



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES – I.C.O.M.O.S.
THE OFFICIAL TECHNICAL ADVISOR OF UNESCO

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HELLENIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE

COMITÉ NATIONAL HELLENIQUE

Prot. No: 1610

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Subject: The katholikon church of the monastery of Chora and the violation of international conventions

According to a recent decision of the Turkish State, the katholikon church of the Chora monastery in Istanbul is being attributed to Islamic worship, without provisions to ensure the preservation of the material body of the monument and all the structural and artistic elements for the preservation of which it was recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. This act is part of the Turkish Government's nationalist policy of fostering and exploiting religious fanaticism.

The domestic policy objectives of a foreign state do not directly concern ICOMOS. But when they do have an impact on the characteristics of a monument on the basis of which the international community has decided to inscribe it on the World Heritage List, then ICOMOS, as the statutory technical adviser to UNESCO on matters relating to monuments and sites, has a duty to express its opinion, as does any organisation that is relevant to the matter and respects its principles.

The katholikon church of the monastery of Chora is one of the most important and best preserved examples of the great Byzantine art of the Palaeologan period, in which the mural painting (mosaics and frescoes) and the marble revetments, combined with their symbolic content and inscriptions, create a unified artistic composition that represents the highest achievements in the field of painting, decoration and intellectual production of the late centuries of the Empire, to the extent that it constitutes a benchmark for other official Byzantine monuments of the period.

The relatively small scale of the monument and the nature of the decoration require a careful management of the architectural shell, i.e. control of the number of visitors, control of the atmospheric conditions and the preservation of the monument. Furthermore, since a key feature of the monument is the mosaics with Christian representations, the function of the monument as a place of Islamic worship would require their concealment and would remove a most important element of its artistic value. The alteration of the cultural character and function of the katholikon church of the Chora monastery is bound to bring about a number of changes that will be imposed as necessary for its adaptation to the new conditions. This has already been demonstrated in the case of Hagia Sophia where, four years after the removal of its museum status and the imposition of its operation as a place of Islamic worship, the character of the monument has changed radically, not only from the point of view of aesthetic/artistic perception, but also from the appearance of serious symptoms of stress on the building fabric.

The Hellenic ICOMOS expresses its strong opposition to the removal of the character of the museum from the katholikon church of the Chora Monastery and the imposition of its function as a place of Islamic worship. Its designation as a World Heritage Site imposes a moral duty on all ICOMOS National Committees and UNESCO to take a stand on this serious issue, and to demand that the Turkish state respects the terms of the World Heritage Convention, to which it is a signatory, and revoke its decision.

On behalf of I.C.O.M.O.S. Hellenic National Committee

The President

Anastasios Tanoulas



The Secretary General

Anastasia Stasinopoulou