

Abstract – Spolia and Textual Reincarnations. A Reassessment of the Hagia Sophia's History – A study of literary representations of buildings leads to intersections of comparative literature and art history. This article uses two concepts from spolia studies, "reincarnation" and "afterlife" to argue that the forms that a building adopts in literature can be considered textual reincarnations. It analyzes, as a case study, descriptions of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople/Istanbul in literary works from authors such as Paul the Silentiary (d. 575–580), Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey (d. 1582), and Edmondo de Amicis (1846–1908). The history seen through the Hagia Sophia's textual reincarnations constitutes an alternative to its mainstream history, which has often considered its conversions to a mosque and a museum as the sole turning points. Although they may have no overt connections to the building's original architectural structure, textual reincarnations of a building can still provide crucial insights into its reception in everchanging contexts.

Keywords – afterlife, appropriation, Hagia Sophia, monument, reincarnation, spolia, translation studies, world literature

C. Ceyhun Arslan
Koç University, Istanbul
cceyhunarslan@ku.edu.tr

Spolia and Textual Reincarnations

A Reassessment of the Hagia Sophia's History*

C. Ceyhun Arslan

This article examines how spolia studies can generate new bridges between the disciplines of art history and comparative literature. It argues that critics can use a key term in spolia studies, "reincarnation", and consider the diverse forms that a building adopts in literature as that building's "textual reincarnations". While the Latin word *spolia* initially meant war trophies, during the Renaissance period it started to also refer to artifacts and building materials that are reused in new cultural and historical contexts. Scholars such as Salvatore Settis and Maria Fabricius Hansen, as my article will demonstrate, have forged bridges between the disciplines of literature and art history, as their work draws analogies between spolia and citations or spolia and translations. While acknowledging the need to establish such

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analogies, I here attempt a new approach and examine how recent scholarship in spolia studies can generate fresh insights on textual representations of buildings. This article provides, as a case study, a close reading of various literary works from different languages and time periods on the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople/Istanbul.

Terms that have recently gained traction in spolia studies – "appropriation", "afterlife", and "reincarnation"– can generate new avenues of research for literary critics who examine textual representations of architectural works from other cultures and earlier time periods. The study of spolia has changed the way in which buildings are analyzed, as it has helped art and architectural historians to rethink the relationship between the building's original structure and its later, modified versions. Scholars now consider these later versions as part of what Annabel J. Wharton called a building's "biography" rather than as the results of the degradation of the building's original structure:

> "If a building behaves like a body, it also demands to be engaged as a surviving witness of various pasts. Once it is recognized that a building has a life, architectural historians may be less likely to focus their scholarly attention exclusively on a structure's origins and more likely to treat its full biography"[1].

This article proposes that the textual reincarnations of a building constitute an integral part of that building's biography.

The first section of this article will provide definitions of the terms spolia, afterlife, and reincarnation in art history scholarship and discuss various ways in which critics can employ these concepts for comparative literature. The second section analyzes textual representations of Hagia Sophia as a case study, since different political entities with diverse ideological visions have wanted to lay a claim on the building. Sometimes the Hagia Sophia is described as a wonder of nature that can undergo no spoliation; at other times, it is described as a person who defends Islam. It can also be reincarnated as a monument that gives information about earlier cultures and time periods. Each reincarnation can be studied as a new afterlife and avatar of the Hagia Sophia – a new reception of the building in a new context – to reassess our understanding of the Hagia Sophia's biography. Such a reassessment can help art historians to move beyond the current historiography that often studies the church, mosque, and museum phases of the building separately.

Spolia studies: bridging the disciplines of comparative literature and art history

In Latin, the term *spolia* means something taken by force as booty[2]. In a more modern sense, the term refers to artifacts that are "incorporated into a setting culturally or chronologically different from that of [their] creation"[3]. There is a wide range of spolia, and the presence of spolia does not necessarily signify victory and imperial domination because architects and builders can use pieces from other works of architecture simply for practical purposes, especially when resources are scarce[4]. Writing on the history of Anatolian churches that were converted into mosques, Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir argues that the reuse of entire buildings can constitute an extreme case of spoliation[5]. Maria Fabricius Hansen also notes that "we find complete buildings converted to new purposes. This is both the most radical and sustainable strategy of spoliation"[6].

In the introduction to *Spolia Reincarnated: Afterlives of Objects, Materials, and Spaces in Anatolia from Antiquity to the Ottoman Era*, Ivana Jevtić notes that the title "reflects its vision, inspired by two interconnected notions: reincarnation and afterlives. To be reincarnated means to appear and live again but in a different body, while afterlife signifies a form of new life"[7]. I propose that these concepts, afterlife and reincarnation, can shed a new light upon representations of buildings in literary works. Further below, Jevtić indicates that essays in the volume:

> "conceptualize the renewed use of material things, buildings, and spaces as a form of new life, assuring them a unique existence and preserving them from oblivion – as if the 'spirit of things' (their soul) continues to live despite alterations in their physical properties or changes in their original function or location"[8].

Therefore, the essays in *Spolia Reincarnated* examine diverse reincarnations of spolia and provide various interpretations of these reincarnations.

Afterlife is also a crucial concept in key works of translation studies and world literature. For example, Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator", one of the most prominent works in translation studies, describes translation as a part of a text's afterlife:

> "Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife"[9].

Afterlife also becomes a key term in the field of world literature, which studies the reception of literary works in myriad historical and cultural contexts. Drawing upon Benjamin's description of translation, David Damrosch makes the following remark:

> "[W]orks of world literature take on a new life as they move into the world at large, and to understand this new life we need to look closely at the ways the work becomes reframed in its translations and in its new cultural contexts"[10].

Numerous critics, such as Vilashini Cooppan, Darrah Lustig, and Patricia Novillo-Corvalán, have used the concept of afterlife to refer to the reception of literary works in new contexts[11]. The use of the concept of afterlife in both art history and comparative literature is a methodological tool that helps scholars to rethink the relationship between the original artwork and its later reincarnations as spolia or as translations.

Many scholars have already explored intersections between the disciplines of art history and comparative literature by drawing analogies between spolia in architecture and intertextual references in texts. For example, Salvatore Settis compares citations to spolia[12], while Akiko Sumi suggests that "Shawqī's reuse of the rhyme-words [in his poem] from al-Buḥturī's [poem] Sīniyyah can be comparable with spolia in architecture"[13]. Maria Fabricius Hansen notes that the literal meaning of the term *translatio*, the Latin term for translation, is to carry something from one place to another. Therefore, the act of incorporating spolia into a work of architecture can be seen as a form of translation[14].

Providing new perspectives on intertextual phenomena is not the only way in which spolia studies can contribute to the discipline of comparative literature; they can also shed new light on textual representations of buildings. Art historians such as Richard Brilliant have

1 Annabel J. Wharton, "The Tribune Tower: Spolia as Despoliation", in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*, Richard Brilliant, Dale Kinney eds, Surrey 2011, pp. 179–197, sp. p. 195.

2 Inge Uytterhoeven, "Spolia, –iorum, n.: From Spoils of War to Reused Building Materials: The History of a Latin Term", in *Spolia Reincarnated: Afterlives of Objects, Materials, and Spaces in Anatolia from Antiquity to the Ottoman Era*, Ivana Jevtić, Suzan Yalman eds, Istanbul 2018, pp. 25–50, sp. p. 26.

3 Dale Kinney, "The Concept of Spolia", in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, Conrad Rudolph ed., Malden, MA 2006, pp. 233–252, sp. p. 233.

4 Robert G. Ousterhout, "Ethnic Identity and Cultural Appropriation in Early Ottoman Architecture", *Muqarnas*, XII (1995), pp. 48–62, sp. pp. 54–55.

5 Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir, "Remains of the Day: Converted Anatolian Churches", in *Spolia Reincarnated* (n. 2), pp. 71–93, sp. p. 71.

6 Maria Fabricius Hansen, *The Eloquence of Appropriation: Prolegomena to an Understanding of Spolia in Early Christian Rome*, Rome 2003, p. 24.

7 Ivana Jevtić, "Introduction", in *Spolia Reincarnated* (n. 2), pp. 3–21, sp. p. 5.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 5.

9 Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt ed. and Harry Zohn trans., New York 2007, pp. 69–82, sp. p. 71. Benjamin uses the term *Überleben* in the source text, and some critics have noted that afterlife is not the correct translation of the term *Überleben*. Still, many important works of comparative literature that drew upon Benjamin's essay have used the term "afterlife".

10 David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, Princeton 2003, p. 24.

11 Patricia Novillo-Corvalán, "Joyce's and Borges's Afterlives of Shakespeare", *Comparative Literature*, LX/3 (2008), pp. 207–227; Darrah Lustig, "The Task of the Survivor in Ruth Klüger's 'weiter leben' (1992) and 'Still Alive' (2001)", *Studia austriaca*, XXI (2013), pp. 29–50; Vilashini Cooppan, "The Ethics of World Literature: Reading Others, Reading Otherwise", in *Teaching World Literature*, David Damrosch ed., New York 2009, pp. 34–43, sp. p. 41.

12 Cited in Kinney, "The Concept of Spolia" (n. 3), p. 244. Salvatore Settis, "Continuità, distanza, conoscenza. Tre usi dell'antico", in *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana*, vol. 3, *Dalla tradizione all'archeologia*, Salvatore Settis ed., Turin 1986, pp. 373–486, sp. p. 384.

13 Akiko Sumi, "Poetry and Architecture: A Double Imitation in the Sīniyyah of Aḥmad Shawqī", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXXIX/1 (2008), pp. 72–122, sp. pp. 92–93.

14 Hansen, *The Eloquence of Appropriation* (n. 6), p. 178. Paolo Liverani cautions critics not to take the analogy between citations and spolia too far. He notes that while citations raise the authority of the quoted text, spolia, especially as war trophies, often imply a degradation of the building from which it was taken. Furthermore, while one may create an exact replica of the text, one cannot do the same for a building. Paolo Liverani, "Reading Spolia in Late Antiquity and Contemporary Perception", in *Reuse Value* (n. 1), pp. 33–51, sp. p. 42. Still, as long as scholars keep in mind these important caveats, an analogy between spolia and citations or other intertextual phenomena can still prove useful, as such an analogy generates important transdisciplinary dialogues.

considered spolia as a subset of appropriation[15]. Likewise, writers can *use* or *appropriate* buildings from earlier times and/or other cultures as they forge their textual compositions. When buildings are *appropriated* in literature and described in ways that serve particular ideological purposes, they do not have to be described as a construction. Reincarnation as a concept suggests that buildings can take *bodies* or forms that are significantly different from their original architectural structure[16]. Spolia studies can be particularly helpful for scholars of art history and comparative literature, since spolia "stand as tangible representations or remains of the 'Other', whether in the realm of politics, culture, religion, ethnicity, etc."[17]. Despite some recent works by critics such as David Spurr and Anne M. Myers[18], the scholarship that describes how literary works represent objects, works of art, or buildings from earlier periods and other cultures remains quite scarce. Spolia studies can make critics more attuned to diverse narrative strategies that authors use when they describe a building, since they may describe that building not as a piece of architecture but instead as something else. Such strategies can de-emphasize the spoliation, and sometimes violence, that resulted in the conversion and reuse of these buildings for new purposes.

As a Byzantinist "accustomed to […] dealing with all the challenges that come with a messy afterlife"[19], Robert Ousterhout observes that "[the Hagia Sophia] has accrued meanings that have nothing to do with its physical form and quite possibly very little to do with its history – and even less to do with religion"[20]. The next section will examine the Hagia Sophia's "meanings that have nothing to do with its physical form". It will ultimately demonstrate that literary critics and art historians can use textual reincarnation as a heuristic concept for reassessing such meanings as important constituents of a building's history.

The many afterlives of the Hagia Sophia

The collection of materials and the incorporation of spolia into the Hagia Sophia has reinforced the status of the building as the symbol of imperial grandeur. Emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565), who built the Hagia Sophia between 532 and 537, ordered the compilation of materials and spolia for the construction of the building; these have been extensively documented by Claudia Barsanti and Alessandra Guiglia[21]. Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446 and r. 1451–1481), who conquered Istanbul and converted the Hagia Sophia into a mosque in 1453, amassed relics and mementos, such as a prayer carpet of Prophet Muhammad, for the mosque and also did not even cover some of the Hagia Sophia's figural imagery[22]. As noted by scholars such as Tanyeri-Erdemir, the Hagia Sophia itself became a spolium when it was used for different purposes in new cultural settings[23]. It was converted into a mosque in 1453, became a museum in 1934 with a decree from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), founder of the Republic of Turkey, and was again re-established as a mosque in 2020 with a decree from Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (b. 1954), who is currently the president of Turkey. However, as this study will show, textual reincarnations of the Hagia Sophia in world literature do not always correspond neatly with its actual reincarnations as a spolium in history. For example, the reincarnation of the Hagia Sophia as a monument occurred in literature much earlier than its establishment as a museum (1934). In the following sections, diverse textual reincarnations of the Hagia Sophia will provide insights into how people have perceived and experienced the Hagia Sophia.

Afterlife I: The reincarnation of the Hagia Sophia as a sea

Bissera V. Pentcheva highlights that marbles have been associated with water throughout Late Antiquity and that many writers, such as Paul the Silentiary (d. 575–580), have attributed maritime qualities to the Hagia Sophia. Pentcheva also notes that the Greek word for marble, "*marmaron*, echoes the verb, 'to quiver,' *marmairō*, and the word for glitter, *marmarygma*"[24]. She thus concludes, "The perceptual merging of marble and gold produced by shimmer and translucence asserts the power of a unifying aesthetic of the glittering sea inside Hagia Sophia"[25]. Fabio Barry notes that "over more than a millennium, observer after observer would report that the combined undulations of

the closely fitted slabs suggested that the entire floor was a 'frozen sea'" in diverse descriptions of the Hagia Sophia[26]. For example, Paul the Silentiary compares the ambo with "an island [that] rises amid the waves of the sea"[27]. Later, he describes how one experiences the Hagia Sophia in the evening with the following words:

> But one would see silver ships lifting up
> their trade cargo of luminosity; suspended,
> they sail the illuminated air as if the sea
> trembles neither before the north wind
> nor when Boötes constellation goes down late[28].

These lines describe candles as "silver ships" that sail "the illuminated air", blurring the distinction between the sky and the sea. The sea does not tremble, hence reinforcing a sense of stability. The building is described both as a natural landscape and as a supernatural milieu that defies the laws of nature, with ships sailing in the air. The following lines, which describe the marble columns as "solidly assembled" meadows, further substantiate the sense of stability that characterizes the Hagia Sophia:

> Who will sing gaping with the
> thundering mouths of Homer,
> the marble meadows solidly
> assembled along the walls
> or the open plains of the hauntingly
> high naos [**Figs 1–2**][29]?

With its "hauntingly high" naos, the Hagia Sophia evokes a sense of wonder, and people sing "gaping with the thundering mouths of Homer". The phrases "marble meadows" and "plains of the hauntingly high naos" emphasize both the high level of craftsmanship inside the Hagia Sophia and its evocation of nature. Procopius (d. ca 565) similarly describes the interior of Hagia Sophia as a meadow whose "flowers [are] in full bloom"[30]. Shortly after its completion, the Hagia Sophia is thus reincarnated in literature as a natural landscape in the works of Paul the Silentiary and Procopius.

15 Richard Brilliant, "Authenticity and Alienation", in *Reuse Value* (n. 1), pp. 166–177, sp. p. 168.

16 Just as one needs to keep in mind important caveats when establishing an analogy between citations and spolia, one needs to also remain cautious about establishing an analogy between reincarnations of a building as a spolium and textual reincarnations of the same building. For example, a building almost always functions as a building even when it is reused for a new purpose. However, in literature, a building may be reincarnated as something other than a building, such as a body of water. Furthermore, a building can have multiple afterlives in literature during the same time period, as it can be described as a person in some writings and as a natural landscape in others. Yet, as we shall see, when buildings are reincarnated as a spolium, they often serve one official purpose only. At the same time, as long as one keeps in mind these important distinctions, establishing an analogy between the reincarnations of buildings as spolia and the different forms in which buildings adopt in texts – their textual reincarnations – can reveal crucial insights.

17 Jevtić, "Introduction" (n. 7), p. 11.

18 See David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature*, Ann Arbor 2012; and Anne M. Myers, *Literature and Architecture in Early Modern England*, Baltimore 2013. Unlike these critics who focus more on the engagement of writers with spatial dynamics of architectural works, this article pays attention to textual representations that describe buildings in diverse and often non-architectural forms, such as a natural wonder.

19 Robert G. Ousterhout, "From Hagia Sophia to Ayasofya: Architecture and the Persistence of Memory", *Annual of Istanbul Studies*, II (2013), pp. 91–98, sp. p. 92.

20 *Ibidem*, p. 97.

21 Claudia Barsanti, Alessandra Guiglia, "Spolia in Constantinople's Hagia Sophia from the Age of Justinian to the Ottoman Period: The Phenomenon of Multilayered Reuse", in *Spolia Reincarnated* (n. 2), pp. 97–123.

22 Gülru Necipoğlu, "The Life of an Imperial Monument: Hagia Sophia after Byzantium", in *Hagia Sophia from the Age of Justinian to the Present*, Robert Mark, Ahmet Ş. Çakmak eds, New York 1992, pp. 195–225, sp. p. 204.

23 Tanyeri-Erdemir, "Remains of the Day" (n. 5), p. 71.

24 Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium*, University Park, PA 2017, p. 127.

25 *Ibidem*, p. 131.

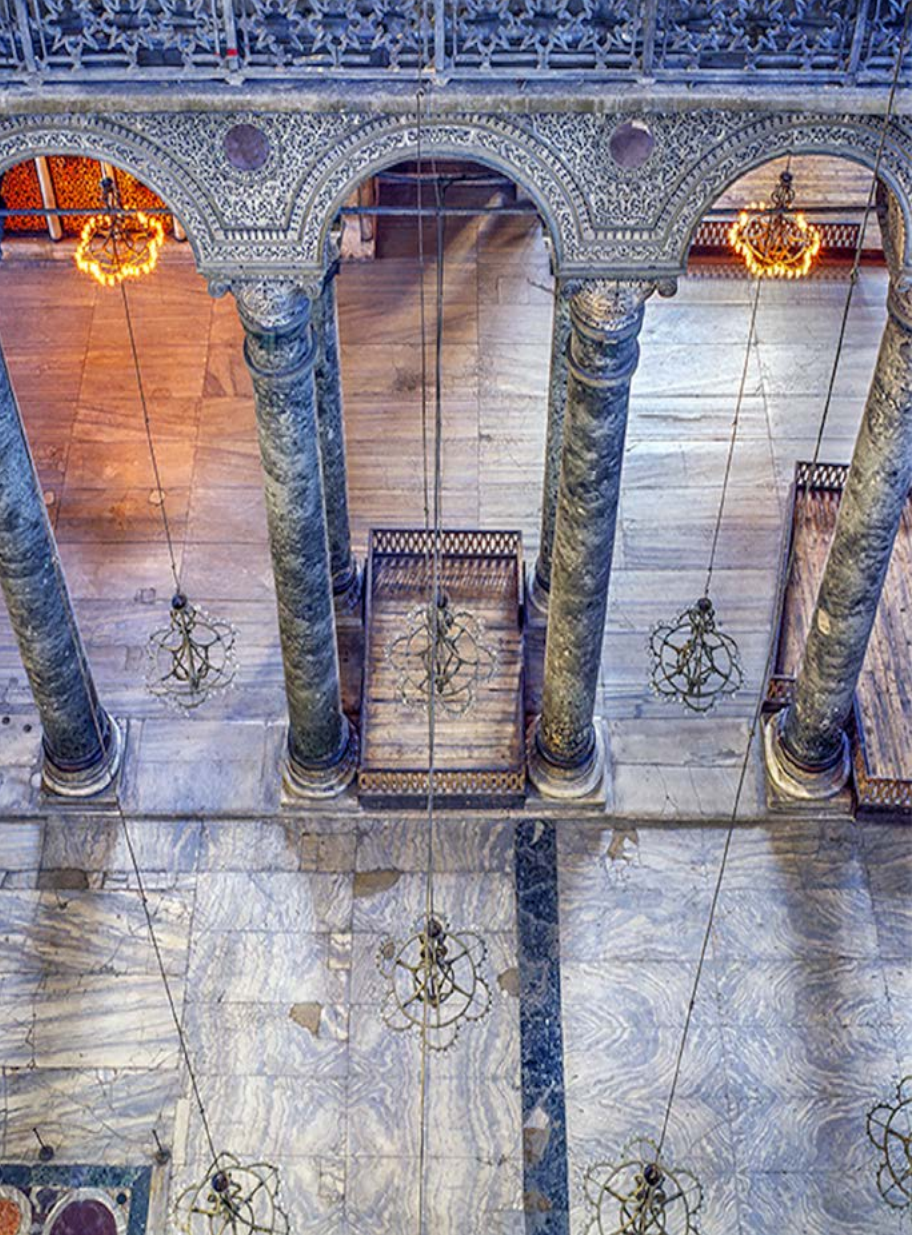
26 Fabio Barry, "Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages", *The Art Bulletin*, LXXXIX/4 (2007), pp. 627–656, sp. p. 627.

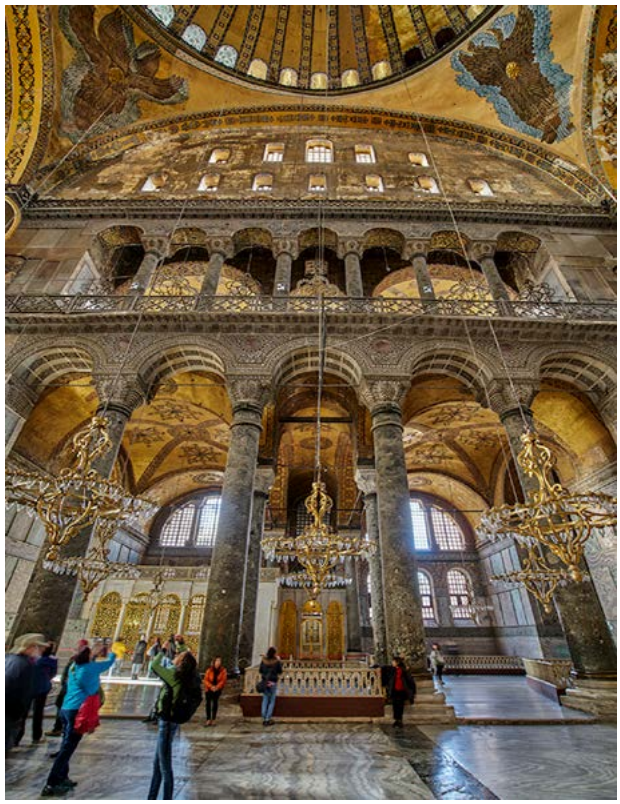
27 Cited in Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia* (n. 24), p. 132, Pentcheva's translation. Paul the Silentiary, *Descriptio S. Sophiae et ambonis*, v. 224.

28 Cited in Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia* (n. 24), p. 167, Pentcheva's translation. Paul the Silentiary, *Descriptio S. Sophiae et ambonis*, vv. 851–854. Cyril Mango translates these lines in the following manner: "One may also see ships of silver bearing a luminous freight; suspended, they sail through the bright air instead of the sea, fearing neither the south wind nor late-setting Boôtes". Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453*, Toronto 1986, p. 90.

29 Cited in Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia* (n. 24), p. 121, Pentcheva's translation. Paul the Silentiary, *Descriptio S. Sophiae et ambonis*, vv. 617–620. Cyril Mango translates these lines in the following manner: "Yet who, even in the thundering strains of Homer, shall sing the marble meadows gathered upon the mighty walls and spreading pavement of the lofty church?" Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (n. 28), p. 85.

30 Procopius, *Buildings*, H. B. Dewing ed. and trans., Cambridge 1971, p. 27; for the Greek original, see Procopius, *Buildings*, p. 26 or I. 1. 59.





1/ North gallery and marble columns, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537

2/ Central nave and marble columns, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537

A work from an early modern Ottoman poet, Tacizade Cafer Çelebi (d. 1515), also attributes maritime qualities to marbles of the Hagia Sophia:

> It [the Hagia Sophia] is equal to the
> rest of the world in amplitude
> Its lofty dome embraces the skies.
>
> Its arch and columns are colorful in places
> Some of them are green marble and
> some of them are porphyry.
>
> Its columns are the center of poles in the sky
> Marbles of its floor are purer
> than a pure mirror.
>
> The waves in the marbles of this floor
> Render its yard a sea with surging waves
> [*derya-yı mevvac*] [**Figs 3–6**][31].

31 Tâcî-zâde Cafer Çelebi, *Heves-nâme (İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin)*, Necati Sungur ed., Ankara 2006, pp. 177–178. All translations from Arabic and Turkish are mine.









3/ Dome, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537

4/ South gallery and arches, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537

5/ West gallery, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537

6/ Column capital, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537

In Tacizade Cafer Çelebi's work, the Hagia Sophia is portrayed both as a natural landscape and as a supernatural milieu, as its dome covers the entire sky. Many segments of the Hagia Sophia are compared with diverse elements of nature: the yard, for example, is like a sea with surging waves. There are significant similarities between the associations of Paul the Silentiary and Tacizade Cafer Çelebi. Even after the Hagia Sophia had been turned into a mosque, Tacizade Cafer Çelebi perceives the building in ways that resonate with Paul the Silentiary's description[32]. Likewise, Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey (d. 1582) makes the following remark in his description of the Hagia Sophia:

> When looking at its waves of marble,
> One is immediately plunged
> into a sea of wonder[33].

The description of the Hagia Sophia as a sea may be dismissed as a motif that provides no information about the building. Nevertheless, this description reveals how Paul the Silentiary, Tacizade Cafer Çelebi, and Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey experienced and imagined the building. The description of the Hagia Sophia as a sea may substantiate the view among readers that the Hagia Sophia has not been and will not be spoliated, since it is not just a regular building. Instead, these authors reinforce the impression that the Hagia Sophia is a wonder of nature that has supernatural characteristics. This description tallies well with the vision of their political rulers, who had high imperialist ambitions.

Afterlife II: The reincarnation of the Hagia Sophia as a person

Gülru Necipoğlu notes that "[t]he [Hagia Sophia] mosque that had been Ottomanized by Mehmed II […] took a much longer time to Islamize"[34]. Here, Necipoğlu writes about the discrepancy between the text Mehmed II commissioned for the Hagia Sophia and later versions of this text. While the text that Mehmed II commissioned put emphasis on the imperialistic ambitions of Ottomans, later versions of the text put more emphasis on the Islamic character of the Hagia Sophia. These later versions also expressed resentment about the imperialist policies of Mehmed II, who shunned the earlier egalitarian ethos that characterized Ottomans when they were a frontier principality. Although Necipoğlu makes this remark to describe the imperialist vision of Mehmed II and those who criticized this vision, her words also capture a shift in the reception of the Hagia Sophia in Ottoman Turkish writings. Early modern works often described the grandeur of the Hagia Sophia as a way to highlight the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire and rarely, if ever, overtly depicted the Hagia Sophia as a battleground between Christians and Muslims or the West and Islam. Late Ottoman and Republican works placed more importance on the Islamic character of the Hagia Sophia as a warning to their audiences against looming Christian or secular threats[35].

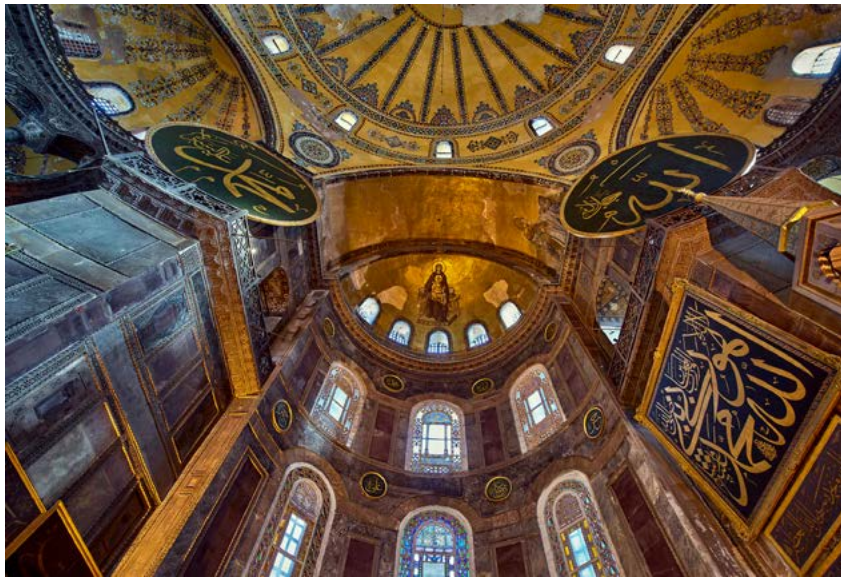
This shift in representations of the Hagia Sophia also corresponds to the increasing interest in the building among Islamist intellectuals[36]. Furthermore, starting in the nineteenth century, writers and philhellenic organizations throughout the West have called for the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a church[37]. Partly as a reaction against growing Western imperialism, Ottoman sultans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries put a stronger emphasis than earlier sultans on their role as the caliph of all Muslims and projected the Hagia Sophia as the key symbol of the Islamic caliphate[38], a vision that shapes debates on the Hagia Sophia even today[39]. This vision established the Hagia Sophia an important symbol for different Muslim communities of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. An Arabic poem by Aḥmad Shawqī (1868–1932) is a case in point that reveals anxieties about the future of the Hagia Sophia and ultimately the Islamic world. The beginning of the poem associates the Hagia Sophia with verdant gardens, as if the building were an eternal and unchanging paradise. In this respect, Shawqī's work resonates with earlier works that associated the Hagia Sophia with nature. Unlike these examples, however, the poem's ending provides a bleak panorama for its readers:

> If they [Greeks] render it a church again,
> That would be a dark day for humankind.

The kid in the cradle would become old
And the dead in their resting
places would be disturbed[40].

Shawqī's poem expresses a deep anxiety, since it suggests that Greeks may take over the Hagia Sophia Mosque, which may then be reused as a church. When Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey (d. 1582) notes that the "world flows like water to the feet of [the Hagia Sophia]"[41], he reinforces the impression that the Hagia Sophia, and hence the Ottoman Empire, stands at the center of the world. However, Shawqī gives the impression that Muslims are confronting the threat of marginalization and even annihilation.

Perhaps as a reaction against this deep anxiety, various writers from the nineteenth century to the present day have described the Hagia Sophia as an indefatigable fortress that fights against this threat. For example, in his poem on the Hagia Sophia, İsmail Safa (1867–1901) notes that atheism





7/ Apse and windows, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537

8/ South gallery, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537

32 Bissera Pentcheva compares descriptions of marble, gold, and glass in literary works from the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid Empire. She concludes: "Marble, gold, and glass display glittering, translucent, and reflective surfaces whose changing appearance attracted both Greek and Arabic eyes. While in each tradition the enchantment is read politically as the powerful authority of the ruler, the two cultures differ in the depth and willingness to view glitter metaphysically". Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Power Of Glittering Materiality: Mirror Reflections Between Poetry And Architecture in Greek and Arabic Medieval Culture", in *Istanbul and Water*, Paul Magdalino, Nina Ergin eds, Leuven 2015, pp. 241–274, sp. p. 268. While both Greek and Arabic texts associate marble with the wonders of nature, the Qur'an and the Islamic exegetic tradition have emphasized that one should not be taken with the sense of wonder that these materials evoke because this sense is a mere illusion. Although this article puts an emphasis on similarities between Byzantine and Ottoman texts to undermine the tendency to study the mosque and church phases of the Hagia Sophia separately, it is also important to keep in mind that Ottoman and Byzantine writers could have different metaphysical conceptualizations of marble and other luxurious materials.

33 Kâzım Yoldaş, *Taşlıcalı Yahyâ Bey Şâh u Gedâ (İnceleme-Metin)*, MA thesis, (İnönü Üniversitesi, supervisor: Hasan Kavruk), Malatya 1993, p. 138.

34 Necipoğlu, "The Life of an Imperial" (n. 22), p. 202.

35 Here, I do not mean that early modern Ottoman writers did not consider the Hagia Sophia as Islamic. In fact, these authors considered it as one of the most magnificent buildings of the Islamic world and compared it with the Kaaba or Masjid al-Aqsa. At the same time, in late Ottoman or Republican works, the Hagia Sophia is often portrayed as openly confessing that it is Muslim and as participating in the fight against foreign enemies.

36 There is no particular consensus on what the term *Islamist* means in scholarly circles; however, I use this term to refer to intellectuals who believed that political and social norms in the community should conform to their vision of Islam.

37 Ousterhout, "From Hagia Sophia" (n. 19), p. 95.

38 Necipoğlu, "The Life of an Imperial" (n. 22), pp. 220–221.

39 After the Hagia Sophia was again converted to a mosque in 2020, some Islamist groups also called for the restoration of the caliphate, which was abolished in 1924. For current debates regarding the caliphate since the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque in 2020, see Tarek Masoud, Aytuğ Şaşmaz, "Istanbul's Hagia Sophia is a Mosque Again. Do Turkish Citizens Want Erdoğan to Restore the Caliphate?", *Washington Post*, July 24, 2020 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/07/24/istanbuls-hagia-sophia-is-mosque-again-do-turkish-citizens-want-erdogan-restore-caliphate/; retrieved 2021-08-24).

40 Aḥmad Shawqī, *Al-Shawqiyyāt*, Beirut 2015, 4 vols, 2, p. 25.

41 Yoldaş, *Taşlıcalı Yahyâ Bey* (n. 33), p. 136.

and infidelity are defeated under the dome of the Hagia Sophia and later writes:

> The windows of this glorious
> building shout out;
> Each corner, each point is full of deep secrets.
> The stones of its columns preach sermons
> About the possibility of eternity in the
> world (*dünyada beka*) [**Figs 7–8**][42].

In these lines, the description of the Hagia Sophia reminds readers that the kind of anxiety that Shawqī expressed is unnecessary: the Hagia Sophia, and hence Ottomans and Muslims, will not be annihilated. Furthermore, the building is not a distant object of observation; it is personified as a subject who speaks and preaches religious sermons.

Ceren Katipoğlu and Çağla Caner-Yüksel argue that the Hagia Sophia's conversion into a museum in 1934 "can be read as a milestone in a larger scale project" that "comprised the basic principles of the new Republic grounded on 'modernization' and 'secularization'". This project also "brought together humanist ideals with a special emphasis on the 'respect and praise of science and arts'"[43]. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a significant rise in Islamist discourses that were reactions against the early Republican project. According to İlker Aytürk, this cultural transformation occurred due to various sociopolitical factors, such as "demographic change, anti-Kemalist sentiments, and electoral behavior in Cold War Turkey"[44]. Therefore, Islamist intellectuals have produced a rich corpus of works on the Hagia Sophia especially after the 1950s, laying the groundwork for its conversion to a mosque in 2020.

In works by Islamist writers, the Hagia Sophia is often depicted as the spokesperson of the Muslim community. The Hagia Sophia carries traces of different cultures and can be viewed as a building with a culturally ambiguous identity. To negate this sense of ambiguity, the building needs to *confess* where it stands in what Islamists consider as the battle between Islam and the West. M. İnanç Özekmekçi notes that many Islamist writers during the Republican period have emphasized that the Hagia Sophia had an Islamic essence even when it was a church or a museum. Therefore, these writers resorted to the personification of the Hagia Sophia (*Ayasofya'yı kişileştirme*)[45]. For example, an article in the *Diriliş* journal described the Hagia Sophia as a "secret Muslim" when it was under Byzantine control, then openly declared that it was a Muslim during the Ottoman period. The Hagia Sophia could tell the world that the East surpassed the West in terms of religion, and it was, like the Virgin Mary, a virgin pregnant with a new religious movement, Islam, when it was a church[46]. The same article also pointed out that before it became a museum and hence adopted "the mantle of death", the Hagia Sophia was a mosque who was "alive, lively and integrated into the believer community, engaged with trade, and had a face that exuded health"[47]. Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti (1917–1983) commented in 1952 that when the Hagia Sophia is used as a mosque again, it will take revenge on those who rendered it naked, coming alive again after it was killed[48]. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1905–1983) indicated in 1965 that once the building turns into a mosque, all the "meanings" that were lost will achieve liberation, "like innocent people who were subjected to chains"[49]. For Kısakürek, the movement that ultimately converted the Hagia Sophia into a museum and turned it into a victim started in 1836, when the Ottoman Empire initiated a set of Westernization reforms[50].

Afterlife III: The reincarnation of the Hagia Sophia as a monument

According to Robert S. Nelson, with the rise of photography and printing press that enabled the widespread circulation of its image, the Hagia Sophia transformed "from an interior space, experienced by the faithful, to a monument, objectified, abstracted, seen from afar, and thus able to be appreciated by modern secular audiences"[51]. The Hagia Sophia started to appear more frequently in international press and on various postcards during this period, and it became routine for European ambassadors to visit the Hagia Sophia starting in the eighteenth century[52]. As Edhem Eldem puts it, the nineteenth century witnessed

the "monumentalization" (*abideleşme*) of the Hagia Sophia, as it was assumed to reveal information about past civilizations[53]. Interestingly, the Hagia Sophia experienced a similar transformation in world literature during the same period[54].

The following words from the famous travelogue of Edmondo de Amicis (1846–1908), *Constantinople* (1877–1878), bolster Nelson's observation that the Hagia Sophia was transformed into a monument through political and technological changes that rendered it a distant object of observation:

> "We had purposely supplemented him [the Greek dragoman] by the old Turkish cavas [a consulate officer] with the hope – and we were not disappointed – that their two accounts might bring vividly before us the struggle between the two religions, histories, and nations, the legends and explanations of one magnifying the Church, those of the other the Mosque, in such a manner as to make us see St. Sophia as she should be seen; that is to say, with one eye Christian and the other Turkish"[55].

These words put a particular emphasis on sight and notes that there is a proper way of seeing the Hagia Sophia – with one eye Christian and the other Turkish. The Hagia Sophia becomes akin to a museum that provides de Amicis knowledge about other cultures. He wishes to see the Hagia Sophia in such a way that he witnesses "the struggle between two religions, histories, and nations". In these lines, the Hagia Sophia turns into a monument that one needs to see from a distance rather than a wonder in which one can experience spiritual transcendence.

In regards to changing attitudes toward the ancient past in the nineteenth-century Egypt, Elliott Colla indicates a shift in "focus from the consideration of time in the abstract to the consideration of specific historical periods arranged in a developmental sequence"[56]. In other words, while ancient ruins in earlier literary works often led people to contemplate time itself, ruins and artifacts eventually become tools that generated new knowledge about past civilizations in nineteenth-century Arabic writings. In a similar vein, many descriptions of the Hagia Sophia during the same period inform readers about "specific historical periods arranged in a developmental sequence", in particular, a list of political rulers who modified the structure of the Hagia Sophia and of important landmarks in the history of the Hagia Sophia.

Many Ottoman literary journals and newspapers featured photos of the Hagia Sophia, ultimately contributing to the monumentalization of the building. The *Şehbal* journal included photos of the Hagia Sophia under the heading "*Nefayis-i Mimariyyeden Bir Bina-yı Mukaddes ve Muazzam*" [A Holy and Magnificent Building from Architectural

42 İsmail Safa, "Ayasofya", *Servet-i Fünun*, XLVII/1201 (1914), p. 72.

43 Ceren Katipoğlu, Çağla Caner-Yüksel, "Hagia Sophia 'Museum': A Humanist Project of the Turkish Republic", in *Constructing Cultural İdentity, Representing Social Power*, Cânâ Bilsel, Kim Esmark, Niyazi Kızılyürek, Ólafur Rastrick eds, Pisa 2010, pp. 205–225, sp. p. 214. The decision to convert the Hagia Sophia into a museum is also sometimes interpreted as a diplomatic maneuver that allowed Turkey to regain military control of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles in 1936. See Fatih Altaylı, "Ayasofya ve Montreux", *Habertürk*, July 25, 2020 (https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/fatih-altayli-1001/2754798-ayasofya-ve-montreux; retrived 2021-08-24).

44 İlker Aytürk, "Nationalism and Islam in Cold War Turkey, 1944–69", *Middle East Studies*, L/5 (2014), pp. 693–719, sp. p. 712.

45 M. İnanç Özekmekçi, "Türk Sağında Ayasofya İmgesi", in *Türk Sağı: Mitler, Fetişler, Düşman İmgeleri*, İnci Özkan Kerestecioğlu, Güven Gürkan Öztan eds, Istanbul 2014, pp. 283–306, sp. p. 291. Early modern works such as Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey's poem also used personification in their descriptions of the Hagia Sophia. At the same time, these works usually personified architectural elements of the Hagia Sophia, such as its arches and columns, rather than the Hagia Sophia itself. The building rarely, if ever, speaks in these works. In contrast, later writings personify the entire Hagia Sophia and sometimes make the Hagia Sophia itself speak.

46 "Ayasofya'nın Anlamı", *Diriliş*, II/1 (1966), pp. 29–31, sp. pp. 29–30.

47 *Ibidem*, p. 29.

48 Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, "Ayasofya", *Serdengeçti*, VI/17 (1952), p. 3.

49 Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Hitâbeler*, Istanbul 1994, p. 165.

50 *Ibidem*, p. 158. Although many historians identify the declaration of Tanzimat Decree in 1839 as the starting point of the empire's Westernization movement, Kısakürek suggested that this movement had been threatening the Turkish spirit since 1836.

51 Robert S. Nelson, *Hagia Sophia, 1850–1950: Holy Wisdom Modern Monument*, Chicago 2004, p. XVIII.

52 Edhem Eldem, "Kilise, Cami, Abide, Müze, Simge", *Toplumsal Tarih*, CCLIV (2015), pp. 76–85, sp. p. 85.

53 *Ibidem*, p. 76.

54 This monumentalization of the building is also tied to the rise of the discourse of antiquities and archaeology during the same period. As Zeynep Çelik has demonstrated, late Ottoman intellectuals considered the construction of museums and the collection of antiquities as important markers of civilization and modernity. See Zeynep Çelik, *About Antiquities: Politics of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire*, Austin 2016.

55 Edmondo de Amicis, *Constantinople*, Maria Hornor Lansdale trans., Philadelphia 1896, 2 vols, 1, pp. 249–250; *idem*, *Costantinopoli*, Milan 1883, p. 238.

56 Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, Durham, NC 2007, p. 124.



9/ Photos of the Hagia Sophia from the *Şehbal* journal, 1909

Wonders] [Fig. 9][57]. Furthermore, just a few pages above, the same journal featured photos of the Alhambra in Spain, which are listed under the heading in French "*Les débris d'une civilisation disparue*" [The Debris of a Civilization that Disappeared] and in Turkish, "*Bir Medeniyet-i Münkarizenin Enkazından*" [From the Debris of a Civilization that Disappeared][58]. These photos of the Alhambra served a dual function. First, they suggested that buildings like the Alhambra and the Hagia Sophia are symbols of a *civilization*, which is a term that attained popularity during the nineteenth century. Second, they demonstrated that all buildings, including the Hagia Sophia, can fall into ruins and that the anxiety felt among Muslims that the Hagia Sophia may become Christian was valid. Likewise, an article in the *Servet-i Fünun* journal listed the different Byzantine emperors who restored the Hagia Sophia after each natural disaster. The article then discussed the conversion of the building into a mosque when Sultan Mehmed II conquered Istanbul and provided exact measurements, such as the height of the Hagia Sophia and the height of its dome. It also gave a list of the Ottoman sultans who ordered some restorations. The article included several photos of the Hagia Sophia that display both the interior and exterior of the mosque [Fig. 10][59].

The addition of a footnote in the description of the Hagia Sophia in a nineteenth-century edition of the seventeenth-century Ottoman travelogue *Seyahatname* by Evliya Çelebi (1611–ca 1682) reveals further insights into the monumentalization of the building. Evliya Çelebi, like early modern Ottoman poets such as Tacizade Cafer Çelebi, described the Hagia Sophia as a wonder of nature. For example, he compared the dome of the Hagia Sophia with the dome of the sky, noting that the world has never seen a dome greater than that of the Hagia Sophia[60]. Nevertheless, a footnote in a nineteenth-century edition reveals a stark distinction between the reincarnation of the Hagia Sophia as a wonder in Evliya Çelebi's work and as a monument in the nineteenth century. The footnote starts with the following paragraph:

> "The Hagia Sophia was initially constructed from wood in 325 by the Great Constantine, who was the

first among Roman emperors who converted to Christianity. It was not constructed for the sake of a great Christian saint. It was named as Hagia Sophia, as the term 'Hagia Sophia' means 'divine wisdom'. The building was expanded by the skill of Constans. But in 404 during the reign of Arcadius, a part of it was burned and then it was rebuilt in 415; however, it completely burned in 532 between the thirteenth and twentieth days of January"[61].

The footnote continues with a discussion of Justinian I, who built the current building of the Hagia Sophia, and the numerous Ottoman sultans, such as Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–1595), and Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623–1640), who made further modifications to the building. This paragraph situates the Hagia Sophia within a temporal sequence of historical events. Historical accuracy is prioritized; for example, the author emphasized that the building burned "between the thirteenth and twentieth days of January". These lines do not convey a sense of the transcendental experience that one can feel inside the Hagia Sophia; rather, they describe the succession of rulers who changed the Hagia Sophia, as the building came to be (re)used as a point of departure for producing a history of world civilizations.

Concluding remarks

Similarities between the descriptions of the Hagia Sophia by Paul the Silentiary and by Tacizade Cafer Çelebi reveal the need for more scholarship that studies the Byzantine and Ottoman phases of the building together. Furthermore, the reincarnations of the Hagia Sophia as a mosque or as a museum in history do not neatly correspond with its diverse reincarnations in literature. In the history of world literature, the reincarnation of the Hagia Sophia as a Muslim person occurred well after it had been turned into a mosque in 1453, just as it became monumentalized well before it



10/ Photos of the Hagia Sophia from the *Servet-i Fünun* journal, 1914

57 "Nefayis-i Mimariyyeden Bir Bina-yı Mukaddes ve Muazzam", *Şehbal*, I/11 (1909), pp. 217–218.

58 "Bir Bedia-i Şark", *Şehbal*, I/11 (1909), pp. 214–215.

59 "Ayasofya", *Servet-i Fünun*, XLVII/1201 (1914), p. 73.

60 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, vol. 1, Ahmed Cevdet ed., Istanbul AH 1314, p. 124. For the ekphrasis of the Hagia Sophia in *Seyahatname*, see Nilay Kaya, "Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâme'sinde Ayasofya Camii ve Ekfrastik Yaklaşım", *Milli Folklor*, XXVIII/110 (2016), pp. 114–120.

61 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname* (n. 60), pp. 125–126.

became a museum in 1934. This history constitutes an alternative to the mainstream history of the Hagia Sophia, which has usually considered its official conversions to a mosque and a museum as the sole turning points, which resulted in scholars studying its Byzantine, Ottoman, and Turkish periods separately.

The recent 2020 decree that reclassified the Hagia Sophia as a mosque is strongly tied to a late Ottoman literary tradition that, concurrent with the rise of Islamism and Western imperialism, started to portray the Hagia Sophia as a Muslim person. Furthermore, early Ottoman writings depicted the Hagia Sophia in ways that evoked its Byzantine heritage, while late Ottoman and modern Turkish writings often did not. Key political transformations caused the Hagia Sophia to be reused as a mosque both in 1453 and in 2020; however, the building's textual reincarnations reveal that the same political reuse of a building does not give rise to the same reception of it. The defining points in a building's biography do not have to be only the moments in which it was reused for a new purpose due to various political reasons. A new textual reincarnation of the building can mark the beginning of an important phase in that building's biography. Therefore, textual reincarnations of a building can be studied in conjunction with its reincarnations as a spolium to generate a more complex biography of the building. Art historians do not have to use textual sources solely as supplements that reinforce their understanding of a building's history; these sources can help them to reassess its history as well.

Spolia a textové reinkarnace
Přehodnocení dějin
chrámu Hagia Sofia

Autor textu se zamýšlí nad studiem spolií jako mostem mezi disciplínou komparativní literatury a dějinami umění. Na rozdíl od dřívějších vědeckých prací, které hledaly analogie mezi citacemi a spolii nebo překlady a spolii, autor hledá průsečíky mezi dvěma zmíněnými disciplínami skrze literární popisy staveb. Užívá přitom dva koncepty relevantní pro studium spolií – *reinkarnace* a *posmrtný život* – aby ukázal, že formy, kterých stavba nabývá v literárních popisech, mohou být považovány za její *textové reinkarnace*. Tato úvaha se zakládá na metodách komparativní literatury, která používá termín *posmrtný život* pro překlady a recepci textů v nových souvislostech. Článek demonstruje, že textové reinkarnace stavby mohou poskytnout klíčový vhled do její recepce v nových kontextech, a to navzdory tomu, že nemají přímou souvislost s její původní architektonickou strukturou. Jako případovou studii si autor vybral popisy chrámu Hagia Sofia v Konstantinopoli/Istanbulu v literárních dílech Paula Silentiaria († 575–580), Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey († 1582) a Edmonda de Amicis (1846–1908). Autor článku ilustruje, že Hagia Sophia je v literárních textech různých kultur a historických období *reinkarnována* do podoby moře, člověka i monumentu a že všechny tyto reinkarnace souvisejí s důležitými dějinnými zlomy, jako je například západní imperialismus, vzestup islámu nebo rozšíření fotografie a knihtisku. Autor se také domnívá, že historici umění nemusí používat literární zdroje jenom jako doplňující materiál pro lepší pochopení dějin stavby, ale také jako zdroj informací pro přehodnocení samotných dějin stavby. V dějinách světové literatury je Hagia Sophia popisována jako postava muslima až dlouho poté, co byla v roce 1453 plně přestavěna na mešitu, zatímco jako monument je líčena ještě před tím, než se stala muzeem v roce 1934. Tato historie představuje alternativu k mainstreamovým interpretacím dějin chrámu Hagia Sophia, které obvykle považují její opětovné užití jako mešity nebo muzea za jediné zlomové body. Důsledkem toho je, že byzantské, otomanské a turecké období bývají studovány odděleně. Pro komplexní porozumění dějin chrámu Hagia Sophia však mohou být její textové *reinkarnace* zkoumány také v souvislosti s jejími *reinkarnacemi* jako spolia.