



ΧΡΗΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ / CHRISTIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF BYZANTINE
AND POST-BYZANTINE ARCHAEOLOGY AND ART, FOUNDED IN 1884

RESOLUTION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHRISTIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Athens, May 29, 2022

The Christian Archaeological Society (ChAE), the academic society of the Greek researchers of Byzantine archaeology and art, founded in 1884, has maintained a continuing watch over the state of preservation of the Byzantine monuments in Constantinople (Istanbul), since the change of their legal status from museums to religious foundations in 2020. Hagia Sophia, perhaps the highest achievement of Byzantine architecture and art, and the Chora monastery, with the Palaiologan frescoes and mosaics, are now under circumstances that threaten their preservation.

Recent photographs from the interior of Hagia Sophia give rise both to disappointment and considerable cause for concern. In the first place, the thousands of uncontrolled visitors are having a drastic impact on the microclimate of the building. The protection and the management of the monument under the guidance of an excellent personnel of scientists and guards, which its former status as a Museum guaranteed, no longer exists. Shoes hanging on 6th century marble revetments, food remnants on columns pedestals, and other images of this kind that have been circulating worldwide demonstrate clearly that the monument is in danger. The damage to the wooden doors of the royal gate which connects the inner narthex to the nave, testifies to the extent of the lack of protection of the monument at this moment.

In the second place, access to the galleries with the imperial mosaic panels has been forbidden and their state of preservation remains unknown. The so-called “movable” cover of the Bema mosaics has in fact been shown to be permanent. No information about plans for the other mosaics of the monument has been published or made available to specialists.

The monastery of Chora remains closed, on the pretext of ongoing works of preservation, although these were completed a long time ago. Furniture for the conversion of the monument to a mosque has been already installed in the interior, while a system to cover the mosaics has been tested as well.

The Christian Archaeological Society appeals to all institutions that are able to intervene effectively to act immediately in order to protect these unique monuments of Byzantine culture and World Heritage. It is totally unacceptable, in our times, to jeopardise the preservation of such important monuments for the sake of backward concepts and political goals.