

Variations in the Eye of the Beholder: The Diverse Sixteenth-Century Reception of Hagia Eirene in Istanbul

Once they passed the grand first gate, the *Bâb-ı Hümâyün* [Imperial gate], the first building in sight that welcomed the visitors of the Ottoman Imperial Palace (*Saray-ı Cedid* [New Palace]) was not an Ottoman, but a Byzantine building of monumental scale, incomparable to any of the other buildings that surround the first courtyard of the palace. This was the former Byzantine church of Hagia Eirene, dedicated to divine peace, which once formed part of the »Μεγάλη Ἐκκλησία [Great Church]« of the Byzantines, functioning together as one complex with the Hagia Sophia.

Hagia Eirene in Istanbul is among the most prominent examples of Byzantine church architecture (fig. 1). The

remarkably well-preserved current structure replaced its fourth-century predecessor, which was destroyed by fire in 532. The sixth-century Hagia Eirene featured a basilical design that likely combined the traditional linear layout with a vertical emphasis, achieved by the addition of a dome to the nave, a feature that was shared with several other significant structures from the same period. The upper structure collapsed after an earthquake in 740 and was rebuilt during the Iconoclastic centuries, probably retaining the existing dome arrangement of the earlier design with some modifications. The architectural integrity of this eighth-century layout remained unchanged over the subsequent Byzantine



Fig. 1 Hagia Eirene in Istanbul. View from southwest. – (Photo B. Ar 2015).

centuries. Throughout the Ottoman era, the building was repurposed and adapted for various uses, yet it underwent few significant alterations to its core architectural characteristics¹. It was the first cathedral of the Byzantine capital and served as a cathedral again after the demolition of the fourth-century Hagia Sophia in 404. As one of the churches where the famous Archbishop John Chrysostom met with the congregations, Hagia Eirene appears in textual sources in relation to some of the notable events and struggles of the administrative and religious history of the Empire, and is also mentioned in the tenth-century book *De Ceremoniis* as part of a processional route between itself, Hagia Sophia and the Great Palace².

Once enclosed within the walls of the Ottoman Imperial palace, Hagia Eirene differed extremely both in size and also in the quality of its construction material from the rest of the buildings surrounding the first courtyard, most of which were small-scale service buildings with their façades hidden behind continuous blind enclosure walls and their clay tiled wooden roofs were in stark contrast with the lead covered dome of this monumental masonry building.

The transformation of the identity of Hagia Eirene from a Byzantine church into an Ottoman monument started long before the transfer of the Ottoman court from its previous location close to the Forum of Theodosius (the Old Palace) to the current location of the New Palace. The Great Church complex was separated from the first day of Ottoman rule in Constantinople, when Hagia Sophia was declared the first Friday mosque of the new Ottoman capital. Soon after the conquest, the war machines of the defeated Byzantine army were deposited in the building of Hagia Eirene as military spoils, causing it to lose its primary religious function. With its enclosure inside the New Palace walls in the following decades, its function was officially changed into the Imperial Armory, housing both the contemporary weapons and equipment of the army and the military spoils of wars. Swords of Ottoman Sultans were housed here together with other venerated military artefacts, and the building soon turned into a symbol of Ottoman military power.

Existing scholarship on the Hagia Eirene building majorly handles it as an example of monumental church architecture for the Byzantine centuries³. Literature focusing on its Ottoman identity is scarce and these are usually short mentions in relation to studies on the Topkapi Palace. The nineteenth-century history of the building did receive some attention in relation to Ottoman museology since the col-

lections housed here throughout the Ottoman centuries formed the basis for the Imperial Archaeological Museum and later the Military Museum, both established first in Hagia Eirene⁴. Prior to accommodating the official function of a museum, Hagia Eirene served as the Imperial Armory for a long period of time. However, the building's function extended beyond what its name suggested, serving a uniquely multifunctional role. Along with its strong architectural appeal and reminiscence of its Byzantine past, its diverse content attracted the attention of a diverse audience. This study focuses on the sixteenth-century perception of Hagia Eirene, aiming to portray an insight on its reception by its Ottoman rulers, by the local communities and by its visitors in accordance with its location, function and content.

An Overview of the First Courtyard

The establishment of the spatial organization of the New Palace was largely completed during the sixteenth century, and was subject only to minor changes in the following periods. Through preserved structures, various archival accounts and attestations of early visitors it is possible to propose a reconstruction of the sixteenth-century organization of the courtyard, the areas surrounding Hagia Eirene and the identification of its neighboring structures with their Ottoman era functions. Once the visitor passed through the *Bâb-ı Hümâyün* they came across a vast courtyard plainly spreading as a flattened terrain of compacted soil. A paved path connected this gate with the second monumental portal leading to the second courtyard. Similar to the spatial organizations of the previous Ottoman palaces⁵, this arrangement consisted of a series of courtyards, around which the administrative and living quarters, as well as various types of service structures were organized. Surrounding this core complex of buildings and courtyards lay the grand gardens and the whole complex was surrounded by an enclosure; *Sur-u Sultanî* which resembled city walls. As one passed from the outer courtyards towards the inner ones, one made a transition from a more public to a more private space. While entrance to the first courtyard was subject to restrictions during the reign of Mehmed II (1444-1446 / 1451-1481), it was permitted following the reign of his successor Bayazid II (1481-1512) allowing a wider audience to have visual access to the site⁶. Most of the palace's external service buildings were located here. Except for Hagia Eirene,

1 For an overview of the adaptations and function changes of Hagia Eirene throughout the Ottoman era see: Ar, Changing Content.

2 Constantine, Ceremonies 186.

3 For most important literature on Hagia Eirene as a Byzantine monument see: Peschlow, Irenenkirche; George, Saint Eirene; Grossmann, Atrium; Feist, Impact 129-145.

4 For a monograph on Hagia Eirene as an Ottoman monument see: Ar, Aya Irini. Also, specifically for nineteenth-century developments see: Shaw, Possessors and Possessed.

5 The Old Palace in Istanbul and the administrative palaces in the former capital Edirne.

6 Spandugino, Petit Traicté 133. Theodoro Spandugino delivering his observations from the early 16th c. mentions that there used to be guards at the gate limiting access to the courtyard and that during his time anyone could enter on horseback.

these were modest in size, independently grouped around small courtyards forming self-sufficient complexes containing workshops, dormitories, kitchens, baths and prayer rooms within independent wall enclosures. The dominant visual element defining this space was the circulation of people rather than the service buildings hidden behind blind wall enclosures. Gülru Necipoğlu's description, based on Lokman's *Hünernâme*⁷, demonstrates that the visual impact of the first courtyard was not defined by buildings, but by crowds of soldiers on horseback with harnesses decorated with jewels, their costumes, and exotic animals exhibited during important days⁸. Entry to the second courtyard on horseback was prohibited and large stables were placed next to its monumental gate⁹ (fig. 2).

Directly on the left side of *Bâb-ı Hümâyün* quarters for guards and barracks for soldiers were situated. Hagia Eirene, serving as the imperial armory [*cebehâne-i âmire*], also stood on this side. Across the courtyard on the right (eastern) side was the hospital. Descriptions by early visitors mention a colonnaded space on this right side with a view to the palace gardens and the sea. Giovanni Maria Angiolello (1451 - c. 1525), who transmits one of the earliest descriptions of the palace, mentions wooden benches overlooking the view to the gardens situated on the right side of the courtyard where servants of the officials could gather and wait¹⁰. These must have provided a scenic point facing towards Hagia Eirene across the courtyard and the sea view on the other. A later visitor, Stephan Gerlach (1546-1612)¹¹, describes the first courtyard as an almost quadrangular large area surrounded by arcaded passages, a *porticus per circuitum*, on all four sides. His observations and the mention of the gardens extending beyond these walls prove that the sixteenth-century visitor still had the same viewpoint¹². Moving further from the hospital on the right side were the bakeries¹³ and at the corner close to the Second Gate was a facility for the distribution of water to the palace.

On the south side of Hagia Eirene, the area between the building and *Sur-u Sultanî* was occupied by the above mentioned barracks, an imperial wood storage yard [*anbâr-ı hîme*] in service for construction activities, oxen stables [*istabl-ı gâvân*] housing the carts for carrying the wood



Fig. 2 The First Courtyard in the *Hünernâme* miniature, c. 1584. Hagia Eirene is represented on the left side. The wood storage building is symbolized by a scale and some wood. The hospital is on the right side. The paper commissioner's building and wooden half open spaces are situated closer to the Second Gate. – (After Lokman, *Hünernâme*).

and a workshop for mattress makers [*hasîrhâne-i hâssa*] to be laid under the carpets¹⁴. The first lion house¹⁵ [*arslan-hâne*] of the palace was also located in this area next to

7 Lokman, *Hünernâme* 1: fols 16a-18a.

8 Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Palace* 44.

9 Angiolello, *Manuscripts Inédits* 50-51.

10 Angiolello, *Manuscripts Inédits* 50.

11 A theologian from Tübingen. Gerlach met David Ungnad von Sonnegg in Vienna, who would later be sent as an ambassador to the Ottoman capital. When Ungnad was appointed by Emperor Maximilian II (1564-1576), he came to the city with him and stayed there for five years between 1573 and 1578 as the ambassador's chaplain. His notes on the city were later published: Gerlach, *Tagebuch*.

12 Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü* 1, 249.

13 In addition to these ovens, a smaller building providing bread specifically for the Sultan and his circle was constructed here in 1616 noted by the seventeenth-century witness Eremya Çelebi (1637-1695). This caused the visual access to be blocked: Kömürciyan, *XVII. Asırda İstanbul* 143 n. 26.

14 For a broader description of the first courtyard and an examination of archival documents on these self-sufficient individual workshops see: Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Sarayı* 40-50. Archival documents about repairs define the mattress makers complex with a dormitory, a pool, a bath with marble veneer, an infirmary, a prayer space and a kitchen arranged around a courtyard surrounded by a portico. The wood storage complex includes a mosque where the funerals of the deceased from the hospital was held. The ox carts not only served for the transportation of wood, but also of the sick from the palace to the hospital. Soldiers in training were operating them under the management of the eunuch in charge of the hospital.

15 »Lion house« was the name given to the building type that housed the wild and exotic animal menageries of the Sultan, and there were about at least four to five of them in proximity to the palace. For a study regarding buildings around the palace with this function see: Asutay-Effenberger/Effenberger, *Inciciyan* 51-94.

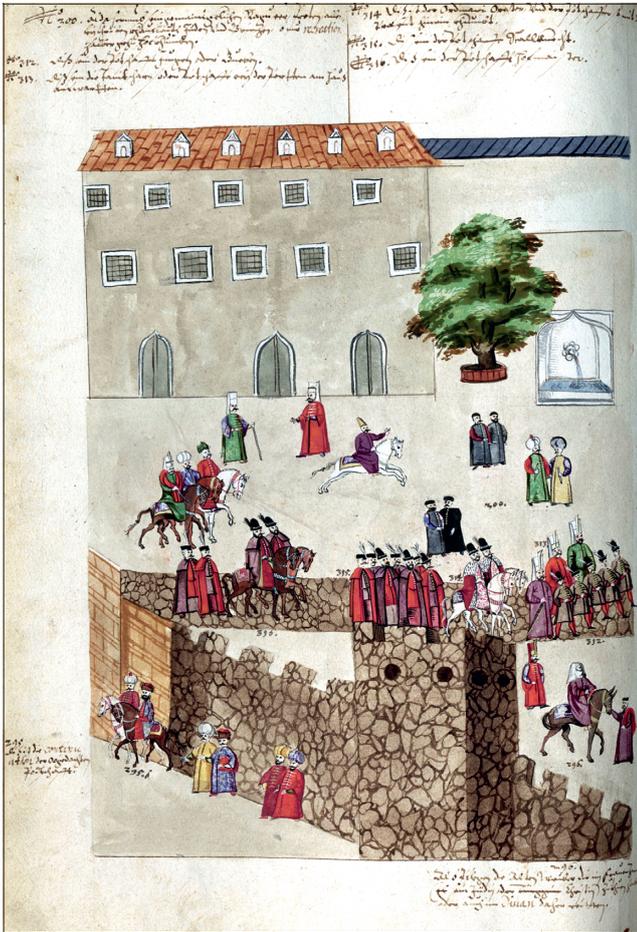


Fig. 3 The Imperial Warehouse depicted in the Habsburg album of Hieronymus Beck. The tree and fountain also seen in the Hünernâme stand adjacent to it. – (After ÖNB Cod. 8615, Fol. 130^v, last quarter of 16th century <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC13954581>).

Hagia Eirene until the beginning of the seventeenth century (fig. 3).

On the northern side of Hagia Eirene stood another considerably large-scale building possibly of Byzantine origin. At its location today stands the Imperial Mint [*darphane-i âmire*] constructed in 1726, when the outer mint was transferred here from Beyazit. It was a multistoried building likely repurposed as a service unit and was majorly reserved as a depot for construction materials, but also included various offices for officials related to construction activity such as the mayor [*şehremini*] and court architects and some ateliers of artisans such as the miniature painters¹⁶. A specialized unit of the imperial mint housing the famous jewelers and masters of metal work of the court of Süleyman I (1520-1566) was also part of this complex. Beyond this building towards the west, down the slope and in proximity to Hagia Eirene lay remains of other constructions, presumed to be also of

16 For a discussion of the probable placement of the artisans see: Mahir, *Minyatür* 19.

17 Alus, *Müze-i Askeriye*. For a discussion relating these remains to a Byzantine palatial complex see: Düzgüner, *Istanbul'da Yapılar* 59-62. 67.

18 Sâ'i, *Mimar Sinan*.

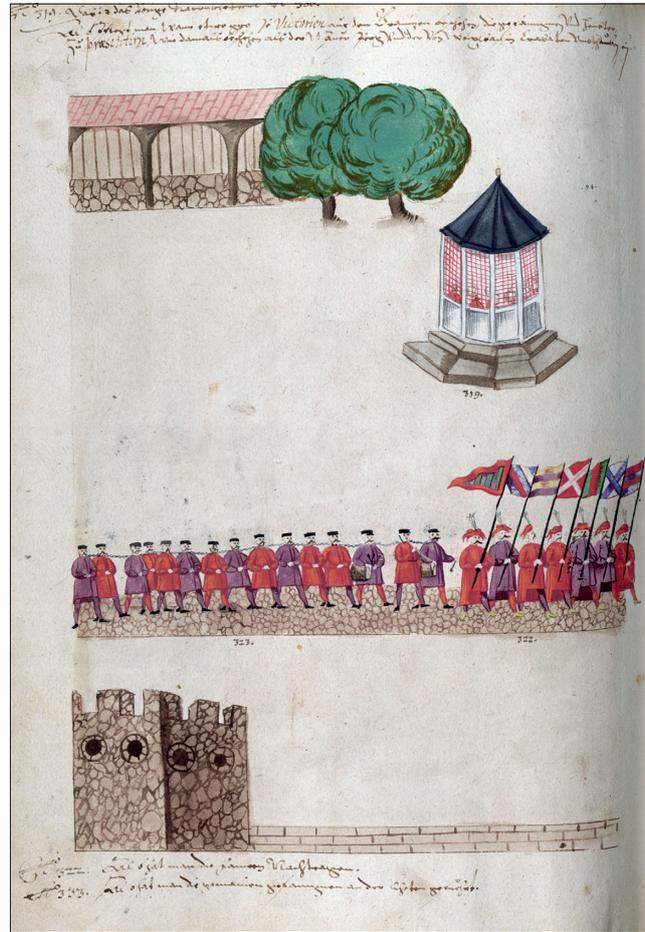


Fig. 4 Paper commissioner's building and wooden half open spaces depicted in the Habsburg album of Hieronymus Beck. – (After ÖNB Cod. 8615, Fol. 132^v (last quarter of 16th century, <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC13954581>).

Byzantine origin by Alus, that may have served as part of this complex¹⁷. The building was referred to as the Imperial Warehouse [*anbâr-ı 'âmire*]. The documented expansion of the complex by architect Sinan¹⁸ is consistent with the evident intensive construction activity in the city during the reign of Süleyman I¹⁹. With its large scale this building was portrayed in the albums of Habsburg messengers as one of the defining elements of the first courtyard. As one moved further northward, as evidenced by both these albums and the Hünernâme miniature, the courtyard walls were aligned with wooden porticos providing a sheltered space for the officials and servants. At the northwestern part of the court stood a large octagonal kiosk with a pointed lead roof which is described by Necipoğlu as the only exception to the simple and uniform architecture of the first courtyard. An official known as the paper commissioner was operating there, collecting petitions and distributing imperial firmans of settled cases²⁰ (fig. 4).

19 Necipoğlu, *Topkapi Palace* 47. For an opposing view that claims the expansion of Sinan was applied to an armory depot at another location in the palace see: Kuran, *Mimar Sinan* 253.

20 Necipoğlu, *Topkapi Palace* 44-45.

Perception of Hagia Eirene and Its Functional Relations with Neighboring Structures

After being enclosed within the palace walls, Hagia Eirene was officially repurposed as a military depot, incorporating Ottoman army weapons alongside Byzantine war machines. Ottoman archival documents spanning several centuries record the continuous circulation of contemporary weapons and supplies for the army. Soldiers from the neighboring barracks were in charge of guarding the building and the maintenance of the weapons. After ascension to the throne, as was customary, every sultan would make a visit to the Imperial Armory. He would be informed by the chief soldier in charge of the collections and the characteristics of the weapons that were taken as loot in past wars and sieges²¹. In these early periods, the building was inaccessible to outsiders and the materials accumulated inside Hagia Eirene seem to have lacked a certain order. In the seventeenth century, Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682) refers to this disorderly appearance in his description of the building as a »weapons depot resembling the tomb of Afrasiyab, beyond any record or account«²². Meanwhile, the Christian relics of the church had not been removed during repurposing. Strangely, in addition to these, some accounts claim that some Muslim relics were also deposited here after the conquest of Egypt. On top of that, architectural elements from ancient structures to be reused in constructions such as fine carved capitals, monolithic columns, and pavement blocks were also listed among its content in construction-related inventories²³.

Military collections included not only contemporary weapons but also the belongings of esteemed former sultans as confirmed by early Ottoman reports. Today most of these artefacts are exhibited either in the treasury rooms of the Topkapi Palace Museum or the Military Museum in Harbiye. Since access was more restricted in the earlier centuries and documentation is scarce, we cannot find much mention of these artefacts. However, evidence from later centuries shows that certain renowned artefacts were originally housed inside Hagia Eirene before their removal to the museums established later. Therefore, we will resort to their testimony here regarding certain items. Renowned artefacts, such as the sword of Mehmed II, were frequently mentioned in nineteenth-century

visitors' memoirs²⁴. We encounter an abundance of such references as the building was used for the display of its collections in these later eras. Alongside Byzantine spoils, military trophies from other defeated enemies were also brought to Hagia Eirene, including symbolic keys of conquered cities²⁵. In Islamic states, military collections played a culturally significant role, distinct from those in late-medieval and early modern European societies. The weapons and armor used by Muslim military leaders were believed to possess sacred qualities. Diplomatic exchanges between medieval and early modern states reflect this distinction, as arms and armor were traded only among Islamic states and were never included in gift offerings to Christian rulers²⁶. Instead, diplomatic gifts from Islamic states to Christian counterparts consisted of gold, luxurious garments, and exotic animals—but never swords or helmets. Equally important were the spoils of war, which included siege machines, weapons, and armor seized from defeated enemies and Hagia Eirene was the house for all these potent symbols of military power²⁷.

The building's architectural quality, its importance to the local community, and its prime location at the city's center likely made it an obvious choice for the new Ottoman rulers as an imperial landmark. The choices and decisions of the rulers in the process of the accumulation of its content must have been intentional. As a well-guarded military structure within the palace grounds, Hagia Eirene became a repository for a diverse array of valuable artefacts, a »menagerie box« so to speak resembling the »cabinets of curiosities« of Renaissance Europe. Its audience was limited to the Sultan and his selected guests.

The more secretive and well-protected the collection remained, hidden from the public eye, the more rumors and legends developed and spread about its content among the city's residents. Travelers' accounts reveal that rumors circulated widely among the Christian population, particularly regarding the Christian relics that supposedly remained inside. Some claimed that relics of saint John the Baptist were housed within²⁸, while others believed that the grave of John Chrysostom lay beneath the structure²⁹. Though most of these stories were unfounded, they fueled public fascination and imbued the building with imagined religious significance. Occasionally, certain items from the collections

21 Sakaoğlu, Saray-ı Hümayun 65.

22 Kahraman/Dağlı, Evliya Çelebi 19.

23 Ar, Spolia 13-14.

24 For example, in his memoirs from his visit to Hagia Eirene in 1851, Gustave Flaubert describes the historical weapons exhibited inside the building and mentions that everybody visiting the building with him (except him) took Mehmed II's sword in their hands and experienced swinging it around. Flaubert, *Voyages* vol. 2, 331.

25 Flaubert, *Voyages* vol. 2, 331; Gautier, *Constantinople* 256-258. Both Gustave Flaubert and Theophile Gautier mention the keys of the conquered cities among the exhibited objects in their descriptions of the contents of Hagia Eirene.

26 For a broad examination of diplomatic gift exchanges and meanings attributed to these, see Behrens-Abouseif, *Practicing Diplomacy*.

27 In his 1839 Istanbul guidebook, Frédéric Lacroix describes Hagia Eirene and its contents as resembling a military museum rather than a mere armory depot. While he notes that the building was officially used as an armory at the time and was closed to visitors, he was still aware of the valuable military artefacts housed within. Notably, he also observes that the Ottomans regarded these weapons with the same reverence and significance as they did holy relics, highlighting their cultural and symbolic importance: Lacroix, *Guide du Voyageur* 28.

28 In his memoirs, traveler Jean Claude Flachet complains about not being able to see the relics of saint John the Baptist, among many other Christian relics, of which he heard many mentions from the local Greek population, indicating that the arm of the saint was preserved in a golden box inside Hagia Eirene. Flachet, *Observations* 16.

29 Majeska, *Russian Travelers 227*; Kömürçüyan, *XVII. Asırda İstanbul* 12. 28-29; İnciyan, *XVIII. Asırda İstanbul* 45. Mentioned in many sources, apparently it was a widespread belief that John Chrysostom was buried here.

were paraded among the city's inhabitants during special celebrations, sparking curiosity about what else might be hidden within. These public displays may have featured Byzantine war machines, or soldiers clad in attire from previous periods, wielding weapons from the earlier Ottoman period³⁰.

With its monumental size and architectural appeal Hagia Eirene was the most visually striking building of the courtyard as evidenced in the visitors' accounts. Its mentions and perception varied in accordance with the origin and background of the beholder. It was addressed in various ways in texts and it appeared in numerous local and foreign visual depictions. While some observers dwelled on the rumors regarding its content, such as the interest among the local Christian population, for a foreign visitor of the palace, unable to access the interior, its monumental appeal and late antique past could be more prominent. In the description of the first courtyard by Jérôme Maurand, a priest from Antibes who visited the palace in 1544, the only building mentioned is Hagia Eirene, and it is noteworthy in terms of the perception of the courtyard that aside from a mention of this single building he dedicates considerable space to the descriptions of the soldiers and horses with their colorful clothing and accessories as defining elements. Being a priest, in his reference to Hagia Eirene he calls it the old palace of the Patriarchs of Constantinople not referring to its Ottoman usage³¹. Gerlach describes the first courtyard as a large courtyard with the old Byzantine Church of Hagia Eirene on one side. Although he does not dwell on the building much, his choice of words for the description of Hagia Eirene displays his perception of the building, as he refers to it as the old Byzantine church rather than the Imperial Armory³².

A function that enhanced the visual perception of Hagia Eirene was the display of wild, exotic animals in the first courtyard during ceremonial feast days and noteworthy events such as the accession ceremony of Süleyman I (1520), providing a demonstration of magnificence through this ancient Near Eastern tradition adopted by Byzantine and Islamic courts³³. European envoys in the sixteenth century showed great interest in these exhibited animals, with many seeing creatures such as elephants and giraffes for the first time. Envoy reports specifically mention the Sultan's wild animals and some of these animals described in the envoys' notes are also visually depicted in albums created by certain European visitors³⁴. One other account indicates that lions were chained

in front of the gates of the armory during envoys' visits³⁵, fortifying the imperial image provided by the monumental building of the army with the image of this animal associated with power. The Ottoman state seems to have deliberately leveraged the grandeur and appeal of Hagia Eirene to showcase the power of its military forces. The earliest lion house of the palace was conveniently located just next to the building, in the area between Hagia Eirene and the outer walls of the palace. The facility was demolished after a fire in 1802 and its area was assigned to the armory after this date. Its location directly over the remains of the Xenon of Sampson and the neighboring cistern unearthed by the excavations of Ramazanoğlu in the 1950s brings to mind questions about whether these units of the Byzantine structures were used as part of the lion house complex to house the animals³⁶ (fig. 5).

Another use signaling the significance of the building in representing the military power was the erection of one of the Sultan's seven *tuğs*³⁷ in front of the building's gates to publicly announce the coming war (fig. 6). When Ottoman sultans set out on a military campaign, four *tuğs* were carried in front of them. During the campaign, at least two additional *tuğs* were taken ahead of time to the sultan's next residing place and erected there. Before the campaign began, two of them were removed from their storage in the palace and placed either in front of Hagia Eirene or the second gate. This act signaled that the sultan was about to embark on a campaign³⁸.

Beyond its symbolic and ideological roles in relation with its function as an armory, Hagia Eirene functioned as part of a larger logistical network within the palace complex. The imperial warehouse building, possibly of Late Byzantine origin, and the wood storage yard, as well as the open areas in the courtyard are the counterparts of this synergy linking the building to broader infrastructural activities. While wood and transport carts were provided by the wood yard complex, the imperial warehouse housed other construction material (fig. 7). Finer architectural materials to be reused were kept both inside Hagia Eirene and in this building and were also deposited in open air in the first and second courtyards³⁹. Listed in both *Tezkiretû'l Ebniye* and *Tezkiretû'l Bünyan'*, the inventories of architect Sinan's projects, and since there is no earlier evidence of its foundation, the wood warehouse was probably established in the sixteenth century⁴⁰. Similarly, for the neighboring large-scale structure, while its function as the

30 Venetian ambassador Ottavio Bon's attestation from his three years of service (1604-1607) in Constantinople presents one of the early descriptions of such usage. Bon refers to Hagia Eirene as one great Hall where there were many weapons of antiquity hanging up such as cimitars, javelins, bows, head-pieces and gauntlets. He states that these were lent to the soldiers and other officials accompanying the sultan or the grand vizier when they made any solemn entry into the city (Withers, *Grand Signour* 9). Nineteenth-century traveler Edward Daniel Clarke witnessed arms and armor from the collections of the armory being taken out of the building and paraded on carts and horses during public celebrations. Clarke, *Travels* vol. 3, 11.

31 Maurand, *Itinéraire* 208. 210. »Passata questa prima porta, trovassimo una bella et grande piazza; in un canto di quella vi se vede il palazzo vecchio de li Patriarchi de Const[ant]inopol«.

32 Gerlach mentions that there were shops where palace craftsmen sold their works »on the opposite side« of Hagia Eirene: Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü*.

33 Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Palace* 44; Lokman, *Hünernâme* 1: fol. 15a-b; 2; fol. 25a.

34 And, 16th Century 149. 153.

35 Konyalı, *Arslan ve Türkler* 257, records that the Habsburg messengers observed these animals as they proceeded to the palace in 1530.

36 Tezcan, *Topkapı Sarayı* 144.

37 *Tuğ*: An aigrette on spear used as an imperial or a high-ranking official's sign, a horsehair banner. They are known to have been seven in number in the sixteenth century and six in later centuries. Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı* 262-263.

38 Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı* 262-265.

39 Ar, *Spolia* 13; Tanyeli/Tanyeli, *Devşirme Malzeme*.

40 Kuran, *Mimar Sinan* 253.

Fig. 5 Byzantine substructures between Hagia Eirene and the enclosure walls. Lion house and other service structures were located on top of these ruins. – (Photo B. Ar 2010).



Fig. 6 Three riders carrying the *tuğs* of the Sultan in a painting of the Swedish ambassador Claes Rålamb from a procession he witnessed in 1657 (see also: Ådahl, *Alay-ı Hümayun* 151). Nordiska Museet NM.0991069). – (Photo P. Segemark).



imperial warehouse is certain for the sixteenth century, there is no evidence of its establishment at an earlier date. The imperial warehouse was also a notable item shaping the first courtyard with its size and the important offices it housed.

An accounts book dated to 1553 in the Topkapi Palace archives concerning the construction of the Süleymaniye com-

plex includes a list of construction material housed inside Hagia Eirene⁴¹. The most extensive category in the inventory consists of spolia, such as columns, carved decorative stones, and large stone blocks made of marble, sandstone, and green stone. Many of these stones are shaped for their intended placement, including coping stones, arch stones, and base

41 Barkan, Süleymaniye; Ar, Spolia 13-14. Unlike the Imperial Warehouse, the materials stored here, according to the inventory, appear to have been more finely trimmed rather than raw. The collection primarily consisted of metal equipment and valuable construction stones. Additionally, various construction tools were present, including shovels, adzes, and *külüng* (a mason's pickaxe), along with finely cut wooden beams, ropes of varying thickness, essential oils, Khorasan

(Roman) mortar, quicklime, equipment for the transportation of materials, and specialized bricks tailored for specific uses, such as dome bricks. The metal stockpile included large quantities of iron, as well as lead and copper objects. Notably, copper chains, intended for reuse in mosques to suspend lighting fixtures, and decorative elements salvaged from other Ottoman buildings for repurposing in new structures, were also stored here.



Fig. 7 A view of the first courtyard in the album of Gaspare Fossati from the 19th-c. restoration of Hagia Sophia. A wood storage yard can still be seen between Hagia Eirene and the enclosure wall. Adjacent to the enclosure wall there still is the barracks for soldiers guarding the gate. – (After Fossati, *Ayasofya* pl. 22).

stones, as they were sourced from pre-existing buildings or ruins. One cannot help but think of the relation between the abundance of ancient material thus accumulated here in the sixteenth century and Hagia Eirene's choice as the location of the archaeological museum of the empire in the nineteenth century⁴².

Conclusion

The sixteenth-century perception of Hagia Eirene was shaped by its architectural prominence, its strategic location within the first courtyard of the Ottoman Imperial Palace, and its evolving function as an imperial armory. The building, originally a Byzantine church of great religious significance, underwent a transformation that mirrored the broader shifts in the Ottoman approach to architectural heritage, military symbolism, and the management of imperial collections.

By this period, Hagia Eirene had become a well-guarded repository of both contemporary and former Ottoman weaponry and military artefacts taken from defeated armies and the Byzantines, reinforcing its role as a potent symbol of military power. However, its visual and spatial presence also contributed to diverse receptions among different audiences. For the Ottoman elite, it served as a functional and symbolic structure, directly associated with the army and the sultan's authority. Its continued use as a storage site for construction materials, coupled with the architectural significance of its neighboring structures, positioned it as an integral element in the palace's logistical and administrative networks.

Meanwhile, for local Christian communities and foreign visitors, Hagia Eirene's identity remained linked to its Byzantine past. The secrecy surrounding its interior fostered speculation and the persistence of legends concerning its religious relics and supposed hidden treasures. For European envoys and travelers, the church's monumental architecture and historical significance stood out in stark contrast to

42 Not all ancient artefacts deposited in such a way in the palace grounds were intended to be used in constructions such as the porphyry sarcophagi of Late Antique Byzantine emperors, brought here from the church of the Holy Apostles after its demolition for the construction of Mehmed II's complex. Unfortunately,

we have little evidence regarding the lists of materials stored at different locations of the palace. The sarcophagi were placed securely in the second courtyard, providing a more controlled environment than the publicly open first courtyard.

the more modest structures of the first courtyard, leading to varied interpretations that often emphasized its former ecclesiastical function rather than its Ottoman military role.

Beyond its immediate functional role, Hagia Eirene was actively employed in the construction of imperial imagery. The display of exotic animals, the use of the site for military announcements, and the strategic positioning of the building within palace ceremonies all contributed to its perception as a key monument of imperial authority. The simultaneous accommodation of relics, military artefacts, and construction materials within Hagia Eirene suggests a deliberate, albeit fluid, approach to repurposing Byzantine structures in the Ottoman context.

Ultimately, the case of Hagia Eirene highlights the multiplicity of meanings that historical monuments can acquire over time. As both a relic of Byzantium and a vital component of the Ottoman palace complex, its sixteenth-century reception underscores the interplay between preservation, adaptation, and reinterpretation. The complex layers of meaning attached to the building by its various audiences illustrate how architecture, function, and perception intersect to shape historical narratives and collective memory. Hagia Eirene, therefore, stands as a testament to the enduring dialogue between past and present, between architectural heritage and evolving socio-political landscapes.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung / Résumé

Variations in the Eye of the Beholder: The Diverse Sixteenth-Century Reception of Hagia Eirene in Istanbul

This chapter examines the sixteenth-century reception of Hagia Eirene in Istanbul, a former Byzantine church that became an integral part of the Ottoman Imperial Palace complex. Although commonly referred to as the »Imperial Armoury«, Hagia Eirene's function extended beyond military storage to include a broader symbolic and logistical role within the palace. Using architectural analysis, archival records and early modern travel accounts, the study explores the different perceptions of the building among Ottoman rulers, local communities and foreign visitors. It highlights how Hagia Eirene's monumental scale, strategic location, and multi-layered history contributed to its evolving identity, serving simultaneously as a military repository, a relic of Byzantium, and a site of public spectacle. The chapter also discusses the broader implications of its transformation, illustrating how architectural adaptation and symbolic recontextualisation reinforced Ottoman imperial authority while maintaining links with the city's past. By tracing the interplay between architecture, function and perception, this study highlights the complex ways in which historical monuments acquire new meanings across different periods and audiences.

Variationen im Auge des Betrachters: Die unterschiedliche Rezeption der Hagia Eirene in Istanbul im 16. Jahrhundert

Dieses Kapitel untersucht die Rezeption der Hagia Eirene in Istanbul im 16. Jahrhundert, einer ehemaligen byzantinischen Kirche, die zu einem integralen Bestandteil des osmanischen Kaiserpalastkomplexes wurde. Obwohl sie allgemein als »Kaiserliche Waffenkammer« bezeichnet wird, ging die Funktion der Hagia Eirene über die militärische Lagerung hinaus und umfasste eine breitere symbolische und logistische Rolle innerhalb des Palastes. Anhand von architektonischen Analysen, Archivaufzeichnungen und Reiseberichten aus der frühen Neuzeit untersucht die Studie die unterschiedlichen Wahrnehmungen des Gebäudes durch osmanische Herrscher, lokale Gemeinschaften und ausländische Besucher. Sie hebt hervor, wie die monumentale Größe, die strategische Lage

und die vielschichtige Geschichte der Hagia Eirene zu ihrer sich entwickelnden Identität beitrugen, indem sie gleichzeitig als militärisches Depot, Relikt von Byzanz und Ort öffentlicher Spektakel diente. Das Kapitel befasst sich auch mit den weitreichenden Auswirkungen ihrer Umgestaltung und veranschaulicht, wie architektonische Anpassung und symbolische Rekontextualisierung die osmanische kaiserliche Autorität stärkten, während gleichzeitig die Verbindungen zur Vergangenheit der Stadt aufrechterhalten wurden. Durch die Verfolgung des Zusammenspiels zwischen Architektur, Funktion und Wahrnehmung hebt diese Studie die komplexen Wege hervor, auf denen historische Denkmäler über verschiedene Epochen und Zielgruppen hinweg neue Bedeutungen erlangen.

Les variations selon les points de vue: la réception diversifiée de Sainte-Irène à Istanbul au XVI^e siècle

Ce chapitre examine la réception au XVI^e siècle de Sainte-Irène à Istanbul, une ancienne église byzantine qui devint partie intégrante du complexe du palais impérial ottoman. Bien qu'elle soit communément appelée »l'armurerie impériale«, la fonction de Sainte-Irène s'étendait au-delà du stockage militaire pour inclure un rôle symbolique et logistique plus large au sein du palais. À l'aide d'analyses architecturales, de documents d'archives et de récits de voyage du début de l'époque moderne, l'étude explore les différentes perceptions du bâtiment par les dirigeants ottomans, les communautés locales et les visiteurs étrangers. Elle met en évidence la manière dont l'échelle monumentale, l'emplacement stratégique et l'histoire à plusieurs niveaux de Sainte-Irène ont contribué à l'évolution de son identité, servant à la fois de dépôt militaire, de relique de Byzance et de lieu de spectacle public. Le chapitre traite également des implications plus larges de sa transformation, illustrant comment l'adaptation architecturale et la recontextualisation symbolique ont renforcé l'autorité impériale ottomane tout en maintenant des liens avec le passé de la ville. En retraçant l'interaction entre l'architecture, la fonction et la perception, cette étude met en évidence les façons complexes dont les monuments historiques acquièrent de nouvelles significations à travers différentes périodes et différents publics.