

The Medieval Byzantine Churches at Trebizond (Trabzon): Promotion of Local Awareness and Conservation through Interpretation and Presentation

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Abstract : The Byzantine Empire, which persisted from the 4th to 15th centuries, covered a significant period in history and bequeathed a significant cultural heritage throughout its territories, including Turkey. However, despite its historical and cultural importance, the approach of the political authorities, which emphasizes the Seljuk and Ottoman heritage, to Byzantium in Turkey is reluctant and problematic. Byzantine history and culture have long been neglected and attained negative connotations. This has led to a lack of awareness and understanding of Byzantine heritage among the public and inadequate conservation efforts. This research aims to address this problem by proposing a reinterpretation and presentation of Byzantine heritage in Turkey that emphasizes its cultural value and presents it to the public as a part of a common cultural heritage in order to accomplish effective conservation, raise awareness and provide a better understanding of the Byzantium. In this article, the ways to interpret, present and integrate the Medieval Byzantine heritage into today's world are analyzed through the selected case study of Trebizond (Trabzon) with a holistic approach by putting emphasis on the Byzantine religious edifices, churches, chapels and monasteries. Although the vestiges of this period are still intact and in use today, their past is unknown to many of their users. This situation is even more evident in the case of the converted churches, which are now used as mosques or mosque-museums. In the city center of Trebizond, 9 out of 12 religious edifices that are still in use were built during the Medieval Byzantine period and converted into mosques under Ottoman and Turkish rule. Currently, these monuments serve as mosques and mosque-museums. However, with the exception of Hagia Sophia and Girls Monastery, their Byzantine past is obscure to many locals. Thus, the promotion of local awareness and conservation of the Medieval Byzantine heritage in the city is required. With this premise, this research will investigate the values and opportunities offered by the Byzantine cultural heritage in Trebizond and the threats to its conservation, and it will offer proposals for a more effective interpretation and presentation so as to foster local awareness and integration of the Medieval Byzantine heritage.

Keywords : Byzantium/Byzantine, Trebizond, cultural heritage, interpretation and presentation, conservation, religious architecture, converted churches interpretation and presentation

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