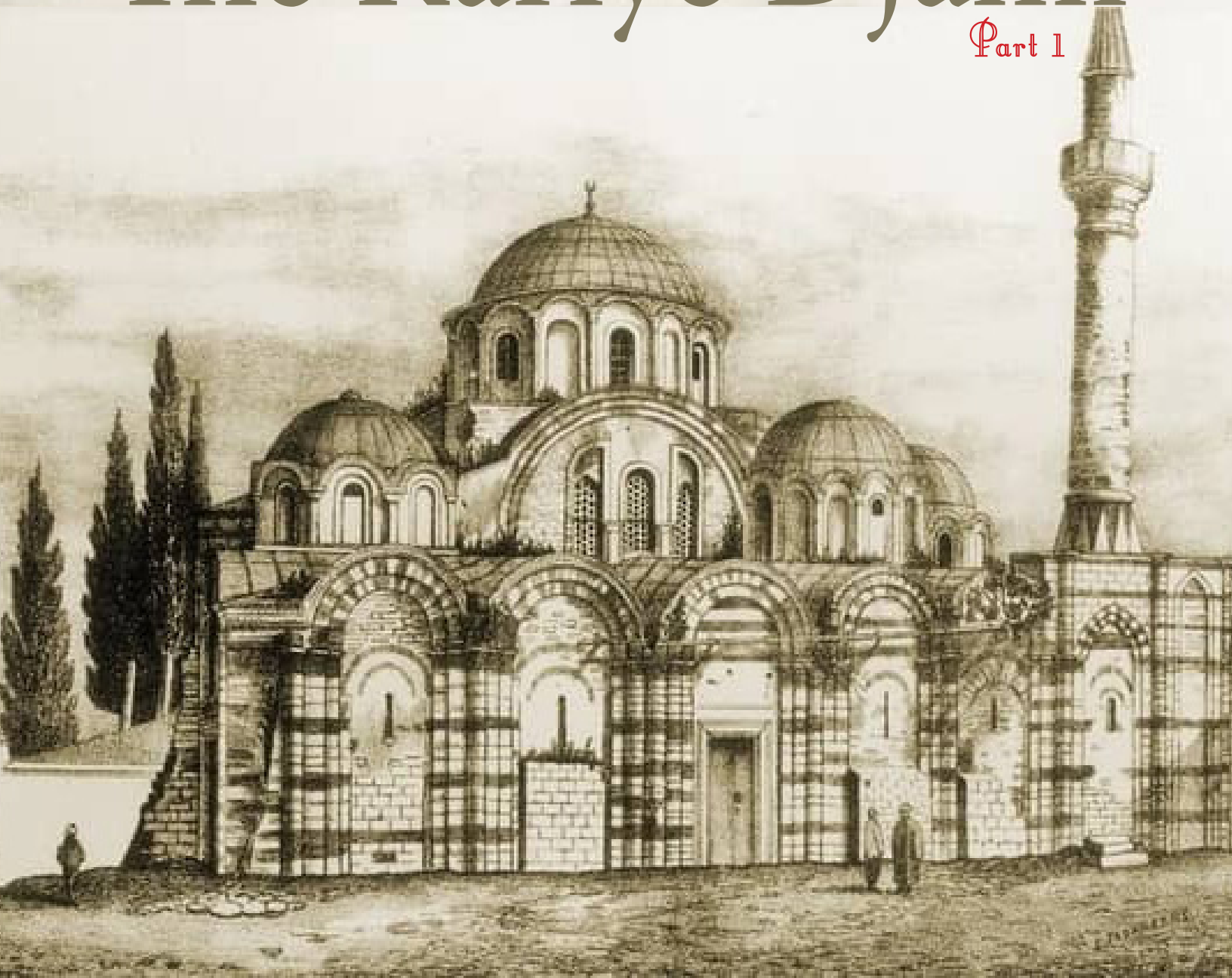
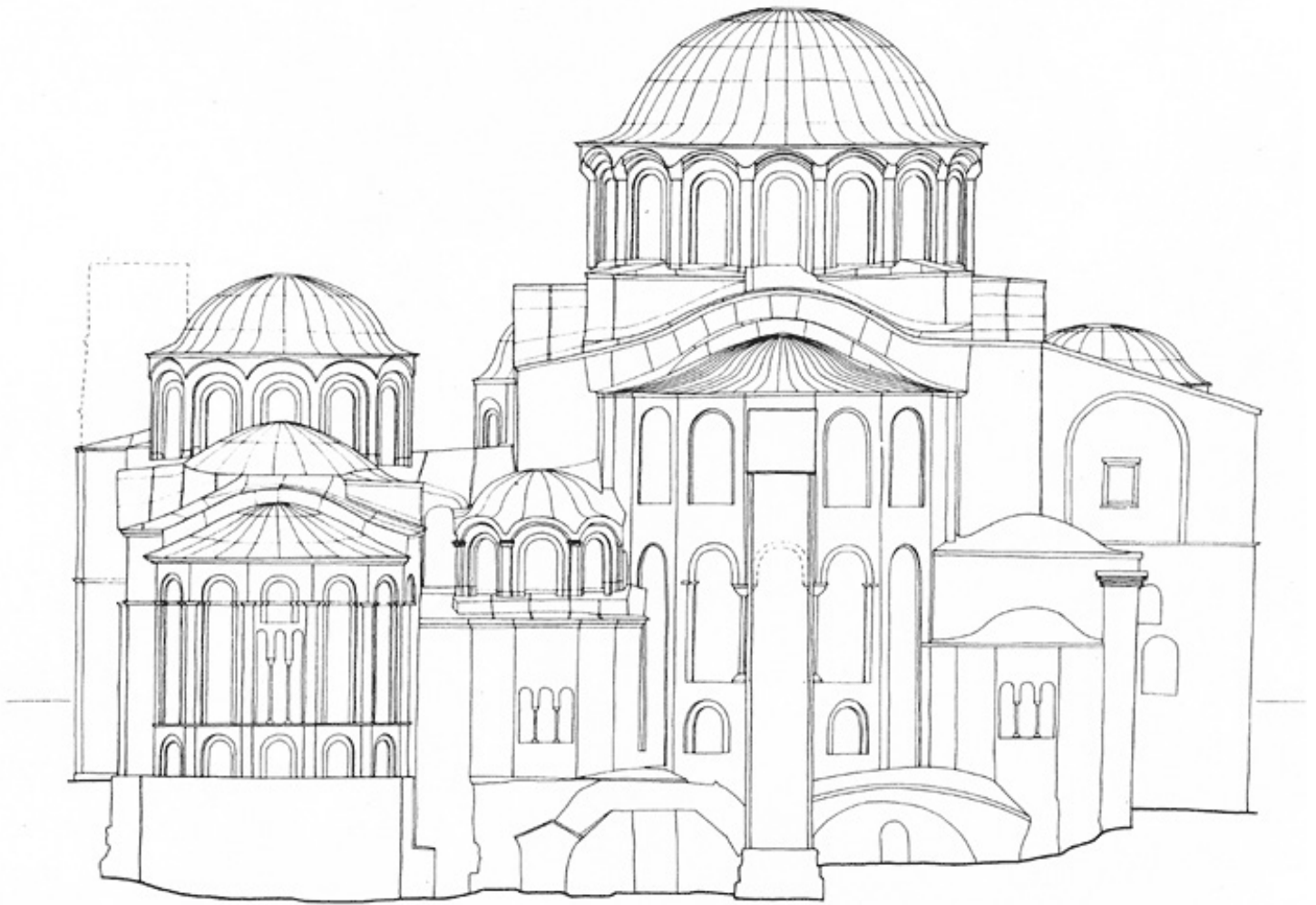


# The Kariye Djami

Part 1



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The Kariye Djami, originally known as the Chora Monastery or the Monastery of Christ (Μονή του Χριστού της Χώρα), stands as a captivating symbol of Istanbul's rich history. Nestled in the Roman Capital, Constantinople, present-day Istanbul, Türkiye, this ancient structure resides near the Charisios Gate (Edirnekapı) and south of the Palace of the Porphyrogenitus (Tekfur Sarayı). The term "chora" (χώρα), suggesting "land" or "in the country," resonates with the rural nature of its location, originally beyond the city walls constructed by Constantine. The site likely remained sparsely populated even during the Ottoman era, contributing to the mystery surrounding Chora's early history.

According to one tradition, the relics of St. Babylas are believed to have been located at Chora in the early 4th century. "Chora" takes on a mystical interpretation, signifying a "dwelling place." Inscriptions on the adornments within the monastery depict Christ as "the land of the living" and the Virgin as "the container of the uncontainable," cleverly playing on the word "chora."

The Kariye Djami's rich history unfolds in a series of transformative epochs:

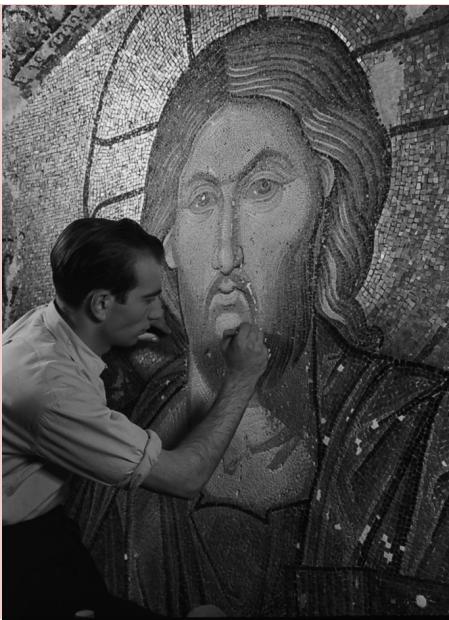
**4th-century Foundation upon Older Ruins:** The monastery traces its roots back to the 4th century, established upon ancient ruins, marking the beginning of its historical journey.

**11th Century:** Maria Doukaina's Architectural Renovation: Maria Doukaina, mother-in-law of Roman (Byzantine) emperor Alexius I Comnenus, reconstructed the Chora Church in the architectural style of an inscribed cross or quincunx during the 11th century, aligning with contemporary trends.

**14th Century:** Archon Theodore Metochites' Artistic Legacy: Archon Theodore Metochites significantly enhanced the church's aesthetic appeal between 1315 and 1321, contributing exquisite mosaics and frescoes, showcasing the finest example of the Palaeologian Renaissance in mosaic art. His dual role as a classical scholar and statesman adds a unique layer to Chora's history.

**15th Century:** Conversion into Kariye Camii: In the aftermath of the Fall of the Roman (Byzantine) Empire in 1453, Hadım Ali Pasha, Grand Vizier of Sultan Bayezid II, ordered the conversion of the famed Chora Monastery into Kariye Camii, emphasizing the term kariye's Greek origins.

**1945–2020:** Museum, Art Restoration, and Controversies: Designated as a museum in 1945, the Kariye Djami underwent restoration efforts sponsored by American scholars in 1948. Since 1511, serving as a mosque, the building ceased functioning as such, opening its doors to the public as Kariye Museum in 1958. Controversies surrounding its status emerged, leading to a lawsuit in 2005. On November 11, 2019, Türkiye's highest administrative court issued an order to reverse the Kariye Djami to a mosque. This decision was subsequently implemented through a presidential decree, officially changing its status to a mosque. The decree was promulgated and recorded in the Official Gazette on August 21, 2020. This administrative and legal process marked a significant milestone in the recent history of the Kariye Djami, transitioning it from a museum back into a mosque and not its original church...



Far Left: The American Byzantine Institute at Dumbarton Oaks during the restoration of the Chora Monastery, also known as Kariye Djami.

Left: Iconographer Elias Damianakis under the restored icon of Christ, during one of his more than twenty visits to Constantinople, present-day Istanbul.

Right: Grand Camlica and Taxsim Mosques Istanbul, Turkiye.

During the late 19th century, the Chora, renowned for its intricate mosaics, gained popularity among Western tourists and acquired the moniker "Mosaic Mosque." In 1945, it underwent a transformative shift when it was converted into a museum under the jurisdiction of the Ayasofya Museum. The Byzantine Institute of America, followed by the Dumbarton Oaks Field Committee in 1947, initiated extensive conservation efforts, including cleaning mosaics and frescoes and overall building restoration. This "museum" decision sparked debate within Türkiye, with proponents viewing it as a progressive step toward global engagement. At the same time, critics, mainly conservatives and nationalists, considered it a concession to the West and a dilution of Muslim identity.

These sentiments never evaporated, and in 2020, amidst challenging political and economic troubles, the Chora underwent an official conversion back into a mosque despite currently being closed with a proposed reopening in May 2024; rumors attach date selected to coincide with historical commemorations.

The recent reconversion has sparked debates and criticism, with accusations of political maneuvering. The sudden pearl-clutching from individuals with ulterior motives isn't as astonishing as it might first appear. These people throughout history use these bouts of "human rights" virtue-signaling skills to showcase their own personal agendas. These are the same individuals who will feign shock over the conversion of a museum into a mosque and will excoriate Ataturk who converted the mosque into a museum.



The fact that Recep Tayyip Erdogan doesn't need this former tiny church/museum as a mosque is evident by his major mosque-building projects in Istanbul and around Türkiye. For example, the largest mosque in the world, Grand Camlica Mosque, just 20.0 km away from Kariye, where 63 thousand people can perform prayers at the same time, or in the Shadow of Orthodoxy's Holy Trinity Cathedral, the new Taksim mosque, which can hold up to 3,000 worshippers at the same time and is only 4 km away from Kariye.





The tumult surrounding Hagia Sophia and Chora are orchestrated, serving as a poignant reminder of historical conquests and reflecting a provocative stance towards Western civilization and Christianity from a fundamental Islamist perspective. The orchestration is attributed to political expediency by Erdogan, capitalizing on the situation, and leveraged by critics, particularly detractors from the Ecumenical Patriarchate.



This reversion is far from unique; numerous churches in Istanbul have undergone a similar transformation into mosques. Having visited most of them, here are the most notable churches currently repurposed as mosques:

- Hagia Eirene (armory but not mosque)
- Sergius & Bacchus (Küçük Ayasofya Mosque)
- Myrelaion (Bodrum Mosque)
- Theotokos Kyriotissa (Kalenderhane Mosque)
- Holy Theodoros (Vefa Kilise Mosque)
- Pantokrator Monastery (Zeyrek Mosque)

Top: Recep Tayyip Erdogan Prays in converted Hagia Sophia Mosque.

Left: Iconographer Elias Damianakis conducting research on converted churches into mosques in Istanbul.

Opposite: Iconographer Elias Damianakis captured before and after the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, highlighting the transformation of the magnificent mosaic of Panagia.

I find myself reflecting on whether those who feign zealotry for "Orthodoxy" will scrutinize Russian fratricide or condemn the Bulgarians for the disheartening thefts from the Eikosiphinisa Monastery. Similarly, will they blame the Greek government for the situation surrounding the Dafni Monastery Museum? Moreover, one cannot overlook Greece's apparent failure to secure Mount Athos. The Greek government's lapses in safeguarding Mount Athos raise significant concerns, especially regarding the enduring illegal occupation of Esphigmenou Monastery by individuals masquerading as monks and squatting at the monastery for decades.

“We will be treating every opinion voiced on the international stage with respect. But the way Hagia Sophia will be used falls under Turkey’s sovereign rights. We deem every move that goes beyond voicing an opinion a violation of our sovereignty,”  
-Erdogan

In contemplating Orthodoxy’s intricate past, we uncover the complex interplay of culture, religion, and politics that have shaped Orthodoxy's historical and religious narratives.





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NO  
FLASH