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‘Of the Relics that We Estimated to Have No Worth’ (*Bizce Hiçbir Kıymeti Olmadığı Anlaşılan Eşyanın*): Disputes over a Church Property in the Early Republican Period, 1922–1945¹

Abstract

The end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Kemalist nation-state were political changes that not only affected the lives of millions of individuals, but also heralded a total demographic and physical reconstitution and transformation of the cities and towns in Asia Minor. The port city of Smyrna/Izmir was undoubtedly one of the Ottoman cities that was devastated by this irrevocable physical, political, and social change. This study attempts to shed light on the history of a church building whose congregation had been compelled to migrate to Greece in September 1922, in the early Republican period.

Agios Ioannis o Theologos (Saint John the Theologian), one of the complete churches located in the Upper Neighbourhood, was sequestered by the Commission of the Abandoned Properties (*Emvâl-i Metrûke Komisyonu*) immediately after the Great Fire of 1922. This paper situates the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos at the nexus of the Abandoned Properties measures and re-territorialisation in the early Republican period. Firstly, a decision was made to destroy the bell tower of the church and convert the remaining building into a school at the end of a lengthy series of correspondence between the ministries and the municipality in 1926. Secondly, its relics, church furniture, and icons were forgotten until the late 1930s. Finally, following two cabinet decisions and lengthy bureaucratic procedures, these relics were transported to Athens in 1945. This paper argues that various institutions of the Republic adopted different strategies to deal with the properties of Ottoman Christian communities after the population exchange in 1923, though the state retained its pragmatic approach towards these remaining properties.

Keywords: early Republican period, Smyrna/Izmir, abandoned properties (*Emvâl-i Metrûke*), Greek Orthodox (*Rum*)

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1. Introduction

On a stormy winter night in 1945, almost a dozen people, waiting for the Greek steamship *Agia Zoni*, hurriedly gathered on the quayside of Izmir (Smyrna). After loading the cargo, Eustathios Chalikiopoulos, a doctor, watched the departure of the ship with unrestrained affection, until it disappeared at *Exokastro*, the outer citadel closest to the entrance of the gulf. This ship was carrying thirty-eight boxes laden with beautiful pieces of carved wood, together with animals. Five years earlier, these wooden carvings had been dismantled from the Church of Agios Ioannis o Theologos (Saint John the Theologian) by Muslim Cretan carpenters and two civil servants from the Greek Consulate-General in Izmir, Mitsos Bastas and Alvanos (Albanian) Daipis. The dismantling process was supervised by Ioannis Gropetis, a remaining Greek Orthodox priest in the city; Eustathios Chalikiopoulos, deputy to the Greek consul in Izmir from January 1940 to 1956; and Michael Sotiriadis, Secretary of the Consulate. The carvings had been stored for some time in the house of Mastrantoni Teneketzis, in Aliotti Boulevard. He was an Italian Catholic plumber, who was married to a Greek Orthodox woman, Kokona Elenitsa.²

This paper, a by-product of the ‘Former Smyrna Churches’ project,³ takes the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos in *Apano Mahala* (Upper Neighbourhood) as an example of how to understand how the properties of Christian communities were liquidated and used by the Turkish authorities in the early Republican period (see Figure 1). After presenting the historical background for this church and its neighbourhood, it discusses the conversion of this church into a school building following the population exchange.

Rachel Finnegan; they have all made suggestions which directly improved this article. All translations of French, Greek, and Ottoman Turkish texts have been made by the author. Needless to say, all mistakes are the responsibility of the author.

2 Vatidou 1965, 148.

3 Between 2009 and 2011, a small but dedicated group attempted to catalogue former churches of Ottoman Smyrna of all denominations, including finding and photographing their relics where they exist, for the Levantine Heritage Foundation. Using a pre-1922 aerial photo from the *Pyrros* encyclopaedia in Greek, postcards, different maps of Smyrna, documents from the Ottoman and Republican Period branches of the State Archives, and memoirs of Smyrniots, we succeeded in matching former churches with locations or, in some fortunate cases, extant buildings. At the end of the project, we brought out a detailed inventory of the former and existing Smyrna churches. This inventory is available online at <http://www.levantineheritage.com/data10.htm> (*Levantine Heritage. The Story of a Community*).

Figure 1: Map of pre-1922 Smyrna neighbourhood and boundaries of fire zone – reformulated version of Baedeker Map (1905) (image courtesy: George Poulimenos). Circle 53 is the exact location of the Agios Ioannis Theologos Church at Apano Mahala.

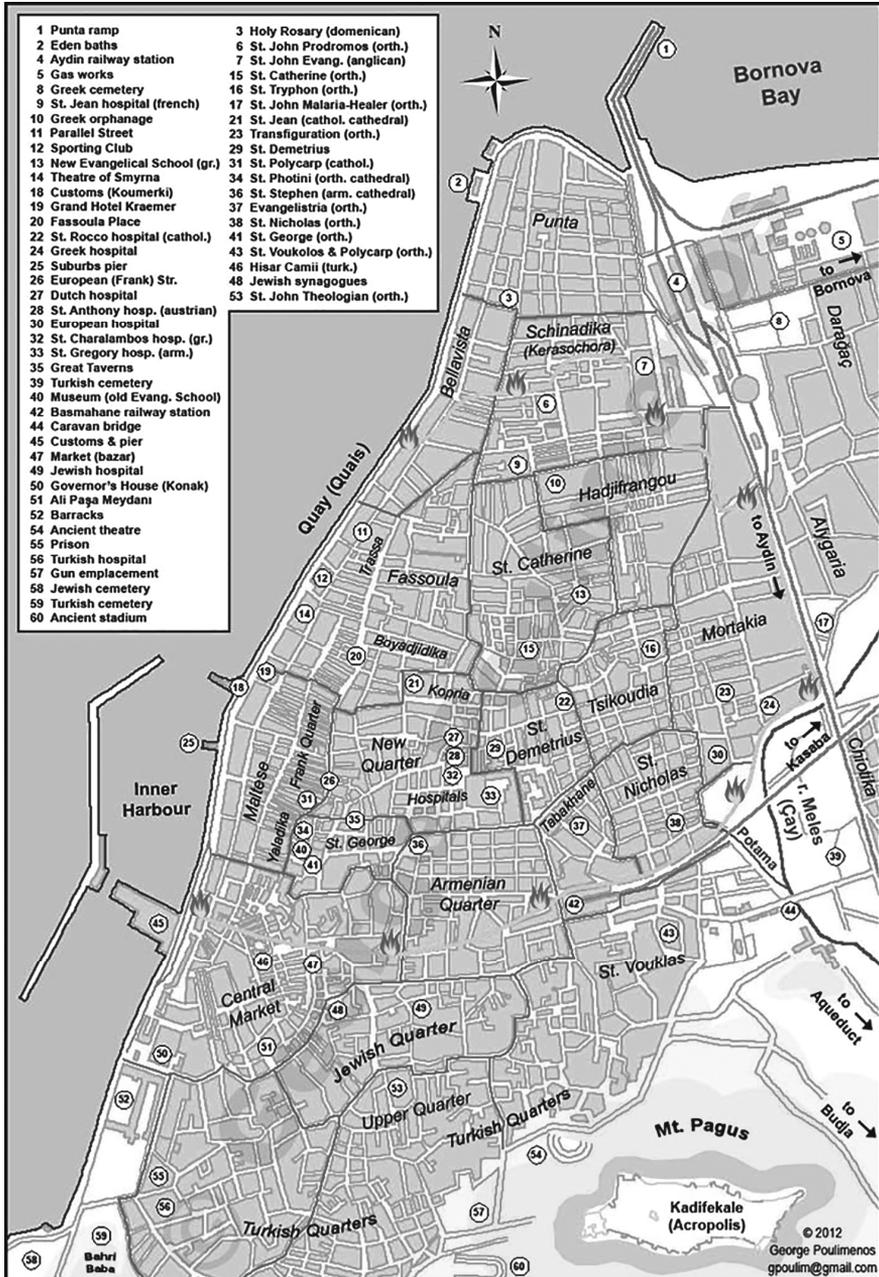


Figure 2: General view of *Apano Mahala* (Upper Neighbourhood) of Smyrna – a poor neighbourhood (source: Levantine Heritage Foundation)



2. *Apano Mahala* (Upper Neighbourhood): A Poor Neighbourhood in Ottoman Smyrna

At the start of the twentieth century, Smyrna was the capital of the Aydın province and the most prosperous and populous city in the Ottoman Empire, after Constantinople. According to the projected census in 1914, approximately 211,000 people lived in the city, of whom 100,000 were Muslims, 74,000 were Greek Orthodox, 24,000 were Jews, and 10,000 were Armenians.⁴ However, these figures did not include the Orthodox Greeks of Hellenic nationality and European nationals, known as the Levantines, who were permanently settled in the port-cities of the Empire.

In this study, I revisit a poor, inland neighbourhood in Ottoman Smyrna known by the locals as *Apano Mahala* (Upper Neighbourhood). It was a place whose narrow roads were paved with cobblestones, and where time was measured in many different calendars; and a location where Muslims, Greek Orthodox, Jews, and Roma lived together in relative harmony (see Figure 2). The Upper Neighbourhood, or *Apano Mahala* in Greek, had been home to poor Smyrniots, regardless of religion, since the eighteenth century. The humble buildings of this neighbourhood were in stark contrast with the busiest part of the city, the port with a quay known as *Les Quais* or *Prokymaia*, built in the nineteenth century. The *Apano Mahala* extended to the old city, close to the south-eastern part of the central market area on the outskirts of Mount Pagus (*Kadifekale*), and bordered on the Jewish, Armenian, and *Agios Voukolos* neighbourhoods.⁵

4 Karpát 1985, 174.

5 Yiannakopoulos 2004, 70–74.

Before the construction of the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos, a chapel had served as a small pilgrimage centre (*mikro proskynēma*) in this neighbourhood since the beginning of the seventeenth century. However, this chapel was burned in 1773, and an initiative to build a new church was undertaken locally by Anthimos, who was elected the metropolitan bishop of Smyrna in May 1797. In 1804, the church was completed. An inscription engraved on a stone at the main entrance door commemorates the contributors to the building:

This blessed church, which was dedicated to the Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian – as written previously – was built by the Christians here through using cheap materials in a humble manner. But with the passage of time, many parts of it were damaged, and it even faced the risk of a complete collapse. That’s why now – with the help of God – it was rebuilt from the ground as a stronger and more beautiful [church]. As it is already evident on the second day of May 1804, all was done with the attention of venerable and Christophile Messrs. Dimitrios and Panagiotis Mourouzis; Anthimos, the Reverend Metropolitan of Smyrna, who is from Naxos; and with the financial support of the pious Orthodox Christians, who live not only in this city but also elsewhere. May their names be written in the Book of Life with the admitted intercession of the Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, patron and protector of our city.⁶

Lady Martha Nicol, a volunteer for the British Hospital at Smyrna, visited the city in 1855 during the final stages of the Crimean War. In her account, she described the court, which was almost completely occupied by graves, and the interior of the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos ‘on the confines of the Jewish quarter’⁷:

The church of St. John is of some antiquity and is remarkable for a most beautiful oak screen, which has two or three tiers of carving, one behind the other, as is seen in Chinese specimens; this is carved all in one piece of wood, not as in some imitations, where the under part is first done, and the outer stuck on with glue afterwards. It is certainly a most magnificent piece of carving, and so is the pulpit which is done in the same manner. In the screen, at regular intervals, are pictures

6 Its interesting inscription, written in late-eighteenth-century Greek, stated: ‘† Ο θειος αυτος και πανεπτος ναος του αγιου endoxou Apostolou kai Euangelistou Ιωαννου του Theologou proteron men ὄs etyche litōs kai eutelōs oikodomētheis ypo tōn entautha eusevōn christianōn sathrōtheis de es akron kai diaphthareis tois pleistois meresi tē tou chronou phora kai ptōssin epapeilōn tēn eschatēn tanēn authis to deuteron theiō eleei knēgerthē ek vathrōn ὄs ēdē oratai epi to kreitton kai makrō veltion kata to aōd-(1804) sōtērion etos Maiou v-tē mesiteia tōn eklamprotatōn kai philochristōn beizadedōn kyriou Dēmētriou kai Panagiōtou Mourouzidōn archierateuontos tou panierōtatau kai sevasmiōtatau Mētropolitou Smyrnēs, kyriou Anthimou tou ek tēs nēsiou Naxou syndromē de kai philotimō dapanē en tē polei tautē kai loipōn eterōn eusevōn kai orthodoxōn christianōn ὄs ta onomata katagraphei en vivliō zōēs tais paneuprosdektōis pros theon presveiais tou autou agiou endoxou kai paneuphēmou Apostolou kai Euangelistou Ιωαννου του Theologou poliouchou kai prostatou tēs de tēs poleōs 1804.’; Lampakis 2009, 214.

7 Nicol 1856, 20.

Figure 3: Bell tower of the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos (source: Orlando Carlo Calu-meno collection)



with halos of silver round their heads, and which are about the least ugly of the pre-Raphaelite school I have seen, under each of these is a small duplicate for the people to kiss.⁸

At the turn of the twentieth century, this church continued to be a place of pilgrimage. Its buildings were renovated and enlarged, and the ritual of this small pilgrimage was formalised within the Greek Orthodox community (see Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5). On 23 February, this church used to be visited by local Christians as well as Muslims as part of the name-day celebrations of Saint Polycarp, one of the patron saints of Smyrna. The procession of the Greek Orthodox community, which started from the lower part of the town, continued to this church at *Apano Mabala*. After attending a divine service at the church, the Smyrniot Christians would climb to the ancient stadium at the top of Mount Pagus, the place at which, according to the Orthodox tradition, Polycarp was martyred.⁹

8 Nicol 1856, 21–22.

9 Anestides 2004, 118. Kosmas Politis, an Athenian-born author who lived in Ottoman Smyrna from 1905 until the Asia Minor Catastrophe in September 1922, also depicts the procession to Mount Pagus in his novel narrating the early twentieth-century Smyrna, *Stou Chatzephrankou*. He describes how the primary school students passed from the Church and School of Agios Ioannis in *Apano Mabala* (Politis 2002, 50).

Figure 4: Interior of the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos (source: Historical & Photographic Archives, Byzantine & Christian Museum in Athens, XAE 6002)



Figure 5: Exterior of the church, showing the rear gate of the churchyard (source: Historical & Photographic Archives, Byzantine & Christian Museum in Athens, XAE 6232)



3. *İstirdât* (Liberation): Arrival of the Nationalist Army in Smyrna

The victory of the Kemalist army in September 1922 constituted one of the last episodes of the disintegration of Ottoman society. Smyrna was burned down, and the Ottoman Christian communities in Asia Minor were exposed to a series of systematic massacres and compelled to leave their hometowns. The Christian communities, who had formed at least 36 percent of the population of the Aegean metropolis in the pre-war period, diminished to 1 percent in 1927. Only 548 Orthodox Christians and 19 Armenians remained in the city.¹⁰ No Ottoman city experienced a population change and transformation as drastic as that of Smyrna, the capital of the Aydın province.

As a result of the Great Fire of 1922, Izmir lost virtually all its connections with its Christian past. A great number of the Ottoman Christians had already fled to Greece during the violent events and the Great Fire in September; however, the properties of the Christian communities were a matter of concern for the local Kemalist authorities. Therefore, the systematic destruction and definite deconsecration of the Orthodox and Armenian churches continued in the winter of 1922–23, until the Convention of the Population Exchange had been signed. Even the properties of the other Orthodox churches, which were not under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and were protected by the British soldiers in the city, were also plundered or confiscated. For example, the properties of the Mount Sinai Monastery in Smyrna were also sequestered by the nationalist government. Among these properties, which the monastery lost, were commercial buildings, such as the *Passage Sinaite*, located in the *Rue des Verreries*; a hotel at the quay; and two depots located in the *Rue Parallèle* and Halim Aga Market.¹¹

This campaign of destruction was followed by attacks on other Christian cemeteries and churches, which belonged mostly to the local Levantine populations in the city. The Dutch cemetery, located in downtown Izmir, was violated by local groups, and all the tombstones in the Anglican cemetery at Bornova were smashed and overturned.¹² Furthermore, the disused half of the Anglican cemetery was expropriated by local authorities overnight in Bornova, on the pretext of road building.

4. After the Catastrophe: Remnants of a Cosmopolitan Port City

After the catastrophe, a group of church buildings continued to stand, owing to their location outside the fire zone. The Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos, one such

10 *1927 Umumî Nüfus Tabiriri*, 76. Most of them were either married to Levantine Catholics or foreign-passport holders so that they were exempted from the population exchange.

11 TNA, FO. 286/908, from Tewfik Rifaat, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Egypt, to Allenby, High Commissioner for Egypt, 20 December 1923.

12 TNA, FO. 141/ 580/1, from Vice-Consul H. W. Urquhart to Sir Horace Rumbold, 13 October 1922.

building located in the *Apano Mabala*, was confiscated by the Commission of the Abandoned Properties (*Emvâl-i Metruke Komisyonu*) immediately after the fire. What was the approach of the Republican authorities to the undamaged churches and monasteries left by the Ottoman Christian communities in the post-fire period? What did these buildings mean to them?

Even before the victory of the nationalist forces in Asia Minor, the properties of non-Muslim communities became one of the hotly debated issues in the Grand National Assembly in Ankara. On 20 April 1922, the National Assembly introduced the 'Law on the Administration of Movable and Immovable Properties Belonging to Those Who Escaped or Were Absent in the Liberated Provinces' (*Memâlik-i Müstablasadan Firar ve Gaybûbet Eden Abâlinin Emvâl-i Menkule ve Gayrimenkullerinin İdâresi Hakkında Kanun*).¹³ However, this law was abrogated in April 1923 and the Liquidation Law (*Tasfiye Kanunu*) of 1915 was implemented again. According to the 19th article of a new regulation, dated 29 April 1923, the relics, furniture, and books in the church buildings would be deposited and preserved with great care, and the school buildings of the Christian communities would be turned over to the Provincial Administration for Schools (*Maârif İdâresi*).¹⁴

In the first two years of the population exchange, individuals, ministries, and other institutions of the new Republic had difficult and endless disagreements over the properties of non-Muslim people and communities. One of the most striking cases of such a disagreement came about in Karşıyaka, the northern suburb of Izmir, in 1925. When the great estate of the Omiros family,¹⁵ which extended over 83,000 square metres, was divided between the Ministry of Education and the municipality, the Ministry of Public Works (*İmâr Vekâleti*) objected. It requested all the details about this property in two different instructions addressed to the Fourth Directorate of Housing and Public Works in Izmir (*Izmir Dördüncü İşkân ve İmâr Muntakası Müdürlüğü*) and the Ministry of Education, on 25 June 1924:

In order to fulfil the necessary conditions, above-mentioned building was later attached to the school garden. The required measures will be determined later. When and how were the building and the garden allocated to the school? Was it built as a school previously or did it belong to the recognised parties? Who is the owner? How many acres of land will be turned into the park? That part is an additional component of the aforementioned building, isn't it? It is requested to investigate these issues and to report the results of the investigation, sir.¹⁶

13 TBMM 1959, 335–336.

14 Onaran 2013, 181.

15 Regarding the Omiros family see Kararas 1971, 53–57.

16 'İcâbına bakılmak üzere mezkûr binâ' hâlen mekteb muahharen bağçesi tahmînen târih-i mezkûrdir. İfâsı ricâ olunur efendim. Bu bâbta ve icâb eden muamele bil'âhire ta'yîn edilmek üzere evvel-emirde mevzû-i bahs binâ' ve bağçe ne zaman ve ne sûretle mektebe tahsîs edilmiştir? Mukaddemen mektep olarak mı inşâ' edilmiştir yoksa eşhâs-ı âdiyyeye mi âittir ve sâhibi kimdir? Park haline konulmak istenilen arsa kaç dönümdür? Mezkûr

In its reply dated 15 December, the Directorate stated that the garden and the building were one of the ‘abandoned properties and belonged to Omiros, who was a member of the *Rum millet* and a missing person’.¹⁷ Besides, the Directorate underlined that the lands allocated to the school formed only one half of the property (45 *dönüm*), the other half being occupied by the military. The mayor of Karşıyaka also appropriated one of two villas in this estate. In another letter, the Ministry of Education objected to the idea of making a park that would be very close to the school and would cause difficulties for education ‘because of roaming people’.¹⁸ Thus, the Ministry asked the prime minister for the garden to be allocated to the school and did not allow the property to be shared with the mayor.

The Liquidation Commissions (*Tasfiye Komisyonları*) had a vital importance in the registration, confiscation, and distribution processes of the abandoned properties. Even after they were abolished, their authority was transferred to the Allocation Commissions (*Tefviz Komisyonları*) that were established in order to allocate the properties to the migrants in the urban and rural settlements.¹⁹ On 6 August 1925, a prominent member of the Allocation Commission in Izmir sent a confidential report to the government, concerning the redistribution of the abandoned properties of Ottoman Greek and Armenian individuals and communities. The report stated that ‘the current status of the buildings and lands recorded in the inventories listing the Ottoman Greek and Armenian abandoned properties that were previously recorded by the Liquidation Commissions and the identities of the people who already occupied these properties in the period of the martial law were unknown’²⁰ and proposed a precautionary list of 12 articles. The first article of this report underlined that ‘based on the existing inventories, the *kaza* of Izmir should be divided into five units in order to determine the changes in the ownership of some 10,000 houses and of the covered buildings as well as the same number of olive orchards, vineyards, and gardens’.²¹ The third article was related to the registration of the abandoned properties of the Ottoman Greeks, in particular, and suggested that civil servants should record the

binânın müstemelâtından mıdır, değil midir? Bu cihetlerin tatlik ve iş’ârı temennî olunur efendim.’; CA, Toprak İskan Genel Müdürlüğü (Muhacirin Fonu), İskan, 19-96-28.

17 ‘[...] emvâl-i metrukeye âid binânın eşhâs-ı mütegayyibeden ve Rum milletinden Omiru nâm zâta âid olub [...]’; CA, İskan, 19-96-28..

18 ‘[...] serbestçe girip-çıkan nâs-ı umûm[a ...]’; CA, İskan, 19-96-28.

19 Morack 2017, 252–253.

20 ‘Tasfiye Komisyonları zamanında tespit edilen Rum ve Ermeni emvâl-i metrukesini muhtevi olup, Emlâk-ı Millîyye idâresi tarafından verilmiş defterlerde muahhar müsakkafât ve arâzinin hâl-i hazır vaz’iyyeti hakkında vukuât defterleri tutulmamış ve ta’kibât icrâ’ edilmemiş olduğu cihetle bugün ne vaz’iyyette buldukları ve kimler tarafından ne sûretle meşgul oldukları birçok avâmil taht-ı te’sirinde meçhul kalmıştır.’; CA, Toprak İskan Genel Müdürlüğü (Muhacirin Fonu), Emval-i Metruke, 2-14-1.

21 ‘Elde mevcûd olan tespit defterleri esâs tutularak İzmir kazası dâhilinde mevcûd olan on bin küsur parça mesâkin ve müsakkafâtın ve bir o kadar kıta arâzî zeytinlik, bağ ve bağçelerle kat’î vaz’iyyetlerini ve bugüne kadar ne gibi tahavvûlât ve tebeddülâta uğradıklarını esâslı bir tarzda bir müddet-i kalîle zarfında tespit ve netice-i matlube istihsâl

Figure 6: Present condition of the courtyard (photo courtesy of the author, taken in 2016)



new information they obtained in the inventories containing the properties of the Ottoman Greeks within their area, and should give a fixed sequence number on a stone or tree close to each building.²²

A cabinet decision, dated 18 March 1925, stipulated that the schools, houses of worship, and charity institutions of the non-Muslim communities, already appropriated due to the Law for the Abandoned Properties (*Emvâl-i Metruke Kanunu*), were allotted to the Special (Provincial) Administration (*Husûsî İdâre*).²³ On 29 December 1925, the General Directorate of Transactions (*Muamelât Genel Müdürlüğü*) declared that a group of properties, abandoned by Ottoman Greeks and Armenians, and at the time serving as schools, would be transferred to the Special Administration. According to this declaration, the ownership of the buildings and the site of the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos was transferred to the Special Administration, though a primary school was established in its grounds in 1926.²⁴ The school was named *İsmetpaşa Okulu*, and the church's bell was dismantled and moved to the archaeological museum (see Figure 6, Figure 7, and Figure 8).

It was no coincidence that this new school was named after İsmet (İnönü) Pasha, the Republic's first prime minister. As rightly pointed out by Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, the names of city streets and public buildings are a specific text of national narration: a place in which the structures of the ruling ideology coincide with the practices of everyday life.²⁵ The names of public buildings, mainly schools and hospi-

edebilmek için İzmir kazası nevahi hariç olduğu halde beş mıntıkaya ayrılmalı'; CA, Toprak İskan Genel Müdürlüğü (Muhacirin Fonu), Emval-i Metruke, 2-14-1.

22 CA, Toprak İskan Genel Müdürlüğü (Muhacirin Fonu), Emval-i Metruke, 2-14-1.

23 CA, Başbakanlık, Kararlar Daire Başkanlığı (1920–1928), 13-16-20.

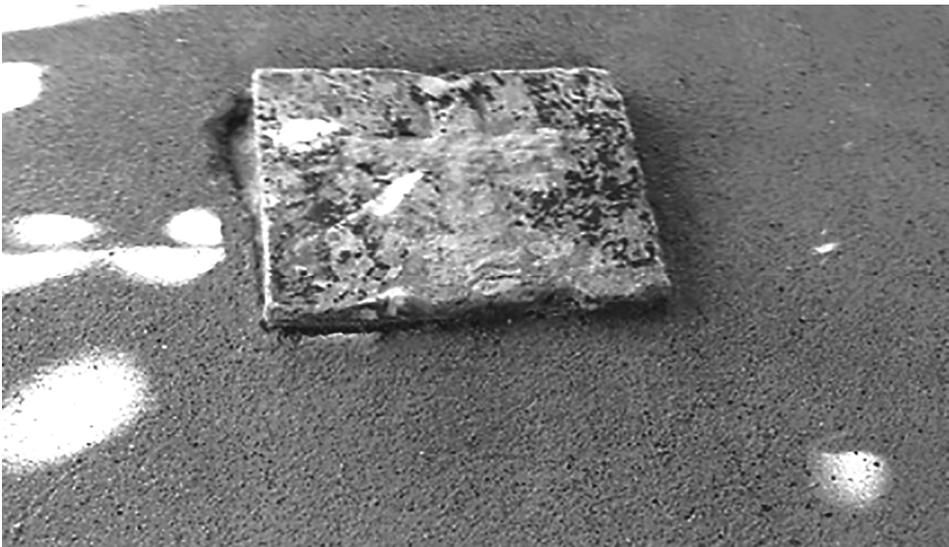
24 CA, Başbakanlık, Başbakanlık Özel Kalem Müdürlüğü, 140-2-2.

25 Rihtman-Auguštin 2004, 180.

Figure 7: Present condition of the church – a depot (photo courtesy of the author, 2016)



Figure 8: Damaged cross-shaped ornament on the wall (photo courtesy of the author, 2016)



tals, or, more precisely, the plates on which these names are written, are one more form of concretising history. The names of schools, together with the busts, memorial plaques, and flagpoles, contribute to the semiotic presence of the ruling ideology because they give buildings a particular symbolic content. In the case of this renaming process, İsmet Pasha was the harbinger of the victory of the Turkish nationalist ideology over the Christian communal presence in the new Republic. However, the story of the church did not end with the renaming and conversion.

5. The Greek-Turkish Rapprochement of the Interwar Period and the Remaining Orthodox Community in Izmir

Because of the expanding Italian threat in the Mediterranean Sea at the onset of the 1930s, a process of rapprochement started between Athens and Ankara. This rapprochement process culminated during the visit of the Greek Prime Minister Venizelos to Turkey between 27 October and 1 November 1930.²⁶ Three different agreements were signed during this visit:

- 1) The Pact of Friendship, Neutrality, Conciliation, and Judicial Settlement (*Dostluk, Tarafsızlık, Uzlaşma ve Hakemlik Antlaşması*)
- 2) The Protocol on the Limitations of Naval Armaments (*Deniz Kuvvetlerinin Sınırlandırılmasına İlişkin Protokol*)
- 3) The Convention of Settlement, Commerce, and Navigation (*İkamet, Ticaret ve Seyrisefain Mukavelesnamesi*)

The third agreement, which provided that citizens of two countries could enter, reside in, and settle in the respective territories without limitations other than those existing for native citizens, was crucially important and guaranteed the legal status for the remaining Greek nationals in Turkey. Although this convention permitted only the individual settlements of people and enterprises, and effectively precluded the return of the Anatolian Greek refugees, Venizelos hoped that a large proportion of the refugees would be able to return to Asia Minor. After the signing of this agreement, a number of unemployed Greeks settled in Turkey, especially in Istanbul. The second urban centre attracting Greek migrants was Izmir. Despite the fact that the ‘Law Reserving Certain Professions, Trades, and Services to Turkish Citizens’ (*Türk Vatandaşlarına Tabisi Edilen Sanat ve Hizmetler Hakkında Kanun*) banned non-Turkish nationals from practising certain professions in June 1932,²⁷ the number of Greek nationals who settled in Izmir increased from 500 to nearly 680 in 1935. Nikos Kararas mentioned in his memoirs the return of a limited number of former refugees to Bornova, a suburb of Izmir:

After the Catastrophe, when the first wave of the storm had passed, Giorgos Tzavelopoulos, the former owner of a great landed estate, returned and settled in Bornova with his wife Valeia and their children Aimilios and Popi. So did Angeliki and Sophia, the two adult daughters of G. Viketos, another rich landowner, as well as Eleni Pappou (Valtatzis). They could not live elsewhere. They returned, like foreigners, to the land where they were born, to live there in poverty with sadness as their only companion, in place of their lost happiness.²⁸

26 Stefanidis 2006, 222. The preponderance of the Anatolian Greek refugees in electoral districts of Macedonia and Thrace, as well as in major cities, such as Athens and Thessaloniki, rendered their vote a valuable political asset for Venizelos.

27 Aktar 2009, 44–45.

28 ‘Meta tēn Katastrofē kai afou perase ē prōtē ormē tēs kataigidas, egyrisan kai katoikēsan pali ston Bournova o allote megalēs ekei ktēmatikēs periousias katochos, Giōrgos

Apart from those Greek nationals, nearly 640 Orthodox Christians of Turkish nationality, who had been exempted from the Population Exchange of 1923 because of their marriages to Levantines, were living in the city in 1935.²⁹ A French consular report, dated 23 March 1947, described the socio-economic status of this dwindling Greek minority shrunk into a shadow of its splendid pre-1922 years:

Until the Great War, the Greeks constituted the most active minority element in the Aegean Region. Before 1922, the minority was composed of 400,000 people, and 200,000 of them [were living] in Izmir. They owned small and large businesses, as well as large farms and many schools. The Greek colony of Izmir has now been reduced to 400 people, most of them working in small jobs (workers, servants, housekeepers). There is no Greek institution in Izmir.

Greece has a Consulate-General in Izmir that has been run by a vice-consul since August 1946. The consular staff also includes a chancellor and a chaplain.³⁰

Indeed, Archimandrite Ioannis Gropetis was ordained to the chapel in the building of the Greek Consulate-General in Izmir, in the friendly political atmosphere of the 1930s, for the needs of this tiny Orthodox community.³¹ Gropetis easily became one of the most important figures among the Christian communities in Izmir. He opened the doors of the chapel at the Greek consulate to all the Orthodox residents of the city, including Greek and Yugoslav nationals, merchants, sailors, and consular officers, as well as a number of local Orthodox residing in the city.³² Following the out-

Tzavelopoulos, me tē gynaike tou Valeia kai ta paidia tōn Aimilio kai Popē, oi dyo megalokopelles kores tou episēs plousiou prin ktēmatia G. Viketou, ē Angelikē kai ē Sofia, kathōs kai ē Elenē tou Pappou (Valtatzē). Den borousan na zēsoun allou. Pēgan, san xenoi pia, ston topo pou gennēthēkan, na zēsoun ekei ftōchika me syntrofia ton pono pou pēre tē thesē tēs chamenēs tōn eutychieas.’; Kararas 1955, 237.

29 *Genel Nüfus Sayımı, 20 İktisrin 1935: İzmir Vilâyeti* 1936, 219–220.

30 ‘Les Grecs, constituaient jusqu’à la Grande Guerre, l’élément minoritaire de beaucoup le plus nombreux et les plus actif de la région égéenne. La circonscription comptait, en effet, avant 1922, près de 400.000 Grecs dont 200.000 à İzmir. Ils détenaient le petit et le grand commerce, ils possédaient d’importantes exploitations et de nombreuses écoles. La colonie grecque d’İzmir est aujourd’hui réduite à 400 personnes exerçant, pour la plupart, de petits emplois (ouvriers, employés, domestiques). Il n’existe plus aucune institution grecque à İzmir.

La Grèce possède à İzmir un Consulat Général qui est géré, depuis Août 1946, par un Vice-Consul. Le personnel du Consulat comporte en outre un chancelier et un aumônier.’; CADN, Izmir 643 PO/1, 18, ‘La Colonie Française – Les Colonies étrangères’, 23 March 1947.

31 Karampatis 1946, 3. Karampatis was a famous athlete, who was able to visit Smyrna/Izmir, his hometown, probably in the early 1940s, and wrote an account of his journey for *Ethnos*. Karampatis claims that Gropetis was sent to Izmir in 1932.

32 In September 1935, R. Marinković, the Yugoslav consul in the city, organised a Te Deum officiated by Gropetis to celebrate the birthday of King Peter II of Yugoslavia (CADN, Izmir 643 PO/1, 44, from R. Marinković, Yugoslav consul, to le Comte du Chaylar, French consul-general, 4 September 1935).

break of the Italo-Greek War at the end of October 1940, Gropetis approached the Anglican chaplain and became closer to the British consulate-general in the city. A week after the Greek troops defeated the Italian invasion and captured Korçë – a city in southeastern Albania – on 22 November 1940, he gave a fervent speech lasting more than an hour, in which he celebrated the Allied victories at the Anglican Church of Mary Magdalene in Bornova. He employed a very cautious tone and completed his sermons with prayers and good wishes for the Allied Powers:

May this God protect Greece, that has illuminated the world, and watch over our most pious and beloved King George II.

May this God support the glorious British nation and lead the steps of his faithful King George VI.

May this God save the Turkish people, our brothers, friends, and allies, as well as their Grand Chef National.

May God bless and crown the Allied weapons.³³

Apart from his pro-Allied activities, we know that, during his years at Izmir, Gropetis turned his attention to the remnants of the Christian past of the city. During a visit to the *İkiçeşmelik* neighbourhood, former *Apano Mahala*, at Easter 1936, Gropetis visited the former Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos, which had been transformed into the hall of a primary school. The principal of the İsmetpaşa School had decided to use the church buildings as a hall for ceremonies and shows. Its *gynaikonitis* (women's section) and some adjacent cells were inhabited by some 30 Bosnian Muslim migrant families from Yugoslavia. In the courtyard of the building, Gropetis noticed some church fittings, covered in a thick layer of dust: an iconostasis (a wooden wall of religious paintings that separates the sanctuary from the nave), an ambon (a projection coming out from the soleas), and a despotic throne (see Figure 9).³⁴

33 'Que ce Dieu protège la Grèce, qui a illuminé le monde, et veille sur notre très pieux et bien aimé Roi Georges II. / Que ce Dieu soutienne la glorieuse Nation Britannique et conduise les pas de son fidèle Roi Georges VI. / Que ce Dieu garde la noble peuple Turc, frère, ami et allié, ainsi que son Grand Chef National. / Que ce Dieu bénisse et couronne les armes alliées.' ; CADN, Izmir 643 PO/1, 43, 'Allocution– Prononcée le 1er Décembre 1940 a l'Eglise Anglicane de Ste. Marie-Madelaine a Bornova, par l'Oeconomie Georges Gropétis, Aumônier du Consulat-Général de Grèce a Smyrne'.

34 Chatzatourian 2002, 23. Although the Convention concerning the Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey signed in January 1923 allowed the communities to take their movable property with them, the members of the Orthodox community (*koinotita*) of the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos could not bring their properties to Greece, since they had already fled there during the violent events in September 1922. Article 8 of the Convention had stipulated that 'the members of each community (including the personnel of mosques, *tekkas*, *medreses*, churches, convents, schools, hospitals, societies, associations, and juridical persons, or other foundations of any nature) who are to leave the territory of one of the Contracting States under the present Convention, shall have the right to take away freely or to arrange for the transport of the movable property belonging to their

Figure 9: Iconostasis, currently held in the Church of Agia Fotini in Athens (photo courtesy of the author, 2015)



This rediscovery was an unexpected development for the Greek Consulate-General in Izmir. Following the population exchange decision of 1923, there was a wave of pillaging the buildings of Orthodox churches in Anatolia. This was instigated by local treasure hunters and financially supported by the auction houses of Europe, particularly those in Paris. The iconostases of some Orthodox churches were sold to France and Egypt, either whole or in pieces. For example, Papadopoulos, a professor of Byzantine history at the University of Athens, mentioned in his memoirs the auction of the iconostasis of the Church of Agios Nikolaos from Asia Minor for 14,000 pounds sterling in France, in 1924.³⁵ Immediately after his visit to the former *Apano Mahala*, Gropetis penned two letters: the first was to Sakellaropoulos, the Greek ambassador in Ankara, and the second was to *Enoseos Smyrnaion*, a refugee association based in Athens.³⁶

Although Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas, who was petitioned by this refugee association, had asked for these church fittings, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk delayed giving his consent to send these items to Greece. In July 1937, the issue of the church fittings was discussed in the Turkish cabinet. On 24 July 1937, the cabinet members issued a decree, endorsed by Mustafa Kemal, to send the relics to Greece:

communities.’ (‘Convention concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and Protocol, signed at Lausanne, January 30, 1923’ 1925, 79).

35 Chatzaturion 2002, 22.

36 Solomōnidēs 1960, 80–82.

[The] transfer of the relics and religious furniture that [were] located in the St. John Church in Izmir and that have no worth to us was ratified by the Council of Ministers on 24 July [1]937 upon the studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (4 May [1]937 and 12 July [1]937) and the Ministry of Education (19 June [1]937 and 22 July [1]937).³⁷

However, lengthy bureaucratic procedures and the unwillingness of the Turkish authorities hindered their transportation to Greece. During his visit to Athens in February 1939, Rüştü Aras, Foreign Minister of Turkey, was approached by the representatives of *Enoseos Smyrnaion*, to whom he declared that the issue of the church fittings could be discussed in Ankara one more time. On 7 December 1940, another cabinet decision confirmed that the relics in the İsmetpaşa School should be given as a gift to the Greek government.³⁸ However, the German occupation of Athens in April 1941 brought a further delay of four years, as the transportation of these objects to Greece became extremely difficult. Thanks to the financial support of the Greek migrants in the United States, these items were eventually transported to Greece in 1945, and were installed in the Church of Agia Fotini in Nea Smyrni, the main suburb of the Anatolian refugees in Athens, in 1949.

6. Conclusion

Due to the great sensitivity of the ‘abandoned properties’ (*emvâl-i metruke*) in the Republican period, the act of researching this subject was very precarious and was likely to make the researcher an easy target of a variety of accusations, ranging from high treason to treasure hunting. However, with the end of the Cold War, the Kurdish and Armenian questions, along with other minority problems, secularisation, and anti-militarisation issues came to the fore in the 1990s. Since then, the integration of the histories of different ethno-religious groups into the social history of the Ottoman Empire has been a challenging and arduous task, closely related to the democratisation and transformation of former Ottoman territories, particularly Turkey, into civil and pluralistic societies.

This study has investigated the mechanisms and strategies involved in converting a community building that formerly belonged to the Ottoman Christians into a public property of the young Republic. In other words, it has attempted to shed light on the

37 ‘İzmir’de Senjan Kilisesinde bulunan ve bizce hiçbir kıymeti olmadığı anlaşılan ilişik listede yazılı Dinî eşyanın Yunan Hükûmetine verilmesi, Hariciye Vekilliğinin 4/5/937, 12/7/937 tarih ve 9371/267, 15306/446 sayılı tezkereleri ve Maarif Vekilliğinin 19/6/937, 22/7/937 tarih ve 4038/1260, 4038/1561 sayılı mutalânameleri üzerine İcra Vekilleri Heyetince 24/7/937 tarihinde onanmıştır.’; CA, Başbakanlık, Kararlar Daire Başkanlığı (1928 Sonrası), 77-68-11.

38 CA, Başbakanlık, Kararlar Daire Başkanlığı (1928 Sonrası), 93-112-18.

Table 1: Remaining churches in Izmir (including the hamlets of Buca and Bornova) in 1923³⁹

Denomination	Number	Ratio
Anglican	3/3	100%
Roman Catholic	13/15	87%
Protestant	1/2	50%
Greek Orthodox	8/35	23%
Armenian Apostolic	0/8	0%

Table 2: Extant churches in the fire zone in 1923

Denomination	Number	Ratio
Anglican	1/1	100%
Roman Catholic	8/9	89%
Protestant	1/1	100%
Greek Orthodox	0/11	0%
Armenian Apostolic	0/2	0%

Table 3: Situations of eight standing Greek Orthodox churches in the 1950s

Number	Converted / Used as
3/8	Mosque
2/8	School
2/8	Military or commercial depot
1/8	Museum

political conjunctures for various institutions of the Republic in dealing with properties of Ottoman Christian communities, through analysing the particular case of converting the Church of Agios Ioannis Theologos into a school building. Following the population exchange in 1923, a large number of houses, stores, workshops, and factories, all of which had been abandoned by the Ottoman Greeks, were seized by the local and migrant Muslims. The commercial buildings continued to function, though their owners had changed, whereas ecclesiastical buildings were either demolished or converted. Churches, or any houses of worship, have long been considered symbols of communities and served as meeting places. It is interesting to note that during the Great Fire of Smyrna and subsequent destruction campaigns, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches which stood side by side all met different fates. One would assume that such a Great Fire would wipe out buildings regardless of creed. Therefore, a post-1922 damage assessment of these buildings may offer remarkable insights (See Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3).

The first outcome of this study, as shown in the above lists, is that European or Levantine churches were left relatively unharmed, while the churches of Ottoman

39 All the data presented in the tables were obtained from the ‘Former Smyrna Churches’ project of the Levantine Heritage Foundation (*Levantine Heritage. The Story of a Community*).

Christian communities, i.e. Greeks and Armenians, were completely wiped out. The reason behind this destruction campaign was that the buildings belonging to the Ottoman Christian communities, particularly churches, were perceived by the Republican authorities as evidence of the unwanted past.

The second outcome of this study is that after the mass killings and expulsions that took place in the autumn of 1922, the Kemalist Republic had a pragmatic approach towards the remaining properties of Orthodox Christian communities, and did not hesitate to convert their buildings to public buildings, such as schools and museums, or mosques, instead of destroying them. However, during this process, the external appearance of the buildings completely or partly changed. Therefore, former and present inhabitants of the city were able to establish an uncanny relationship with the present condition of these buildings. This relationship with the present dominates the memoirs of Olga Vatidou, a Smyrniot Orthodox Christian who was able to visit her hometown after thirty long years, in 1952. In her memoirs, Vatidou mentioned her visit to former *Apano Mabala*. She saw the supporting beams of the iconostasis which had already been transferred to Greece and also the *paratronion* (side-throne) that remained behind and which bore an icon of St. Anthimos, patron saint of Metropolitan Anthimos who renovated the church at the start of the nineteenth century. The church was packed with school desks and other rubble. Vatidou wrote that the remaining Christians of Izmir, for many years after 1922, used to visit the sites of the vanished churches on feast days, and the remnants of the Orthodox cemetery; and even passed by the İsmetpaşa School on 23 February, though without daring to display any sign of religious activity or worship.⁴⁰ Everything happened silently in this uncanny city, which was at the same time familiar and foreign.

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40 Vatidou 1952, 51–52.

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