Appropriation of Church Buildings in Northern Cyprus

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ABSTRACT
The appropriation of places of worship by communities associated with different religions has been a common practice throughout history, although the aims of and processes for such appropriations may vary. In some cases, it can be interpreted as a cultural conquest. Alternatively, it can be a convenient adaptation to provide a place for prayer while maintaining the sanctity of the place. The process of appropriation provides an understanding of cultures and their change over time. Given the changing dynamics of long, on-going conflicts in Cyprus, this article aims to trace the relationship between heritage and contemporary cultural dynamics by examining the process of the appropriation of church buildings in northern Cyprus before and after the conflict that resulted in the division of the island in 1974.
Keywords: Cyprus, church, mosque, heritage, conflict

INTRODUCTION
The Republic of Cyprus, established in 1960, has been a troubled state since the armed conflict in 1963 when the Turkish Cypriot legislators rejected the proposed amendments to the constitution and Turkish representation left the government. The political problems between the two communities eventually led to the permanent division of the island following a military intervention by Turkey in 1974. This dramatic development was accompanied by a massive population movement between the north and the south. The division forced both communities to separate and have no contact for the next thirty years. Few Greek Cypriots remained on the north have maintained their own churches up to today while most churches were deserted after the division. As the displaced Turkish community from the south began to settle in the northern villages and to appropriate abandoned houses, the deserted churches located in these areas began to be adapted as well. Some of these churches were converted to museums by the new Turkish administration and some others were assigned new functions by the newcomers, primarily as mosques.

The conversion of churches to mosques has been a common practice since the early days of Islam. The Umayyad Mosque in Samarra, previously known as St. John's Church, is one of the earliest examples of this practice, while Hagia Sophia in Istanbul is a well-known example from the Ottoman period. Some of the churches in Cyprus were converted into mosques when the Ottomans conquered the island in 1571. The most well-known cases include the Selimiye Mosque, located in Nicosia, and the Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque, located in Famagusta, previously known as the Cathedral of St. Sophia and the Cathedral of St. Nicholas, respectively. These two converted churches are still being used as mosques. After the 1974 conflict, the Turkish Cypriots also converted some of the church buildings in the villages when they relocated. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in the construction of new mosques, and the converted churches have been abandoned and have an unknown future.

This paper will examine, in detail, the process of the conversion of churches into mosques in northern Cyprus before and after the 1974 conflict with the aim of tracing the relationship

between the cultural dynamics and the heritage, both of which have changed over time. In the first section, the paper provides a short historical background about the island. The second section introduces the religious heritage of Cyprus and focuses especially on the religious buildings. The third section examines, in detail, the historical periods before and after the 1974 conflict to understand the dynamics of the appropriation and the transition of churches into mosques.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CYPRUS
Cyprus is an area with an accumulation of different cultures. Throughout its history, many mixed and hybrid cultures have reigned on the island, which has a strategic position lying on the crossroads of Africa, Asia and Europe. The first of these rulers were the Persian-Phoenician and Hellenistic Egyptian Ptolemaic powers who ruled the island during the first millennium B.C. During Roman rule, which lasted from 58 B.C. to 395 A.D., many Christian Armenians settled on the island. Later, although the island remained in the possession of the Byzantine emperors, it was twice overrun and temporarily occupied by the Saracens (assumed to be Syrian Arab Muslims) (Arbel 2000).

In 1184, the Byzantine ruler of Cyprus, Isaac Comnenus, broke away from Constantinople and declared himself an independent emperor. The island was freed from Comnenus' tyranny in 1191 by the Crusaders under Richard I of England, who then bestowed it to the French crusader Guy de Lusignan, the titular king of Jerusalem, and his descendants. By this time, there was no trace of any permanent Arab Cypriot community, although some Arabic place names remained, such as Kantara and Komi Kebir (Hill, 1948a and 1948b).

In 1489, the island was ceded to the Venetians by Catherine Cornaro, widow of James II, the last of the Lusignan kings. Under Venetian rule (1489-1571), many Albanians came to the island (Hill, 1948a) and built a small mosque in Limassol, Arnaut (Albanian) Mesjid. The Venetian Empire's Cypriot colony was subsequently conquered in 1570-1571 by the Ottoman Emperor Sultan Selim II. The Ottomans abolished the feudal system on the island, which had lasted during the rule of the Lusignans and Venetians, and established, in its place, the manorial estates known as çiftlik, which were granted to the Anatolian immigrants who were encouraged to settle in Cyprus. In the year 1878, Cyprus was leased by the Ottomans to the British government, who administered the island until 1958.

With the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, the island gained independence from Britain in 1960. However, soon after, in 1963, an inter-communal dispute erupted between the island's two major ethnic groups, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The dispute ended with the military intervention of the Turkish government in 1974 and invasion of the island, leading to the separation of the two principal communities. Since then, the two communities have lived separately, divided by a UN controlled buffer zone. In the process of separation, the Turkish Cypriots who once lived in the southern part of Cyprus were relocated to the northern area, while the Greek Cypriots who lived in the north had to leave their homes and move to the southern part of the island. Though most of the Turkish and Greek populations were relocated after the 1974 separation, there are still some families who have not left their homes. In 1983, the Turkish Republic of northern Cyprus, which is still not recognised by any country other than Turkey, was established.

RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF CYPRUS
The religious heritage of Cyprus is a result of the numerous cultures that have populated the island during its long history. These cultures include the Lusignans, Venetians, Nestoraians, Maronites, Armenians and Ottomans (Jeffery 1918, Enlart 1987). The island has a distinctive background that dates back to early Christianity. As early as 45 AD, the church in Antioch

sent Paul and Barnabas, who were accompanied by Barnabas' nephew John Mark, to the island of Cyprus as their first missionaries. When Paul and Barnabas converted the Roman governor, Sergius Paulus, to Christianity, the island became the first country in the world to be governed by a Christian ruler (Keshishian 1985). After the establishment of Christianity, the pagan temples and sanctuaries on the island were replaced by churches and monasteries, a few of which still remain today. In the fourth century, Cyprus was ruled by the Byzantine Emperor, and the Orthodox Church has been dominant on the island ever since (Hill 1940, Goodwin 1978).

Under the Lusignan and the Venetian rule (1191-1571), the Orthodox church lost its independence. In 1191, with the arrival of the Crusaders, cathedrals and churches similar to Latin churches in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as monasteries and mountain castles, were built in the principal towns on the island. The most distinguished examples of such architecture with French Gothic influences erected during this period included the St. Sophia Cathedral in Nicosia and the St. Nicholas Cathedral in Famagusta, where the kings of Jerusalem were appointed and crowned (Hill 1948a).

A decade or two after their arrival, the Latin Church established an archbishop in Nicosia with bishoprics in Famagusta, Paphos and Limassol, and the Greek bishops were forced to minister to their flocks under the Latin Church. The Latin Church aimed to influence the Greek clergy and Latinise the native Greek Orthodox Church. Although the Orthodox Church's power was reduced, it was allowed to hold services in its customary manner in its churches (Jennings 1993, 2009).

After the Ottomans conquered the island in 1571, they converted some churches to mosques and also constructed a few new mosques and mesjids (Jennings 1993). In addition, the Orthodox Church was re-established during this time. The Ottoman rulers allowed the Greek Orthodox Church as well as the Armenians, Nestorians and Maronites to retain and administer their churches and construct new churches, monasteries, schools and other buildings as needed. After the Latin hierarchy disappeared, however, the Greek Orthodox church emerged with comparative freedom (Benedict 1995).

During British colonial rule in the 19th century, a number of church buildings were constructed in the villages. The administration supported these buildings as they were also used as schools. It was during this time, in 1935, that the Department of Antiquities was established, an inventory of historic buildings was prepared, and some restoration work was conducted. Some churches were returned to their original functions, such as the Armenian Church in the walled-city of Famagusta.

Among more than 500 places of worship belonging to Christianity (monasteries, churches, and chapels) that remained in the north after the 1974 separation, some churches in the villages were adopted as mosques by the new residents of the villages, and a few housed secular functions such as folkloric dance centres or kindergartens (Saifi and Yüceer 2012). Furthermore, a handful of towns constructed their own mosques soon after the displacement, such as the mosque in Yeniboğaziçi/Ayios Sergios[1], which was constructed in 1976. Under the initiatives of the Department of Antiquities and Museums, a few churches have been converted to iconic or archaeological museums, such as the Panayia Theotokos Church in İskele/Trikomo, the St. Mamas Monastery in Güzelyurt/Morphou and the

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[1] The Greek names of the villages were changed after 1974 and re-named with Turkish names. Throughout the text, both Turkish and Greek names of the villages are given when they first appear in the text and later referenced using only the current name.

Archangelos Church in Girne/Kyrenia (Hyland 1999). In smaller towns, churches as well as other buildings were abandoned. A handful of churches, however, have been maintained by their own communities, such as the Apostolos Andreas Monastery and the Ayios Synesios Church in Dipkarpaz/Rizokarpasso, which are currently being used by the remaining Greek Cypriots in the village, and the Ayios Georgios Maronite Church in Korucam/Kormakitis.

Since the displacement of the communities in 1974, the churches that have become derelict are those that were abandoned and have not served any purpose for the incoming Turkish population. These abandoned churches have not been maintained and have been referenced in several reports presented to international commissions (Grieboski and Porter 2009, Yüceer 2012).

The next section examines the process of the appropriation of church buildings for mosques both before and after the 1974 division of the island. This examination not only provides insight into the dynamics involved in the process of appropriation but also emphasises how these dynamics are affected by conflict.

FROM CHURCHES TO MOSQUES – THE APPROPRIATION PROCESS
BEFORE 1974:
In this section, churches that were converted into mosques before the 1974 conflict will be divided into two categories: those that are still used as mosques and those that currently serve a different function. Some of the early churches on the island were converted into mosques before the 12th century, during the Syrian-Arab Muslim invasion of the island (Bağışkan 2009). However, as there is not enough information available regarding this process, all cases examined herein are from the Ottoman period.

Churches that were converted to mosques and still function as mosques:
One of the best known cases of the appropriation of churches into mosques during the Ottoman period is that of the Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque (Figure 1) in Famagusta, which was converted from Saint Nicholas Cathedral after the Ottoman conquest of the town in 1571. Referred to as "The Daughter of Notre Dame of Reims" (Walsh, 2005) and constructed in the early 14th century, St. Nicholas Cathedral in Nicosia was where the Crusader King of Jerusalem was crowned after becoming King of Cyprus in Nicosia (Gunnis, 1956). The impressive west façade of St. Nicholas is dominated by the remnants of two identical gabled bell towers; the north tower was converted into an elegant minaret after the building became a mosque. The three gabled doorways have bases for statues that no longer exist. At the base of the gables, remnants of carvings of human or living creatures that were destroyed are present, as Islam forbids the depiction of images and idols. Accordingly, all internal decorations and Christian references were removed. Within the building, the wider central aisle leads to the apse on the east end with only a gathering place for imams (mahfel) located in the centre. Today, the floor is covered with carpets that indicate the direction of Mecca and the specific place for each individual during prayers.

Figure 1. Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque

Not only were church buildings converted into mosques in large cities after the Ottoman conquest of 1571 but in small towns as well. An important example is the Latin church of Agia Marina in Mehmetçik/Galateia village that was reconstructed and modified into the Hacı Ahmet Mosque (Bağışkan 2009). This ashlar building is square in layout with nine equal groin vaulted bays and a dome in the central bay, which can accommodate approximately 1000 people. The mihrab, located in the south wall, indicates the direction to Mecca (quibla). According to the Ottoman census of 1831 (Prio), the Mehmetçik/Galateia village was solely inhabited by Turkish Cypriots throughout the British period, and according to its original population, no one was displaced.

Churches converted to mosques that now have a different function:
The Sinan Pasa Mosque in Famagusta (Figure 2) was converted from a mid-14th century Latin church to a mosque during the Ottoman period. Later, it served as a barn, a grain store, a petroleum repository and a library. After going unused for a period of time, it is currently being used for cultural gatherings. This rather crude and heavy looking building has two entrances, one on the west and the other on the north. While the west door is not as elaborate as typical Gothic churches, it is well-known that the north entrance was converted from a window into a portal in 1940 (Walsh 2004). The building was restored in the 1930s during the British period. The building has one nave that leads to the semi-domed apse at the east end and two side aisles that terminate with apsidal chapels, which are also semi-domed (Walsh 2004).

Figure 2. Sinan Pasa Mosque

The second example is the gothic church of St. Catherine in Nicosia (Figure 3) that was built by the Lusignans in the 14th century as part of a women's monastery. The building, impressive with its gothic stone carvings on the facades, is the second largest church in Nicosia. The Ottomans added some elements and modified other aspects of the church when converting it into a mosque, which they called the Ağalar Mosque. It was during this time that the interior was covered with a thick coating of gypsum under which remains all the moulded and carved details of its stone workmanship. The tall windows were also filled in with perforated gypsum slabs, thus replacing the glass. Instead, to obtain the required light, large square window openings were cut through the side walls at the floor level. In the 1950s, after being restored by Evqaf, this building was used as the marriage and registration office. It was then restored between 1986 and 1991 and renamed the Haydar Pasha Mosque. Today, it is an exhibition gallery (the H P Gallery) and a museum, as designated by the Department of Antiquities.

Figure 3. Haydar Pasha (Ağalar) Mosque

AFTER 1974:
After the 1974 partition, seventy churches were converted into mosques, and fifty of them are still being used in this manner, while twenty have been abandoned (based on the information received from Cyprus Evkaf Foundation). This section presents two examples of churches that were converted to mosques and are still being used as mosques and two examples of churches that are now unused even though they were once converted to and used as mosques.

Churches converted to mosques after 1974 and still functioning as mosques
One of the converted churches that still functions as a mosque is the Panayia Chardakiotissa Church in Değirmenlik/Kythrea. Today, it is known as the Başpınar Mosque. According to the 1831 census, the village was predominantly inhabited by Christian Greek Cypriots. Today, it is mainly inhabited by displaced Turkish Cypriots, most of whom are Turkish migrants from Trabzon or persons who come from the Larnaca district. The one-aisle, cross-vaulted church with six bays, a cylindrical apse and a belfry was built in 1902, and as the largest church in the village, it was the first to be converted to a mosque in 1975. According to Gunnis (1956), the gallery of the church had icons dating back to its predecessors in the 17th century. Today, no signs of the original iconostasis, mural paintings or decorations are evident. The interior of the building is painted white, the floors are covered with carpet, a mihrab is placed facing in the direction of Mecca and a wooden minber has been installed for the imam. On the other hand, the exterior, other than some Islamic symbols on top of the belfry, has undergone only minimal alterations.

Another example is the Panayia Theotokos Church, which is located in the Famagusta district, in the city of Akdoğan/Lysi (Figure 4). In the Ottoman census of 1831, Greek Cypriot Christians constituted the only inhabitants of the city. This was true during the British period as well. However, because all of the inhabitants were displaced in 1974, many Turkish Cypriots moved into the city. Accordingly, the large 19th century urban church in

Akdoğan/Lysi has distinct characteristics incorporating many elements from Cyprus's Lusignan, gothic era churches, including the gothic style gables and finials, the pointed arches and the window frames. It is worth noting that the south entrance of the Panayia Theotokos Church is configured as a gothic portal.

Figure 4. Akdoğan Mosque

Churches converted to mosques after 1974 and now abandoned
There were fifty churches that were converted into mosques after 1974. Due to the construction of new mosques since 1991, twenty of these mosques lost their congregation and currently is abandoned. The first case examined herein is the Agios Nikolaos Church in Mormenekşe/Limnia. In the 1831 census, all of the inhabitants of the village were Greek Cypriot Christians. This was true during the British period as well. After all of the village's inhabitants were displaced in 1974, however, displaced Turkish Cypriots from the Larnaca district were relocated to the village of Mormenekşe/Limnia (Prio). Some Turkish nationals, mainly from the Adana province of Turkey, also settled in the village in 1976 and 1977. The large cross vaulted church in Mormenekşe/Limnia dates from 1863, according to the date carved on the north entrance of the church. A unique characteristic of this particular church is the carved relief of Christ on the eastern wall. The church was converted to a mosque by incoming Turkish Cypriots and functioned as such until 2010.

Another example is the Agios Sergios Church in Pamuklu/Tavrou, which is located on the Karpaz/Karpas peninsula. The village was solely inhabited by Greek Cypriots before 1974 (based on the 1831 census), and it remained a solely Greek Cypriot village throughout the British period. After most of the village's inhabitants were displaced in 1974, the village housed Turkish nationals, primarily from Giresun and Ordu, located on the coast of the Black Sea, and from Yozgat province in central Anatolia, who settled there in 1976 and 1977. The Agios Sergios Church in Pamuklu/Tavrou is a typical 19th century church with the exception that the central dome is located on top of a circular drum. The church also has bell towers on both sides of its west façade. Since 2010, the building has been abandoned.

Evaluation:

The above examples of appropriating church buildings for use as mosques allow an adequate understanding of the process and its relationships to the period and culture. With respect to the Ottomans, generally, the most significant and biggest church in the town they conquered was selected and converted into a mosque. In Cyprus, this practice is shown by the conversions of St. Sophia Cathedral in Nicosia and St. Nicholas Cathedral in Famagusta, the two largest churches in the cities, into mosques. As a sign of power, the name of the sultan "Selim" is given to the most prosperous cathedral in the capital; thus, since 1571, St. Sophia Cathedral has been called the Selimiye Mosque. Similarly, the second largest and second most important cathedral in Famagusta was given the name of the commander "Lala Mustapha Pasha", who fought for more than one year to conquer the walled city. Apart from these two important examples, few churches have been converted into mosques in the towns by the Ottomans, who supported the construction of new mosques instead. Because the mosques that were constructed during the Ottoman reign were modest examples when compared to those built in Anatolia and because there were only a limited number of conversions from churches, it can be concluded that the approach of the Ottomans to the appropriation process was a cultural conquest in which the most significant places of worship became icons for display.

With respect to the different approaches of the Ottomans towards Latin and Greek Orthodox churches, it has been mentioned in several sources that most of the churches that were converted were Latin churches, as the Ottomans considered the Latins to be their enemy, while the Ottomans supported the Greek Orthodox churches. Although the number of converted Latin churches is greater than the number of churches belonging to other religious groups, the total number of churches converted when Famagusta was conquered is still unknown. The conquest of Famagusta, which was the last town the Ottomans conquered on the island, can also be considered a display of power. Arriving on the island from Larnaca, the Ottomans easily assumed control of almost all of the cities and towns until they arrived at Famagusta. In what turned out to be a dramatic story, the Ottomans required thirteen months to conquer Famagusta, and they took significant losses (Abulafia 2012, Walsh 2004). The Ottomans extricated all of the residents of Famagusta from the town without even considering their origin, ethnicity or religion. Accordingly, all buildings, including twenty five churches, were abandoned (Yüceer 2012). Some of the buildings were destroyed during the siege, previous sieges and/or earthquakes, while others were converted into mosques, such as the Jacobite Church in the Syrian quarter of the town, which was named Tanner's (Tabakhane) Mosque (Langdale and Walsh 2007), and the Greek Orthodox Stavros Church, which was named Mustapha Pasha Mosque. As in the exceptional case of Famagusta, the Ottomans approach to appropriating churches may not depend on ethnicity if there was a resistance to the change in power.

Regarding the changes in the physical state, converting a church building into a mosque requires certain physical alterations as the prayer space must be organised according to the doctrines of Islam. First, the building must be 'cleansed' of all its Christian symbols and artefacts such as icons, murals, paintings, crosses and bells as well as sculptures of humans or animals, especially within the prayer space. The moveable items are generally removed, and the walls with paintings are generally plastered and whitewashed. A special place called the 'mihrab' is needed for the imam's use, and this place also indicates the direction of Mecca. Because the prayers are conducted on the ground, the floor of the mosque is generally carpeted during the conversion. The carpets in mosques today are designed such that the place for each person to pray and the direction towards Mecca are clearly indicated. A significant physical alteration to the outside of the building is the addition of a minaret, a high tower-like structure from where the imam conducts the call for prayers. In some instances, one of the bell towers was converted into a minaret and sometimes a new tower was erected. However, as a result of advanced technology, loudspeakers are now commonly

placed at the top of the minaret, and the imam is no longer required to climb the stairs to conduct the call to prayers five times a day.

After the 1974 conflict, the conversion of churches into mosques adopted an approach similar to that discussed above with respect to the physical alterations of the buildings. However, the social context differed significantly. When the Turkish Cypriot refugees were relocated to the north, they found themselves in a state with an unknown future. They did not know when the conflict would end, how long they would have to stay in their new location or whether they would ever go back to the homes they were forced to leave, a situation the Greek Cypriot refugees were also facing.

It was logical that the refugees would use the most appropriate, available spaces for their mosques, whether it was a church building or an open space appropriate for gathering. Facing an unknown future may have been the reason that the arrangement felt temporary. This temporary state of mind is reflected in the alterations made to these church spaces, as the changes were minimal and were only completed if the religious requirements mandate it, such as removing icons. However, other elements, such as bells, were sometimes left as they were. For example, in the converted church building in Tuzla, which was turned into a mosque in 1974 and has been used as such ever since, the bell is still sitting in its same place, as if someday it will be ringing again. A similar example is that of the church belfry in Mormenekşe/Lymnia. The same attitude is evidenced in the conversion of churches for secular uses as well.

However, since 1991, there has been an increase in the construction of new mosques, especially in those areas where a church had been converted to a mosque. Today, 20 church buildings that once housed mosques have been abandoned. One might argue that the size of these churches may be inadequate to provide for growing needs as the population of the town might increase in time. There are some who suggest that, especially for religious sermons during special times, these spaces are not sufficient and there are many people who are forced to pray outside of the building. This situation, however, is not uncommon in mosques; even in the largest mosques, there are exterior spaces specifically dedicated for these occasions. More importantly, as in the case of Pamuklu/Tavrou, the size of the new mosque is usually not that different from the existing church building that was used as a mosque (Figure 5). Therefore, it is clear that the reason for constructing a new mosque is not primarily to provide a larger space for a growing population.

Figure 5. Agios Sergios Church and the New Mosque in Pamuklu

The other issue that plays a role in building these new mosques is related to ownership. The churches in the north belong to the Greek Cypriots, and their ownership is under the control of the Cyprus Evkaf Foundation, which has existed as a pious foundation since the Ottoman period. After the 1990s, the Greek Cypriot refugees applied to the European Court of Human Rights and demanded access to their properties in the north (Constantinou et.al. 2012). In April 2003, when the checkpoints that had divided the communities for almost thirty years were opened, thousands of displaced Greek Cypriots visited their former villages, houses and religious sites. These visits by the former owners have not only been emotional for them, but have also created anxiety for those living near these sites. In their recent article, Constantinou et al. (2012) mention that Greek Cypriots brought icons and candles that they placed in or near the churches, thereby attempting to reclaime these sites. As a consequence, many Turkish Cypriot villagers began to put pressure on the local authorities to build mosques to replace the converted churches, an idea supported by the fact that almost all of the new and planned mosques are located in villages where churches have served as mosques.

The issue of ownership is not only a legal issue but also has social implications. Constantinou et al. provide an anecdote in which a Turkish Cypriot explains, "the reason for asking a mosque to be built was because the mosque was going to make our village look more Turkish and we, as refugees, would feel more rooted" (2012, p. 183). In other words, it is possible to understand the phenomenon of new mosques as a reflection of the identity problem associated with a post-conflict syndrome. The situation in which a new mosque was constructed and opened in Beyarmudu, a village near the border of the dividing line, provides relevant information with respect to the identity issue as a mosque had already been constructed in the town during the 1950s. The mosque had a pitched roof, following the typology of Cyprus village mosques, and a very modest minaret. The new mosque, on the other hand, has a central domed space with two high minarets. Based on conversations with the local population during the opening ceremony of the new mosque on April 12, 2012,

we learned that the old mosque was, in fact, sufficient to serve the village population. However, the villagers wanted a new, larger mosque with two minarets. Therefore, they funded a large part of the construction of the mosque. Even those who migrated to England and only visit the village on special occasions contributed to the construction. The villagers also indicated that the new mosque improves the identity of Beyarmudu as a Turkish town, especially for those who are looking at the town from the 'other' side of the green line.

The case of the appropriation of churches as mosques in Ayvalık, a small town on the coast of the Aegean Sea of Turkey, also supports the argument that new mosques are reflections of a post-conflict syndrome rather than a satisfaction of a physical requirement. Ayvalık, a province of the city of Balıkesir in Turkey, was populated mostly by Greeks before the establishment of the Turkish Republic. After the 1923 population exchange agreement between Greece and the Turkish Republic, the Turkish population that had relocated from Greece lived in this town. The physical as well as psychological conditions of the Turkish people who moved to Ayvalık are similar to the Turkish Cypriots who were relocated after the 1974 conflict. The churches in Ayvalık were also turned into mosques, and some of them are still used as mosques, such as the Hayrettin Pasha Mosque (Güney, 2008). The population of the town drastically increased beginning in the 1980s when it became a tourist attraction. As a result, new mosques were constructed as required by the new neighbourhoods. The converted churches are still used as mosques, although the new mosques were clearly constructed to satisfy the increased need for space due to the growing population. However, in Northern Cyprus, unlike Ayvalik, once a new mosque is constructed, the church building that had served as the town's mosque no longer fulfils a purpose and is abandoned as a result.

Conclusion
Although buildings are built with specific functions in mind, circumstances may change over time and require that the building be used for different functions. With religious buildings, the issue of re-use involves more than just the physical adjustment of space because these are buildings that convey emotion and symbolism. Because Cyprus's heritage is built around its religious buildings, churches and mosques, these buildings have become iconic images of the cultural heritage reflected in the current conflict. As churches have been appropriated for mosques since the 12th century, this research showed that the approach has changed over time in Cyprus. In the Ottoman period, appropriation can be considered to be a cultural conquest, and the approach just after the 1974 conflict was simply a convenient adaptation of what might be termed the sanctity of a religious building. This approach can be seen in the selection of churches centrally located in the villages simply because a location was needed for prayer. This research also reveals that the approach of communities in converting churches to mosques are similar after the 1974 conflict, yet there are some villages where none of the churches were reused as mosques. This situation applies mostly in the villages where the community suffered significant losses during the conflict period from the late 1950s until 1974.

The current approach of the government to empty or vacate the churches used as mosques indicates that any source of claim, which may lead to further anxiety in Cyprus, is being erased. The number of restorations of religious heritage sites has increased since 2003, reflecting respect for other heritage on both sides and leaving churches with an uncertain future, and this observation contradicts the attitude that these claims are being erased. The construction of new mosques, which are sometimes larger than necessary, shows that the mosques, as expressions of religious identity, have become indicators of "presence" when viewed by others.

The communities' approaches towards religious buildings that belonged to religions other than their own and the appropriation process of these buildings do not need to adhere to some general criteria. The case of Cyprus offers proof of a situation in which the appropriation process of churches differs in different periods and depends on the cultural and political dynamics of the time. Even after the 1974 conflict, the process of appropriation and the approach to religious heritage has changed with the changes in social and cultural contexts and the duration of unsolved conflicts. Today, although all national and international claims seek peace, the communities seem to have adapted to living in the aftermath of conflict after thirty-nine years. As reflected by the portrayal of the new mosques, however, the attitude of the north calls for the separation to be tolerated.

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