Multicultural policies and heritage in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic: The case of Mardin

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Abstract
Even though the Ottoman Empire's multicultural government policies were somewhat discriminatory, the autonomic structure allowed diversification. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic corresponded to the rise of the nationalist ideology. With the consequences of the Lausanne Treaty and the Republic identifying itself as a nation-state, minorities living in Turkey were started to be seen as 'subsidiary elements' added to the state through a treaty. The governmental policies regarding minorities have thus affected the production and conservation of architectural heritage of these groups. This presentation will evaluate the ways in which the 'national heritage' is challenged by multicultural heritage through the example of Mardin, with its multicultural attributes conserved since the early years of the Ottoman Empire.

Anatolia is a palimpsest of different periods and cultures, and it is not a surprise that empires and nations that lived in this geography have comprised of many different races, religions and ethnicities. Plurality has characterized Anatolia from the prehistoric era to the present. Even though far from perfect, the Ottoman Empire, like many other empires, was an embodiment of a 'multiculturalist' society. Its *'millet'.*[48] system not only allowed, but also encouraged plurality

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[48] The term *millet* in the Ottoman Empire referred to a non-Islamic religious community. The Turkish term *millet* originally meant both a religion and a religious community. Millet has its roots in early Islam, and the Ottomans used it to give minority religious communities within their Empire limited power to regulate their own affairs, under the overall supremacy of the Ottoman administration. According to the Qurʾan, Christians and Jews were people of the Bible, known as *dhimmi*, who were not forced to convert to Islam but allowed to live under the Muslim arrangement with certain prohibitions while practicing their religion and paying the *cizye* and military exemption tax. The Ottomans allowed the "religions of the book" to be organised in *millets*: the Orthodox Christians or Rums, the Armenians, and the Jews. Non-Muslims had to be part of a *millet* to be considered citizens of the empire. In the 19th century, *millet* additionally came to denote such modern concepts as nation and nationality. 19th century reforms in the Ottoman Empire changed the structure of the *millet* organisation. The regulations of the Greek community (*millet-I Rum*) were drafted and approved in 1862, and for the Armenian community (*millet-I Ermeniya)* in 1863. Submission of proposals

through its government policies that bolstered interaction between the diverse groups. Multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire was also embodied within society; there were many different languages being spoken, religions being practiced, and schools that taught those languages and religions.

Similarly, the Republic of Turkey is a diverse nation, and hence a plural society. However, it is difficult to classify Turkey as a 'multiculturalist society' as its government policies are not very effective on managing the 'problem' of the existence of a number of different ethnic or religious groups within a single nation. In most nation states, the alternative histories and heritages of minority groups within societies may be seen to act as a challenge to the idea of a 'national heritage'. Some believe that 'national heritage' is threatened by multiculturalism and subaltern studies. As also noted by Rodney Harrison, "Nation states embrace the idea that societies must hold shared cultural beliefs and heritage in order to strengthen and root those beliefs, and the structures of power and authority that underlie them."[49] However, there is no doubt that today, all heritage is imperative to create memories that shape the way in which people see themselves and their environment in the modern world.

The city of Mardin is located in the southeast of Turkey and is an archetype of how pluralism has been treated and handled throughout the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. It is considered a transition area between Anatolia and Mesopotamia and has been the home of many civilisations and cultures throughout history. It is still a melting pot of different religions and ethnicities. What distinguishes the city of Mardin is that its history and culture is defined by multiculturalism and it managed to conserve most of its discrete characteristics until today. Even though it started to homogenise in the past few years, it has always been a city of diversity with Muslims, Armenians and Syriac Christians, Arabs, Kurds, Yazidis, Keldanis, and Shemsis living together. Mardin is an unprecedented example that one must study in order to understand how pluralism has been manifested in cultural heritage throughout the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey as this multiculturality is reflected in the city scape, architecture, music, food, fine arts and crafts as well as daily lifestyle of the residents.

In order to fully comprehend the development of how politically underrepresented groups in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic has been administered, one must understand the difference between the terms 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism'. A 'multicultural' society is a society where more than one culture exists, and where these social groups of people are economically interdependent. Both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic could be considered 'multicultural societies.' 'Multiculturalism', on the other hand, is about the recognition and integration of cultural differences both through governmental policy, and by the society.[50] Considering its *'millet'* system, the Ottoman Empire could be interpreted as a 'multiculturalist' society. However, looking at Turkey's government policies, and the society's views on underrepresented groups, it is difficult to classify Turkey as a 'multiculturalist society'.

Multicultural policies in the Ottoman Empire
Even though multiculturalism emerged as a novel concept in the 1970s among western industrialised nations,[51] it is certain that the Ottoman Empire, along with most other empires, was a multiculturalist nation.[52] Due to its imperialist demeanor, the Ottoman Empire consisted of diverse groups of people with different languages, religions and ethnicities. As long as everyone paid their taxes, the empire provided them autonomous living areas and security. When compared to western nations of its time, it is seen that the Ottoman Empire was somewhat more tolerant to diversity and differences.[53] Historian Stanford Shaw points out that the Ottoman

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for the reorganisation of the Jewish community (*millet-I Yahudiyan*), as required by the *Khaṭṭi humayun* (imperial decree) of 1856, was delayed due to internal dissension (Aviv, 2016, 1).
[49] Harrison, 2010, 164.
[50] *Ibid.,* 165.
[51] *Ibid.*, 166.
[52] The term 'multiculturalist' is used to indicate: pertaining to, or advocating multiculturalism.
[53] Kymlicka, 1998, 240; see also Anık, 2012, 119.

Empire never forced Christians or Jews to convert to Islam, nor enslaved them.[54] Some historians along with Shaw believe that both the reason why the Ottoman Empire was so successful, and the reason why it fell was due to the tolerant demeanor towards its plural society.

The rulers of the Ottoman Empire believed ethnic and cultural differences in a nation were sources of richness. When Jews were exiled from the Spanish Empire, Sultan Bayezid II welcomed them into the Ottoman Empire, and stated: "How can you tell me that King Fernando is 'smart' while he purposefully impoverishes his own country and enriches mine?" [55]

The Ottoman Empire conquered a large portion of North Africa and Eastern Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries, and had citizens with a range of different religions, languages, races and ethnicities.[56]

However, the term 'minority' usually referred to non-Muslims living in the empire.[57] These minorities were grouped according to their religious identities rather than their ethnic identities, and the largest of these minority groups which were given a *'millet'* status were Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians, and Jews.[58] Undoubtedly, non-Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire were never treated as first class citizens, nor did they have political rights, but they were given the freedom to practice their religion, speak and teach their language, maintain the continuity of their traditions, and live their everyday lives the way they wanted in a secure manner.[59] They were allowed and encouraged to cherish their religious identities. The empire gave every minority group the freedom to practice their religions freely as well as allowing them to have their own law and court of justice. According to the *'millet'* system, each group resolved their legal matters according to their own law with the leadership of their appointed religious leader. The Ottoman government was only responsible for applying the decision made by that minority group's court of law.[60]

Compared to all other minority groups, Greek Orthodox Christians were more privileged as they were given important roles in international relations. Ottoman leaders were not fluent in western languages, so some Greek Orthodox Christian citizens were appointed to translate classified information to the imperial council.[61] This group of minorities were given diplomatic privileges and were exempt from taxes. With time, this led to the rise of an aristocratic Greek Orthodox group who mostly lived in the Fener area in Istanbul.[62] The former ambassador of Sweden, Erik Cornell, states that the Orthodox population preferred to be under the reign of the Islamic Ottoman Empire rather than being under the reign of a Catholic nation in order to conserve their religious identity.[63] Similarly, the Sephardi Jews who were exiled from Spain and Portugal, and Romaniote Jews who were exiled from Italy, were welcomed in the Ottoman Empire, and actually described the 16th century which they spent in the Ottoman Empire as their 'golden era'.[64] The renowned Turkish historian, Halil İnalcık, points out that the Ottoman Empire never followed an 'ethnic purification' policy throughout its rule. On the contrary, it acted as a large umbrella of sovereignty over all religious and ethnic groups in order to protect and maintain a peaceful empire.[65]

The Ottoman Empire's tolerant demeanor towards the minority groups was reflected in how these groups' architectural heritage was treated. Minorities were allowed to reside in all areas except

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[54] Shaw, 1976, 151.
[55] Şen, 1997, 244-245.
[56] Anık, 2012, 120.
[57] Ortaylı and Akyol, 2002; see also Kaya, 2007, 45.
[58] Shaw, 1976, 151.
[59] Demirdağ, 2002, 32.
[60] Anık, 2012, 121.
[61] Demirdağ, 2002, 17-20.
[62] *Ibid.*, 17.
[63] Cornell, 1998, 39-40; see also Anık, 2012, 23.
[64] İnalcık, 2000, 266.
[65] İnalcık, 2006, 210.

Mecca and Medina.[66] The government never interfered with the interiors of religious structures such as churches or synagogues. However, the government applied some restrictions on large maintenance projects of existing structures and the construction of new religious structures.[67]

The rise of the nationalist movement
The concept and ideology of nationalism developed in Western Europe in the 18th century, and stirred up the Ottoman Empire along with the whole world in the first half of 19th century.[68] The non-Muslim minority groups in the Ottoman Empire who were in good relations with the European nations started to revolt with the quest for independence, and some groups established autonomy. It is questionable whether the reasons why these revolts were so forceful and influential was because the Ottoman Empire never followed assimilating governmental policies.[69] Minorities were able to conserve their culture, religion, language and traditions, therefore, they never lost their identity, or the strong emotional connection to their roots. Perhaps, the rising nationalist ideology ignited this strong emotional connection, and along with other factors, dragged the empire into collapse.[70]

Before the collapse of the empire, the rising disturbance among minorities and pressure coming from the European countries inflicted the rulers to declare two edicts of reforms.[71] These reforms altered the multiculturalist understanding of the *'millet'* system, and brought every group together under the same legal structure. According to the new declaration, all citizens of the Ottoman Empire, no matter what their religion, were equal in every way. All of them were obliged to do military service and pay the exact amount of taxes. They could all own real estate and serve in governmental office. Rulers of the Ottoman Empire hoped that these reforms would mitigate the quest for independence coming from minorities. However, these reforms disconcerted minority groups even further as they lost their privileges that allowed them social, political and economic advantages.

Archaeology and cultural heritage in the Ottoman Empire
Since Anatolia has been a palimpsest of many different cultures, it immediately became a point of interest for first generation European archeologists. Ottomans lived among Ancient Greek and Roman antiquities for years, however, they long neglected these antiquities. On the contrary, they regarded them more as 'stones to be reused', and allowed foreign archeologists to take them out of the empire.[72] However, in the 19th century, with the westernisation process, some leading intellectuals were disturbed by the fact that historic artifacts were taken out of the country and argued that a museum should be established in the Ottoman Empire to house these artifacts. One of these intellectuals, and a preeminent figure in the history of archaeology in Turkey, Osman Hamdi Bey, had a great impact on the founding of the first museum, the Ottoman Imperial Museum, which is now called the Istanbul Archaeology Museum. Osman Hamdi Bey, and hence

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[66] However, after 1581, minorities were banned from residing around the Eyüp Sultan Mausoleum and Jews were evicted from the Ortaköy area, especially from around the Ortaköy Mosque (Refik,1930, 157-88).
[67] For example, the construction of a new annex on an existing structure was not permitted (Demirdağ, 2001, 27).
[68] Özdoğan, 1998, 116.
[69] Demirdağ, 2002, 32.
[70] *Ibid.*, 32.
[71] Series of reforms promulgated in the Ottoman Empire between 1839 and 1876 under the reigns of the sultans Abdülmecid I and Abdülaziz. These reforms were intended to effect a fundamental change of the empire from the old system based on theocratic principles to that of a modern state. This document called for the establishment of new institutions that would guarantee security of life, property, and honour to all subjects of the empire regardless of their religion or race. It also authorised the development of a standardised system of taxation to eliminate abuses and established fairer methods of military conscription and training. The promises of equality for non-Muslims (mainly Christians and Jews) living in the empire were not always carried out, but the balance of the changes provided for in the edict *(ferman)*, along with other reform measures, were implemented principally under the leadership of Mustafa Reşid Paşa, who served six terms as grand vizier. The reforms included the development of a new secular school system, the reorganisation of the army based on the Prussian conscript system, the creation of provincial representative assemblies, and the introduction of new codes of commercial and criminal law, which were largely modeled after those of France. These laws, moreover, were administered by newly established state courts independent of the *'ulema'*, the Islamic religious council. The Tanzimat reform movement came to a halt by the mid-1870s during the last years of Abdülaziz's reign. Under the Tanzimat effort to centralise administration, all legal authority became concentrated in the hands of the sultan (Bauer, *et.al.*, 2016).
[72] Özdoğan, 2003, 180.

the Ottoman Empire was especially interested in Ancient Greek and Roman civilisations and the establishment of this museum became the symbol of the westernisation process.[73]

Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire was never associated with nationalism.[74] However, with the rise of the ideology of nationalism, most newly established nations started looking for ways to root themselves in histories older than the empires they declared independence from in order to strengthen their identity. They inducted institutions on history, archaeology and cultural heritage.[75] Similarly, countries and nation states that recently declared independence from the Ottoman Empire developed a nationalist take on archaeology.[76] For example, Greece started archeological excavations almost one year after their independence, and specifically focused on the archaeology of the Hellenistic period.[77] This was a purposeful effort to root a recently established nation to an entrenched history.

Policies on multiculturalism, archaeology and cultural heritage in the Republic of Turkey
The Turkish Republic was established with great struggle after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Republic signed the Treaty of Lausanne with the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Portugal, Belgium and Yugoslavia. The treaty considered and referred to non-Muslims as minorities, and only recognised Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenians and Jews as minorities.[78] After the treaty, non-Muslims were seen as additional elements affixed to the Turkish population through an international treaty rather than an authentic element of the population.[79]

After the establishment of the Republic, leading intellectual figures like Ethem Bey and Aziz Ogan followed in the footsteps of Osman Hamdi Bey.[80] When Osman Hamdi Bey's teachings were amalgamated with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's principles, a new approach to archaeology and conservation was developed.[81] Just like many other leaders of the time, Atatürk felt the need to create a national identity which is rooted to a history prior to the Ottoman Empire in order to strengthen the foundation of the new Republic. One of the main reasons why *'Türk Tarih Tezi'* [82] (Turkish History Thesis) was written was to prevent the perception of the Turkish Republic being the continuity of the Ottoman Empire.[83] The easiest way to do this was through Pan-Turkism, and associating the nation with the Turks in Central Asia. A large group of Muslims in the Ottoman Empire were already executing their nationalist views through this ideology. However, Atatürk was fully aware of the dangers that came along with this affiliation. This ideology could easily be taken too far, and the nation could abandon Anatolia and migrate to Central Asia.[84] In order for the Turkish Republic to embrace Anatolia as a motherland, the nation's history had to be rooted to Hittites and Sumerians.[85] With Atatürk's desire to thoroughly research and create a museum devoted to Hittite civilisations, the Turkish Historical Society initiated the first excavations undertaken by the Turkish archeologists in sites like Alacahöyük (the Hittite capital) and Ahlatlıbel. The departments of History and Archaeology within the University of Ankara and the University of Istanbul, and the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations *(Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi)* in Ankara was established as Atatürk believed that rooting the Republic's identity to these

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[73] *Ibid.*, 181. For the process of westernisation of the Ottoman Empire and the development of arts and archaeology in this period, see Cezar, 1995.
[74] Özdoğan, 1999, 195.
[75] Özdoğan, 2003, 181.
[76] *Ibid.*, 181.
[77] *Ibid.*, 182.
[78] Even though Syriac Christians are non-Muslims, they were not considered as a minority group in the Treaty of Lausanne at the request of their religious leaders. However, after wanting to establish their own schools, they filed a lawsuit to be considered as a minority. Since 2012, Syriac Christians are considered minorities (Kaya, 2017).
[79] Mahçupyan, 2004, 1.
[80] Özdoğan, 2003, 182.
[81] *Ibid.*, 182.
[82] For the Turkish History Thesis, see İnan, 1939, 245.
[83] Şimsek, 2012, 89.
[84] Özdoğan, 2003, 183.
[85] *Ibid.*, 183.

empires would help the nation embrace the history and the palimpsest of all cultures of Anatolia.[86]

When creating a nation out of the ruins of the multicultural Ottoman Empire, given the worldwide rise of the nationalist ideology, it was essential to formulate an attitude that would assure national pride and identity. Nation states, including Turkey, embrace the idea that societies must hold shared cultural beliefs and heritage in order to strengthen and root those beliefs.[87] However, this approach created further problems with the integration of minorities as the term 'nation state' assumes that the whole society is made out of people with the same religion, language and ethnicity. According to this definition, outsiders are marginalised.[88] Similarly, the cultural heritage of those who are 'outsiders' can sometimes be ignored or disparaged since the heritage of minority groups may be seen to act as a challenge to the idea of a 'national heritage'.[89]

The case of Mardin

During the Ottoman period, the city of Mardin had a large non-Muslim population. When historic documents and the tangible cultural heritage in Mardin are studied, it can be seen that minorities were integrated into daily life and the culture of the city rather than being assimilated.[90] These diverse groups lived in Mardin as neighbours for hundreds of years, and adopted a mutual demeanor, outlook, lifestyle and traditions.[91] Not surprisingly, Mardin's built environment reflects this diversity, with an abundance of Islamic and Christian and some Jewish religious structures. The Muslim population of Mardin was composed of Turks, Kurds and Sunni Arabs while Christians were mostly composed of Syriac Christians and Armenians as well as Keldani Catholics and Protestants.[92] Even though there were some Jews living in Mardin during the Ottoman era, most of them have migrated to other cities today.

It is important to point out that Mardin was a significant city for Syriac Christians and that this group had a great impact on the cultural heritage of the city.[93] After Christians settled in Mardin in the 4th century, the area became the spiritual centre for this group. It is known that most Syriac Christian churches and monasteries were built in the 6th century.[94] These structures, along with schools and cemeteries are crucial for public memory.

Syriac Christians were not given a *'millet'* status by the Ottoman Empire, however, they engaged in governmental bureaucracy through the Armenian Patriarchate until they could represent themselves in 1927.[95] As implied by this example, there was a social, political and economic interaction between most non-Muslim groups in the Ottoman Empire. This is also the case today. Since there is only a small number of Armenians living in Mardin, most of them go to the Syriac Christian churches for prayers and religious rituals.

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[86] İğdemir, 1973. For a synthesis of these issues, see Serin, 2008, 218-219.
[87] Harrison, 2010, 164.
[88] *Ibid.*, 165.
[89] *Ibid.*, 164.
[90] Kaya, 2007, 46.
[91] Işık and Güneş, 2015, 449.
[92] *Ibid.*, 452.
[93] *Ibid.,* 450. For example, the masonry architecture which characterises the city is a Syriac Christian tradition.
[94] *Ibid.*, 455. For religious architecture in this region, see also Palmer, 1990.
[95] Şimşek 2003; see also Kaya, 2007, 46.

Figure 1 – Mardin, Deyrulzafaran Monastery, (Photo: İpek Karaoğlu Köksalan)

Figure 2 – Mardin,Deyrulzafaran Monastery, (Photo: İpek Karaoğlu Köksalan)

Similarly, the number of Syriac Christians living in Mardin has also diminished significantly. Most of the neighborhoods occupied by this group until the 1980s are now abandoned since most of the population migrated to Istanbul and even other countries due to economic and security related issues.[96] Syriac Christian religious structures in Mardin which are still in use include Deyrulzafaran Monastery, Mor Gabriel Monastery, Meryem Ana Monastery, Mor Yakup Monastery, Mor Malke Monastery, Kırklar Church, Mor Yakup Church, Mor Şmuni Church, Mor Barsovmo Church, Mor Had Bsabo Church and Mor Kuryakos Church.[97] In addition to churches and monasteries, there are a number of mosques still standing today. These include Merkez Ulu Camii and Zeynel Abidin Camii, which are wonderful examples of Artuqid architecture. Even though it is known from the written resources that there was a synagogue in the Jewish neighborhood, it has not survived. However, a fountain called Ayn-i Yahud, which was built by the Jewish community, still survives.[98]

Figure 3 – Mardin, Ulu Camii (Photo: İpek Karaoğlu Köksalan)

Conclusion
Just like in many historic towns, Mardin's astounding built environment epitomises the palimpsest of cultures that have lived there. The city managed to conserve its plural characteristic throughout the Ottoman Empire due to the empire's multiculturalist policies. However, with the rise of nationalism and the indirect consequences of the Lausanne Treaty, the tolerant demeanor towards the non-Muslim groups has changed. This change was reflected in the demographics of Mardin and the population became more and more homogeneous during the Republican period.

[96] Işık and Güneş, 2015, 451.
[97] *Ibid.*, 455. See also Palmer, 1990.
[98] Işık and Güneş, 2015, 455.

Multicultural heritage continues to present a challenge to many nations, including Turkey, as they feel the need to produce cohesive heritage narratives to create a single, unified image.[99] However, the multicultural aspect of Mardin is what makes it so momentous as a symbolic hub of coexisting religions, ethnicities, cultures and traditions. The city's absolute conservation is only possible when every authentic aspect, including the diverse population, is maintained. It is understandable that acknowledgement of plural forms of heritage may appear as a challenge to unified national discourses.[100] Therefore, there is no doubt that the role of cultural heritage in multicultural societies will continue to be controversial. However, the first step towards resolution is to embrace the idea that cultural heritage does not only belong to the group that identifies with it, but belongs to the whole of humanity as every piece of cultural heritage is a glimpse of our common history.

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[99] Harrison, 2010, 197.
[100] *Ibid.*, 197.

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