

Review of the recent restoration of the Vefa Kilise Camii

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Abstract

The Vefa Kilise Camii is a small but interesting Byzantine structure in Istanbul that has been of particular interest to researchers because of its mass, facade layout, and spatial composition. It was converted into a mosque in 1484 and listed as *Kilise Camii* in the *Vakıflar Tahrir Defteri*. Before its last repair in 2018, the structure was damaged by neglect, unplanned repairs, deterioration of materials, fires, earthquakes, functional changes, and vandalism. Both its Byzantine and Ottoman components were damaged. To this end, the Regional Directorate of Pious Foundations began repairing the structure in 2018 and reopened it to worship in early March 2021. The article presents an assessment of the restoration and makes a remark on general threats against its preservation, and maintenance. Restoring medieval structures requires a multidisciplinary, multi-expert team to define, repair, and maintain them. Vefa Kilise Camii repairs have revealed that a few things could have been handled better.

Key Words: *Mid-Byzantine Era, Constantinople, Vefa, Kilise Camii, preservation.*

Introduction

Despite being a relatively small structure among the Middle Byzantine Period (843-1204) monuments in Istanbul, the Vefa Kilise Camii has been of particular interest to researchers. The building, which is almost a jewel on the western slope of the third hill, has been affecting the passers-by for centuries with its mass formation, facade layout and spatial setup. Charles Texier's sketches after the 1833 fire provide the earliest visual representations of the building.

Initially constructed as a church in the 11th century, the building was converted into a mosque and registered as Kilise Camii (Church Mosque) in the foundations registry in 1484 by Molla Gürani,

Mehmet II's instructor. In memory of its founder, Molla (Şemseddin) Gürani, the street passing to its south as well as the surrounding neighborhood were named after him. However, in 1934 Kilise Camii's neighborhood, which had been named after Molla Gürani, was combined with Hoca Gıyaseddin neighborhood, and as a consequence its own neighborhood could not survive to our day. Following its restoration in 1937, the Kilise Camii gained increasing attention, especially among Byzantine scholars, with the discovery of outer narthex mosaics by Miltiadis Nomidis, and Hidayet Fuat Tagay. As a cultural asset, Vefa Kilise Camii was registered on 15.07.1937. The registration records can be found in the *Encümen Archives* (file number 24917, cardboard box 124) with an inventory template completed by Aziz Ogan on 02.06.1942.

Having undergone significant interventions since 1995, the Regional Directorate of Pious Foundations began repairing the building in 2018, and it was reopened to worship in early March 2021. The goal of this article is to provide a general assessment of the restoration of this important edifice, which was part of my doctoral dissertation in the restoration program at Istanbul Technical University.

1. Location and surroundings of the building

Vefa Kilise Camii lies in the Vefa quarter of the Süleymaniye Urban Area in Istanbul's Fatih District on the third hill of the Historic Peninsula. Vefa quarter's borders are defined by Bozdoğan Aqueduct in the south, Küçükpazar neighborhood in the north, Süleymaniye and Hoca Gıyaseddin neighborhoods in the east and Atatürk Boulevard in the west.

The Kilise Camii whose initial name in the Byzantine period is unknown, was located on the western slope of the third hill, in the tenth region according to the Late Antique city plan (Müller-Wiener, 2007, p.169). In today's city, the building, which was founded by Şeyhü-l-Islam Molla

Gürani, is situated on Tirendaz Street in the Hoca Gıyaseddin neighborhood (Ayvansarayı, 2001, p. 251). To distinguish it from other mosques converted from churches (like Eski İmaret, Fenari İsa, and Zeyrek), it is also called Vefa Kilise Camii after the name of the quarter (Eyice, 1995, p. 375).

Vefa, with its proximity to the branch of Mese leading to Adrianapolis/Kharisius Gate (Edirnekapi) and to Makron Embolos (Uzunçarşı Street – the street descending from today's Istanbul University Headquarters to the Golden Horn) during the Byzantine Period, was a district where nobles and wealthy people lived (Kuban, 2000, p. 83). With the decline in population in the city in the late Byzantine Period, two monasteries were established in the beginning of 1300, and a third monastery in the second quarter of the 14th century, on a large area that includes today's Vefa (Mango, 1990, p. 429). "Gorgoepekoos", one of these three monasteries, was built around 1300 by adding an annex to an existing church (Mango, 1990, p.429). According to Mango, the features of this last church fit well with the Kilise Camii (Mango, 1990, p. 429). Due to their proximity, the cisterns located to the west and south of the Kilise Camii were likely related to the monastery whose katholikon the Kilise Camii was (Figure 1). In the last repair, traces of Byzantine structures that had been part of the monastery have also been discovered to the east of Kilise Camii.

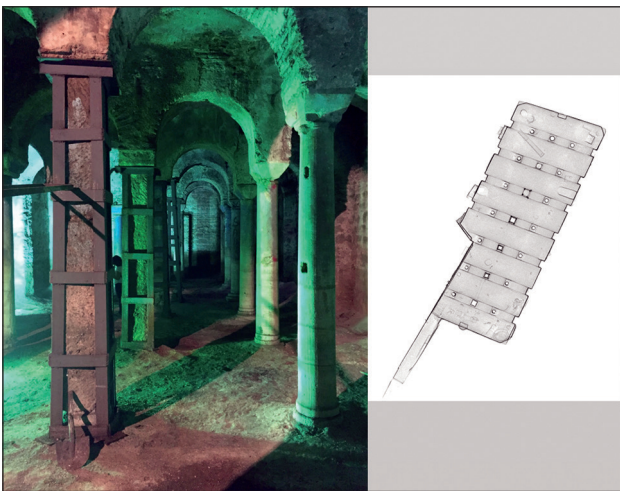


Figure 1. The cistern located 30 meters west of the Kilise Camii (2018). In overview map on the right, it is seen that one of the walls of the cistern is partially cut because of the structure built illegally on it in 1966.

After the city was taken over by the Ottomans, Mehmed II settled in the palace district of the former Byzantine capital. Located north of the Forum Tauri, the Old Palace was the first imperial palace to be built in the city by Mehmed II where currently the buildings of Istanbul University, the Süleymaniye Mosque, and the Biology Institute are standing today (Kuban, 2000, p. 205; Ayverdi, 1953, p. 7). Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512) had his mosque complex built on the Forum Tauri on the 3rd hill (Kuban, 2000:224). Starting from the reign of Mehmed II, tradesmen groups such as saddlers, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, etc. started to concentrate around the 3rd hill (Eyice, 2006, p. 76). During the reigns of Mehmed II, and Bayezid II, scholars such as Molla Hüsrev, Molla Gürani, and Şeyh Vefa Efendi established neighborhoods and built monuments in their own names at Vefa quarter (Erdoğan, 1941, p. 5).

To the north of the Bayezid Complex, Süleyman I (1520-1566) built his mosque complex. According to Kuban, Süleymaniye is an imperial stamp on the silhouette of Istanbul, as Hagia Sophia is; it is the most symbolic structure of the Ottoman empire, which is incorporated into the urban landscape. As the dominant element of the Golden Horn silhouette, it has fascinated everyone throughout history with its grandeur, and beautiful contour in the skyline (Kuban, 1998, p. 26). Also worth of mention are the mansions of Pertev Mehmed Pasha, one of the viziers of the of Süleyman I, Sultan Ahmed III's son-in-law Nevşehirli İbrahim Pasha, Kaymak Mustafa Pasha, Revani Çelebi, Payzen Yusuf Pasha, Shipyard Treasurer İbrahim Çelebi, and Recai Efendi which were all located in the Vefa Quarter (Karaman and Dağlı, 2008, pp. 278, 281, 286). Those mansions of the state elders' were lining the ridges of Süleymaniye and Zeyrek, all overlooking Vefa Square, which was landscaped with trees and flowers; people flocked to this square for strolls (Erdoğan, 1941, p. 5).

Vefa preserved its significance until the end of the 19th century-beginning of the 20th century; due to its proximity to districts such as Beyazıt and Vezneciler, where scholars and students were concentrated, it continued to exist as a distinguished district (Erdoğan, 1941, p. 33). Tombstones in the Kilise Camii cemetery, and the Voynük Sücaettin Camii cemetery are good indicators that the people

buried in them were important and respected citizens (Figure 2). Vefa also kept its popularity until the 1930s due to its proximity to Şehzadebaşı, and Direklerarası, the entertainment and art centers of the Old City (Esmer, 2020, p. 298). The Süleymaniye region, which comprises the Vefa quarter, where the upper class lived until the first half of the 20th century, has changed slightly since the Constantine Era, with great fires and earthquakes. But it has not undergone major changes until the first half of the 20th century; the urban fabric exhibited an organic development which matched the land's topography (Kuban, 2001, p. 3)

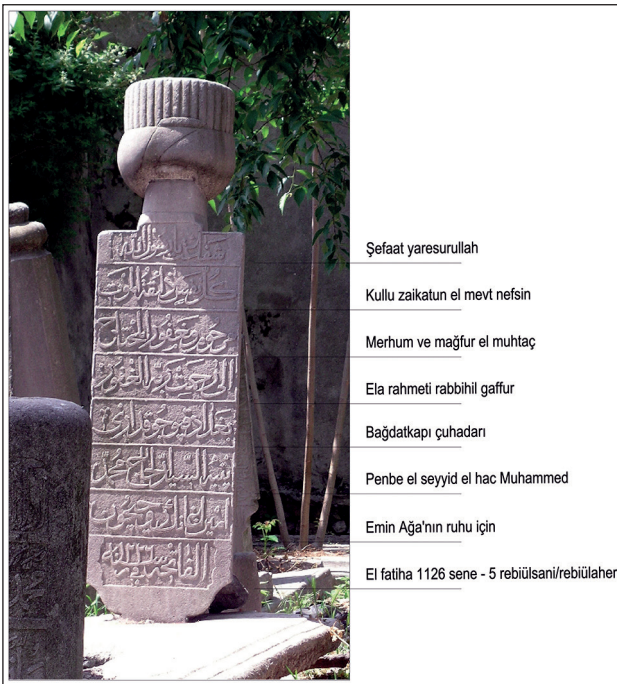


Figure 2. The tombstone from Vefa Kilise Camii hazire (cemetery) (2007).

In the 19th century the Ottoman industry started to develop on the shores of the Golden Horn due to the ease of access and transportation its shores provided. Unfortunately, the first master plan for Istanbul in the Republican Era suggested that industrial facilities should be further built on the shores of the Golden Horn. In the following years, the Golden Horn area, as well as the Süleymaniye neighborhood, became an area housing factories and ateliers of various sizes, changing the residential character. Another important factor for the change was the opening of Atatürk Boulevard on 27.02.1943. This was a major town planning act of the early 40's in the Republican Era which re-

sulted in the demolition of some monuments as well as of many houses. It further brought about significant changes such as a major change in the volume of buildings, their average proportions and their lots. The enlarged width of roads also invited more motor-vehicles while consecutive constructions of new buildings and facilities further altered the previous residential character. Concerning the inhabitants of the area, the demographical and social status of the neighborhood changed drastically in the following years.

After the 1950's the inhabitants of Süleymaniye, responding to the changing physical and social environment factors, sold their houses in order to move to new "selected" neighborhoods of Istanbul, leaving their houses to new migrants. The neighborhood became the first "station" for migrants providing accommodation with very low rents. As the new owners/tenants of the houses could not appreciate their value, some of them were transformed into small ateliers or storage spaces while some big houses and mansions were rented room by room to migrant families, changing completely the inner spatial features. Therefore, a maintenance problem arose which resulted in the loss of many structures. The socio-demographical pattern of the new inhabitants also lead to some other problems. Extreme fanaticism blended with ignorance damaged monuments such as Vefa Kilise Camii. Concrete was poured over the spoliated parapet slabs of its minaret in 1995, as well as many other inconvenient interventions.

The Süleymaniye Urban Historical Area was selected for UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1985. However, after the 2000's, the rising value in real estate in Istanbul and the gaps in the Turkish legal system increased the problems. Although Süleymaniye was a World Heritage Site, it was declared a renewal area in 2006 by the help of the Law No. 5366. Law No. 5366 on the "Conservation through Renewal and Utilization through Revitalization of Deteriorated Historic and Cultural Properties", the "Renewal Law", issued in 2005, played a key role in transforming many historic areas. With this law, the Council of Ministers has become able to designate "urban renewal sites" while giving local authorities (municipalities) a great deal of power over these projects contrary to the conventional planning system (Esmer *et al*, 2023).

2. Brief history of Vefa Kilise Camii and its repairs

On the narrow road leading to Vefa Square, north of the Şehzade Complex, was the first church here which was built by the patriarch Sforakios during the reign of Theodosius (408-450 AD) according to Paspatis (Paspatis, 1877, p. 314). However, this early period structure was destroyed in a fire (Paspatis, 1877, p. 315). Also the quarter called Vefa today, housed the residence of the historian Nikitas Choniatis, which was burned in 1204 by the Latin crusaders (Paspatis, 1877, p. 316). Paspatis as well claimed that it was possible that the church which we call as the Kilise Camii was dedicated to Agios Theodoros, a soldier saint, or to Agios Phanourios, also a young soldier saint. The claim that this church was named Phanerotis in honor of Saint Phanourios stems from the tradition during the Byzantine period. Because those who lost money visited the church (Paspatis, 1877, p. 316). However, there is no definite evidence about certainty of these names to belong to the Vefa Kilise Camii.

According to Mango, the Kilise Camii may be the katholikon of one of the three monasteries founded around Vefa in the 14th and 15th centuries. Specifically, he suggested that Vefa Kilise Camii might be the monastery church named “Gorgopekoos” that had annexes built around 1300 by Nikephoros Choumnos, originally built by Michael IV or V around 1034-1041 (Mango, 1990, p. 429). This is because the building phases observed in the Kilise Camii and the so-told features of this structure are very similar.

It is believed that the narthex and naos of the Kilise Camii, which are the first phases of the current structure, were built in the 11th century during the Middle Byzantine period (Mango, 1965, p. 330). After the Latin invasion, the northern and southern annexes were probably added as part of the building’s repair work (Mango, 1965, p. 330). The outer narthex is thought to have been built around 1320 (Ousterhout, 1987, plate:161). Vaulting evidence indicates the northern annex was added later than the naos. In the passage from the outer narthex to the northern annex, there is still a visible lower part of an arched window opening, proving the outer narthex, the last phase

in Byzantine Era, was built after the northern annex (Ousterhout, 1987, plate:163).

Ottoman annexes such as a minaret and mihrab were added when the building was converted into a mosque in 1484 (Barkan and Ayverdi, 1970, p. 61). The structure is defined as follows in Hadikat’ül Cevami: “The founder is Şeyhü’l-Islam Molla Gürani, and Abdurrahman Efendi, one of the mudarris, son of Mehmed Eminzade Hüseyin Ağa, gave up its minbar” (Ayvansarayı, 2001, p. 251).

It wasn’t until 1833 that there was much information about the structure following this change of function by the end of the 15th century. In the texts written by Evliya Çelebi and Ayvansarayı, very little is stated concerning the building than a very general description. The structure was in a dilapidated state when Texier examined it in 1833 due to the fire that had occurred in August that year (*Rebiülahir* 14, 1249) (Cezar, 1963, p. 327). Texier drew the first survey of the Kilise Camii in 1833 (Figure 3). The drawings of Lenoir, who examined the building in 1836, were published in 1852 after those of Texier. Following Lenoir’s inspection, the building was renovated with some changes to its architecture (Mango, 1965, p. 324). The structure was inspected for the first time by Salzenberg after repairs were completed. During Salzenberg’s visit, the building looked quite like it does now, and it was in use as a mosque (Mango, 1965, p. 324). In 1877 and 1878, Pulgher and Paspates were the researchers who examined the structure following Salzenberg.

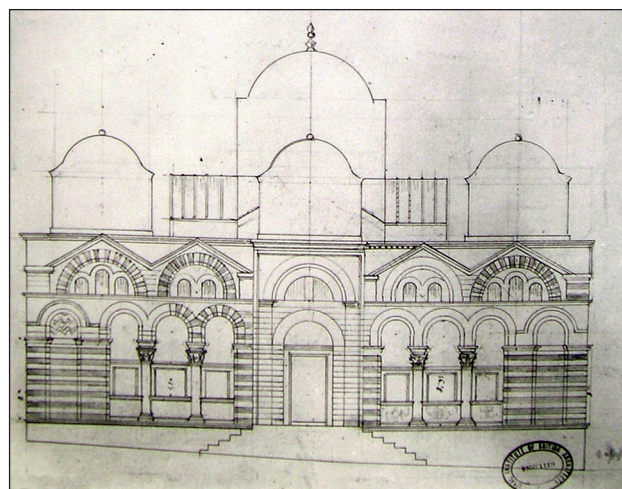


Figure 3. The survey of Kilise Camii by Texier (RIBA, 1833).

The Kilise Camii underwent a repair at the beginning of the 20th century according to a document found in the Ottoman Archives dated 30 January 1907. According to the document, some of the damaged parts of the building were explored and the building could be repaired by the state using the emanet system with the approval of the sultan. It is confirmed that the Sultan accepted this request (Figure 4).

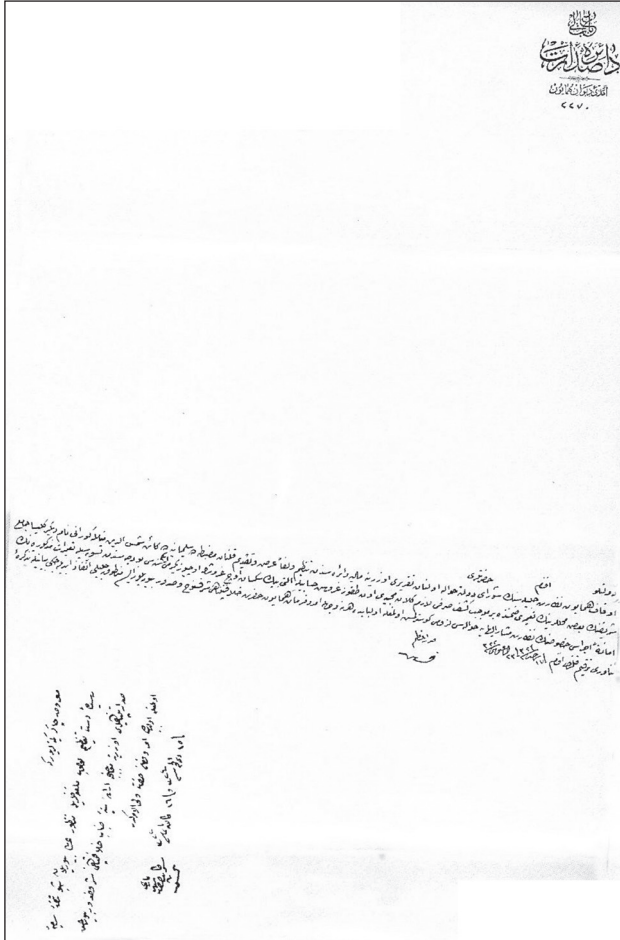


Figure 4. The archival document showing the repair of the Kilise Camii (İ. EV. / 1324 Z/8).

Following the repair, Gurlitt and Millingen in 1912 and Ebersolt in 1913 examined, photographed, and surveyed the structure. Some inconsistencies exist in the drawings of Texier, Lenoir, Salzenberg and other researchers. However it's important to note that Texier and Lenoir's drawings were made before photographic technology became prevalent and they provide information belonging to the first half of the 19th century

In 1926, another researcher, Nikolai Brunoff came to Istanbul and examined the building (Fig-

ure 5) (Brounoff, 1926, p. 13). And in 1937, an amateur enthusiast, Hidayet Fuat Tagay, worked with a topographer Miltiadis Nomidis for 10 months in the building for its repair. The most important outcome of their work were the discovery of the tomb chambers in the basement of the building, and the mosaics of the outer narthex domes (Figure 6). This repair was stopped abruptly when their permit was cancelled before they could finish uncovering, and cleaning the outer narthex mosaics (Nomidis, 1958, p. 36).



Figure 5. The Brunoff's examination of the south parekklesion (Brunov, 1930/31, p.140).

In 1955, 1965, and 1972 consecutively, superficial restorations were carried out by the Pious Foundations (Vakıflar) on the facades of the Kili-se Camii resulting in the loss of some traces in the masonry (Figure 7). The interview for my dissertation with Semavi Eyice revealed that the repairs were made without a restoration project. Furthermore, no detailed record of these repairs, but only some expense and material lists were found in the Archives of the Istanbul Regional Directorate of Pious Foundations. The last repair by Vakıflar in the 20th century was in 1987, again without a restoration project.

After 2006, the Vefa Kilise Camii, and its surroundings were transformed into one of Istanbul's Renewal Areas. In a report filed by the Renewal Board, it was stated that the marble parapets and column capitals were plastered and covered with a thick layer of paint. The building underwent a restoration campaign by the Pious Foundations in 2018, and was reopened to worship in March 2021.

EXONARTHEX — Coupole Sud									
PROPHETES									
	S. Salathiel	Jechonias	E. Achim	Sadoc	N. Azor	Ellakim	O. Abiud	Zorobabel	
	S.-E.	E.	N.-E.	N.	N.-O.	O.	S.-O.		
CORPS :									
Hauteur totale:									
nimbe y compris	en m. 1.47	1.475	1.448	1.412	1.43	1.48	1.49	1.404	
couronne y comprise	> 1.40	1.415	1.395	1.378	1.37	1.435	1.41	1.345	
jusqu'à la couronne	> 1.332	1.341	1.303	1.279	1.287	1.364	1.329	1.253	
jusqu'aux épaules	> 1.172	1.169	1.174	1.123	1.13	1.212	1.132	1.14	
jusqu'à la partie inférieure de la									
livre inférieure	> 1.24	1.245	1.225	1.183	1.17	1.274	1.21	1.165	
Largeur maximum	en cm. 65.5	62	59.5	67.2	71.5	60.7	72	65.5	
Largeur aux épaules	> 28	27	28	30.2	31	32	31.5	29	
NIMBRE :									
Diametre	> 32.5	327	31	31.5	32.6	32.7	32.8	32.8	
Forme géométrique Cercle régulier									
Nombre de pierres de la									
circonférence	Pièces 68	74	69	64	66	72	75	64	
Dimensions des pierres									
variant entre	en mm. 13x11	14x11.5	13x10.5	13x11	14.5x10.5	16x12	19x11	14x11.5	
et	> 6x6.5	5.5x5	6x6	8x7	6x7	7x6	5.5x5	7x6.5	

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Figure 6. The article of Nomidis presented details of the repair work (Nomidis, 1958, p.39)

3. Problems of Preservation Before The Last Repair

There has been multiple changes to the original structure as one can imagine during its millennial lifetime. Apart from various changes during the Byzantine Era, in the 15th century, during its conversion to a mosque a number of liturgical interior elements of the church were lost, including the ambon and iconostasis. There has been a cut in the eastern facade in the lower part of the diaconicon, and the entire protrusion of the prothesis, and the apsis of the north annex is also demolished at an unknown date. A fire in 1833 damaged

the parekklesion adjacent to the south facade; four marble columns supporting the main dome of the naos were replaced by stone piers. There are no remaining original wooden Ottoman annexes such as its minbar and sultan's lodge.

However, prior to the last repair in 2018, the structure suffered from severe problems as never before such as: negligence, unplanned repairs, deterioration of materials, fires, earthquakes, functional changes, user-caused problems like vandalism, and improper additions/interventions (Figure 8). Natural, environmental, and human factors all contributed to the problems. It can also be noted that elements from both the Byzantine and Ottoman periods were similarly damaged.

In the years since the last well documented repair at the Vefa Kilise Camii in 1937, which was cut short for an unknown reason, only superficial and unplanned repairs have been conducted. An incorrect jointing on the south facade caused masonry traces to be lost in 1972, and the roof shape of the north annex also changed.

In 1979, a member of its congregation white-washed the hand-drawn decorations from the last Ottoman restoration and the mosaics. As a consequence, the appearance of Ottoman hand-drawn decorations along with Byzantine mosaics, which encompass different cultural layers, was muffled. The conservative attitude combined with ignorance caused some residents in the quarter to scrape and plaster some reliefs on the monument's west facade.

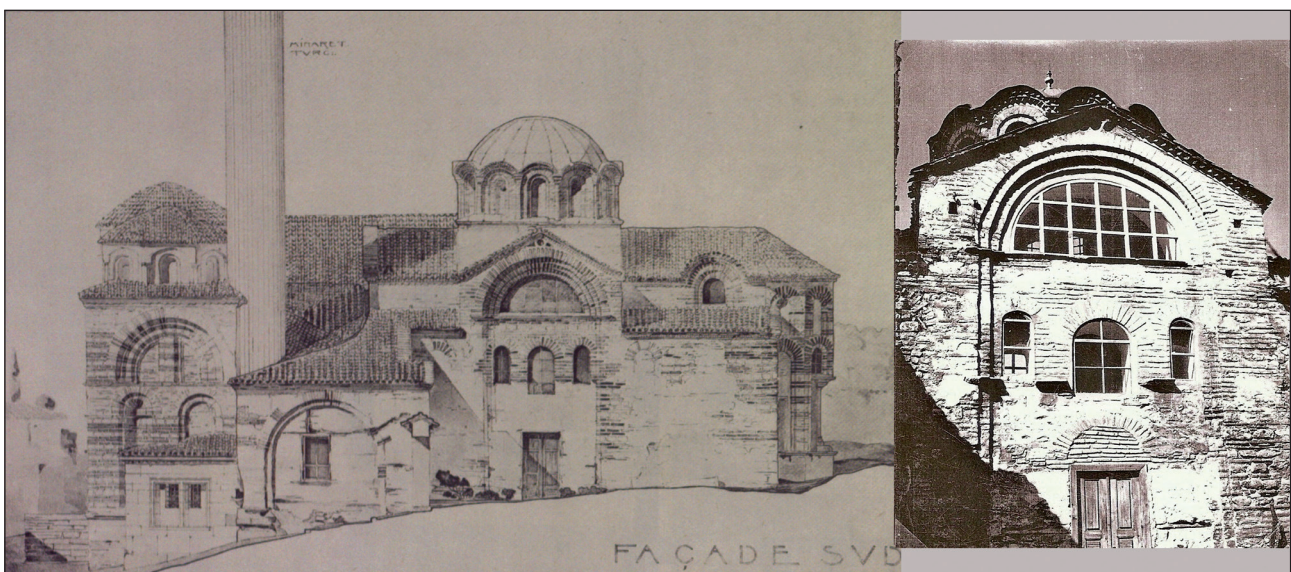


Figure 7. The traces of arches on the south facade (Ebersolt, 1913-Şengül Tümer, 1953)



Figure 8. The condition of the north annex prior to restoration (2007).

Crosses on the marble parapets of the western facade, which now look clean after restoration, were scraped off before cement was applied. An Artamanov photograph from the 1930s shows one of these intact crosses. There is a possibility that those who scraped away the crosses learned that damaging historical monuments is illegal and covered the areas they damaged.



Figure 9. The condition of the roof prior to restoration (2007).

In 1995, the north annex of the Vefa Kilise Camii were transformed into a wc unit. Aside from hygienic concerns, an improper plumbing intervention affected the historic structure. And ablution faucets were placed on the north wall of the outer narthex. Daily abuse by its users gradually deteriorated the structure. A shanty structure was added to the east of the south annex which was used with the south annex as a lodgement for the *mouezzin*. However the lodgement was rented to a family not related with the Kilise Camii. Moreover another shanty-unit with a metal structure was placed at the southwestern corner of the outer narthex and a person selected by the mosque congregation was dwelling in it. Also there was a room on the second floor of the north annex above the wc unit that the congregation used like a dormitory for some youngsters without a legal permission. Since In January 2009, the joinery on the eastern facade of the building was replaced with PVC windows. Istanbul Regional Directorate of Foundations became aware of the situation, but did not initiate an action. Furthermore, during the repair work, it was discovered that cement mortar had been carelessly applied to the parapet slabs on the balcony of the minaret. As well for this, punishment should be meted out to whoever was responsible.

Rain and snow were leaking in through the building's roof and facades, causing damage to the walls and ceilings (Figure 9). Cement-based mortar used to repair the building in 1955, 1965, 1972, and 1987 consecutively contained salts that leached into the brickwork, causing efflorescence. It would therefore not be incorrect to say that the structure was in dire need of urgent repair prior to 2018 in order to stop its relentless deterioration.

4. Evaluation of recently completed repair

Following the re-opening in March 2021, the mosque began serving as a religious building, and its general view and state of conservation have improved significantly. They removed the wc unit from the north annex, shanty-unit from the outer narthex, and built ablution faucets outside in the courtyard to replace the shantystructure next to the south annex (Figure 10). Further, they uncovered the remnants of the monastery on the east side of the mosque (the



Figure 10. The new ablution faucets (2021)

masonry technique is similar, there is also a curvilinear fragment of an apse and a broken cornice on it), and the remains of the wall that formerly housed the mosque's madrasah (Figure 11).



Figure 11. The walls of monastery (2021)

It's deliberately good that they left the remnants without any re-integration. On the south facade, they discovered the bases of the collapsed parecclesion columns. Furthermore, north and south parekklesia, of which Brunov, and Thies

mentioned in their research, were excavated and left open for exploration. This has made it possible to see some of the building details that were seen in Texier drawings in 1833. And in general, the pointing and plastic repairs are of good quality.

The following issues, however, might have benefited from better interventions: pointing and investigating traces in specific areas, deciding what color to paint the walls and ceilings, and some of the new fabrications. It was worth paying attention to the special decorations on the facades. Among them is the checkerstone motif between the two arches over the entrance door on the outer narthex's western facade (Figure 12). The checkerstone motif was not appropriately pointed. Even in the previous dilapidated state of the facade, the motif looked more discernable. A second motif is the meander motif on the northern facade, which Lioba Thies discovered and that I stressed in my dissertation as a point to be careful with during repair work. This part of the wall was simply pointed without investigating the motif (Figure 13). And the meander motif is probably lost irreversibly.



Figure 12. The checkerstone motif (Above: 2007 - Below: 2021).



Figure 13. The place of the meander motif (Esmer, 2019 during repair- Theis, 2005)



Figure 14. The bowls left open after the repair (Hendrix D. 2021)

There were also traces of arches on the south facade that can be seen in the drawings by Ebersolt, Van Millingen and also in the photographs by Şengül Tümer, an art history undergraduate student who completed her graduation thesis with Semavi Eyice in 1953. The traces were as well discussed in my PhD dissertation. During the 1972 repairs, these traces were lost. They have also not been investigated in the recent restoration, so the facade remained same as it was before the repairs regarding these two arches (Figure 7). Furthermore, the three partially visible bowls on the south facade have been cleaned and left open, but they are in need of protection. They have probably survived so long because they were plastered during the Ottoman period and are now exposed to the sun, snow, and rain (Figure 14).

For interior a yellow color was preferred at the last repair, likely due to rasping during restoration and the discovery of old layers. However, this yellow color is very dominant and does not look convenient. A softer tone would have been more appropriate. The Ottoman decoration from its last repair is forced into any surface that is available (Figure 15). There are even instances where hand drawn decorations have been applied to asymmetric surfaces, which makes them look odd. The windows made of white portland cement on the upper elevations would look better if these were placed a little inside and had a shadow share (Figure 16). The entrance portal, especially the tone of the wood veneer could have been much better chosen (Figure 17).



Figure 15. The interior color and hand drawn motifs (2021)



Figure 17. The entrance portal (2021)



Figure 16. The windows from white portland cement (2021)



Figure 18. The wooden porch (2021)

One of the most problematic applications is a wooden porch next to the south facade and blocking the triple opening completely (Figure 18). Wooden posts with wide cross-sections were used frequently, as if they were meant to support a 3-storey building, when they only needed to support a wooden porch.

All the architectural sculpture pieces found during excavation are still standing in front of the eastern facade to be displayed, and it is hoped that the courtyard will remain clean and free of trash in following years.

During the restoration the parapet slabs of the minaret were cleaned off the cement coating but, while the majestic peacock-adorned slab and other slabs remain in-situ, the color of their stones faded and some details were obliterated while cleaning the cement on them, which is unfortunate (Figure 19). Moreover, currently the interior of the parapet of the minaret is cluttered with wires and speakers, causing it to look unkempt.

On the western facade, there were two stone-mason's marks (theta-epsilon) and a bit too much

cleaning was applied, so that the surface of that piece seems to have eroded. Also, the column standing on that piece which serves as a column base was replaced with a new one during the last restoration. The previous shanty unit was attached to that column, so it may have caused the original one to deteriorate. The replaced column is of gray veined marble, and does not seem to go well with the rest of the elements on the facade in colour and texture.

Finally it is important to make a few remarks on the nearby surroundings of the monument which is located in Süleymaniye World Heritage Site. The surrounding areas of the Kilise Camii look more like a post-conflict zone, rather than a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the photograph taken from its minaret balcony (Figure 20). There is a parking area for motor vehicles on every plot of any demolished structure. In such an environment it is not possible to expect that the Vefa Kilise Camii will be maintained, clean, and its preservation will be safeguarded. Further, it is located in a renewal zone that is capable of producing major changes in quantity within a short amount of time. Based on



Figure 19. The figures on the parapet slabs of the minaret balcony (Erdoğan, 1996 - Esmer, 2021).

these circumstances, Kilise Camii is continuously threatened by its environment, and is at risk.



Figure 20. The nearby surroundings of the Vefa Kilise Camii (2021)

5. Conclusion

Medieval structures are excellent historical documents, providing evidence of different styles, and periods. Over the centuries, they have been repaired many times, and additions have been made at different periods. Defining, repairing, and maintaining these structures requires multidisciplinary, multi-expert teams. After the repair of the Vefa Kilise Camii, it is clear that there were some points that could have been better handled.

By their nature and history (materials and assembly), architectural heritage structures present a number of challenges in diagnosing and restoring them that limit the application of modern building codes and standards, according to the Icomos Charter- Principles For Analyzing, Conserving And Restoring Architectural Heritage (ICOMOS, 2003). It is desirable and essential to provide recommendations that cover both rational methods of analysis and culturally appropriate methods

of repair. Architectural heritage which requires a multidisciplinary approach for conservation, reinforcement, and restoration is not just about its appearance, but also about the integrity of all its components as a unique product of the specific building technology of its era. Furthermore, all its qualified additions are considered part of the monument. There is a need for a thorough understanding of the materials and structural characteristics. Information on the structure in its original and earlier states is essential.

Interventions should ensure safety and durability while preserving heritage values as much as possible. Within each small corner of the monument one can detect an important detail of its long past, building/repair technology, approach of the period and so on. For instance after the cleaning of the paint layers one can see the masons's toolmarks on one of the delicately carved column bases at Vefa Kilise Camii or a spoiled Ottoman slab used as a lintel at one of the openings on the main apsis on the eastern facade (Figure 21).

The choices of colors to be applied, the additions to be removed, the motifs to be added all require a thorough understanding of the structure's history, its periods, past repairs, building techniques used at the time it was built, including its qualified additions, as well as the knowledge of the current methods of conservation. Maintenance of the building after repair is also another concern. The inside of the balcony of the minaret is already cluttered with cables and speakers. Moreover, it looks like the architectural sculpture was laid down haphazardly in the garden without being properly secured against theft and/or damage.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that these medieval structures have continual scientific committees that observe, and report any problems as they occur, so that precautions can be taken before they become too severe. Additionally, a protective zone should be established around them to prevent them from being affected by physical and social changes.

Besides being a protected area, and also a World Heritage Site, the Süleymaniye is a renewal area since 2006. World Heritage Site of Süleymaniye encompasses Vefa quarter and the Kilise Camii, and there is a sharp conflict related to preservation, as the area is both a World Heritage Site, and a re-



Figure 21. The toolmarks on the column base and an spoliated Ottoman slab (2021).

newal area. As recommended by the Valletta Principles (ICOMOS, 2012), a protected urban area is any part of a town that represents a historical period or stage of development of the town. It includes monuments and authentic urban fabric, in which buildings express the cultural values for which the place is protected. Therefore, it is unacceptable to approve the state of Süleymaniye as renewal area according to its requirements of preservation. Furthermore, as indicated in the charter, an accumulation of changes could have a negative effect on a historic town and its values. However, major quantitative and qualitative changes are enabled by the Renewal Law No. 5366 in renewal areas.

As a conclusion, a preservation strategy for a medieval monument needs to consider the urban scale, the surrounding environment, the building structure, and material conservation requirements. In the case of Vefa Killise Camii, it is hoped the institutions responsible will keep these requirements in mind for the future.

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