

NEO-OTTOMAN MEMORY OF “NEW TURKEY”

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ABSTRACT. The article aims to present the process of creating the so-called neo-Ottoman memory politics under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has remained in power since 2002. In the first two decades of the 21st century, Turkey underwent a thorough transformation, including the replacement of elites, the undermining of the ideological foundations of the Kemalist republic, as well as the redefinition of Turkish nationalism and state identity. The key element of these changes was the ongoing rehabilitation of the Ottoman Empire – relegated by the republic to the position of episode in the history of the Turks. As a result of the creation of the so-called “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” in the 1980s, as well as the development of social nostalgia for the former empire in the following decade, the new politics of memory, meeting this nostalgia, achieved spectacular success. However, it was conducted in a top-down manner, with great care taken to ensure that the content appearing in the public sphere was consistent with the intentions of the new power elite. This new memory, however, did not remove the republican heritage – its absorption became a key factor in strengthening the legitimacy of “New Turkey” – a monumental project of political and identity transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Turkish public space is profuse with references to the past. The ubiquitous images of the first president, Kemal Atatürk, are still to the fore. In the last two decades, these references specific to secular, republican Turkey have increasingly begun to intermingle with the representations of the Ottoman past. This is an expression of the sweep-



ing reconstruction of the republic since 2002, ruled by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP). It has undermined the previous formula of secularism of the state, replaced the elite, and empowered lower social classes. The element of change that will be of particular interest to me in this text is AKP's fundamentally different attitude toward the Ottoman Empire from the Kemalist one. It has been rehabilitated – it is no longer a failed, decadent state from the legacy of which the Kemalists wanted, with more or less success, to dissociate themselves. On the contrary, it is a stage in history that for today's elites is an object of nostalgia, but also a model and a reference point to which the "New Turkey" refers, wanting to recreate its power and universalism in order to carry out a similar mission.

In this article, I will present the evolution of Turkish politics of memory. After 2002, the authorities made the Ottoman era the most important reservoir of legitimizing myths. I call them myths because it is not a matter of extracting *strictly* historical knowledge, but rather patterns, providing a point of support in building a renewed national identity. I understand the mythologization of the past, in line with Barbara Szacka's considerations, as "the spontaneous transformation of figures and events into timeless patterns and personifications of values that sanction behaviors and attitudes important to the life of the collective."¹ I intend to prove that despite the apparent resentment on the part of the new elites, together with the vigorous exertion of non-Kemalist models, the basic, constitutive references of the modern Turkish nation established by the old republic have not been erased but gained new life, and this is because they were constitutive of the nation, and internalized even by the supporters of the party in power today. Their reinterpretation, creating a kind of collage of Kemalist and neo-Ottoman memory, helped it maintain legitimacy, creating a renewed identity for Turkey.

The spectacular transformations of the last two decades have relatively rarely given researchers an ace to separate the question of memory from the totality of the problems addressed in the literature.² This happened for several reasons. First, the changes were very broad – they included politics, social life, the place of religion in public sphere, state symbolism, or the formation of a new nationalism. Second – terms such as "memory" or "politics of memory" (or "historical memory") hardly appear in the

¹ B. Szacka, *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit*, Warszawa 2006, p. 24.

² Noteworthy works on the politics of memory and history politics in Turkey: G. Bozoğlu, *Museums, Emotion and Memory Culture. The Politics of the Past in Turkey*, London–New York 2020; M. Ergin, Y. Karakaya, *Between neo-Ottomanism and Ottomanism: navigation state-led and popular cultural representations of the past*, "New Perspectives on Turkey" 2017, no. 56, p. 33–59; K. Kujawa, *Turkey and the Politics of Memory. Consequences for Domestic and Foreign Affairs and Security in the Region* [in:] *Europe's Islamic Legacy: 1900 to the Present*, ed. E. Drayson, Leiden 2023, p. 9–29; C. Ortega Sanchez, *Traumas and Glories: Politics, Narratives and Memory Under the Rule of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey*, "Przegląd Nauk Historycznych" 2024, vol. 23, no. 1, p. 171–193; J.Y. Walton, *Geographies of Revival and Erasure: Neo-Ottoman Sites of Memory in Istanbul, Thessaloniki, and Budapest*, "Die Welt Des Islams" 2016, vol. 56, p. 510–532.

Turkish public sphere, and only occasionally in academic discourse. The discourse of remembrance appropriate to Western Europe, centered around World War II and the Holocaust, and in Central and Eastern Europe around World War II and communism,³ does not exist in Turkey either, due to separate experiences.⁴ This does not mean that the Turkish state does not have conscious memory politics. On the contrary – it is conducted extensively in various fields.

MEMORY VS. HISTORY, HISTORY POLITICS VS. THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

The distinction between history and memory, blurred in the public sphere (where most references to the past are simply labeled as “history”), needs clarification. Barbara Szacka points out the distinctiveness of these notions as forms of thought. In her view, memory encompasses a broad horizon of references to the past, and while it feeds on historical knowledge, it is not identical to it, at least because of the myths it contains. History, on the other hand, has an “unquestionable autonomy”, resulting from the professional workshop and scientific rules of fact-finding that apply to every historian, as well as from the pursuit of a model of objective, value-free knowledge. Between these two forms of thinking, there extends a kind of gray area, full of intermediate forms, but in principle both perform separate social functions – history is about acquiring and storing knowledge, and memory is about extracting it for practical use.⁵ Pierre Nora, plotting the differences between history and memory, draws attention to the sacrality and affectivity of memory, appropriating and prone to appropriation. These features contrast with the secularity, rationality, and criticality inherent in history. Time in the domain of memory is also distinct from historical time. While history operates rigorously with the notion of linear (but also epoch-shifting) historical time, memory does not concern it, operating in the “eternal present”.⁶ Polish sociologist Jerzy Szacki calls memory, not without irony and a pejorative tinge, “practical history” and even “mythology”. In this view, the recalled heroes of the past behave and think in exactly the same way as contemporary audiences. Features of memory include: “obsession with unambiguity” (the protagonists of the history of interest are exclusively good or bad) and “fiction of the chosen people” (the described community is unique because of its

³ B. Krzysztan, *Pamięć, polityczność, władza. Reprezentacje pamięci zbiorowej w Gruzji, Armenii, Górskim Karabachu i Abchazji*, Toruń 2021, p. 23.

⁴ E. Akgül, *Hafıza Politikalarının Dışında Kalan Türkiye ve Geçmişle Yüzleşmek*, „Bianet”, 22.04.2015, <https://bianet.org/haber/hafiza-politikalarinin-disinda-kalan-turkiye-ve-gecmisle-yuzlesmek-163984> [accessed 12.06.2023].

⁵ B. Szacka, op. cit., p. 17–31.

⁶ P. Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, “Representations” 1989, no. 26, p. 7–24.

achievements, merits, or inflicted suffering).⁷ In this regard, J. Szacki's considerations are complemented by P. Nora's comments.

The term "politics of memory" is sometimes used, in the literature and socio-political practice, in parallel or interchangeably with the term "historical politics". In my opinion, the two categories should be distinguished by definition. As a political scientist Rafal Chwedoruk writes, there is no consensus in contemporary humanities on what history politics actually is. In his opinion, history has been subject to political interference for centuries and has been instrumentalized since antiquity.⁸ According to a historian Krzysztof Zamorski, history, which in history politics is the starting point for political action, is conceived as a "human experience of the past."⁹ In his view, the reflection on history takes two forms – simple and critical. In the first sense, history is "a non-intentional, (...) primary, often instinctive record and reproduction of events and facts of history as perceived in individual and social terms."¹⁰ Personal experience is related to social experience. Simple reflection on the past coincides with memory and the politics based on it is, in my opinion, the politics of memory.

Critical reflection is not necessarily identified with academic history, the essence of which is to comply with the rigors and methods of research that give history a scientific dimension in a technical sense (as Jacques Le Goff maintains).¹¹ However, it is located, Zamorski says, a level higher, so to speak, and this is because it contains interpretations of the experience contained in the first, simple reflection, often sharing some elements with it. However, it is distinguished by expanding the field of historical experience – it develops the areas considered useless in light of current needs, as well as historical abstraction, which is a "potential" area. It is, so to speak, holistic, and this is because it is alien to the selectivity of a simple reflection.¹² We could add that it is more ambitious, and systematized, does not deal too much with personal experience related to social experience, there are fewer emotions in it, as well as the relationship between what has been recorded from the past and current human needs, or more precisely, current political needs. The above comments lead us to the clearest distinction.

It was taken up by historian Alexei Miller, whose view is that history inevitably becomes politicized. Researchers have their own views and are subject to contemporary political conditions. The academic circles partly accept this, assuming that there are liberal, conservative, or Marxist historians. As a rule, however, it is said that the highest ideal is to rise above these entanglements. The politicization of history can

⁷ J. Szacki, *Historia i mitologia*, "Res Publica Nowa" 2001, no. 7, p. 53–58.

⁸ R. Chwedoruk, *Polityka historyczna*, Warsaw 2018, p. 11, 20.

⁹ K. Zamorski, *Nostalgia i wzniosłość a refleksja krytyczna w dziejach. Kiedy „polityka historyczna” ma sens?* [w:] *Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenia Polski i jej sąsiadów*, eds. S.M. Nowinowski, J. Pomorski, R. Stobiecki, Łódź 2008, p. 59.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 60.

¹¹ J. Le Goff, *Historia i pamięć*, Warsaw 2007, p. 33.

¹² K. Zamorski, op. cit., p. 60–61.

also have a simpler form, such as the ad hoc use of the historical argument in politics.¹³ Fundamentally, however, the phenomena of this order – if I read A. Miller's intentions correctly – are non-systemic in nature.

The politics of memory, in turn, is understood by A. Miller as a set of norms and practices regarding what is to be socially remembered and forgotten. Here, indeed, we are dealing with a phenomenon of very wide scope and long metric – it is observed in both tribal and modern societies.¹⁴ In the latter, practices regulating what should be remembered and what should be forgotten include state ceremonies, commemorations, and rituals (remembering), as well as silencing, marginalizing, or regulating access to archives (forgetting).¹⁵

History politics, on the other hand, is based on the cooperation between the state, recognizing history as a politically important area, and professional historians. The goal is to establish a desirable body of historical knowledge. In this dimension it differs from the politics of memory – it seeks to reconcile political goals and findings made in concert with the professional rigors of historiography. This task can be a breakneck one, especially given the ideologizing rhetoric accompanying its implementation ("History is too serious a matter to be left in the hands of historians"). Nevertheless, the politics of history should be considered qualitatively distinct from the usual politicization of history, as well as the politics of memory. And this is because, it is a relatively new, more sophisticated, ambitious, and institutionalized phenomenon.¹⁶

Since I will continue to deal with the issues concerning the establishment of new norms about what is to be remembered, the management of emotional memories of the nation's past, rather than activities involving professional historians (unless servile), I will continue to use the term politics of memory.

I still have to return to Krzysztof Zamorski's comments. As a critic of Polish history politics (which, as we can already see, is rather a politics of memory), he maintains that it is nostalgic. He understands nostalgia as a "disease of the soul", full of the pain of misunderstanding, of being lost in the present, and of suffering in the past which is not distant, for its clarity about the "golden age", inevitably gravitating toward a simple affective understanding of history.¹⁷ In Turkey, too, nostalgia un-

¹³ A. Miller, *Rossiya: vlast' i istoriya*, "Pro et Contra" 2009, no. 3–4, p. 6–7.

¹⁴ Miller does not elaborate on this, but the social practices of remembering and forgetting were described by Emile Durkheim, which, with the rest, was one of the starting points for Maurice Halbwachs' reflections on the social framework of memory. See: A. Vassilev, *Voplošennaya pamiat': kommemorativnyi ritual v sociologii E. Durkheima*, "Sociologičeskoe obozrenie". 2014, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 141–167.

¹⁵ A. Miller, op. cit., p. 7–8.

¹⁶ Modern history politics gets its start from the West German *Geschichtspolitik* of the era of Helmut Kohl, who himself held a degree in history and surrounded himself with advisors who were professional historians. Its institutional pattern later spread throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Ibid, p. 8–13.

¹⁷ K. Zamorski, op. cit., p. 58–59, 62–63.

derstood in this way is a powerful engine of action for the two traditionally hostile camps – the Kemalist and the neo-Ottoman.¹⁸

NEO-OTTOMAN MEMORY

At the end of the last century, Pierre Nora observed a spectacular turn toward “remembering” in Western societies. This happened at the grassroots level, where private genealogical research, memoir literature, or the phenomenon of collecting various carriers of individual memory began to flourish. Similar phenomena could be observed at the state level – in the form of various celebrations of important events for individual nations. He called this phenomenon “the time of memory”.¹⁹ Although Turkey remained (and still remains) outside the main European debates on memory, this phenomenon did not escape it in the 1990s.

The politically and economically “lost decade” of the 1990s, marked by the erosion of the state, scandals, economic crises, and violence, brought unprecedented popularity to the Ottoman Empire. An anthropologist Esra Özyürek, who observed this, presented a long list of memory carriers, as well as practices, whose common denominator was a nostalgic reference to pre-republican times. During the twilight period of Kemalism, the uncertainty of the future was responded to with a desire to put the present in order, and this was achieved by extracting the remnants of the past. Hence came the popularity of fiction and films relating to the Ottoman times, as well as the rise of memoir literature, which started to gain new readers. All this was accompanied by the interest in material souvenirs of the old era, new restaurants offering supposedly “Ottoman” cuisine, women’s fashion stores supposedly recreating the way Ottoman women dressed, or commercial courses in learning Ottoman script.²⁰ This explosion of memory contrasted sharply with the republican politics of, as Özyürek put it, “administered forgetting” that embraced the Ottoman Empire, but also the memory of its non-Muslim subjects – Greeks or Armenians.²¹

This revisiting of the Ottoman past, motivated by a nostalgia that feeds on a widespread sense of insecurity in the society, was on the one hand a local expression of

¹⁸ An analysis of Kemalist nostalgia: E. Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern. State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*, Durham–London 2006. Neo-Ottoman nostalgia was described by H. Yavuz, *Nostalgia for the Empire. The Politics of Neo-Ottomanism*, New York 2020.

¹⁹ P. Nora, *Czas Pamięci*, “Res Publica Nowa” 2001, no. 7, p. 37–45.

²⁰ E. Özyürek, *Introduction: The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* [in:] *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey*, ed. E. Özyürek, Syracuse–New York 2007, p. 1–16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3–6. Özyürek is puzzled by the contrast between memory and forgetting. The matter becomes clearer when, following Paul Ricoeur, we realize that memory naturally creates structures of forgetting. A complete story (devoid of the element of forgetting) cannot be told, and an ideologized memory must always omit something – due to fear, shame, or other reasons. P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey, D. Pellauer, Chicago–London 2004, p. 443–448.

phenomena sweeping across the Western world, but on the other hand, had a local political basis. After 1980, when the military once again took power,²² it almost immediately embarked on a conservative identity project known as the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis".²³ Roughly speaking, it consisted of a fusion of two traditions – the ethnic nationalism created in the first period of the republic, claiming that Turks are the ancient people and Islam. This ideology was the work of the conservative intelligentsia concentrated in the organization called the Hearth of the Enlightened (*Aydınlar Ocağı*). Its representatives claimed that what constitutes the essence of Turkish national consciousness is two and a half thousand years of the nation's history (as the official version of history proclaimed) and a thousand years since it professed Islam.²⁴ In 1983, the army ceded power to civilian governments, and the Turgut Özal-led Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*), which dominated Turkish politics for more than a decade, won the first election. Özal was the first politician in power to openly demonstrate his religiosity. He also attempted to turn his partly Kurdish background into an asset – all of which was accompanied by the glorification of the Ottoman Empire, the legacy of which was to make Turkey attractive internationally,²⁵ and internally it was to serve as a platform for forging a new inclusive identity.²⁶ The military continued to ensure the preservation of Kemalist memory, the core of which remained the cult of Atatürk,²⁷ but in parallel, according to the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis", Ottoman heritage became a source of pride (as it was reflected in school textbooks²⁸), and public space was filled with a peculiar collage of newly built mosques and monuments to Turkey's first president. References to the Ottoman Empire, although allowed by the establishment selectively, were spectacular – in 1986 a newly completed bridge in Istanbul was

²² The September 12 coup d'état was the third of four military intrusions into the republic's political life. Earlier governments were overthrown in 1960 and 1971, and later in 1997. 1980 saw the outlawing of all political parties, the dissolution of parliament, trade unions, and student associations, and the imprisonment of several hundred thousand politically active people. E. J. Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History*, London–New York 2004, p. 278–280.

²³ Y. Taşkın, *Muhafazakâr Bir Proje Olarak Türk-İslâm Sentezi* [in:] *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasî Düşünce, 5 Cilt: Muhafazakârlık*, ed. A. Çiğdem (der.), İstanbul 2003, p. 381–402.

²⁴ Particularly interesting is a nationalist motto from that period recalling two "origins" in Turkish history: "We are Turks as Tien Shan mountains and Muslims as Hira Mountains". Turkishness and Islam are symbolized by the mountains – the Tien Shan is the legendary cradle of the Turks and the Hira, where Muhammad experienced his first visions. It is hard to find a symbol of something more constant and resistant to the passage of time. H.E. Cohen Yanarocak, *The Evolution of the Turkish School Textbooks from Atatürk to Erdoğan*, London 2022, p. 24.

²⁵ K. Wasilewski, *Sen o potędze. Neoosmanizm w polityce zagranicznej Republiki Turcji*, Warsaw 2023, p. 99–100.

²⁶ M. H. Yavuz, *Social and Intellectual Origins of Neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a Post-National Vision*, "Die Welt des Islams" 2016, no. 56, p. 452.

²⁷ K. Öktem, *Turkey since 1989: Angry Nation*, London and New York 2011, p. 62.

²⁸ H.E. Cohen Yanarocak, op. cit., p. 94–101.

named after Mehmed II the Conqueror, and between 1986 and 1992 a 1,000 lira banknote was issued with his image.²⁹

The intelligentsia forming the intellectual base of Özal's government promoted this early form of neo-Ottomanism in the magazine "Türkiye Günlüğü", which promoted the idea of rehabilitation of the Ottoman past – as once expressed by one of the authors: "the country should come to terms with its history, return to it and stop being afraid of itself."³⁰

This form, tolerated and controlled by the Kemalist establishment, created the atmosphere in which the memory of the former empire could be extracted and used politically by the ruling right. For the military, it was useful because under Cold War conditions it impregnated society against the influence of the left. With the end of the USSR, however, the hardline secular rhetoric returned, with "religious reaction" (*irtica*) becoming the main threat.³¹

The truly antagonistic, confrontation-oriented use of Ottoman memory against the traditional elite was accomplished by the camp accused of this reactivity – the representatives of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* – RP),³² which originated from the *Millî Görüş* (National Outlook) movement. It won local elections in 1994 and parliamentary elections a year later and entered the government as the first party in history to openly contest republican secularism. The first of these elections was a particularly significant development. The party's winning of power in Istanbul and obtaining the position of mayor by future Prime Minister and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was narrated as part of the "eternal present". The party described it as "the re-conquest of Istanbul".³³ The militant rhetoric was a foreshadowing of what would later happen in the domain of official national memory. The Welfare Party government was overthrown in 1997, and a year later the grouping was outlawed and replaced by the Virtue Party (also outlawed in 2001). The AKP, formed in 2001, was another political incarnation of the *Millî Görüş* movement. After its electoral victory in 2002, already at the national level, the party started referring widely to the Ottoman past to draw from it timeless ideals, important for the redefined community, and to establish its own legitimizing myths.

²⁹ M. Matusiak, *The Great Leap. Turkey under Erdogan*, "OSW Point of View" 2015, no. 51, p. 38. Mehmed is the only Ottoman ruler to be found on any means of payment in republican Turkey. However, he was not the only figure from the period commemorated in this way. During the same period, the 10,000 lira banknote featured the figure of Mimar Sinan, the builder of the Süleymaniye Mosque (among others).

³⁰ N. Tokdoğan, *Yeni Osmanlıcılık. Hinc, Nostalji, Narsisizm*, İstanbul 2018, p. 65.

³¹ M. Matusiak, op. cit., p. 38.

³² N. Göle, *Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites*, "Middle East Journal" 1997, vol. 51, no. 1, p. 46–58.

³³ R. Cakır, *Ne Şeriat Ne Demokrasi. Refah Partisini Anlamak*, İstanbul 1994, p. 208.

NEO-OTTOMAN SITES OF MEMORY

Neo-Ottomanism in the form it took in "New Turkey" took shape in a process of several years, in which a new nationalism and a renewed identity of the state were gradually forged, and not without compromises.³⁴ However, its typical sites of memory – conceived in the strict sense as physical sites of commemoration, but also in the broader sense as any representation of the past in the present³⁵ – began to appear almost immediately after the advent of the new government.³⁶

In 2003, the Miniature Park (*Miniatürk*) was established in Istanbul. Like other such places in the world, it is a co-creation site of a modern "imagined community". As İpek Türeli pointed out, while Ankara's state architecture – monumental – and drawing on classical models, introducing an element of timelessness,³⁷ conveys the sublime, miniaturization on the contrary is meant to convey beauty.³⁸ The park featured 136 objects miniaturized at a scale of 1:25, each an element of Turkey's historical heritage. Republican heritage is presented by Atatürk's Mausoleum Anıtkabir, the parliament building, or the Monument to the Republic in Istanbul's Taksim Square. These buildings are a nod to the old republic. However, the Ottoman heritage exposed in most of the works comes to the fore. Istanbul (which is the heart of the Turkish identity being transformed in a neo-Ottoman spirit) accounts for more than 60 of them – these include Hagia Sophia, mosques such as Blue Mosque and Selimiye, palaces (Dolmabahçe, Topkapı and Khedive), towers (Galata and Dolmabahçe), as well as churches (St. Anthony and Hagia Eirene), along with the Ahrid Synagogue highlighting the multi-religious Ottoman heritage).³⁹ Anatolia is represented by a similar number of works, including the Rumi Mausoleum in Konya (which, according to Türeli, is intended as a tribute to the Sufi and heterodox heritage of these lands⁴⁰), a

³⁴ M. Chudziak, *Kult państwa w „Nowej Turcji”*, "Sensus Historiae" 2022/2023, vol. 48, p. 35–60.

³⁵ A. Szpociński, *Miejsca pamięci (lieux de mémoire)*, "Teksty Drugie" 2008, no. 4., 2008, p. 11–20.

³⁶ An analysis of the sites of memory of the "New Turkey", focused on similar examples, is discussed by C. Ortega Sanchez, op. cit., p. 185–189. His research, however, aims to present how the new politics of memory intends to change the public sphere and society from secular to Muslim again. There is, of course, a convincing justification for this, but in my opinion, as I try to show in the following parts of this article, it is impossible to ignore the reinterpretation of Kemalist memory and its corresponding sites of memory in the development of a specific synthesis of two memories – republican and "new Turkish".

³⁷ As Sibel Bozdoğan has shown, buildings such as the parliament building and Atatürk's mausoleum contained deliberate references to the classical architecture of Greek antiquity. In doing so, it was argued that classicism reflected the collective will of the entire society. This was part of the construction of a national memory, intended to show that Turks are also heirs to ancient civilization. S. Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building. Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, Seattle–London 2002, p. 277–279.

³⁸ İ. Türeli, *Modelling Citizenship in Turkey's Miniature Park* [in:] *Orienting Istanbul. Cultural Capital of Europe?*, eds. D. Göktürk, L. Soysal, İ. Türeli, London 2010, p. 106.

³⁹ *Works of Istanbul*, Miniatürk, <https://miniatürk.com.tr/en/eserler.html> [accessed 31.05.2023].

⁴⁰ İ. Türeli, op. cit., p. 110.

monument to the Heroes of the Battle of Gallipoli, as well as numerous other mosques, madrassas, and mausoleums of Muslim saints.⁴¹ No less important are also works depicting the objects located outside Turkey (recall that the park's motto is "A great country in a small miniature", another element directly opposite to the identity assumptions of the Kemalist republic – obsessively turned toward itself). Among them were such sites as Atatürk's family house in Thessaloniki, the tomb of the Bektashi dervish Gül Baba in Budapest, the mosques of Al-Aqsa and the Dome on the Rock in Jerusalem, the bridge in Mostar, and the now-defunct Ajyad Fortress, which had towered over Mecca since 1780.⁴² Here, too, one of the buildings reflects an important part of republican memory (Atatürk's house), although it, too, encompasses both memories (in fact, it is one of the few objects of Ottoman heritage that survives in Thessaloniki to this day). The others, however, directly express the empire, territorially stretching from Budapest (where the remains of a dervish representing heterodox Islam rest) to Mecca, where a fortress demolished in 2002 symbolized Ottoman rule over Islamic holy sites. Also, Jerusalem, Islam's second most important holy place – remarkably – is becoming a part of Turkey's national heritage, the ambitions of which were expressed by neo-Ottoman ideologue Ahmet Davutoğlu in the slogan "Jerusalem is also our case".⁴³

The exhibition can be considered the first memorial created in Turkey during the AKP era, extracting and using representations of Ottoman heritage to redefine the nation. This was done in a nostalgic form, convinced of the concept of the "golden age", transforming appropriately selected objects into an ensemble of references forming a coherent entity that relates to timeless patterns, relevant to the "New Turkey".

Sites of Ottoman memory understood broadly, were not new. The Republic, as much as in its radical drive to establish a nation-state wanted to erase the Ottoman past, had to tolerate its representations on many levels. These were most readily exposed in literature. Hakan Yavuz notes that while, for example, Orhan Pamuk, a liberal and secular Istanbul resident extolling its former cosmopolitanism, did so to create personal space for himself, other authors, such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Kemal Tahir and Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi, who were more numerous, religious and conservative, treated the Ottoman Past as Turkey's golden age. Empire in their views, was an ideal of Muslim life, the memory of which became an asylum for believing Muslims in a secular republic and a weapon in contesting the republican order.⁴⁴ Their work shaped generations of Islamist activists, from whom AKP cadres were later recruited.

⁴¹ *Works of Anatolia*, Miniaturk, <https://miniaturk.com.tr/en/anadolueserleri.html> [accessed 31.05.2023].

⁴² *Works from the Overseas*, Miniaturk, <https://miniaturk.com.tr/en/yurtdisieserleri.html> [accessed 31.05.2023].

⁴³ *Herkes unutsa Kudus bizim davamızdır*, "Anadolu Ajansı", 7.11.2014, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/herkes-unutsa-kudus-bizimdavamizdir/103726> [accessed 25.05.2023].

⁴⁴ M. H. Yavuz, *Nostalgia*, p. 81–95.

One of the most spectacular manifestations of the new memory politics, already observed during Erdoğan's rule in Istanbul, became the celebration of the anniversary of the conquest of Constantinople. Admittedly, this was not a new commemoration – the first such celebrations were organized back in 1914. During the republican era, preparations for the 500th anniversary of the conquest, which fell on May 31, 1953, were begun by the government of İsmet İnönü (another example of ambivalence in the republic's approach to the Ottoman past). The celebrations had already taken place under the government of the Democratic Party, which was founded on the conservative wing of the Kemalists and ruled Turkey throughout the 1950s.⁴⁵ After that, however, until the 1990s, the acts of memorializing were organized only at the expense of small right-wing organizations. Under Islamist rule in Istanbul, however, they took on a new tone.

Initially, they depicted, in a rather clumsy manner, the re-enactment of a decisive battle, followed by reading out Mehmed's *firman* issued after the conquest. These celebrations, ridiculed by supporters of secularism, turned into anti-secular rallies. However, they quickly gained enough popularity among the residents to survive the ban of the Welfare Party and the removal of Erdoğan from the post of mayor. By the turn of the century, secular authorities had come to terms with their grassroots organization, and in 2000 President Ahmet Necdet Sezer's office sent a letter touting the conquest as a "triumph of science and reason".⁴⁶ After the AKP gained power, the holiday gained even more prominence, eclipsing even the similarly timed commemoration of the anniversary of Mustafa Kemal's landing in Samsun on May 19, 1919, considered the beginning of the War of Liberation – the event central to republican memory, constituting the founding myth of the new state.⁴⁷ From around 2005, the ritual accompanying the commemoration began to develop: ceremonies were held at Dolmabahçe Palace, and Mehmed's *firman* was read out, the message of which – the announcement of respect for the people's religion – was juxtaposed with the democratization of the first years of AKP rule. Similarly, the groundbreaking nature of the event (the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modernity) was pointed out, also directly related to a new era in Turkey's recent history. In later years, the ceremonies were accompanied by concerts, poetry contests and increasingly spectacular visual representations of the conquest.⁴⁸ In the second decade of AKP rule, the previously invoked models of tolerance contrasted with the party's democratization project, aimed at seeking Turkey's accession to the European Union, began to give way to an explicitly emphasized "spirit of conquest" and indications of the Islamic nature of the

⁴⁵ A. Hür, 'Nevzuhur' *Fetih Bayramı*, "Radikal", 31.05.2015.

⁴⁶ B. Koyuncu, *AK Parti'nin ulusal kimlik vizyonunda İslam unsuru Türkiye'de ulusal kimlik – din ilişkisi üzerine bir örnek olay incelemesi*, Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, İstanbul 2013 (PhD thesis), p. 175. This secular representation of the conquest and Mehmed himself was already evident in the Kemalist historiography of the 1930s. See G. Bozoğlu, op. cit., p. 106.

⁴⁷ N. Tokdoğan, op. cit., p. 89–90.

⁴⁸ B. Koyuncu, op. cit., p. 178–181.

Ottoman state. In 2014, the Yenikapı Square (literally “Yenikapı Assembly Space” – *Yenikapı Toplanma Alanı*), located within the administrative boundaries of the Fatih (meaning “Conqueror”) district, was put into operation. Annual ceremonies have been held there since 2015. As in the 1990s, the dominant tone of these celebrations has become anti-secular polarizing and targeting the former elites under whose rule Muslim believers suffered oppression. The commemorations thus went from a local event to a festival, and in the end turned into a public holiday, during which the ideological compact of the government and “New Turkey” supporters is manifested.⁴⁹

We can return to specific sites of memory that, in “New Turkey”, transform modernity in a neo-Ottoman fashion not only as a form of ritual but in everyday life, linking the memory of the “golden age” with modern Turkey, as well as engaging visitors and transforming the space.

The most spectacular example of such a site is the one that opened in 2009. Panorama 1453 History Museum (*Panorama 1453 Tarih Müzesi*). It was established in Topkapı Fetih Park, directly adjacent to the historic walls of Theodosius.⁵⁰ It features a panoramic and three-dimensional painting showing the decisive battle of the city’s conquest. The 3,000-square-meter canvas shows Ottoman and Byzantine soldiers. The visitors’ platform is separated from the painting itself by a space filled with figures of heroes, cannons, and other weapons, which, along with sound effects, are meant to make the painting even more realistic, transporting visitors back in time.⁵¹ According to Isaac Hand, describing its interior – visitors are led first through a section showing the historical context and then up a spiral staircase to a platform from which the panorama can be viewed, “moving in time, but not in place.”⁵² And, according to Nagehan Tokdoğan’s account, the excitement of the journey is felt by some in a bodily way: “while visiting the museum, one can find elderly men shivering in the crowd, women with clear admiration in their eyes, and children and teenagers competing for the opportunity to have their picture taken against the backdrop of the painting.”⁵³

According to Gönül Bozoğlu, the affective aspect of experiencing Ottoman memory in this way is fundamental. Many of her interlocutors declared that they regretted that they were not born in Ottoman times, while others pointed to the recovery of history “taken away” by the Kemalists.⁵⁴ The key moment of this “time travel” became

⁴⁹ N. Tokdoğan, op. cit., p. 215–221.

⁵⁰ *Türkiye’nin ilk panoramik müzesi*, “Hürriyet”, 31.01.2009.

⁵¹ A similar technique can be seen in the Atatürk and War of Independence Museum, located in the basement of the Atatürk mausoleum in Ankara. There, this type of decoration separates visitors from the panoramic images depicting the most important battles in Kemalist memory. See: G. Bozoğlu, op. cit., p. 155–175.

⁵² I. Hand, *Place-making and the Panorama 1453 Museum in Historical Context*, “Lights: The MESSA Journal” 2013, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 25.

⁵³ N. Tokdoğan, op. cit., p. 211.

⁵⁴ G. Bozoğlu, op. cit., p. 96–119.

the meeting with the "ancestors" (*ecdat*). The word *ecdat*, borrowed from Arabic, unlike the Turkish *ata*, seems to be extremely important – it is supposed to indicate a genealogical connection, expressed by the term of Arabic origin – and combined with the experience of overcoming the time barrier it makes one realize "who we are."⁵⁵ This was the task with the rest that Erdoğan himself set for the museum before its opening: "(...) when our descendants in the future look at this history, they will ask 'Who am I?' We don't want youth growing up with an inferiority complex. On the contrary, we want youth to grow up in self-confidence."⁵⁶

So we can see that the commemoration, which depicts the nation's history in the "eternal present", is transformative to Turkey's modernity. This is truly a masterpiece of memory politics.

These and other state efforts have been in response to a kind of "Ottomania" observed over the past two decades, manifested in a mass-scale interest in popular culture works such as the 2012 film *Fetih 1453* ("Conquest of 1453") and the series *The Magnificent Century* (*Muhteşem Yüzyıl*).⁵⁷ The state, however, has not allowed this memory to go unchecked. "The Magnificent Century" faced harsh criticism from Erdoğan, who could not stand the portrayal of Suleiman the Magnificent "from the perspective of the harem, not from the perspective of the saddle."⁵⁸ Turkish public television station TRT has itself produced a set of TV series depicting the successive stages of Ottoman history over the past decade: "Revival: Ertuğrul" (*Diriliş: Ertuğrul*, 2014–2019), Capital: Abdülhamid (*Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, 2017–2021) "Foundation: Osman" (*Kuruluş: Osman*, from 2019). All of them evoke the stories of Ottoman rulers in some way relevant to modern AKP politics. The first two ruled in the early days of the empire, the last at its decline. Particularly relevant is Abdülhamid II, about whom an analogy is drawn with today's president. It is almost directly said in the pro-government press that both are great modernizers, leaders of the Islamic world, misunderstood or attacked by the West, which does not want Turkey to play its rightful role in the world.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 98.

⁵⁶ "İstanbul Bülteni" 2009 (January), p. 18, see B. Koyuncu, op. cit., p. 182.

⁵⁷ M. Ergin, Y. Karakaya, op. cit.; E. Batuman, *Ottomania*, "The New Yorker", 9.02.2014.

⁵⁸ *Başbakan Erdoğan'dan Muhteşem Yüzyıl'a ağır eleştirisi*, "Hürriyet", 25.11.2012.

⁵⁹ H. Kaplan, *Abdulhamit ve Erdoğan*, "Sabah", 3.06.2016. "Modernity" understood through the prism of technological advancement is the obsession of Turkish Islamists. Both Kemalists and Islamists were aware of their backwardness in relation to the West. While the former recognized that its causes lay within Turkey itself, the latter never accepted this, claiming additionally that Turkey towers over the West spiritually. The examples of the Abdülhamid and Erdoğan governments, on the other hand, are supposed to show that Turks are capable of modernization without abandoning their spiritual heritage and religion. Cf. E. Aktoprak, *Postkolonyal Bir „Dava” Olarak „Yeni Türkiye” nin Yeni Ulsu*, "SFB Dergisi" 2022/2023, vol. 71, e.g. 1, p. 1–31.

Important rulers were commemorated by giving their names to various public buildings⁶⁰ while space gradually began to be transformed so as to reproduce the Ottoman heritage, even if in a material sense it has not survived to the present day – examples include the reconstructed old towns in Konya and Ankara, the new presidential palace, or the entrance gates to Ankara, which are works of “Ottoman-Seldjuk architecture” – inherent in the AKP government’s “invented tradition”.⁶¹

The process of Ottomanization of memory, which continued uninterrupted for two decades, lived to see its crowning achievement in the summer of 2020 – that is, Turkish state’s revocation of the 1934 decree that converted Haghia Sophia into a museum. Thus, the temple, which M. İnanç Özekmekçi described as a building serving for centuries as an expression of the hegemony of whoever exercised de facto power in the state,⁶² became a mosque again, but also a place of neo-Ottoman memory and triumphalism for the ruling party. According to the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak*, the act marked “the end of an eighty-year exile” and the “rebirth” of the temple and “returning it to the people”.⁶³ One can see in this rhetoric a resentment against the Kemalist elite, as well as a conviction that historical justice has been done. Here is Turkey’s historical heritage returned to its place – Haghia Sophia has the same function it had for five centuries of Ottoman rule. This was also expressed in the symbolism accompanying the first prayers, during which the chairman of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) Ali Erbaş held a sword signaling that making the basilica a mosque again would express the “spirit of conquest” (*fetih ruhu*) emphasized on all possible occasions.⁶⁴

WHAT ABOUT THE KEMALIST MEMORY?

The march of neo-Ottomanism shook the collective memory of Turks its official version expressed the nostalgia and resentment towards the elites of the old republic, who, according to some visitors to the panoramic museum of conquest – “took away”

⁶⁰ These include Mehmed II, Selim I, Suleiman the Magnificent, and Abdülhamid II. Cf. K. Kujawa, op. cit.

⁶¹ N. Tokdoğan, op. cit., p. 74., H. Ghulyan, *The Spatialization of Islamist, Populist, and Neo-Ottoman Discourses in the Turkish Capital under AKP Rule*, “New Perspectives on Turkey” 2019, no. 61, p. 125–153.

⁶² M. İ. Özekmekçi, *Türk Sağında Ayasofya İmgesi* [in:] *Türk Sağı: Mitler, Fetişler, Düşman İmgeleri*, eds. İ.Ö. Kerestecioglu, G. Gürkan Öztan, İstanbul 2014, p. 283–307.

⁶³ O. Özgan, *Ayasofya’nın dirilişi: Seksen altı yıllık sürgün bitti*, “Yeni Şafak”, 11.07.2020.

⁶⁴ *Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Ali Erbaş’ın kılıçla hutbe okuması çok konuşulmuştu! Peygamber Efendimiz nasıl hutbe okurdu?*, “Sabah”, 25.07.2020; H.F. Başer, *Prof. Dr. Ziya Kazıcı: Kılıçla hutbe geleneği oranın savaşıla fethedildiği anlamına geliyor*, “Anadolu Ajansı”, 25.07.2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ayasofya-camii/prof-dr-ziya-kazici-kilicla-hutbe-gelenegi-oranin-savasl-fethedildigi-anlamina-geliyor/1921902> [accessed 31.05.2023].

the nation's history.⁶⁵ By mining the memory of the Ottoman Empire, this history has been "returned" to it. So, since a change has taken place in the officially promoted collective memory, no less fundamental than changes in other areas of socio-political life, it is impossible not to raise the question of what happened to the heritage of Kemalist Turkey. Has the memory constructed for decades by its elites been erased? Or, as some critics of neo-Ottomanism claim – has it been trivialized or marginalized?⁶⁶ The answer to this question is – like everything in modern Turkey – complex.

The Kemalist republic, as is well known, separated itself with a thick line from the Ottoman Empire in its founding. As a modern state, it had to create a modern nation. The revolutionary order, in which the sultanate was abolished, the regime and legal system were modernized, the alphabet was changed and state secularism was established, given the deep Muslim religiosity of the society, needed legitimacy. This one was sought in the nation's most ancient history. This nation, understood in modernist terms, had not existed at all until the establishment of the republic. Being at the service of the state, however, the republican historiography of the 1930s created the myth of an eternal nation, dating back to the earliest prehistory of mankind. The Turks were said to have originated in Central Asia and to have given rise to all the greatest ancient civilizations. Over the centuries they were to create from a dozen to more than a hundred different states. "Turkish Historical Thesis", which was a project presupposing the writing of "national" history, containing all the information that a Turkish citizen was supposed to know, proclaimed *expressis verbis* the need to give resistance to foreign historiography belittling the role of Turks in world history. Because of this, scholars working under Atatürk's watchful eye produced a number of studies portraying Turks as pioneers of all civilizations, who were innately capable of state-building. Such a portrayal of national history was aimed at belittling the role of the Ottoman Empire in national history⁶⁷ and archaizing the genesis of the order established by the Kemalists.⁶⁸ The content promoted by the "Thesis..." but also by later historical writing essentially boiled down to the fact that the Turks were the forerunners of democracy, secularism, the rule of law, parliamentarianism, and women's equality. Other equally important motifs of official historiography involved the cult of the military

⁶⁵ G. Bozoğlu, op. cit., p. 107.

⁶⁶ İ. Parlak, O. Aycan, *Turkey's Memory Politics In Transformation: AKP's New And Old Turkey* [in:] *Political Culture of Turkey in the Rule of the AKP: Change and Continuity*, eds. A. Bilgin, A. Öztürk, Baden-Baden 2016, p. 82–83.

⁶⁷ These treatments, if only by changing the alphabet and reforming the language, have been relatively successful. However, it should be noted that contrary to the radical intentions of the Kemalists and the lamentations of the Islamists today, the Ottoman past was never fully discarded. Rather, it was the subject of negotiation, and the elites made numerous compromises on what could stand firm in the collective memory. See N. Danforth, *Multi-Purpose Empire: Ottoman History in Republican Turkey*, "Middle Eastern Studies" 2014, vol. 50, no. 4, p. 655–678; M. E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire. The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*, Berkley–Los Angeles–London 2001.

⁶⁸ B. Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih, Türkiye'de „Resmi Tarih“ Tezinin Oluşumu (1929–1937)*, İstanbul 2003, p. 119–123.

and the sacralization of the state – placed outside of history, derived from eternity and moving towards it.⁶⁹ Thus, it will not be controversial to state that the top-down propagation of such content was primarily aimed at justifying (and later maintaining) the existence of the revolutionary political order. History, created by professional scholars, found itself at the service of the state and absorbed into memory.⁷⁰

The nationalist body of historical knowledge has evolved over the years. An example is the abandonment after Atatürk's death of the absurd "Theory of the Solar Language" (proclaiming that Turkish was the pre-language of all mankind), but as a rule, the most important "truths" established in the early republic have survived until modern times. The aforementioned "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" was in fact a continuation and supplement to the "Turkish Historical Thesis".⁷¹ Such "truths" as the "eternity" of the nation, its state-forming history, in which the most ancient states and the modern Turkish Republic are the work of the same timeless nation, and the "eternal" Turkishness of Anatolia, also survived.⁷² Thus, the historical knowledge promoted by the state, which is essentially mythology, understood according to Barbara Szacka's words, has become a key component of education that has successfully created a citizenry that is unconditionally loyal to the republic. Turks – according to İsmail Kaplan – internalized the belief in the sanctity of the state, the nation, and the leader, instilled in them by republican education.⁷³

These beliefs were reinforced by official rituals commemorating key moments for the new state – the proclamation of the republic (October 29, 1923), the opening of parliament (April 23, 1922), and the beginning and end of the war of liberation (Mustafa Kemal's landing at Sivas on May 19, 1919) and the "Great Attack" ending the war against Greece (August 30, 1922).

The above remarks about the internalization of the proclamations of official historiography, to some extent, also apply to religious citizens, and, as we will see shortly, also to representatives of the new elite, coming from Islamist backgrounds. In addition, the two memories – Kemalist and neo-Ottoman – coincide at some points, which is of great significance.

One of the most important such points is Gallipoli, a memorial site significant to both the Kemalist and Islamist camps.⁷⁴ The Ottoman Army's only significant victory

⁶⁹ T. Bora, *Milli Tarih ve Devlet Mitosu* [in:] idem, *Medeniyet Kaybı: Milliyetçilik ve Faşizm üzerine Yazılar*, İstanbul 2006, p. 43–64.

⁷⁰ M. Chudziak, *History and Memory in Republican Turkey. The Scope of the Main Questions* [in:] *Memory of Heritage. Heritage of Memory*, eds. V. Julkowska, W. Werner, Poznań 2016, p. 190–208.

⁷¹ E. Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931–1993) Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine*, İstanbul 2006.

⁷² Idem, *Citoyenneté turque, territoire anatolien*, Exposé à l'ENS, Paris, 19 février 2008, dans le cadre du séminaire d'Emmanuel Szurek sur l'Anatolie, https://www.susamsokak.fr/pages/Citoyennete_turque_territoire_anatolien_2008-2893654.html [accessed 30.05.2023].

⁷³ İ. Kaplan, *Türkiye'de Milli Eğitim İdeolojisi ve Siyasal Toplumsallaşma Üzerindeki Etkisi*, İstanbul 2005, p. 390–395.

⁷⁴ E.Z. Güler, *Bir Ulusal Hafıza Mekânı Olarak Gelibolu Yarımadası* [in:] *Türk Sağı*, p. 307–345.

during World War I, in Turkey, known as the "Battle of Çanakkale" (April 25, 1915 – January 9, 1916) for the Kemalists became the "birth of the republic", during which the genius, patriotism and heroism of its later founder Mustafa Kemal were revealed in full glory. For Islamists, on the other hand, it is the heroic defense of the Ottoman Empire against the armies of the Christian powers. As Suavi Aydın maintains, the only element common to both of these "legends" is their detachment from actual history.⁷⁵ One has to agree with that statement – Kemalist historiography appropriated the battle for the republic, as Kemal defended the sovereignty and integrity of the empire, while the "nationalized" story about it is a subsequent imputation. The Islamist story, on the other hand, passes over the ultimate subsequent collapse of the state and the rise of a republic seeking to be its complete negation on the ruins of the empire. Both memories, however, have more in common than factual selectivity. First, the Battle of Gallipoli covers up the Armenian genocide, which took place at a similar time – the greatest disgrace of modern Turkish history, which the elites, neither old nor new, were ever ready to face. Moreover, Turkishness, according to Barış Ünlü, framed as an unwritten contract, precludes any empathy or recognition of the harms (not to mention the rationale) of minorities such as Armenians or Kurds.⁷⁶ This point of "agreement", after some attempts at accountability, was eventually adopted by the new elites. Secondly, the figure of Mustafa Kemal, despite all the anti-religious legacy he left behind, was never openly attacked by the ruling Islamists. The successful defense of the straits, which was also a defense of the empire's sovereignty, became a perfect point in his biography that shows that "Gazi Mustafa Kemal", as Erdoğan refers to him today, is also a hero of religious Turks. The cult developed while he was still alive, which openly conflicted with Islam, found its crowning glory in a mausoleum completed in 1953. The Anıtkabir, with its shape reminiscent of the Athenian Parthenon, built from materials flown in from all over the country, exhibiting the heritage of the Hittite and Sumerian civilizations (which had been Turkified by early Republican historiography) became the symbolic center of the republic. As Christopher S. Wilson, referring to Kantorowicz's "The King's Two Bodies", the mausoleum became not only the resting place of Atatürk's physical body but also of his political body – it is the very heart of the entire republic, which its founder embodies.⁷⁷ This element of Turkey's republican political culture, which transcends memory and is the absolute foundation of the modern Turkish political imagination, the AKP has never been able to undermine. Instead, it has assimilated it. In addition to such practices as the president's adoption of symbolism evoking the "16 historical Turkish states", from the Hun Empire to the Ottoman Empire (the invention of the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis", which became a link between republican nationalism and neo-Ottomanism), visits by "New Turkey"

⁷⁵ S. Aydın, *Çanakkale Ruhu 2015*, "Birikim" 2015, no. 312, p. 45–58.

⁷⁶ B. Ünlü, *Türklük Sözleşmesi. Oluşumu, İşleyişi ve Krizi*, Ankara 2018, p. 14–15.

⁷⁷ Ch.S. Wilson, *Beyond Anıtkabir: The Funerary Architecture of Atatürk: The Construction and Maintenance of National Memory*, Ashgate 2016, p. 107.

leaders to the mausoleum of the republic's founder became an element of state ritual assimilated by the new memory. Turkey's leaders under AKP rule, even in the phase where the most prominent motif of politics was pro-Europeanism and democratization, and a subsequent rejection of Kemalist baggage, including an exalted and brazen worship of the first president, paid official visits to his mausoleum. During them, first Abdullah Gül (president from 2007 to 2014) and then Erdoğan always addressed Kemal with the words "Holy Atatürk" (*Aziz Atatürk*), and then pledged to him the reports on the state of the republic.⁷⁸ Although the AKP's manner, contained a running agenda in line with the political interests of the Islamist camp, it is impossible not to see here the symbolic power that Turkey's most important site of its historical heritage still plays. Atatürk's mausoleum is a shrine to the republic. Paying homage to him is a prerequisite for maintaining political legitimacy. Therefore, in order to maintain it, even the government pushing the neo-Ottoman project, and its corresponding memory, had to assimilate the Kemalist legacy.

CONCLUSION

Turkey's renewed identity is no longer Kemalist. A key element of this renewal has been the re-excavation and use of the memory of the Ottoman Empire. The elites of "New Turkey", themselves shaped by a spirit of nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire rejected by the Kemalist republic, responded to a massive grassroots turn toward re-excavating the past immediately preceding the advent of the republic. However, the process of identity transformation could not be left alone. The state actively pursued a conscious politics of memory, animating it by drawing parallels between the Sublime Porte's greatest triumphs and AKP politics, between the universalism of the Ottoman order and the democratization and contemporary ambitions of the "New Turkey." As it solidified, however, the elements of the neighboring with neo-Ottoman, Kemalist memory became increasingly apparent. This is the paradox of both the old republic and the "New Turkey". Neither the former has fully dissociated itself from the Ottoman past (although it pursued it vigorously), eventually recognizing it, nor has the latter been able to fully reject the Kemalist legacy. What's more – it adopted and assimilated its most important truths, transforming and reinterpreting them. As a result, the contemporary collective memory of Turks has become a combination that is an attempt to "reconcile" the two great traditions – Neo-Ottomanism, which has begun to dominate, at least in terms of density and number of references visible in the public sphere, and Kemalism, the symbols of which, its sites of memory and patterns, although slowly giving way to their Neo-Ottoman counterparts, have retained their importance.

⁷⁸ See Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan Anıtkabir'de, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, 3.06.2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/147376/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-anitkabir-de> [accessed 20.06.2023].

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