

Διάλεξη

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Imperial Heritage, National Burden: Byzantine and Ottoman Monuments in Republican Istanbul (1923-1949)

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Αμφιθέατρο «Γεώργιος Κατσανεβάκης» Γ2.2, Πολυτεχνείο Κρήτης, Χανιά

Post-Ottoman/early republican Istanbul was a city in crisis: one-sixth of the urban area was fire-stricken and desolate; the urban infrastructure was crumbling; the population declined by 25% in five years; and the urban economy was a shadow of its pre-WWI state. For the first time since Constantine the Great declared it Roman Empire's capital city in 324 C.E., Istanbul was not the seat of a major imperial polity. The sense of decline that permeated the city stood in stark contrast with its ubiquitous historical monuments, themselves in ruins or in dire need of restoration but still testified to Istanbul's bygone ages of prosperity. Throughout the early republic, debates, negotiations, and controversies over the fate of Istanbul's monuments were a staple of the local print media. Should Byzantine monuments be embraced as part of national heritage? Which monuments of the Ottoman Empire in terms of period, typology, and patron were to be preserved? Given that it was inevitable to demolish many monuments for the sake of enlarging public squares and opening boulevards, which monuments could be sacrificed and which ones could not? In an ethno-nationalist Turkish Republic, what was the relevance of Greek, Armenian, and Jewish memories that dotted hundreds of street names? In this presentation, I discuss the debates, negotiations, and multiple, conflicting imaginations of heritage sparked by all these questions in early republican Istanbul. I show that local actors and institutions shaped the making of post-imperial heritage, which casts doubt upon the present scholarship that tends to equate early republican Turkish history with the iron-fisted, top-down modernization of the Ankara-based techno-bureaucratic apparatus, which left no room for debate and negotiation

