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Islamists meet archaeology: the Justice and Development Party's nascent politics of archaeology in Turkey

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ABSTRACT
This article analyzes the nascent politics of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) on archaeology. In the quest to transform the Turkish state, archaeology is tasked by the ruling party to become a significant medium in the production of a new national history and identity. This study reveals that the instrumentalization of archaeology serves primarily the AKP's bid to construct a new state identity, one that is an amalgam of Islamism and nationalism with an anti-Westernism tenet. The article investigates two cases that illustrate the AKP's nascent politics of archaeology and explains how that politics impacts the discipline.

Introduction

In a 2018 speech, President R. Tayyip Erdoğan criticized early Kemalist archeology as 'futile,' for it 'attempted to trace our presence in Anatolia back to thousands of years of Manzikert,' i.e., the war where the Seljuks defeated the Byzantines in 1071.[1] This comment on archeology, at the time rare for a political figure, illustrates the ruling Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) strategy of using archeological issues to distinguish itself from Turkey's Kemalist heritage in establishing a new political discourse as part of its agenda for cultural hegemony.

When the AKP came to power in 2002, its immediate priority was survival as it was surrounded by Kemalist forces such as the military and the judiciary. However, it managed to survive, and gradually succeeded in weakening its non-elected rivals. Meanwhile, the AKP gradually transformed Turkey into a more authoritarian regime. It also initiated an agenda for cultural hegemony in line with its Islamist-nationalist ideology.[2] This happened through the integration of Islamic elements into the traditional national-cultural policies centered on Turkishness.[3] Various examples of this agenda that are geared toward 'creating a pious generation' are observed in fields like family policy and education.[4] Erdoğan has publicly expressed his commitment to religion by defining Islam as a set of rules that encompass all areas of life.[5] This is indeed different from Kemalism, an ideology of modernization[6] that aimed to build a nation based on principles like secularism.

A recent component of that change is the AKP's nascent politics on archaeology. The interest in archaeology symbolizes that the party has managed to reach a new phase of political and cultural change. Reflecting this change, 13 of the 101 archeological surface surveys undertaken in Turkey in 2023 are directly related to Turkish-Islamic periods.[7] Ali Şahin, the leading AKP deputy on archelogy-related legislation, explains this fact as a consequence of the socio-economic development in Turkey. Accordingly, the social and human development achieved by the AKP has reached a point that makes archaeology a major issue, as it happened in the West.[8] Şahin's analogy is a discursive attempt to explain the Islamists' increasing interest in archaeology.

Shaped by political motivations, the AKP's interest in archeology has the goal of instrumentalizing archaeology in line with its ideology. Hence, the party's approach to archaeology has moved into line with the general patterns of the ongoing transition from Kemalism, the founding ideology of the Turkish Republic, to the new state ideology represented by the AKP, which is an amalgam of Islamism and nationalism laced with elements of anti-Westernism. Though this transformation has been analyzed by recent studies in fields like foreign policy,[9] family,[10] education,[11] media[12], and theater,[13] the literature is silent on how archeology has become relevant in the AKP's hegemony building. The analysis of the AKP's archaeology politics in this regard provides not only a new perspective on the political change in Turkey but also a better understanding of how this party redefines concepts like nation, identity, and history.

Contributing to closing the gap in this field, this article studies the encounter of the AKP and archaeology by explaining what this party's nascent politics of archaeology is, and how that politics is relevant in the AKP's bid to establish its cultural hegemony. The article develops two hypotheses that set the stage for theoretical and analytical frameworks: (i) the AKP is developing a politics of archaeology as part of its cultural

agenda in line with its Islamist ideology; (ii) this policy displays both continuity and change in the general trajectory of Turkish archeology.

The article is presented in four sections. The first section outlines the theoretical framework of the archaeology-and-politics relationship. The next section provides a brief examination of the politics of archaeology in Turkey. The objective of this revisit is to observe continuity and rupture in Turkish archeology, which is required to contextualize the AKP from the historical perspective. The third section studies two cases in order to exhibit the AKP's encounter with archaeology: the Turkish Institute of National Archaeology and the Manzikert War Project. The first case is chosen because the Institute is the AKP's first landmark intervention in archaeological studies. This case enables analysis of the most critical political, institutional, and legal changes that the AKP has ever introduced into the discipline. It is equally instructive in the observation of the debates within the archaeological community on the AKP's increasing influence on archaeology. The second case, the Manzikert War Project, enables us to examine how an archaeological project is instrumentalized by the AKP as a public strategy for constructing a new historical narrative. The article ends with concluding remarks on how the AKP's early encounter with archaeology is relevant for an understanding of the relationship between archeology and politics.

Theorizing the political nature of archaeology

Setting early romantic theories aside, the first systemic archeological approach was the school of culture-history that imagined people with an archeological culture as sharing similar values. Archaeological culture was believed to generate spatially bounded recurring groups of distinctive traits that accumulate continuously over the ages.[14] Culture-history literature was a product of the late 19th and early 20th centuries when archaeology rose to assist in the understanding of the origins of nation states.[15] The school of culture-history was a product of German political and intellectual context. However, it later influenced archeological studies in other European countries.

The culture-history perspective was challenged by processual theories in the 1950s. Those theories characterized archaeology as an objective science isolated from political and social factors, and incorporating the methods of the natural sciences. This is dubbed 'the methodological revolution' that enhanced the perception of archaeology as an objective discipline.[16] The school of processual archeology generated new approaches, delving into ecology, physics, and biology.[17] For example, borrowing from evolutionary biology, some theorists developed approaches such as 'dual inheritance,' 'evolutionary archeology,' and 'human behavioral ecology.' They are known as the Darwinian archeological approaches.[18] Others embraced ecological methods that promised a scientific interpretation of past.[19]

In the late 1970s, the processual archaeology literature was confronted by post-structuralist theories. Not rejecting the critical role of material factors, the post-structuralists recognize the influence of social and political factors in the construction of archeological knowledge. Scientific objectivity was declared an unattainable goal, as archaeological knowledge does not exist apart from its creation in a social context.[20] These theories suggest the incorporating of the social context in which the spatial process of the historical event occurred into archaeological knowledge.[21] Unlike the processual theories, the post-structuralist theories interact with the social sciences to propose that an archeological work materializes in a context of social, political, and economic issues.[22] This led to the abandonment of the idea that there is one universal form of archaeological explanation that fits all contexts.

By challenging the earlier efforts to build true scientific theory in archaeology, the post-structuralists asserted that 'nearly all archaeological theory is best defined as methods of interpretation, explanation, or critique.'[23] In this cluster, various schools emerged to follow the Marxist interpretation of archeological knowledge from the dialectic materialist perspective, the feminist perspective that places gender at the center of interpretations of archeological findings, or other theories inspired by literary and cultural theory.[24] The processual and post-structuralist theories have generated contending narratives, such as the cultural, the scientific, the political, and the functional.[25] This has become the grand debate where two paradigms differ in method and theory.[26]

A legacy of the post-structuralist approaches is the instrumentalist interpretation of archaeology, which aims to serve society in addressing challenges like political domination or economic inequality.[27] An ideologically driven moral dimension, that is, a socially responsible interpretation of the past that can be used in the present and the future, was constructed as the articulator of archaeology.[28] For the sake of the community, archaeology was redefined as a kind of political program that may affect or change the *status quo* with better goals.[29] For example, Marxists suggested an archaeology to challenge the legacies of colonialism and the omnipresent class struggles.[30] Archaeology was no longer merely the explaining of the past, but also the shaping of the present.[31] From a comparative perspective, while culture-history relies on idealistic elements in the archaeological study of the past, processual theories rely on materialist elements and post-structuralists theories suggest considering both materialist and idealist elements.

Writing on the trajectory of these theories and approaches, it is critical to remember that archaeology grew out of a political context in which the nation was the major provider of legitimacy to the state. Without nationalism, archaeology might never have advanced beyond the status of a hobby.[32] That connection with nationalism came in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries, and made archeology another element of nation-building: the propagator of the shared idea of a particular nation.[33] Archaeology has thus been closely related to the state.[34] This was observed not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world, including the Middle East, Latin America, China, and Japan.[35] Though the nationalism dimension later faded, the interplay between archeology and politics was recalled when the post-structuralist theories reminded that archaeology is no longer merely the explaining of the past, but also the shaping of the present.[36] Since political struggles over the past are necessarily ideological, these theories proclaimed that archaeological practice inevitably produces ideology.[37] This point elucidates why this article features post-structuralism as methodologically important. As the following pages display, the AKP's use of archeology fits into a pragmatic attitude as framed by the post-structuralist theories. The AKP expects archeology to be helpful in the development of an alternative historical narrative in line with its ideological outlook. This ideological approach to the discipline, as the next section discusses, shows continuity with the early Kemalist perspective, which similarly used archeology according to its ideological outlook.

Turkish archeology

Archaeology emerged as a popular science in the early Kemalist period as the new regime needed historical and 'scientific' arguments to bring its nation-building agenda in line with its nationalist, secular, and pro-Western tenets.[38] The first excavations in Ahlatlıbel began with Atatürk's suggestions.[39] A committee decided the later excavations similarly, according to political strategies.[40] The aim of the state-driven archaeological research was to prove the thesis that the Turks are the successors of the ancient Anatolian civilizations. While this constructivist role served the nation-building process crucially, it synchronously functioned as the basis of a secular Turkish mythology that preceded Islam. Atatürk interpreted the archaeological findings of the Alacahöyük excavations, home to the Neolithic settlements, as 'the historical documents of Turks who are as old as 5,500 years'.[41] To popularize these ideas, the government named institutions accordingly, like 'Sumerbank' (Sumerian Bank). The early Kemalist archeology, mostly because of its political nature, included speculative elements, such as that the Hittites, or the people who brought civilization to Egypt, originated in Central Asia.[42] Theoretically, the early Kemalist archeology fitted culture-history, as it worked to prove that a Turkish nation existed with distinctive traits historically bound to Anatolia.

Pre-historic Anatolian civilizations such as the Hittites' were regarded as the ancestors of the Turks.[43] This enabled the Kemalists to argue that Anatolia was 'scientifically' tied to an ethnically bound and secular

understanding of national identity.[44] Another strategy was to link the Turks to the West. The Kemalist history thesis defined the ancient Anatolian civilizations, and even their antecedents like the Minoans and Mycenaeans (i.e., the forefathers of the ancient Greeks) as Anatolian cultures.[45] This provided the argument that the Turks and the Greeks (a Western civilization) share the same proto-Sumerian origins.[46] Logically, Kemalist archeology resulted in breaking with the Ottoman Empire, for it transmitted a multi-ethnic and cultural heritage of the past.[47] As the early Kemalist archeology focused on the prehistory of Anatolia, issues like the Byzantine were mostly left to foreign scholars.[48] This is critical to observing how Kemalism read the West selectively.

The first generation of Turkish archaeologists was committed to the Turkish history thesis. Members of this generation, like Remzi Oğuz Arık, Şevket Aziz Kansu, Ekrem Akurgal, and Halet Çambel, were sent for training to Western countries by the government.[49] That tradition turned out mostly secular, Kemalist-minded graduates of the leading universities who came to dominate archaeological research.[50] Their impact on shaping the next generation of archeologists was decisive. As an example, Akurgal taught at Ankara University until 1981, having turned out no fewer than 23 of his students to positions in Turkish universities.[51]

Foreign archeologists and archeological institutes played important roles in this period. Kurt Bittel of the German Archeological Institute worked on the Hitit excavations, contributing to the studies on Anatolian prehistory. Henning von der Osten of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago[52] became the first head of the Department of Archaeology at Istanbul University in 1937. Several German archaeologists who escaped the Nazi regime, like Benno Landsberger, Clemens Bosch, and Hans Gustav Güterbock, also contributed to the discipline.[53] The German approaches dominated the first generation of Turkish archaeologists.

The speculative elements of the early Kemalist archeology were gradually abandoned in the 1940s, during the presidency of İsmet İnönü (1938-1950). İnönü's pragmatic tolerance of Islam-inspired ideas, given the rise of the conservative opposition in the country as well as the growing communist/ Russian threat, gave more space to alternative ideas, like Anatolianism. Represented by Mükrimin Halil Yinan, Hilmi Ziya Ülken, and Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu, this thought, incorporating Islam into the historical paradigm, developed the idea of an ethnically defined and geographically bounded national identity deeply rooted in Anatolia.[54] However, Anatolianism was more an intellectual trend than an archaeological paradigm with excavations. More importantly, the new cultural paradigm of the İnönü period promoted a humanistic view that included Greek and Roman elements.[55] Though archeological studies remained committed to the Kemalist goals, speculative elements like the early concentration on Anatolian prehistory were

abandoned. The Turkish History Congresses, convened in 1943 and 1948, had sections on the Medieval Ages, the Byzantine, and even the Ottoman periods.

This trend continued during the rule of the Democrat Party (DP) between 1950 and 1960. Though it was a center-right party with a different historical view, the DP did not intend a radical change in the trajectory of archeology. For example, Remzi Oğuz Arık, a member of the first archaeological generation, was a DP deputy. Besides, the DP, which sought to survive in a web of Kemalist bureaucracy, for it came to power after a 27-years regime building period, never viewed archeology as a strategic field.[56]

Meanwhile, Turkish archaeologists developed new international connections. In the 1960s, we see archaeologists like Robert J. Braidwood and Patty Jo Watson in Turkey, symbolizing contact with new methods from American universities.[57] Ufuk Esin, inspired by Braidwood, came to represent new archeological approaches.[58] Süleyman Demirel's center-right governments between 1965 and 1971 never saw archaeology as a primary issue. This is observable in government programs that mention archeology only in general contexts, such as in efforts to bolster tourism, or to protect old artifacts that represent Turkish civilization.[59]

A more important development was Demirel's ambitious policy of constructing dams. That affected archaeology by introducing rescue projects. The Keban Dam Rescue Project, begun in 1967, was a turning point in Turkish archaeology, for it allowed archaeologists to deploy new ideas and methods.[60] As its scope was dictated by the geography of the dam, not by ideological motive, the project evolved on a scientific course, resulting in the discovery of Byzantine, Roman, Urartian, Ottoman, and Seljuqi remains.

The period witnessed Turkish archaeologists' embracing of processual archeology. Robert Whallon, an American archaeologist involved in the Keban Project, was a representative of processual archaeology.[61] Sönmez Kantman, the co-author of *Analitik Arkeoloji* (Analytical Archaeology) – the first Turkish book on processual archaeology – worked on the Keban project.[62] As an example of adaptation, in this period, Akurgal, though staying loyal to the premises of Kemalist archeology, redefined Anatolian archaeology in regional terms according to which Anatolian cultures were united by the Ionian world of thought, where the impacts of indigenous populations and the eastern influences were recognized.[63] As of the 1960s, archaeology in Turkey was no longer a profession for the elite but the impact of the first generation still persisted.[64]

In the 1980s, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, according to which Turkish culture is a mixture of Turkish values and Islamic beliefs,[65] was supported by Turgut Özal's center-right governments. Though some excavations in the period, for example in Alanya[66], could be interpreted as supporting this ideological trend, they never changed the trajectory of archaeological

studies. This is valid for the 1990s, a decade of political instability. Apart from supporting archaeology as a routine policy, no government ever considered it a strategic field. A critical development was Turkey's signing the 1992 Valetta Convention on the protection of archaeological heritage. Turkey promised archaeological studies before construction projects, a case that verifies the ongoing autonomy of Turkish archaeology. The diversification of the archeological studies continued in this period so far as to include other fields that the early Kemalists archeology had ignored, as observed in the works of Gülru Necipoğlu on the pre-modern Islamic periods including the Ottomans.[67] Similarly, a huge interest in the Byzantine is observed. Reflecting that plurality, for example, of the major excavations conducted in 1995, twenty-four were on prehistoric sites, thirty on Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine sites.[68] As Gül Pulhan summarized, Turkish archaeology had come to a point where it no longer promoted 'a specific period or region'[69] dictated by a political agenda.

The AKP claims archaeology

The relative 'depoliticization' of archaeology which was observed in the 1990s started to come to an end when the AKP has set to create a counter-hegemony after muzzling the Kemalist veto-powers in the early 2000s. As already indicated, the AKP's nascent politics of archaeology is another example of this party's creating a counter-hegemony to challenge the Kemalist order. The AKP needs a new theory of nation that rests on its own ideological preferences.[70]

The early signals of this alternate historical narrative are observed in museums. Recently built museums focus on the Ottoman and Islamic heritages, and less on similarly important ones, such as the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine. Posocco traces the origins of this strategy to the Panorama 1453 Museum in Istanbul, which opened in 2009.[71] Similarly, Maessen explains this museum as an example of the AKP's policy of creating a new historical memory.[72] Bozoğlu, for whom the museum symbolizes a desire to chart a mythic story about the 'national self' by immersive means, concludes that the Panorama 1453 is a cultural device for rebuilding memory to come in line with the AKP's conservative-Islamism.[73] Conservative-Islamism, which contains nationalistic and religious elements, recognizes religion as the primary reference while imaging Turks as the leading historical agents of Islam. Though it is a continuation of previous Islamic and conservative ideologies, it is different in having a strong stance on the primacy of Islam.[74]

The AKP's entry into the field of archaeology marks the embracing of a comprehensive strategy on the (re)production of cultural and historical knowledge. However, during its early years, the party had mostly approached

archaeological excavations from a narrow economic and pragmatic perspective. Erdoğan was a regular critic of archeologic excavations, for they slowed down his mega-construction projects. When an archaeological excavation hindered construction, Erdoğan criticized archaeologists as hindering 'our projects.'[75] The Islamists construed archaeology as a secondary field that matters only in terms of its impact on tourism. That pragmatic approach was abandoned since 2015, as observed in their nascent, nuanced narrative on archaeology.

The Islamists' interest in archaeology is observed both at the national and the local level. At the national level, archaeology has become a subject of the AKP's metanarrative, the 'Turkish Century,' which claims that Turkey is becoming a global power. A part of the discursive strategy within this context was to claim that Turkey is becoming a great power in every field now including archaeology. While propagating 'Turkish Century,' Erdoğan declared that the 10,500 artefacts displayed in museums are there thanks to recent excavations. He underlined that the museums in Istanbul have been renovated.[76] Likewise, Nuri Ersoy, Minister of Culture, argues that Turkey is now in its golden age in archaeology.[77] Any development concerning archaeology is instrumentalized by politicians as a proof of Turkey's becoming a global power.

The AKP's political programs are the other contexts where the growing interest in archaeology can be detected. While the term 'archaeology' was not even mentioned in the early 2000s, it became apparent in the mid-2010s, when the party boasted successes 'in every field of culture so far as to archaeology.'[78] This has been repeated in the succeeding programs. This change symbolizes the AKP's recognition of archaeology as a political subject. This process culminated in 2015, when the AKP finalized its strategy on archaeology.

The 2015 strategy promised to 'develop the archaeological studies on Saljuqs, Ottomans, and Central Asia, and to reorganize the departments of archaeology and history of art as units that feed and support each other.'[79] Repeated in Erdoğan's 2023 presidential election manifesto, this policy is critical on two fronts. While displaying the new strategy of orienting archaeological studies toward the Ottoman and Saljuqi past, it also underlines a rapprochement of archaeology and the history of art. The dovetailing of archaeology and the history of art has long facilitated the use of historical knowledge to demonstrate the spirit/identity of Turkey. This is crucial for political actors, as it makes of archaeology a convenient tool for supporting their political theses.

As a part of their routine of supporting the government's policies at the local level, AKP mayors have initiated public projects to promote the new archeology strategy. Local actors' engagement in the discipline reveals two embryonic narratives. It includes mixed messages, focusing on the economic and cognitive perspectives that identify archaeological sites likely to attract

tourists, and teaching the new generation the history of the Islamization of Anatolia. Various AKP mayors have financed 'archaeology festivals' in the recent years and those activities were promoted by Erdoğan's office. As a symbolic development, Erdoğan has begun to visit archaeological sites across the country.

As its entrance into archaeology symbolizes a nascent regime that expects archaeology to promote an Islamist historical narrative, the AKP differs from previous center-right parties.[80] First, the AKP imagines archaeology as a strategic field that is part of its cultural and ideological agenda. Secondly, the AKP, having ended the Kemalist tutelage, has a capacity to push for a cultural agenda[81] so far as to bring its transformative impact into fields like archaeology. Basically, the AKP's bourgeoning interest in archaeology is a result of the long rule of one party with a solid ideology.

In fact, various political interventions with the potential of weakening the traditional autonomy of archaeological community or 'establishment' have already been observed. In 2018, the AKP enacted a law that any foreign archaeology team in Turkey must have a majority of Turkish citizens, and must have a Turkish co-director. This regulation, according to Minister Ersoy, 'could be realized after 160 years of the beginning of excavations in Turkey, and is a revolutionary change in the centennial of the Republic.'[82] However, the regulation has quickly generated a new interdependence of the government and Turkish archeologists, as it creates opportunities. The price for academics of being a beneficiary of these opportunities is the need to condone the government's policies.[83] Archaeological studies in Turkey are financially and administratively connected to the government. An excavation, which requires administrative permission, is a costly work that is operated according to complex rules.

Early archaeological studies were managed under the umbrella of the Turkish Archaeological Institute, founded in 1934.[84] In the late 1960s, this model was replaced by a new one managed by the Ministry of Culture or by public agencies (as the ministry was several times abolished). Today, the ministry has two effective instruments: the financing of excavations, and the setting of rules. Though foreign-funded excavations create opportunities for Turkish archeologists, the government can influence them via its second instrument, as it happened in 2018.

To exhibit the AKP's nascent politics of archaeology in detail, we analyze two cases below. The scope of this article is limited by major pertinent developments. The article studies only an embryonic part of Turkish archaeology – not the whole field – that is, only the relevant parts where the early impact of the AKP's political interventions are most clearly observed. However, the patterns that this article observes in its cases are likely to become more influential in the interplay of politics and archaeology in Turkey as long as the AKP stays in power.

The Turkish Institute of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

The foundation of the Turkish Institute of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage (TIACH) in 2023 is a major step in the AKP's strategy to influence archaeology. Despite its having been designed as a national institute, the TIACH was established in Gaziantep, a south-eastern city. As another peculiarity, the institute has a complicated organizational scheme in which the municipality of Gaziantep, an AKP stronghold, has a leading role. Gaziantep provides the AKP with a space, far from the archaeology establishment, where it can build alternative structures into the discipline.

Further political influence on the administrative structure of the TIACH is observable. Edibe Sözen, a professor of communication who has served under the AKP in different capacities, such as deputy, bureaucrat, as well as advisor to Erdoğan, is an influential figure in institutional processes. Ali Saydam, a prominent pro-AKP media figure, holds influential roles. Like Sözen, Saydam has no professional experience in archaeology. The AKP legislators defend this unusual structure on the pretext of institutional flexibility.[85]

The TIACH was welcomed by pro-government circles as a national challenge to foreign hegemony in archaeology. Ali Şahin, a leading AKP deputy in the archelogy-related legislations, argued that Turkey has not been able to address its archaeological heritage from a 'national archaeological acquis,' because of the foreign domination in the field.[86] Such arguments appear to be a challenge to the Western (or colonial) impact on Turkish archeology, which Islamists usually associate with names like Gertrude Bell and T. E. Lawrence. The government's frequent reference to its bringing back various stolen artefacts, mostly from the Western countries, is also another example of this anti-Western discursive strategy. Şahin, similarly, criticized former governments because Turks did not 'establish an archaeology institute that belongs to themselves.' In parallel with Turkey's growing regional influence, Şahin stressed, the TIACH was expected to become an influential cultural instrument of foreign policy across Turkey's 'geography of influence.'[87]

The inauguration of the institute, normally a marginal subject for the public, was intensively promoted by the AKP because the institute expected to be seen by the people as a major turning point in archaeology. The Islamist, pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak* saluted the TIACH as 'a domestic and national spurt in archaeology.'[88] Influential actors, whether involved in archaeology or not, even like the Minister of Justice, have visited the Institute's headquarters. As a discursive strategy, the institute was carefully branded as the first national archaeology institute. However, there had been already a national institute at Pamukkale University, established in 2015 and before that an archaeology institute was founded at Aegean University in 1962.

The TIACH was criticized for being a political attempt to weaken the scientific basis of archeological studies. The Istanbul branch of the Turkish Association of Archaeologists, which represents archeologists of diverse political backgrounds who associate themselves with the Kemalist legacy, described the TIACH as an attempt to monopolize the discipline. The association claimed that the TIACH would replace scientific approaches with anachronic perspectives in archaeology.[89]

The TIACH does not reject the need for archaeological research of the previous Anatolian cultures. However, it declares its mission as 'principally' focusing on 'the common knowledge and values of humanity in the fields of Turkish and Islamic archaeology.'[90] Ironically, the Institute was established in a former Armenian church (*Kendirli*) in Gaziantep, a city that experienced the purge of Armenians in the early 20th century. Şahin, in the official justification of the TIACH's law of establishment, stressed that the Institute is located in the Kendirli 'building,' which still has bullet wounds left over from the French occupation, and serves as a reference to the Turkish Independence War against the Western powers.[91] In this rather strange argumentation, Şahin contextualizes the TIACH within a nationalist and anti-Western narrative. Similarly, Nevzat Çevik, head of the TIACH, explains the institute's operation in a church as evidence of the protection of cites of national value: local people sheltered in that church during the French occupation.[92]

Opposition parties have criticized the TIACH bill forcefully. The representative of the Good Party (*IYI Parti*), a center-right nationalist party, described the proposal as a 'foggy' bill with a vague purpose.[93] The Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), the secular-Kemalist main opposition party, criticized the bill on institutional, political, and scientific perspectives: Institutionally, it is wrong to have politicians, i.e., the local AKP mayor, within the hierarchy of an institute that is expected to function at national level. Furthermore, for the CHP, the proposed model, aiming to create an autonomous mechanism in archaeological studies, will weaken the role of the Ministry of Culture. Politically, the bill is yet another example of the AKP's politicizing of an executive office that should be governed impartially. Scientifically, creating a national institute with a special focus on Turkish and Islamic archaeology is wrong, as that is incompatible with the universal principles of the discipline.[94] In sum, the CHP opposed the institute, as it creates a parallel mechanism to realize the AKP's politically motivated archaeology policies.

A more vocal criticism came from the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP. Facing the risk of closure, this party today continues under the institutional roof of the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party, DEM Party), a pro-Kurdish and left-leaning party, on culture and identity perspectives. The HDP, which could be imagined as today's DEM, criticized the TIACH as a new instrument of imposing Turkish

culture on ethnic groups. According to the HDP, the bill represents a continuity of the Kemalist archaeology that ignores other ethnicities and aims at creating a Turkish-Islamic nation at the expense of the other peoples of Anatolia.[95]

From June 15-17 2022, before its inauguration, the TIACH convened the First National Archaeology Collegium, with the mission of redefining the ideal definition and advancing the Turkish archaeology.[96] With the participation of politicians and experts, the collegium began with a documentary demonstrating the TIACH's mission. The documentary's text was written by Çelik, an archaeologist with experience on museology. The documentary contextualized archaeology within a selective narrative that referenced the continuity in history from the Saljuqs to the Turkish Republic. The main motifs in this selectivity were Anatolia's Islamization, and its becoming of a Turkish homeland.

According to the documentary, the Turkish-Islamic civilization is based on rationality and metaphysics through a history-imagination that inherits a 'shared spirit,' throughout ages. The motto of the program was '*Türk Tarihi, devam!*', meaning 'Turkish history, continue!' It thus presents influential figures in Turkish history as actors sharing the same goal. Atatürk, for instance, was framed within this continuity with his original voice, while evoking his famous 'how happy is a person who says I am a Turk,' rhetoric. The documentary features the Saljuqs as the originators of Anatolian history, while predecessors are briefly referenced as 'all the previous roots'. The documentary also depicts Anatolia as the cause passionately pursued by the various powers throughout history. Accordingly, it interprets Anatolia as an agora of rivalry between the West and Turks. This is a contrast with the Kemalist perspective, which imagined Anatolia as bridging Turks with the West.

A manifesto of the collegium, the documentary clearly displays how archaeology is strongly linked to the current political setting. Its discursive strategy aims at adapting the discipline to the AKP ideology based on Turkishness, Islamism, and anti-Westernism. While continuity is framed mainly in reference to the Islamic past, Anatolia's pre-Islamic history is ignored. As importantly, Anatolia is framed as a dichotomy between the Turks and the West. As a part of this strategy, Çevik rebuffed the opposition parties' critics by warning that it is 'time to work, not to complain,' and defended the local actors' decisive role in the institution as evidence of 'doing archaeology with the people'.[97] Through this populist discourse, Çevik intended to criticize Turkish archaeology for having been elitist in the past.

The Turkish Association of Archaeologists protested, and some leading archaeologists criticized the collegium and the TIACH in general. Archaeologist Güneş Duru described the program as a recent case of the AKP's intervention in archaeology. In a broader sense, Duru said, the ongoing political

interventions have caused self-censorship among archaeologists, as they fear of being blacklisted by partisan bureaucrats appointed by the AKP.[98]

Fahri Işık, a leading archaeologist on the Ionians and Lycians, construed the collegium as an 'ostentatious show' that produced no solution to the problems. Işık considered the establishment process of the TIACH as a *fait accompli*.[99] Similarly, Mehmed Özdoğan, a leading archaeologist on the Neolithic Anatolian culture, criticized the TIACH for destroying the balance between archaeology and politics, the latter having gained full authority over the former. Özdoğan underlined that such a trend produces more centralization and bureaucratic influence and monopolizes the science to the point that it might easily destroy Turkey's achievements in archaeology.[100]

The Manzikert War Project

In the same spirit with the TIACH, the Historical and Archaeological Surface Research Project of the Battle of Manzikert (henceforth 'the Manzikert Project') was initiated in 2020. Bringing together 39 scholars from 13 universities, the project is financed by the Ministry of Culture. Having the biggest scale in battlefield archaeology ever in Turkey, the project aims to shed light on the size of armies, logistics, tactics used in warfare, weapons, and human losses in an area of $153 \, km^2$, as well as on the historical identity of Manzikert.[101]

Before analyzing that project, one should revisit the symbolic meaning of the Manzikert War in Turkish national histography, and Erdoğan's instrumentalizing of Manzikert as a founding symbol of his nation-imagination of the 'New Turkey'. For Turks, The Manzikert War in 1071 symbolizes the opening of Anatolia to Turkish conquest.[102] As Hillenbrand underlines, the myth of Manzikert became a key symbol in the formation of the new Turkish Republic almost a millennium later.[103] The first and second generations of Turkish historians defined the war as the turning point in the Turks' making a homeland of Anatolia.[104]

In 1971, the nine-hundredth anniversary of the victory was celebrated in widespread jubilation. Back in March 1971, the army, after botching a coup attempt by a leftist junta, sought the resignation of the government. Dominating politics, the army initiated a nationalistic agenda to counterbalance the leftist threat and to de-escalate mass political violence among ideological groups on the streets. It was in this context that all references to the Malazgirt war were constructed as the initial symbols of the Turkification and Islamization of Anatolia. Commemoratives were issued, and Alp Arslan, the victorious Saljuq ruler, was memorialized by special sessions. His statue was erected in the city. In equally symbolic effect, two white monoliths – called the 'Gateway to Anatolia' – were built to rise up triumphantly forty-two meters into the sky.[105]

The Manzikert War has become a founding motif in the AKP's alternative historical narrative. Erdoğan describes his 'New Turkey' ideal as 'the 2071 vision,' referring to the millenary of the Manzikert victory.[106] The aim is remaking Anatolia to again become 'the beating heart, breathing lung, thinking brain, and center of our heartland in every sense.' Manzikert, for Erdoğan, is the source of Turkish sovereignty in Anatolia, and of the social contract of the 'New Turkey'.[107] It is the beating heart of the Turkish civilization, and for Erdoğan, a spiritual legacy for all Turks. He warns that 'if we forget the spirit of Manzikert, there will be neither a before nor an after for us.'[108]

Erdoğan's Manzikert narrative is a clear case of interpreting land as a dynamic of historical continuity. This sort of interest in history presupposes an independent historical dynamic between land and people. Confirming this, Erdoğan asserted that Manzikert displays how 'the people living in these lands are united for the same noble cause'. Pragmatically, this discourse helps political actors make history and land the essential components of identity. This is effectively to define national identity as a historical transcendentality. As a result, political actors can, paradoxically, justify their present agendas through past events, and they can claim the past (and land) in their contemporary political agendas. As an example of this, Erdoğan declares the goal of 'constructing a new Turkey that is in line with our vision of 2071.'[109]

In Erdoğan's discourse, Manzikert, in contrast to the Kemalist narrative, is located at the beginning of Turkish history, and as exclusive of the Anatolian civilizations. He criticized the Kemalist archaeology for tracing the origins of Turkish nation in a period before Manzikert.[110] Instead, the Saljuqs and the Ottomans are underlined as the originators of the forming continuity in Turkish history. Reflecting this, Erdoğan argues that Manzikert initiated a process for Turks that ended up with the conquest of the Balkans and Constantinople.[111] This discourse helps framing historical continuity in the context of Turks versus the West.

As a concrete visualization of interest in Manzikert, Erdoğan constructed a presidential palace in Ahlat, a neighboring city. The reference to the legitimization of constructing a palace in an underdeveloped region of the country is highly symbolic: 'Sultan Alp Arslan built his military tent there; we, as his heirs, should build a tent there.'[112] Visiting the region with mass political gatherings on every anniversary of the war has become Erdoğan's routine. In 2018, more than 70.000 people listened to him in Manzikert. In annual orations, he always repeats the motto 'one nation, one flag, one homeland, and one state,' in Manzikert, a city situated in the heart of the historically Kurdish-dominated region.

In essence, Erdoğan's Manzikert narrative is part of a larger strategy of reframing Turkish identity in reference to the Saljuqs and the Ottomans to (re)create a new national memory.[113] This complex strategy has many

legs, such as streamlining the popular series on Alp Arslan on public television channels. Reflecting their impact, Alp Arslan became the most common male name in 2022. Another field, in this sense, is architecture. As an election pledge, the AKP promised to revitalize the traditional architecture. Many civic centers with the Saljuqi-Ottoman motifs were caused to appear across Turkey by the TOKI, the public housing agency. This is different from the eclectic architecture of the early Kemalist period, which used Saljuqi and Ottoman motifs, containing them, however, in a Renaissance layout to create a synthesis of the local and the Western.[114] According to Batuman, a professor of urban design, revitalizing the Saljuqi-Ottoman motifs in the public sphere is a manifestation of the AKP's new nation-building project.[115] Peker, a professor of architecture, conceptualizes this trend as a 'revanchist architecture,' symbolizing the 'reconquest of cities' that were believed to have been Westernized by the Kemalists.[116]

The crux of Erdoğan's narrative on Manzikert is that he reproduces Anatolia and Turkish history as connected in a historical continuity that creates the essential elements of the new national identity. Accordingly, considering all aspects of his Manzikert discourse, what appears is a culture-and-identity construction project that regards the Manzikert War as the most appropriate rhetorical focus in Turkish history.[117] In this narrative, Anatolia is transcendentally reframed as 'the land of the nation's common destiny'. This post-geographical notion made Anatolia 'a unifying cultural source of national history and destiny.'[118] This sort of framing, as Eren notes[119] resulted in an overlap between archaeology and cultural history, in which land is imagined as a dynamic that characterizes people's historical identity.

The Manzikert Project in context

Serving Erdoğan's nation-imagination in the 'New Turkey', the project has drawn great interest, and the public was regularly informed on that work. This section analyses how this project is presented to the public, as it is key to understanding of how it is contextualized in Turkish politics. To this end, the section focuses on two leading public faces of the project: Adnan Çevik, the project leader, who is a professor of medieval history, and Mustafa Alican, the rector of Muş Alparslan University, a promoter of the project.

Çevik serves as an important academic in the AKP's archaeology agenda. Çevik supervised an archaeological project in 2016 to reveal the route of Suleiman the Magnificent during the Rhodes expedition in 1522, within the borders of Muğla, a touristic southwestern Turkish city and home to ancient Greek civilizations. In parallel with the AKP's selective historical approach, Çevik and his team were sponsored by the government to map out the cisterns, inns, baths, bridges, fountains, and other artefacts that

were built by Suleiman during the expedition. As an ambitious work, it visualized a historical event and its artefacts in a given environment, for the purpose of exposing people to a visualized interpretation of the past. A key tool for manufacturing a new identity, this project is also significant in this regard as it serves the same political agenda as the Manzikert project.

Çevik usually underlines that geography determines and limits human actions by making people act in a similar way.[120] This argument enables Çevik to propose an essential link between Anatolia and the Turks. The Manzikert project has, therefore, never only sought to collect historical materials through archaeological methods. Instead, as Çevik says, it sought to 'reveal the historical identity of Manzikert.'[121] Unsurprisingly, Çevik objects to Hillenbrand who defines Manzikert as a myth constructed in after-thought.[122]

Unlike Hillenbrand, Çevik imagines an objective, i.e., a solid, deterministic historical relationship between Turkish identity and Manzikert. Framing Manzikert as the origin, he and the project exclude the ancient civilizations that impacted Anatolia. Reflecting this, Çevik frequently repeats that the Manzikert War has a historical significance because it is the beginning of the Turks' making a homeland of Anatolia.[123] Accordingly, the project is presented as an initiative 'in the footsteps of the holy heritage.'[124] A review of Çevik's X/Twitter account on the project reveals this Islamist and nationalist interpretation of history similarly.

The same ideological perspective is observable in Alican's framing of Manzikert in his wider dialogue with the public. For instance, his popular book, *The Manzikert Diary: In the Footsteps of a Holy Legacy* is typical example of his framing of 'Manzikert' in a Turkish-Islamic populist discourse.[125] Similar to Çevik, Alican underlines that Manzikert is 'not only a battle but a meaning,' which he formulated as 'Manzikert as a spirit.'[126]

Making transcendental connections between past and present, Alican ascribes historical and political missions to Manzikert. As experienced in history, where Manzikert became the origin of the Turks' rise to the leadership of Islamic world, Alican claims it is relevant also today, while Turkey is in a position of re-assume its historical mission.[127] Thus, for Alican, Manzikert is an ontological reference for Turkey, a 'framework of understanding.'[128] In his article in *Derin Tarih*, a populist Islamist journal with an anti-Kemalist and revisionist historical perspective, he defines the Manzikert as the biggest project of the Turkish Republic. Praising Erdoğan's special interest, Alican writes that Manzikert was the 'founding event of Anatolian Turkey.'[129]

As indicated, both Çevik and Alican frame Manzikert in line with the AKP's new history discourse. As importantly, they also want to see the Manzikert battlefield as a new destination for popular visits. Çevik emphasized the importance of learning history on site, and asked that the battlefield be turned into a destination, like the Dardanelles Martyr's Memorial.[130] Supporting this, Alican lamented in an interview with the Islamist *TV-Net*

that people do not know much about the Manzikert War.[131] In what appears as a discursive strategy to attract conservative citizens, Çevik emphasized that the project's one important goal is 'naturally' to find the graves of Muslim martyrs in Manzikert.[132]

Making Manzikert a new Dardanelles, a military campaign in the First World War on the Gallipoli Peninsula, where the Ottomans repelled the allied powers, changing the course of the war, is already a goal embraced by the authorities. İlker Gündüzöz, governor of Muş, said: 'Manzikert will be like the Dardanelles.'[133] Allusions to the Dardanelles are significant, as that plays a formative role in the Islamists' constructing of new historical identities, such as in neo-Ottomanism.[134] Islamist actors, mainly Erdoğan, have successfully used the Dardanelles to reframe national history in line with Islamic credentials, in contrast with the Kemalist secular historiography. Every year, approximately four million people visit the Dardanelles sites. Visiting the Dardanelles is almost a regular practice for schools.

The field of Manzikert battle was declared a national park by Erdoğan in 2018. Like the Panorama 1453 Istanbul, a panorama museum was opened in Manzikert. Thousands of students were brought to the museum by authorities. The museum, described by Governor Gündüzöz as having sections on 'critical phases of Turkish history,' such as the failed coup of 15 July 2016, is a typical attempt to provide a historical outlook in line with the AKP's political premises. The museum, thus, has sections on Turkey's 2071 vision, which are normally political manifestations rather than cultural or historical subjects. The emerging Manzikert site is also used as an apparatus by the government in regard of the Kurdish question, as many people in the region support Kurdish political actors. Reflecting this, Governor Gündüzöz said that local students are brought to the museum in cooperation with the police. The authorities plan to bring 110,000 students to visit museums annually.[135]

Similarly, the Manzikert project has drawn the keen interest of Islamist-populist TV programmers who hold considerable influence over conservative citizens. For example, Talha Uğurluel, an ultra-populist guide, made several programs on the project where he framed Manzikert in an Islamist narrative. In a discursive strategy focused on conservative and nationalist people, Uğurluel proclaimed that 'we found the heroes,' referring to the discovery of 'martyrs' graves' in Manzikert.[136] The official X/Twitter account of the project tweets about Uğurluel's programs, and retweets his messages.

The AKP strategy of making Manzikert an element of national identity-consciousness seems to work as researchers show. A recent study on the Manzikert battlefield visitors detected that there is a positive correlation between visitors and their national identity consciousness. More importantly, the study confirmed a positive relationship between identity and space, meaning that Manzikert generates a 'cognitive and emotional connection between visitors and the destination.'[137]

Conclusion

This article studied the AKP's nascent politics of archeology and observed that it displays both continuity and rupture from the general trajectory of Turkish archeology. Despite that they are almost opposite in content, both the Islamist and the early Kemalist archeology prove the post-structuralist argument that archaeology is ideological, as both favor using archeological knowledge as political strategies. Naturally, the authoritarian and state-centric nature of both Kemalist and Islamist ideologies has fostered this structural similarity. However, on the other hand, the AKP symbolizes a rupture from the general trajectory of Turkish archeology, considering especially how Turkish archaeology has developed since the 1960s, and where it stands today. After the 1960s, the influence of ideological agendas in Turkish archaeology notably waned, with academic priorities beginning to steer research. In contrast, under the AKP, there's a noticeable reversal of this trend. The AKP administration wants archeology to prioritize a certain period and subject after a long time. This can fairly be dubbed anachronic, given the evolution of Turkish archeology in the recent decades.

Looking at the findings of the article in terms of the theory of the relationship between politics and archeology, the AKP is observed to have two priorities in this period: Firstly, this party introduced the first examples of new legislations and institutions in archaeology which are expected to facilitate its goals. Secondly, the projects that the party promotes are expected to instrumentalize archaeology to have it support the AKP's new historical narrative, a vital component of building its cultural hegemony. On this account, the case of the AKP displays that political actors with alternative imagination of national history and identity still consider archaeology as a useful instrument to realize their political agendas.

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Disclosure statement

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