

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN TURKEY

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Abstract: Turkey has become one of the leading countries for international tourism with more than 31 million tourists in 2011. However, most of this development has been in the mass tourism sector. This has led to a concentration of the tourism activities and infrastructure in Istanbul and along the Aegean and western half of the Turkish Mediterranean coasts while most of the country has remained virtually untouched by international tourism. Although mass international tourism has been crucial for the economic development of the country it has also led to increased discrepancies in development among the provinces. Arguably, mass tourism is also considered less sustainable in the long term so that more sustainable alternatives need to be found to attract tourists to other parts of the country and contribute to a more harmonious development of the country. Among these alternative forms of tourism we found that religious tourism has a great potential for development in Turkey. We used direct observation and a range of secondary sources to assess the development potential of religious tourism in different parts of the country. We found that the greatest potential for development exist in Central and Southeastern Anatolia as well as in the eastern half of the Mediterranean Region and the Eastern Black Sea Region. These areas are blessed with a great variety of religious and cultural sites yet so far have seen very little tourism development.

Key words: tourism, sustainable tourism, alternative tourism, religious tourism, Turkey

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INTRODUCTION: TOURISM IN TURKEY

Recently Turkey reported a growth rate of 8.8% for the second trimester of the year 2011 making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Comsa, 2011). This is

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especially significant in a context in which most developed countries are confronted with serious economic difficulties. One major driver of this economic success is the development of the tourism sector.

Based on data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2011), Turkey is one of the most important countries in the world for international tourism. With approximately 27 million tourists visiting the country in 2010 Turkey ranks the seventh in the world after France, USA, China, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom but before Germany (Table 1). Turkey is also positioned among the top ten tourism earners for the year 2010 with incomes close to \$21 billion (UNWTO, 2011; Table 2). Like in most other countries, international arrivals suffered a strong slowdown in growth in 2009 due to the global economic crisis in 2008 but recovered in 2010 when the number of international tourists to Turkey has increased by 5.7% compared to 2009. The growth in the number of foreign tourists has then been robust through 2011. In 2011, almost 31.5 million international tourists visited the country, almost 10% more than in 2010 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012; (Table 3). Also, Antalya (with 9.2 million international visitors) and Istanbul (with 6.9 million) were among the top 10 most visited cities in the world in 2010 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012 and UNWTO, 2011).

Table 1. Top ten countries in the world for international tourist arrivals
(Source: UNWTO, 2011)

Rank	Country	International Tourist Arrivals (2010) (millions)
1.	France	76.8
2.	United States	59.7
3.	China	55.7
4.	Spain	52.7
5.	Italy	43.6
6.	United Kingdom	28.1
7.	Turkey	27.0
8.	Germany	26.9
9.	Malaysia	24.6
10.	Mexico	22.4

Table 2. Top ten countries in the world for international tourism receipts
(Source: UNWTO, 2011)

Rank	Country	International Tourism Receipts (2010) (in billion U.S. dollars)	Average Spending by International Tourists (U.S. dollars)
1.	United States	103.5	1733
2.	Spain	52.5	996
3.	France	46.3	602
4.	China	45.8	822
5.	Italy	38.8	890
6.	Germany	34.7	1290
7.	United Kingdom	30.4	1082
8.	Australia	30.1	5102
9.	Hong Kong	23.0	1150
10.	Turkey	20.8	770

The number of hotels and their bed capacity have also increased substantially since the 1980s. Currently, hotels in Turkey have a capacity of 567,470 beds with an additional 258,287 beds planned to be added during the next few years (Deloitte, 2010). In 2009, tourism generated approximately 10.2% of Turkey's GDP and employed 1.7 million

people, or 7.2% of total employment (Deloitte, 2010). However, if we take into consideration that the hotel and catering industry generally underreports employment for tax evasion, we may agree with Smid and Loewendahl-Ertugal (2002) that perhaps as much as 16% of the labor force is employed in the tourism industry. According to Ismet Yilmaz, undersecretary of the country's Culture and Tourism Ministry, tourism is the single biggest generator of wealth in the country (Anonymous, 2008).

However, most of this tourism development has been in the mass tourism sector, or the so-called sun-sea-sand tourism. While this focus on beach tourism has been crucial for the economic development of Turkey, further indiscriminate development of this sector would raise some major concerns due to the very nature of this type of tourism¹:

a. One of the problems is that of very uneven development of tourism in Turkey (see also Seckelmann, 2002). With more than 783 thousand square kilometer of land, Turkey would be larger than France, the Benelux countries and Switzerland taken together, yet almost all international tourism in the country is taking place in Istanbul and on a narrow strip along the Aegean and the Mediterranean coasts while most of the country remains blank on the world tourism map. The Culture and Tourism Ministry (2012) has reported that in 2011 the great majority of international arrivals in Turkey were recorded in five provinces: 1) Antalya 33.27%, 2) Istanbul 25.61%, 3) Muğla 9.78%, 4) Edirne 8.59%, and 5) Izmir 4.36% (Figure 1). Together these five provinces have attracted more than 81% of all foreign visitors to Turkey in 2011 while only 19% of the international tourists visited the other 76 provinces. In order to get an even clearer image of the regional disparities in international arrivals we have compiled a map showing the number of international tourists per 100 inhabitants (Figure 2). The map shows that, while 31 out of the 81 Turkish provinces receive less than one international tourist per 100 inhabitants, in five provinces this indicator exceeds 100: Antalya (637.34), Muğla (487.93), Nevşehir (394.90), Denizli (110.29) and Aydın (104.84).

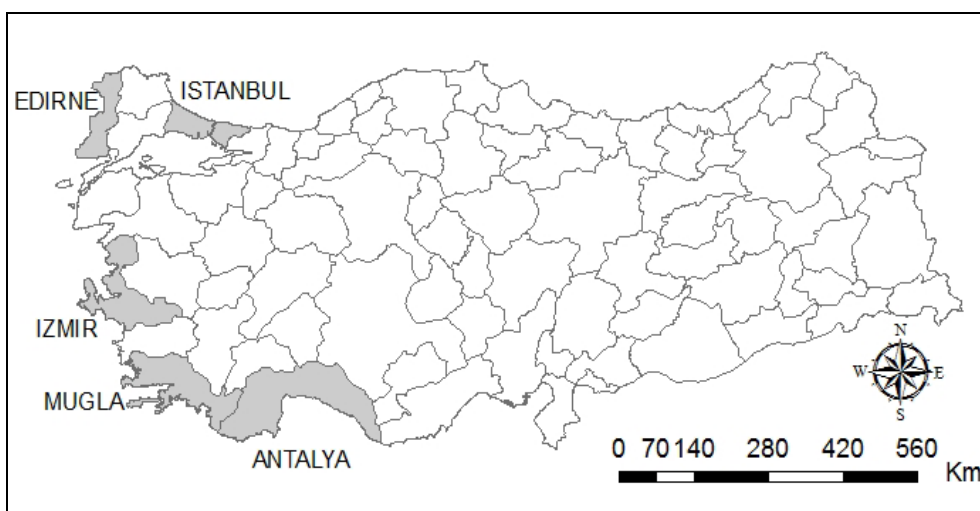


Figure 1. Provinces in Turkey that concentrate the majority of international arrivals

b. This type of tourism is generally characterized by lower spending per tourist. Many participants in mass tourism are from the lower or middle income group with limited disposable income. Also, since mass tourism is based on a similar combination of attractions (in this case “*sun, sea and sand*”) the competition in the Mediterranean region

¹ For a more detailed discussion on the challenges of mass tourism see Shaw and Williams (2006)

is based on price and there is a strong pressure on the local operators to keep prices low (Guitart, 1982). Turkey is very competitive in the region for beach tourism because it has much lower prices than other (Western) Mediterranean countries but this also means reduced incomes and profits (Table 2).

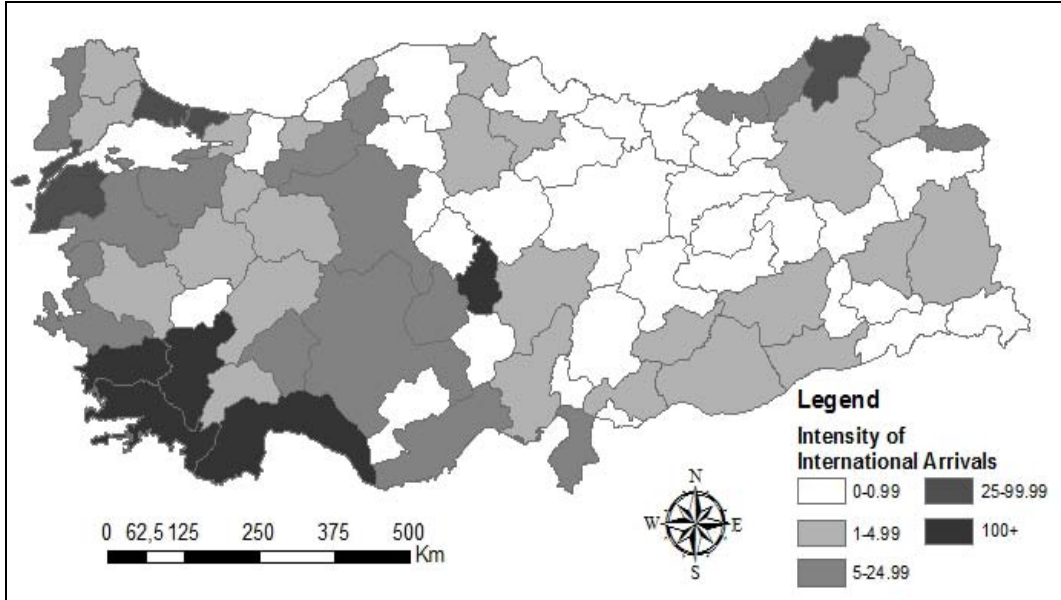


Figure 2. Intensity of international arrivals (calculated as the number of international tourists per 100 local inhabitants)
(Source: Calculated by the authors based on data from Turkish Statistical Institute, TurkStat, 2012)

Table 3. The monthly distribution of international tourist arrivals in Turkey
(Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012)

Month	2009	2010	2011	Rate of change 2010/2009 (%)	Rate of change 2011/2010 (%)
January	751,817	809,974	975,723	7.74	20.46
February	898,927	953,848	1,079,505	6.11	13.17
March	1,207,729	1,414,616	1,617,782	17.13	14.36
April	1,750,281	1,744,628	2,290,722	-0.32	31.30
May	2,718,788	3,148,337	3,283,125	15.80	4.28
June	3,263,089	3,500,024	3,780,637	7.26	8.02
July	4,343,025	4,358,275	4,597,475	0.35	5.49
August	3,760,372	3,719,180	4,076,783	-1.10	9.62
September	3,136,010	3,486,319	3,923,546	11.17	12.54
October	2,617,193	2,840,095	3,039,754	8.52	7.03
November	1,403,740	1,491,005	1,596,295	6.22	7.06
December	1,226,143	1,165,903	1,194,729	-4.91	2.47
Total	27,077,114	28,632,204	31,456,076	5.74	9.86

c. Another problem is related to the seasonality of beach tourism activities. Most international visitors to Turkey are registered during the summer months while during the winter time most tourism activities in the coastal areas come to a halt (Table 3). During the summer months the three major provinces (Antalya, Muğla and Izmir) implicated in beach mass tourism increase their share of international visitors (table 5) whereas during the winter months only Antalya makes the top five list but with a lot fewer

visitors from abroad (110,176 in January 2011 versus 1,519,531 in July 2010) (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012 and table 4). Edirne, Artvin and Ağrı, included in this top, are border provinces and many of the visitors are either in transit or are involved in short-term visits across the border to see family and friends or to do some shopping. Istanbul, being one of the largest cities in the world presents a diversified offer for international visitors. The main problem deriving from the seasonality of tourism activities is finding and keeping a well qualified labor force.

Table 4. Top five provinces for international arrivals during the winter months (as percent of total number of international arrivals in Turkey)
(Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012)

Rank	December 2010	January 2011	February 2011
1.	Istanbul 40.48%	Istanbul 38.78%	Istanbul 39.97%
2.	Edirne 14.61%	Edirne 13.52%	Antalya 17.33%
3.	Antalya 10.43%	Antalya 11.29%	Edirne 11.93%
4.	Artvin 8.54%	Artvin 9.16%	Ağrı 5.80
5.	Ağrı 4.15%	Ağrı 5.68%	Artvin 5.07

Table 5. Top five provinces for international arrivals during the summer months (as percent of total number of international arrivals in Turkey)
(Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012)

Rank	July 2010	August 2010
1.	Antalya 34.87%	Antalya 39.96%
2.	Istanbul 18.80%	Istanbul 16.96%
3.	Muğla 13.48%	Muğla 15.89%
4.	Edirne 11.82%	Edirne 7.33%
5.	Izmir 4.40%	Izmir 4.95%

d. When we combine temporal polarization determined by seasonality with spatial polarization results a spatial organization that puts an intense pressure on the environment and on local communities.

ALTERNATIVE TOURISM

Due to the above described shortcomings of mass tourism, there is an increasing need for Turkey to develop alternative forms of tourism, or “*new forms of tourism*” as Mowforth and Munt (2008) refer to them. There is no universally-accepted definition of alternative tourism but, in general, the term is used to designate tourist products and services that are different, perhaps even opposite to mass tourism by means of supply, organization and the human resource involved (Pearce, 1992; Butler, 1992; Williams, 2009). It may include forms such as ecotourism, rural tourism, and different forms of cultural tourism, medical tourism or religious tourism. Many of these capitalize on a niche resource, are relatively small in scale and encourage interaction with the local communities. These forms of tourism are reckoned to be more ethical in their relationship with local communities as they promote respect for local cultures, livelihoods and customs, involve local people in the development process and imply a more equitable distribution of both economic costs and benefits between tourism developers and host communities (Williams, 2009; Hall & Lew, 1998). These characteristics make alternative forms of tourism very important for local and regional development because they allow local communities to benefit more from the development of tourism.

Recognizing the limitations of mass tourism, the Turkish government is actively encouraging the development of alternative forms of tourism in the country. In a document released a few years ago (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007), the government has stated very clearly its ambitions for Turkey to be one of the top five

countries in the world in terms of the number of foreign tourists and tourism revenue by 2023. One of the main problems in Turkey is the very uneven regional development of the country. The government is committed to eliminate or, at least reduce these differences and tourism constitutes an effective tool. Mass tourism has been determinant for the economic development of the Aegean and Mediterranean coastal regions; however, most of the inland provinces, lacking the type of attractions sought by mass tourists failed to benefit from it (Seckelmann, 2002).

The government believes that it must focus on niche forms of tourism that are based on each province's individual attractions and resources in order to attract more visitors to the country, and especially to those provinces which are not featured on the mass tourism map. This strategy, if successful, promises to foster social and economic development of backward regions and disadvantaged groups. Two forms of alternative tourism have been specifically highlighted in the government's document: cultural tourism and religious tourism. Southern and Southeastern Anatolia could especially benefit from these two forms of tourism as they possess a very rich patrimony of cultural and religious structures and traditions, some of these being included in the UNESCO list. One major impediment in the implementation of the government's plan would be the lack of adequate infrastructure; however, the government is committed to remedy this situation by building new roads, upgrading airports and transforming restored historical buildings into guest houses and small family-owned hotels (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007).

RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Many studies have attempted to define and compare religious tourism and pilgrimage (Graburn, 1977; Turner & Turner, 1978; Cohen, 1992; Smith, 1992; Shinde, 2007). Pilgrimage has been traditionally defined as traveling to a shrine or to a place with religious significance with the purpose of performing religious rites and rituals or to fulfill a spiritual need. On the other hand, religious tourists could be motivated by much broader cultural reasons. Another difference between religious tourists and pilgrims, if we accept this classical view, is in behavior during travel. The travel of a pilgrim is characterized by austerity and ritual (Blackwell, 2007) while the behavior of religious tourists resembles both that of pilgrims and tourists (Pusztai, 2004; Vorzsak & Gut, 2009; Josan, 2009). By taking a spiritual leader on the journey, praying and singing hymns they resemble the pilgrims. However, they reject physical penitence and ascetism, and, similar to tourists, prefer a comfortable journey and good quality accommodation.

However, this classic division between pilgrims and religious tourists no longer holds because "*contemporary pilgrimages involve such huge numbers of people that they can only be organized in the same manner as mass tourism*" (Tomasi, 2002, p. 21). Moreover, today many people travel for both religious and recreational reasons and many pilgrimage places have been "*secularized*" through commercialization and commoditization (Raj, 2008; Shinde, 2007). At many religious sites today you can find also secular tourists who may visit not only to learn more about the place but also to fulfill some personal or spiritual needs (Sharpely & Sundaram, 2005; Collins-Kreiner, 2010). On the other hand, even deeply religious pilgrims today prefer to use modern means of transportation and stay in hotels, or, at least, require the provision of some services (Vorzsak & Gut, 2009; Nolan & Nolan, 1992). This would make them, at least partly, tourists.

For these reasons, the division between pilgrimage and religious tourism is blurred today. Motivation has become more complex with only a fraction of the travelers visiting religious sites for their sacred significance. An increasing number of tourists visit these sites for a range of other reasons, mainly cultural or educational (Sharpely & Sundaram, 2005). As a matter of fact, for many, religious tourism is part of a broader cultural tourism

(Swarbrooke, 1999; Rinschede, 1992). In this study, religious tourism refers to all travel to sites of religious importance motivated, at least partly, by religion (Rinschede, 1992).

We should also mention that religious tourism means not only visiting sites, shrines and structures with religious significance but also attending religious conferences, different cultural-religious events, exhibition of cultic objects, as well as concerts of sacred music (Vorzsak & Gut, 2009). Nolan (1992) distinguish three types of religious attractions:

1. Pilgrimage shrines which have strong religious significance but have little else to attract secular tourists.

2. Shrines that attract both pilgrims and more secular tourists because the site is also attractive from a historical, artistic or scenic perspective.

3. Sites where the main attraction is represented by religious festivals.

The “*new*” religious tourists are also more likely to visit other tourist objectives while in the area and also make more use of the local hotels, restaurants or local transport which recommends religious tourism as an important economic sector especially for those regions that lack other opportunities for development.

Every year an estimated 300 million people, motivated by religion, travel across the world (Rundquist, 2010). In the USA alone religious tourism is involving 4.5 million people but this number is expected to double by 2012 (ibid). It is understandable then why more and more countries are seeing the development of religious tourism as an important provider of jobs and income.

RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN TURKEY

Religious tourism has been very little developed in Turkey. So far religious tourism accounts for only 1% of the total number of foreign tourists to Turkey (Aktaş & Ekin, 2007). This is somewhat surprising because the country is well-endowed with religious and sacred sites. All three major monotheistic religions and hundreds of other religions and sects are represented in Turkey. When it comes to Christian sites, for example, Turkey is as important as Israel or Greece for religious tourism. However, most of these sites are promoted for their archeological and historical value rather than for their religious or spiritual significance (Aktaş & Ekin, 2007).

RESEARCH GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this paper is to assess the potential for the development of religious- cultural tourism in Turkey. While we refer exclusively to the visitation of religious sites, objectives and events we added cultural to conform to the findings of previous studies that many tourists visit these sites for cultural or educational motives rather than strictly religious ones.

Information for this paper was gathered through direct observation. Most of the sites and objectives discussed in this study have been visited at least once and at least by one of the authors. We have also used a range of secondary sources such as scientific and newspaper articles, internet websites, brochures and videos promoting local tourism sites as well as official government documents.

FINDINGS

For a better organization we will discuss our findings based on four major regions (Figure 3).

Istanbul

Istanbul, with a long history expanding over years has been a major center for all three monotheistic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. There are approximately 444 mosques in Istanbul. Among the most visited by tourists are: Sultanahmet Mosque, Beyazit Mosque, Süleyman Mosque, Fatih Mosque, the New Mosque and Eyüp Sultan Mosque.

The Sultanahmet Mosque is also known as the Blue Mosque for the blue tiles adorning the walls of the interior. It contains, besides the mosque, a madrasah (religious school), a hospice and the tombs of his founder, Sultan Ahmed I, who commissioned the building of the mosque between 1609 and 1616. The mosque is facing St. Sophia and is one of the most visited objectives in Istanbul and one of its symbols. The mosque was also visited in 2006 by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to Turkey (BBC, 2006).

Built near the ruins of Teodosius' Forum, Beyazit Mosque was the second large imperial complex in Istanbul after the 1453 conquest. The small garden behind the mosque contains the tombs of the founder, Beyazit II. The mosque is in the heart of the historical Peninsula, near the Grand Bazaar and Istanbul University and is visited by many tourists.

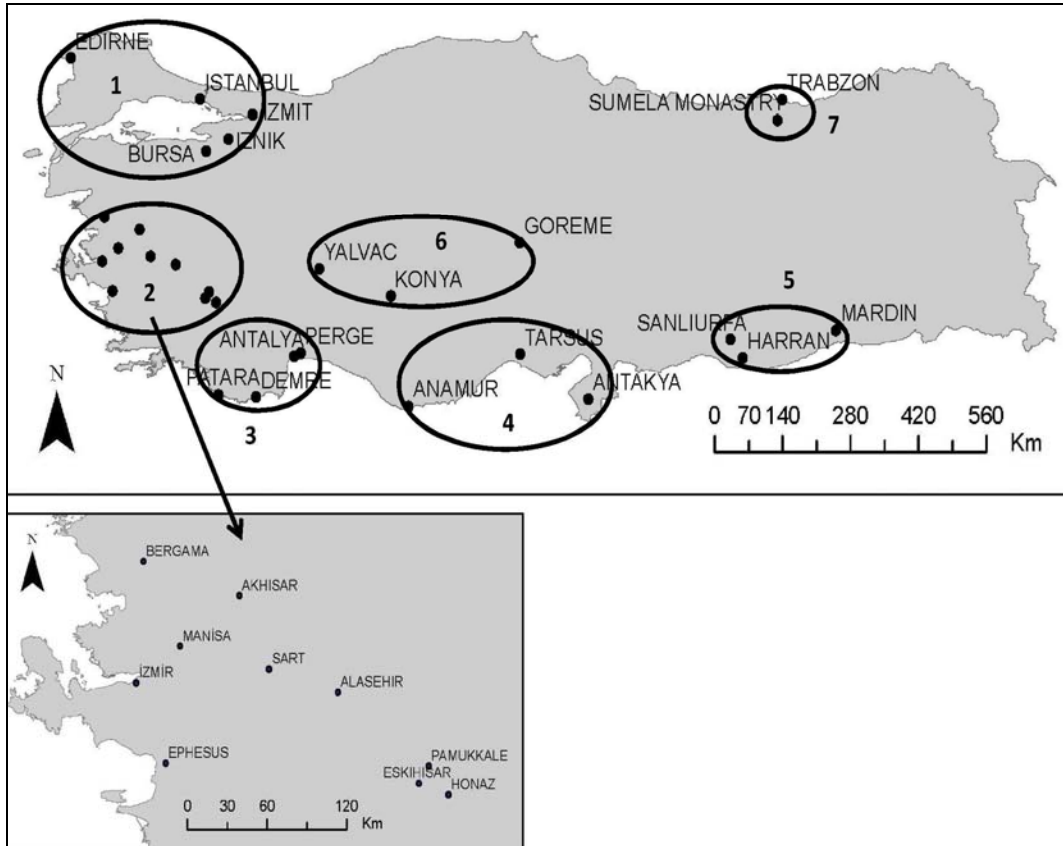


Figure 3. Regions in Turkey for religious tourism

Süleyman Mosque is the second largest mosque in the city and one of the most visited. It was built by Sultan Süleyman (Soliman) the Magnificent between 1550 and 1558. As is the case with many mosques, the complex also included a hospital, a primary school, a medical college, madrasah, hamams (public baths), a caravanserai and a public kitchen. Several tombs, including that of the founder, his family, of two other sultans and of architect Sinan could be found here.

Fatih Mosque is one of the largest examples of Turkish Islamic architecture built in Istanbul between 1463 and 1470. The mosque was damaged several times and completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1766 after which it was rebuilt on a different plan in 1771. The complex includes schools, library, hospice, caravanserai and several

tombs. Among these there is the tombs of Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople, and his wife's. The original plan included a market, hamams, hospital and a kitchen for the city's poor but they no longer exist.

The New Mosque (Yeni Camii in Turkish) is another Ottoman imperial mosque located in the Eminönü District. It was built between 1597 and 1665. The market was part of the social-religious complex that survived the times and is known today as the Spice Bazaar (or the Egyptian Bazaar), visited by millions of tourists every year. The religious tourists pray at the tombs of six sultans, some of their family members as well as at tombs of numerous members of the court buried in the courtyard of this mosque.

The Eyüp Sultan Mosque was built in 1458 as the first Ottoman mosque after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. This is considered the holiest site in Istanbul being situated next to the site where Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (Eyüp Sultan in Turkish) is buried. He was the standard bearer of the Prophet Mohammed and fell there during the Arab assault on Constantinople in 670. It is said that some of the personal belongings of the Prophet Mohammed himself are preserved in the tomb. Many pilgrims from Turkey and the Muslim world visit the tomb annually.

Aya Sofya (or Hagia Sophia) is a museum today visited by millions of tourists every year. As the Church of Holy Wisdom it was built initially by Emperor Constantine the Great and destroyed and rebuilt several times. The final form dates from the time of Justinian I (the sixth century) and is considered to be one of the best examples of Byzantine architecture. As the seat of the Patriarch of Constantinople for more than 900 years, Hagia Sophia hosted several ecumenical councils. After the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453 it was converted into a mosque until 1934 when it became a museum. Having served as a religious center for both Christianity and Islam the museum is a "*must-visit*" objective for all religious tourists visiting Istanbul.

Many other old Byzantine churches in Istanbul have been either converted into mosques (Chora Church, Church of Christ Pantokrator, Church of Christ Pantepoptes, Monastery of Gastria, Church of Saint John the Baptist at Lips, etc.) or function as museums (Hagia Irene). Some have been abandoned and are in ruins (Monastery of Stoudios, Church of the Virgin of the Pharos) and a few are still active (the Church of Sainte Mary of the Mongols is the only one from the Byzantine time that has never been converted into a mosque). There are also many newer churches belonging to the Greek, Bulgarian, Syriac and Armenian minorities in Istanbul as well as Catholic (especially Italian) and Protestant churches.

The Jews of Istanbul have about twenty active synagogues in the city. The Italian Synagogue was built in the 19th century and rebuilt in 1931 by the Sephardic Jews who migrated to Istanbul from Southern Italy. The Ashkenazi Synagogue was founded by the Jews coming from Austria in 1900.

The Marmara Region

Bursa is the fourth largest city in Turkey with a population of close to two million (TurkStat, 2011). A former Ottoman capital, Bursa has numerous edifices with significant historical-cultural and religious value. Ulu Camii (The Great Mosque) is the largest mosque in the city built at the end of the 14th Century by Sultan Bayezid I. Another tourist objective which attracts many religious-minded visitors is the Green Mosque (Yeşil Camii) which includes besides the mosque a madrasah, a kitchen for the poor, a public bath and the tombs of the founders. Another site where many tourists go to pray is the complex with the mausoleums of the first two Ottoman Sultans: Osman and Orhan.

Bursa has also been an important center for the Turkish Jews. Several synagogues built hundreds of years ago are still in good shape and open for the visitors and worshippers. Among these are the Geruş Synagogue, the Ets Ahayim Synagogue and the Mayor Synagogue.

Iznik (old Nicaea), in the province of Bursa was an important center for the Christian faith. Two of the historical church councils were convened here. Of the many churches of Nicaea few have survived. The Church of the Dormition, one of the largest in Anatolia was completely destroyed during the war between Turkey and Greece (1919-1922) but the Hagia Sophia (Saint Sophia) has been partly restored and can be visited.

Not far from Nicaea lies another great city for Christianity: Nicomedia (today's Izmit). The city served for a few years as one of the four capitals of the Roman Empire during the Tetrarchy. It was also the capital of Constantine the Great before Byzantium. Many Christian martyrs died during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. They are known as the "*20,000 martyrs of Nicomedia*". Today the city of Izmit is known mainly for its industry and none of the sites of early Christianity has survived.

Edirne was the second capital of the Ottoman Empire and one of main centers after the capital was transferred to Istanbul. Therefore many cultural and religious monuments could be found here. Among these is the Selimiye Mosque built by the famous architect Mimar Sinan in the 16th Century. The construction is absolutely remarkable; the cupola is higher than that of Aya Sophia's and the minarets are the second highest in Turkey after two minarets of Sabancı Merkez Camii in Adana. In 2011 the complex was featured on the UNESCO's World Heritage List. Of the numerous churches that had been built in Edirne only two have survived and are still active both belonging to the Bulgarian Orthodoxy.

The Aegean Coast and the Western Half of the Turkish Mediterranean Coast

The area is the repository of many Christian, Islamic and Jewish religious "*treasures*". Some of the earliest Christian communities lived here at times when their religion was still forbidden in the Roman Empire. They gathered secretly in small churches such as the Seven Churches of Revelations: Ephesus (Efes in Turkish, situated near the modern town of Selçuk), Sardis (today Sart), Pergamum (today Bergama), Philadelphia (today Alaşehir), Laodicea (near the modern village of Eskihisar), Smyrna (today Izmir) and Thyatira (today Akhisar). Not much is left today of these churches but the pious visitor can walk the historical streets and immerse himself or herself into the atmosphere of early Christianity. Pergamum is the place where the first Christians were executed by the Romans. In Ephesus one could find the Church and tomb of St. John and the Baptismal. St. Paul also lived in Ephesus for a few years while he was trying to convert the population in the area. He wrote the famous epistle to the Corinthians from here.

Near Ephesus, on Mount Koressos, is a small house where Virgin Mary spent her last years. After Jesus was crucified, St. John, fearing for Virgin Mary's life decided to move her to Anatolia. The house was rediscovered at the end of the 19th Century and in 1961 Pope John XXIII made it a point of pilgrimage for Christians. The house was also visited by Pope Paul VI in 1967, Pope John Paul II in 1979 and Pope Benedict XVI as well as numerous other personalities: Bill Clinton, Sting, Elton John, Brian Adams and James Brown. The house is considered to be a holy spot for Christianity and visited by half a million people every year. Also near Ephesus there is another site of pilgrimage: the cave of the seven sleepers.

Pamukkale is better known today for its hot springs; however in the past, under the name Hierapolis (meaning "*Sacred City*"), the city was an important religious center first for pagan cults and then, starting with the first century for Christianity. The Apostle Philip lived and was martyred in this city. Not far from Pamukkale lies another important city for Christianity, Colossae, to the inhabitants of which has Saint Paul addressed his famous epistle.

In the province of Antalya, Demre is the former Lycian town of Myra and the hometown of St. Nicholas. Many tourists come here to see the church of St. Nicholas and to buy religious material from the numerous gift shops tended by the many Russian

citizens living in the area. Religious tours are also organized to the nearby city of Patara, one of the early Christianized cities. Patara was visited by Saint Paul and Saint Luke and it is the place where Saint Nicholas was born. Tourists can visit the remains of four churches in the area. Antalya city itself (old Attalia) and Perga (in Turkish Perge) were also visited by Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas before their sail to Antioch. Perga was an important city for early Christianity and the remains of two basilica churches from the 5th and 6th Centuries are still visible today.

There are also numerous vestiges of the Jewish heritage in Western and Southern Anatolia. Jewish communities have existed in Anatolia for more than 25 centuries. Most of the early Christians, including Saint Paul were from these communities. Sardis, the capital of the Kingdom of Lydia was a city of no less than 100,000 inhabitants during the time of the Roman Empire with a very influential Jewish community. The remnants of a large local synagogue were unearthed in the late 1950s and are testimony to a very prosperous community. Many synagogues also existed in Izmir and Manisa.

Other regions of Turkey

While less known and less visited today, many regions in Turkey possess remarkable cultural and historical assets that could be used to attract international tourists and increase revenue. These religious objectives could be grouped in the following regions:

- a. The Eastern Half of the Turkish Mediterranean Coast and Hatay
- b. Southeast Anatolia: the provinces of Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Mardin
- c. Central Anatolia: Cappadocia and Konya
- d. Eastern Black Sea Region: Trabzon.

a. The Eastern Half of the Turkish Mediterranean Region and Hatay

Tarsus is a historic city in the province of Mersin and the capital of the ancient province of Cilicia. It is also the birthplace of Saint Paul. An important Christian community developed here relatively early, many of the local Christians being martyred by the Roman local authorities for their beliefs. The Church of Saint Paul is a site of pilgrimage today as are some Muslim sites including the mosque (Ulu Cami) built near Prophet Daniel's burial place (actually this is only one of the six locations claiming to have Daniel's tomb). The tomb is marked by a funerary monument. The mosque contains three other tombs that are considered sacred: that of the 9th Century caliph Mamun, that of the famous Muslim physician Lokman Hekim and that of Seth, which, according to a legend is the son of Adam and Eve and the founder of Tarsus. An interesting place to visit for the religious tourist is the old city of Anamur, in the same province. The city flourished during the Roman times (between the first and the fourth centuries AD) but its existence continued well into the Byzantine period. Today only ruins have remained of the old city. Besides the remnants of the city walls, aqueducts, baths and houses one can distinguish here the ruins of several churches.

Antioch (or Antakya) is a very old city situated less than 20 kilometers from the Syrian border. Antioch was a city of great religious importance playing a very important role in the history of Christianity. It constituted the base for Saint Paul's missionary journeys and it is the most probable place where the gospel of Matthew was written. Saint Luke also lived in Antioch for a number of years. The Cave church of Saint Peter (known also as the Grotto of Saint Peter or Sen Piyer Kilisesi in Turkish) is most likely the oldest church in the world where both Saint Peter and Saint Paul preached around the year 50 AD. Their followers were the first to call themselves "*Christians*". The small Cave Church of Saint Peter is a museum today but religious ceremonies are still sometimes performed here. Later the city hosted a number of church councils and produced numerous influential Christian figures

including some of the first martyrs. Several small churches and monasteries are still open and can be visited in Antakya. The city also hosts one of the oldest mosques in Anatolia, Habib-i-Neccar and a small synagogue.

b. Southeast Anatolia

Sanlıurfa is known as the city of the prophets due to the many prophets who are said to have lived in the city. Prophet Abraham may have been born in Urfa and a mosque sits today on the cave where he was born. However, Abraham is an important figure in all three monotheistic religions so the sites associated with him are visited by tourists of all the three major religions. Another major tourist objective is a pool with sacred fish situated in the courtyard of a 13th Century mosque, Halil-ur-Rahman. Legend has it that Nimrod threw Abraham into the fire but God turned fire into water and the firewood into fish. Urfa was also an important center for Christianity although little has survived the time. Under the Roman rule many Christian martyrs suffered here and the city (then called Edessa) was also a host for one of the first Christian councils in 197.

Harran, in the province of Sanlıurfa, is considered an important center for the Jewish faith as this is known as the place where Abraham and his family settled for many years while on route from Ur in Chaldea to Canaan (according to the Genesis). The place was also an important center of Assyrian Christianity and is known as the place where purpose-built churches were first constructed openly. The small town is also an important place for Muslim visitors as this is the site where the first Muslim university was built during the late 8th and the early 9th Century. Only a few ruins have survived to remind us of this great achievement. The town is also known for the traditional mud-brick “*beehive*” houses, built without using any wood. The design of the houses, unchanged for at least 3000 years keeps them cool during the hot summers without a need for air conditioning.

To the east, the province of Mardin has an enormous potential for the development of religious tourism. Both Muslims and Christians will find this province very interesting. Until 1932 the city of Mardin was the seat of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate. Many Orthodox churches and monasteries were built in this province. However, most Christians emigrated from Mardin following World War I and only a small community remained in the province. One of the main effects is that most churches and monasteries are closed or are in a bad shape today. The most important and the only one still active in southeastern Turkey is the Saffron Monastery (Deyrülzazafran). This is one of the oldest monasteries in the world, being built in the 5th Century. The Church of the 40 Martyrs is another important church that dates back to the 6th Century. The province also presents interest for the Muslim religious tourist. Besides numerous mosques, the province has the oldest religious school (madrasah) in Anatolia, built in the 12th Century.

c. Central Anatolia

Cappadocia is a geographic region in Central Anatolia of fantastic natural beauty including the “*fairy chimneys*” and many historical sites such as underground cities, castles or houses carved out in the rock. The region was also an important center for early Christianity. There are over 500 cave churches here dating mainly from the 6th Century. Such a complex of monasteries and churches carved into the rock can be visited in Göreme. The Göreme National Park is on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1985. The churches found here, sculpted in rock contain numerous pieces of Byzantine art from the post-iconoclastic period in relatively good conditions. There are at least ten churches and chapels in the area built (or rather carved) mainly between the ninth and the 13th Century. The region is also known as the “*Land of the Three Saints*” because of the three great theologians (Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus) who preached here in the fourth

century at a time when Christians were oppressed and were forced to pray in caves transformed into small churches and chapels.

Konya has been an important center for Islam. It was the place where Rumi (or Mevlana), an important Persian-born Islamic scholar lived most of his life. His tomb has become a place of pilgrimage today. His followers created the Order of Whirling Dervishes who are famous for their dance. The Whirling Dervishes perform once a year during the Mevlana Festival in December. In 2005, the Mevlana Sama Ceremony in Konya was proclaimed by UNESCO as one of the Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Although there are few traces left, Konya was an important center for early Christianity. St. Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium (the old name of Konya) in the 1st Century and St. Thecla was born there. However, with the decline of the Christian community, most of the churches were closed or were transformed into mosques. There still is one church dedicated to St. Paul open in Konya. The church was built in 1916 by the French community in town. Many pilgrims traveling the paths of St. Paul in Anatolia stop to visit this small church.

Northwest of Konya, near the modern city of Yalvaç, are the ruins of the old Pisidian Antioch. This is the place where Saint Paul first preached outside of the Jewish community. The city played an important role for early Christianity and served as meeting place for several church councils. The Great Basilica was excavated in the 1920s and represents one of the earliest examples of Christian churches in Anatolia. An inscription found on the sixth century-altar reading “*Agios Pavlos*” suggests that the name of this church was Saint Paul’s. The ruins of another old church were also excavated in the area and can be visited today. Archaeologists claim that there is evidence to suggest that the church was built over the site of a synagogue so it could be the church in which Saint Paul first preached to the Gentiles (non-Jews).

d. The Eastern Black Sea Region

Trabzon has many cultural attractions, some of which could attract the religious tourists. Among these are churches such as Hagia Sophia (the most visited church in Trabzon built in Byzantine style), Hagia Ana, Hagia Theodoros, and Hagia Konstantinos, monasteries such as the Armenian monastery of the All-Savior and Vazelon Monastery as well as many churches that were transformed into mosques (Panagia Krisokephalos is Fatih Mosque today, Hagios Evgenios is Yeni Cuma Mosque and Hagia Andreas is Nakip Mosque).

Not far from Trabzon, in the same province, at an elevation of 1200 meters, there is a relatively well-preserved monastery dedicated to Virgin Mary. According to local legends, the monastery was founded in the fourth century during the reign of Emperor Theodosius and during its long history it fell into ruin and was restored several times. The monastery continued to flourish even after the Ottomans conquered the Empire of Trebizond in 1461 because Sultan Mehmed II granted the monastery special protection and privileges. It continued to be funded by the Patriarchate in Istanbul as well as by the Greek communities in Anatolia and elsewhere. Even the Greek voivods (from Istanbul’s Fener District) of the 18th Century Wallachia took a special interest in this monastery (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007). The monastery was inhabited continuously by monks until 1923 when, following the population exchange between Turkey and Greece it was abandoned. Recently, the Turkish government has initiated the restoration of the monastery and the site has become very popular among tourists. While most of the tourists are not visiting the site with a religious purpose in mind, an increased number of pilgrims has been recorded mainly from Russia and Greece. Starting with 2010, divine liturgies are allowed again to be performed on the 15th of August (the day of the Assumption of Virgin Mary) which are also attracting hundreds of pilgrims from the Orthodox world (Euronews, 2010).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Istanbul

This is one of the regions in Turkey with the highest number of international visitors and the most balanced region in terms of distribution of international tourists throughout the year. The region receives international visitors all year round due to the diversification of tourism offer. Istanbul is one of the largest cities in the world, situated at the joining of two continents, Europe and Asia and draws millions of tourists every year from all around the world. Some come to experience the tremendous historical heritage while many others visit for shopping or to participate in different events, festivals or concerts that are taking place here throughout the year. While there are numerous sites in Istanbul and in the Marmara Region with great religious significance, it is difficult to differentiate those tourists who are visiting these sites strictly for their religious values from those who are rather interested in these sites' historical and cultural significance although some reports suggest that their numbers may be on the rise (Davenport, 2009).

A major increase of the number of visitors to these religious sites would have a limited impact given that tourism activity is more balanced here. It may even cause some negative effects as it could disrupt the local worshippers. Especially during the main tourism season there may be long lines of tourists waiting to enter some of the most popular religious sites in Istanbul (for example the Blue Mosque). There are however religious sites with a great potential situated in areas where tourism is underdeveloped and which could benefit from it. The municipality of Eyüp, an old neighborhood of Istanbul is investing millions of dollars to become a center for religious tourism (Hürriyet Daily News, 2011). As discussed earlier, the Eyüp Sultan Mosque and tomb are among the most sacred sites in the Muslim world. Thousands of pilgrims visit the site every day but due to a shortage in accommodation they are spending their money in other neighborhoods. The municipality intends to increase the accommodation capacity of the neighborhood from less than 300 today to 1000 by building new hotels in the area and by transforming the old mansions into boutique hotels. There are also many other religious sites (mosques, churches and synagogues) that do not receive the attention they deserve. These have a great potential if introduced in a religious tour.

The Marmara Region

The Marmara Region (Bursa, Iznik, Izmit, and Edirne) is blessed with numerous religious sites belonging to all three Abrahamic religions. Owing to the role Bursa and Edirne have played in the history of the Ottoman Empire (as the first and second capital) they are visited by numerous domestic tourists. However, the number of international tourists is still below the potential. Out of the many millions of foreign tourists who visit Istanbul every year few venture outside the city limits. We believe that the area has a great potential for the development of international religious tourism due to its proximity to Istanbul and to its accessibility. Edirne and Izmit are connected to Istanbul through a well-maintained motorway and Bursa and Iznik are also easily accessible.

The Aegean and the Western Half of the Turkish Mediterranean Region

Annually many millions of foreign tourists visit the area. While most of these tourists visit for sea, sun and sand, some decide to enhance their tourist experience by visiting other natural and cultural objectives in the area.

A diversification of the tourism offer by including some natural, historical and religious objectives in the area could enhance the tourists' experience and increase revenue. But the real difference could come from encouraging the development of

religious tourism as a complementary form of tourism off the main mass tourism season. Already many companies organize their religious and pilgrimage tours during the spring, autumn or even late winter seasons. Several advantages derive from such approach. On the one hand, religious tourists benefit from getting access to discounted tourism services in the main coastal resorts and from visiting the religious sites in the off-season, without the crowds which allows for the proper performance of religious rites and rituals. On the other hand, the tourism industry could also benefit from keeping the businesses open all-year round. The seasonal character of coastal mass tourism makes finding and keeping qualified staff difficult and the development of religious tourism in the off-season could alleviate the problem.

Other parts of Turkey

This category includes the last four regions analyzed in this study (the eastern half of the Turkish Mediterranean and Hatay, Southeastern Anatolia, Central Anatolia and the Eastern Black Sea Region). Although some of these areas are fairly well-known by domestic and international religious visitors, in general these regions receive fewer tourists. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, these regions are further away from the mainstream tourism regions. Secondly, some areas, such as Mardin, also suffer from underdevelopment of infrastructure but this is being remedied by the government. Thirdly, parts of the Southeast Anatolia region have been until recently considered too dangerous for tourism due to the activity of the PKK, the Kurdish terrorist organization. However, today the area is safe as the terrorists were pushed across the border in Iraq.

Outside the two main regions discussed earlier, the impact of international tourism is, so far, limited. Due to this situation, the development of an alternative form of tourism could have the greatest impact here. We consider that these regions have the greatest potential for the development of religious tourism. Our claim is supported by the fact that these regions contain an impressive number of religious sites that represent all three Abrahamic religions. Also the infrastructure has improved dramatically in the last decade making it easier for both foreign and domestic tourists to travel to these areas.

Turkey's economy has witnessed one of the highest growth rates in the world. Many jobs have been created in the process and many Turks enjoy today greater disposable incomes which they may use for traveling in Turkey or abroad. Religious tourism could benefit from the development of domestic tourism (Seckelmann, 2002). Moreover, Turkey has signed agreements with neighboring countries such as Syria, Iran and Georgia to eliminate visas for their citizens. This has already increased cross-border traffic and will allow Christians from Syria, Armenia and Georgia to visit important religious sites in Turkey that were, perhaps built by their ancestors. Due to proximity, many Christian Syrians can visit the churches and monasteries in Mardin and many Russians and Georgians cross the border to visit the Sumela Monastery, especially on August 15, for the liturgies dedicated to Virgin Mary. The Turkish government has recently allowed special liturgies to be performed in the Armenian church on the Akdamar Island (or Akhtamar in Armenian) on Lake Van and it is expected that the church will attract large Christian crowds in the future and will increase awareness of this site for international religious tourism.

Central and Eastern Anatolia (and Turkey in general) have also much to offer to Muslim pilgrims. The easing of border crossing resulted in millions of Iranians, Syrians, Azeris and Iraqis traveling to sites that are considered sacred in the Muslim world like the ones in Konya, Istanbul and Sanliurfa. There are reports on the significant increase in interest in religious tourism packages for Muslims. Many such religious sites have recently become popular stopover for travelers on their way back from Mecca (Davenport, 2009).

In conclusion, Turkey is one of the most important destinations for mass tourism. However, while mass tourism has significantly contributed to the country's economic development during the past thirty years, the very characteristics of this type of tourism may hamper a sustainable development of the country in the future. One of the main problems with a tourism based on sun, sand and sea is in its concentration during a short summer period and along a narrow coastal area. This puts an increased pressure on the existing resources (especially water and land) of the coastal areas (Aegean and Mediterranean) and on the local communities which have to deal with the crowds. The seasonal character of the mass tourism business also creates difficulties in the management of local jobs with most employment being temporary and seasonal.

On the other hand, the majority of the provinces in the country has not benefitted from the development of tourism and this has contributed to increasing regional inequality. Situated at the crossroads of many civilizations, Turkey is characterized by incredible physical and cultural diversity. Recognizing the potential, the government is committed to developing alternative forms of tourism in order to exploit this potential and to ensure a more harmonious development of the country. This study has proven that religious tourism could become an important tool for regional development.

However, the development of alternative forms of tourism should happen with care. Many studies present mass tourism as the least sustainable while alternative forms of tourism are presented as more in tune with the principles of sustainability. While this may be true in general terms, an increasing number of new experiences suggest that alternative tourism development could be just as damaging to the environment and to local communities if left unchecked (Williams 2009). The main danger is over-visitation of sites and agglomeration of visitors. This can result, on the one hand in a poor experience for the visitors and, on the other hand, could lead to damage to buildings and landscapes and to increased stress for the local community and for the worshippers (Swarbrooke, 1999). The negative impact is felt especially when are visited places of worship that are active and when most tourists visit for cultural rather than religious reasons and their behavior is not appropriate (Swarbrooke, 1999).

Tourism can create income and job benefits but very careful planning is needed in order to eliminate or minimize these negative side-effects and to promote growth and development in the area (Hall & Page, 1999). The government has a very important role in the planning process because the action of many stakeholders needs to be coordinated in an efficient way and because important investments need be made in infrastructure (Hall, 1999). As Page (1999) has argued, the existence of good infrastructure and transport system are crucial for the development of tourism. The government also needs to be involved in marketing and advertising the region for domestic and international tourists and in the creation of a business environment that would encourage potential investors to invest their money in this business.

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