



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

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It is with deep sorrow that the Christian Archaeological Society was informed of the decision of the Turkish government to change the museum status of the Monastery of Christ of Chora in Istanbul, a unique monument of European culture, reverting it to a mosque. This decision follows closely the recent conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

The Chora Monastery, dedicated to Christ the Savior, was built in the late 11th century over an earlier building and was radically repaired in the early 12th century. In the early 14th century it was renovated by the *Grand Logothetes* of Byzantium under the Emperor Andronikos II (1282-1328), Theodoros Metohitis, a powerful politician and a great scholar of his time. Metohitis expanded the original building adding an exonarthex to the west and his burial chapel on the south side. Under his initiative the church was decorated with mosaics and frescoes of exquisite quality that mark a return to the aesthetic values of late Antiquity rendered with a transcendental expression, in an artistic idiom distinguished for the elegance and grace of the figures.

This unique monument had been converted into a mosque during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512), and its painted decoration covered. Conservation works carried out by the American Byzantine Institute and the Dumbarton Oaks in the decade 1948-1958 restored the monument to its former glory and following the completion of the restoration project the Chora Monastery became a Museum.

According to the recent decision of the Turkish state, the Chora Monastery will revert to a mosque, a change of status contrary to the principle of respect for the historical identity of monuments. This change will have unpredictable consequences for the worn-out building and the integrity of its monumental decoration which will be covered anew to serve the religious function of the monument.

The Christian Archaeological Society expresses its distress for the fate of the Monastery of Chora and calls on the international organizations mandated for the protection of cultural heritage and the leadership of the European Union to make every effort to protect the monument that preserves the most brilliant example of Byzantium monumental art of the Palaiologan period.

The Administrative Board of Christian Archaeological Society