malatya	42	Teacher	11.11.2022
32_M	Male	TR, İstanbul	56	Tradesman	11.11.2022
33_F	Female	Saudi Arabia	25	Chemist	11.11.2022
34_M	Male	UK	36	Chef	11.11.2022
35_F	Female	UK	36	Beauty Expert	11.11.2022

36_F	Female	TR, Aydın	24	Architect	10.12.2022
37_F	Female	TR, İzmir	24	Architect	10.12.2022
38_M	Male	Finland	24	Mathematician	11.12.2022
39_F	Female	Ukraine	57	Engineer	17.12.2022
40_F	Female	TR, Tekirdağ	21	Not working	17.12.2022
41_F	Female	TR, İzmit	21	Receptionist	17.12.2022
42_M	Male	TR, Bursa	37	Business Manager	17.12.2022
43_F	Female	Denmark	32	Doctor	17.12.2022
44_M	Male	TR, İstanbul	42	Tourist Guide	17.12.2022
45_F	Female	Austuria	39	Marketing	17.12.2022
46_M	Male	Austuria	39	Service Sector	17.12.2022
47_M	Male	TR, İstanbul	24	Student	17.12.2022
48_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	22	Student	14.03.2023
49_F	Female	TR, İstanbul	23	Student	14.03.2023

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions (English)

Interview day and time:

Age:

Gender:

Occupation:

Lives at:

Stays in Istanbul at:

Stays in Istanbul for:

1- In this visit, by which transportation route did you arrive at Hagia Sophia? Did you come alone or with a group/family?

2- In this visit, before Hagia Sophia, were there other historical, touristic, shopping places that you visited? Will you visit after this?

3- Did you visit Hagia Sophia before -when it was a mosque or a museum-? When?

4- Did you know that in 2020 Hagia Sophia was converted to mosque from a museum? Can you tell about your opinions on this?

5- Upon this conversion, the monument was prone to some spatial transformations. Do you know what are they? Can you tell about your opinions on this?

6- In your visit to Hagia Sophia, which spaces did you pass? Can you tell about your experiences at the courtyard and the security gate?

7- Before entering the main space of Hagia Sophia, did you visit other places such as the turbes, Theodosius Hagia Sophia ruins, the Imaret, the Infants School, or the madrasah ? Do you have any information about these places?

8- In Hagia Sophia, have you noticed the architectural elements and objects from different periods of the monument?

9- During your visit to Hagia Sophia, in which parts did you stay/ wanted to stay longer? What did impress you about there?

10- During your visit to Hagia Sophia, were there spaces or objects that you couldn't access? What were the restrictions?

11- During your visit to Hagia Sophia, did you witness the time of prayer? Were there spatial changes that you observed in that time?

12- During your visit to Hagia Sophia, were there visiting rules that you observed?

13- During your visit to Hagia Sophia, have you ever been in contact with the responsible religious or security staff?

14- As you were leaving Hagia Sophia, what were the things remained in your mind about the space? Which spaces and objects have impressed you the most?

15- Is there anything that you would like to add?

Thank you.



CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Information

Name and surname: Sare Nur Avcı

Academic Background

Master's Degree Education: Kadir Has University, School of Graduate Studies,
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