



Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya Müzesi)

Summary :

The church of Hagia Sophia, the hallmark of Justinianic architecture and one of the supreme achievements of all Byzantine architecture was the largest building in the Byzantine capital. Though made up of elements current in the 6th century, its design was both original and unique, since it would not be imitated until the 16th-c Ottoman mosques. It also marks a turning point in the symbolic understanding of Byzantine religious architecture. A legend and a symbol of the capital during both Byzantine and Ottoman period (when it turned into a mosque), it went under several restorations and modifications throughout the centuries and is today a museum (Aya Sofya Müzesi), while it figures some of the finest examples of Byzantine monumental painting in Constantinople.

Date

first built 360; 415 (second dedication); 532-537 (Justinianic church)

Geographical Location

Constantinople, Istanbul

1. General introduction

Hagia Sophia or simply "Megale Ekklesia" (the Great Church) was the cathedral of Constantinople, erected in the center of the [Constantinian city](#) on the First Hill, very close to the [Great Palace](#) and the [Hippodrome](#). Adjoined to the somewhat earlier church of [Hagia Eirene](#), with which it shared the same enclosure, and together with the Hospice of Samson, they formed a large complex administered by the same clergy.¹ The present building (now Ayasofya Müzesi), erected by the Emperor [Justinian I](#) in the early sixth century, is the third church of Hagia Sophia at the site. The first Hagia Sophia, built in the second half of the 4th century and known simply as the Great Church, and the second, 5th-c. building were both destroyed by fires in the course of riots in Constantinople.

2. The Great Church in the fourth and fifth century

The plan of the first two churches is unknown but it is reasonable to assume that they were timber-roof, three-[aisled](#) or five-[aisled basilicas](#). The first Hagia Sophia was consecrated in 360 in the reign of [Constantine](#)'s son Constantius II.² It burned together with the neighbouring [Senate](#) during the 404 riot and was perhaps first repaired by the Emperor [Arcadius](#) and then built anew or thoroughly reconstructed by Theodosius II (the inauguration of the church in 415).³ The only part that survived the fire was a circular building adjacent to the church; this may have been the same as the still standing [skeuophylakion](#) at the north-east corner of Hagia Sophia.⁴ The bread and wine for the liturgy in Hagia Sophia were prepared in the skeuophilakion, and gold and silver chalices, patens, gospel books and liturgical vessels were also stored there. In addition, written sources also enumerates a considerable number of precious relics that were kept in this building.⁵ The liturgical vessels and the relics were probably stored in rectangular round-headed niches that articulate the interior of the building on two levels (the upper niches accessible from a corbelled gallery to which an external staircase led).⁶ Other remains of the pre-Justinianic church were found in front of the [narthex](#): The colonnade with a mosaic floor excavated before the World War II belonged to the monumental gabled propyleum that preceded the [atrium](#) of Theodosius' cathedral.⁷

3. Sixth-century cathedral

The damage of Theodosius' cathedral during the [Nika Riot](#) in 532 was the great opportunity for Justinian to build a church that surpassed all ecclesiastical structures not only in the city but also in the whole Roman and post-Roman world. [Anthemios of Tralles](#) and [Isidore of Miletus](#) were employed as master-builders, and it is clear that they approached the design of the church from a theoretical perspective, disregarding the constraints of empirical building practice. The construction progressed rapidly and the new church, a colossal [domed](#) basilica with an [apse](#) projecting to the east and with a total length about 135 m, was inaugurated on 27 December 537. The daring construction of the first dome and the fact that the church was erected with haste led to the collapse of the dome after the earthquakes of 557.⁸ Unfortunately, Procopius does not describe the the original dome in detail.⁹ On the other hand, it



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is clear from [Agathias](#)' account of the rebuilding of the church that the original dome was larger and lower than the second dome which was constructed by [Isidore the Younger](#), nephew of the original engineer: «It [ie. the new dome] was narrower and steeper so that it did not strike spectators with as much amazement as before, but it was far more securely set up.» The church was re-consecrated in 562.¹⁰ The dome of Hagia Sophia is slightly smaller than the dome of the Pantheon in Rome; it has a diameter of 31.87 m and a height from floor level of 55.60 m.

Hagia Sophia displays a radically innovative design, combining elements that had already emerged in [Early Byzantine religious architecture](#) (in the church of [Sts Sergios and Bakchos](#), and maybe even in the church of [St. Polyeuktos](#)) but in an original way and on a vastly larger scale. The weight of the dome passes through the [pendentives](#) to four massive piers. Between them the dome seems to float upon four great arches of which the western and eastern ones are extended by half domes carried on smaller semidomed [exedras](#). The central domed core of the church is flanked by aisles on the south and north sides and by two nartheces on the west side. [Galleries](#) above the aisles and the inner narthex were originally accessible by four spiral ramps adjoining the four corners of the church – now only that on the north-west corner is in use for this purpose.

4. Patriarchate and baptisteries

The palace of the Patriarchs was also reconstructed after the Nika Riot. It was situated at the south-west corner of Hagia Sophia and comprised a long, possibly two-storied, [vaulted](#) hall flanked by smaller rooms. Only the north wall (with three large round-headed, now blocked, openings) and part of east wall as well as springings of vaults remain of the large hall. These remains of the main reception space of the palace can be seen above the Ottoman ablution fountains.¹¹ There are further rooms once probably belonging to the [Patriarchate](#). These are well preserved and are situated above the south-west vestibule of the church and on the top of the south-west access ramp. They are usually dated in the reign of Justin II and are decorated with figurative mosaics executed probably in the 9th century. Although directly accessible from the gallery of Hagia Sophia, they are not open to tourists.¹²

The octagonal domed building (now one of the sultans' mausolea), situated to the left when leaving Hagia Sophia through the south-west vestibul, may also have been originally part of the patriarchal palace. Its architecture and masonry point to the 6th century and it is usually identified as a baptistery. Although it served this function probably as early as the 9th- or 10th century, it may have been originally built as a small recetion hall of the patriarchs or a chapel because Paul the Silentiary (later 6th century) in his description of Hagia Sophia mentions a baptistery that was apparently north of the church, which is also confirmed by other post-sixth-century sources. The patriarchate was enlarged in the 7th century when the Thomaites Hall was added by one of the patriarchs of this name (Thomas I, 607-610, or Thomas II, 667-669).¹³

5. Appearance of Justinian's church after its first dedication in 537

Despite several additions and modifications made during its almost 1500 years long history Justinian's Hagia Sophia retains in general much of its original appearance. Nevertheless, if we want to visualize the Great Church as it probably appeared in 537 it is above all necessary to remove four Turkish minarets and outer buttresses surrounding the church on all sides. The outer buttresses are to be dated in the middle and [late Byzantine periods](#): The flying buttresses on the west façade and those in the middle of both long sides as well as the south-west buttress belong to the former group while more massive buttresses on the east side of the church to the latter group (built by [Andronikos II Palaeologos](#)).¹⁴

The silhouette of the church in 537 also differed from the present state as the dome was originally lower and its curvature was similar to that of the four pendentives marking the transition between the four big piers and the drum of the dome. The present dome rises about 6 m higher than the original one. Moreover, the interior of the church was brighter than it is today. Besides blocking some windows by adding the outer buttresses, the principal alteration of fenestration occurred after the first dome collapsed and was rebuilt: on the walls beneath the south and north big arches supporting the dome, were in 537 larger windows than the present ones (these are even smaller than after the rebuilding during Justinian's reign due to later, probably Ottoman, interventions).¹⁵ In addition, the south-west and north-west porches does not seem to be part of the original design – the former was created when the rooms opening off the



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south gallery and belonging to the patriarchate were built (which also included modification of the top of the south-west access ramp tower).¹⁶

The most important loss is the disappearance of the Justinianic atrium that preceded the church on the west. The atrium extended westwards from the outer narthex for about 42 m and its three sides opened into the courtyard through pairs of columns alternating with piers.¹⁷ In the centre of the atrium was an elaborated marble fountain. The atrium disappeared in the Ottoman period and the last columns and piers were demolished in 1870s. In addition Hagia Sophia was in the 6th century surrounded by courtyards on all sides;¹⁸ only the patriarchate, the Great Baptistery (on the north flank) and the earlier skeuophylakion adjoined the cathedral. The facades of Hagia Sophia were neither plastered nor presented their brick masonry but they were faced with white Proconensian marble slabs.

6. Interior decoration

As far as the interior is concerned, the surfaces were sheathed with polychrome marbles (as they are today) and decorated with numerous crosses and ornamental designs on gold mosaic background (in the south-west spiral ramp, inaccessible to public, a preserved fresco cross may also belong to the Justinianic period).¹⁹ Such a simple decoration is understandable if we take into account the very short time in which the cathedral was erected (only five years!). Columns also present various kinds of coloured marbles and are the important feature of the whole appearance of the interior: on the groundfloor are columns of green Thessalian marble and re-used porphyry columns while green columns dominate on the galleries. The column shafts carry white marble capitals. The marbles of Hagia Sophia were much admired by Byzantines and Procopius adds: "Who could recount the beauty of the columns and the marbles with which the church is adorned? One might imagine that one has chanced upon a meadow in full bloom...".²⁰ Sculptors from St. Polyeuktos - a church with most impressive sculptural decoration and a challenge to Justinian from its donor, Anicia Juliana - were probably employed on the decoration of Hagia Sophia; however, or maybe as a response to the challenge, they reintroduced in Hagia Sophia a more conservative style with less oriental motifs than in St. Polyeuktos, while they also introduced the intricate arched **entablatures** and capitals that became hallmarks of Early Byzantine metropolitan style. As the interior was better lighted in the 6th century than today (larger windows, numerous oil lamps and candles) the visual effect of the colorful decoration of the interior must have been more impressive.²¹

In addition, the presence of liturgical furnishings made the appearance of the broad nave and the apse much different from what one see today. In the apse was installed a **synthronon** of seven semicircular steps of which the topmost one was occupied with the seat of the patriarch on the axis. In front of the synthronon was a **ciborium** composed of four silver columns supporting an octagonal canopy. The altar table of the Great Church, made of gold embellished with semiprecious stones, stood under the canopy. A silk and gold embroidery decorated with images of Christ and the Apostles Peter and Paul covered the altar table. The **bema** (presbytery) occupied much of the area beneath the eastern half-dome and it was composed of marble parapet slabs and silver columns carrying an architrave. A raised pathway projected westwards from the bema and led to the **ambo**, a raised stand used for reading the Gospel or the Epistle. The ambo was constructed of marble and ivory and was accessible by two flights of stairs. The imperial metatorium, a screened-off place where the emperor stayed during a mass, was probably in the easternmost bay of the south aisle. On the other hand, the empress's place was on the gallery, above the inner narthex.²²

7. Post-Justinianic mosaics

As already said, the Great Church of Justinian was decorated in non-figurative mosaics (crosses, acanthus rinceau, geometrical patterns). However, images of Christ and the saints may have started to appear in the church soon after Justinian's death if later sources mentioning scenes from the New Testament commissioned under Justin II are to be believed. By the mid-eighth century figurative mosaics were present in Hagia Sophia because the iconoclastic patriarch Nicetas is said to have destroyed (mosaic) images of saints and Christ, decorating the church, in 768.²³

Nevertheless, the oldest surviving figurative mosaics in Hagia Sophia date in the period after **Iconoclasm** in 843. These include the



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Virgin Mary with Child and the Archangel Gabriel in the apse executed in the later years of Michael III's reign (842-867) and four winged seraphim on the pendentives of the dome (only two of them are original, probably 9th-c mosaics; the other two are painted copies). The dome of the church was decorated (probably) also in the 9th century with a large image of the Pantocrator (in 562 there was only a large mosaic cross in the dome). The Pantocrator mosaic disappeared completely but, what is interesting, it was still visible in the early Ottoman period when Hagia Sophia had already served as a mosque. Other early mosaics, which survived only fragmentary, are in the rooms above the south-west porch and the top of the south-west access ramp tower. They depict **Deesis** as well as various saints. These rooms are not accessible to public which is also the case of the small cruciform chapel with fragments of mosaics that is situated on the top of the south-west outer buttress. All of these mosaics probably date in the tenth century at the latest.²⁴

Nevertheless, other surviving mosaics are in the main space of the church and can be seen by the visitors. A magnificent 10th-c. mosaic in the **tympanum** over the door leading from the south-west porch into the inner narthex shows the Virgin Mary with Child seated on the throne and flanked by Constantine and Justinian who offer to him models of the city of Constantinople and of the church of Hagia Sophia, respectively. Approaching further the interior of the building, one can admire a mosaic over the Imperial door (the middle door from the narthex into the nave, reserved for the emperor) dating in the late 9th- or early 10th century. This probably represents the Emperor Leo VI performing proskynesis (falling on his knees as the act of his homage) in front of Christ on the throne. Christ holds an open book in which are the words: "Peace be unto you. I am the Light of the World". Christ is accompanied by two busts in roundels showing the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Gabriel.

Further figurative mosaics are on the galleries. In the north gallery is a relatively small mosaic image of the Emperor Alexander (912-913), while in the south gallery three more mosaics have survived. Alexander is depicted as standing figure and wears imperial cloak and scarf, gem-studded carmine buskins and helmet-like crown. As far as the mosaics in the south gallery are concerned the Deesis is the largest and, on the other hand, the latest mosaic in Hagia Sophia. It dates in the late 13th or 14th century and shows the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist pleading with Christ in an act of intercession for the salvation of humans. In the east extremity of the south gallery are two imperial mosaics. The earlier of them shows Christ enthroned between the Emperor Constantine IX and the Empress Zoe. The 11th-c. imperial couple is depicted frontally in formal dress, bearing gifts (scroll and money). It is probable that the figure of the emperor has originally shown one of Zoe's earlier husbands (Romanos III or **Michael IV**) and was later changed into the portrait of Constantine IX. The latter of the imperial mosaics in the south gallery was commissioned under John II Comnenus in the early twelfth century. It is a portrait of him and his wife Irene flanking the Mother of God with Child and a side panel depicts their son Alexius. It is similar to the mosaic of Constantine IX and Zoe, though it is less naturalistic and more schematized. The last mosaics to be mentioned decorate the balustrade above the galleries, beneath the round-headed windows in the north and south large tympana. There are rows of mosaics of bishops (those well preserved include St. Ignatius of Constantinople, **St. John Chrysostom** and **St. Ignatius Theophorus of Antioch**) each holding a codex and making the gesture of blessing.²⁵

8. Influence of Justinian's Hagia Sophia on religious buildings in the East and West

Justinian's Great Church is regarded as the greatest achievement of the Byzantine architecture. However, the direct architectural influence of the 6th-c. cathedral of Constantinople on later Byzantine churches was not as significant as one would expect. Its complex design and grandeur had been never repeated. On the contrary, later Byzantine churches were erected on a modest scale reflecting both the shortage of resources after the sixth century and the trend to create smaller religious communities. Nevertheless, a dome resting on four piers or columns – the main compositional element of Hagia Sophia – was adapted by the builders of those later churches (often of the **cross-in-square** plan). Moreover, Hagia Sophia's influence can be seen also on a symbolic level – it was the powerful symbol of the Empire and the Orthodox Church. The Great Church of Constantinople was admired not only within the Empire but its fame spread outside its borders (Western Europe, Russia) and became a source of inspiration also for Ottoman architects. The architectural and/or symbolic influences of Hagia Sophia can be traced for example in St. Sophia in Kiev (11th century), Langobard St. Sophia in Benevento (8th century), Charlemagne's church at Aachen (8th/9th century) or in Giuliano de Sangallo's church of St. Maria at Prato (late 15th century; perhaps influenced by Cyriacus of Ancona's drawings of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople).²⁶ However, the full impact of Justinian's cathedral is more obvious in great Ottoman mosques such as Suleymaniye



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Camii and Sultanahmet Camii in Istanbul.

1. Justinian's Novella III, 1, in W. Kroll and R. Schöll (ed.), *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, 3. (Berlin 1895; repr. 1968), p.21. There were in the 6th century 60 priests, 100 male deacons, 40 female deacons, 90 subdeacons, 110 readers, 25 singers and 100 custodians (!). In addition the same clergy also served in the nearby churches of Theotokos church in Chalkoprateia and St. Theodoros of Sphorakios.
2. *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, 1 (CSHB, Bonn 1832), p. 544.
3. Damage of Constantius' church by fire in 404: see note 4; consecration of Theodosius' church: *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, 1 (CSHB, Bonn 1832), pp. 572-573; Mainstone, R., *Hagia Sophia. Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London 1988), p. 134; Bardill, J., *Brickstamps of Constantinople 1* (Oxford 2004), p. 55.
4. Palladius, *Dialogus de vita S. Joanni Chrysostomi* in PG 47, col. 35-36. The lower part of the skeuophylakion built of alternating bands of brick and stone is dated in the fourth or fifth century whereas the upper part that shows pure brick masonry seems to have been added by Justinian.
5. Relics in the skeuophylakion: the cross showing the height of Christ «when he walked the earth,» blood from miraculous icon of Christ, gifts of the Magi to Infant Jesus, blood and head of St. Panteleimon, head of St. Anastasios, hand of the patriarch of Constantinople Germanos and many others. See: Majeska, G.P., "Notes on the Skeuophylakion of St. Sophia", *Vyzantijskij vremennik* 55 (1998) p. 212-215.
6. Türkoğlu, S., "Excavations of the Saint Sophia Skeuophylakion", *AMY* 9 (1983/84) pp. 10-11 (English summary), pp. 23-35 (in Turkish).
7. Schneider, A.M., *Die Grabung im Westhof der Sophienkirche zu Istanbul* (Berlin 1941).
8. Damage of the church in 532: *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, 1 (CSHB, Bonn 1832), p.621-622; first consecration in 537: Taylor, R., «A Literary and Structural Analysis of the First Dome on Justinian's Hagia Sophia, Constantinople,» *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 55.1 (Mar. 1996), pp. 66-78; collapse of the first dome: Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. L. Dindorf (CSHB, Bonn 1831), p. 420.
9. Procopius describes it as follows: «Above the arches the construction rises in a circle: it is through this that the first light of day always smiles. Indeed, I believe it towers above the whole earth, and the structure has gaps at short intervals, being intentionally interrupted so that the openings corresponding to the division in the masonry are channels of constant illumination... Rising above this circle is an enormous spherical dome which makes the building exceptionally beautiful», Procopius, *De aedificiis* I.1.41-46, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), p. 75.
10. Agathias, *Historiae* V.9.2-5, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), p. 78; re-consecration in 562: Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. L. Dindorf (CSHB, Bonn 1831), p. 429; *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf (CSHB, Bonn 1832), p. 687; on the first and second domes see also Mainstone, R., *Hagia Sophia. Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London 1988), p. 126f; Bardill, J., *Brickstamps of Constantinople 1* (Oxford 2004), p. 36-37 and 64.
11. Dark, K.R. – Kostenec, J., "The Byzantine Patriarchate in Constantinople and the Baptistery of the Church of Hagia Sophia" *Architectura* 36.2 (2006), pp. 120-123.
12. Cormack, R. – Hawkins, E.J.W., "The mosaics of Saint Sophia at Istanbul: the rooms above the southwest vestibule and ramp" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977) pp. 175-251.
13. For the so-called Baptistery on the south-west corner of the church see Dark, K.R. – Kostenec, J., "The Byzantine Patriarchate in Constantinople and the Baptistery of the Church of Hagia Sophia" *Architectura* 36.2 (2006), pp. 123-129; for the Thomaites see Stichel, R., "Sechs kolossale Säulen nahe Hagia Sophia und die Curia Justinians am Augusteion in Konstantinopel", *Architectura* 30 (2000), pp. 23-24, who suggested that this hall may have been originally the Senate of Justinian I situated on the east side of the Augustaion.
14. Mainstone, R., *Hagia Sophia. Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London 1988), pp. 102-105.



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15. Mainstone, R., *Hagia Sophia. Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London 1988), p. 125 and fig. 120.
16. Cormack, R. – Hawkins, E.J.W., "The mosaics of Saint Sophia at Istanbul: the rooms above the southwest vestibule and ramp," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977), pp. 177-202.
17. Schneider, A.M., *Die Grabung im Westhof der Sophienkirche zu Istanbul* (Berlin 1941), pp. 22-28.
18. Procopius: «...the many colonnades and columned courts by means of which the church is encompassed...», Procopius, *De aedificiis* I.1.58, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), p. 76; Paul Silentiarius: "And outside the divine church you may see everywhere, along its flanks and boundaries, many open courts..." , Paul Silentiarius, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae* 612-4, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), p. 85; Evagrius: " .beautifully adorned open courtyards on all sides", Evagrius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*. IV.31, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), p. 80.
19. Cormack, R. – Hawkins, E.J.W., "The mosaics of Saint Sophia at Istanbul: the rooms above the southwest vestibule and ramp" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977) fig. 8.
20. See above, note 18.
21. Procopius: "You might say that the interior space is not illuminated by the sun from the outside, but that the radiance is generated within, so great an abundance of light bathes this shrine all round", Procopius, *De aedificiis* I.1.30, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), p. 74.
22. Liturgical furnishing: Paul Silentiarius, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae* 682-884, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), pp. 87-91, Paul Silentiarius, *Descriptio ambonis*, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), pp. 91-92; imperial metatorium in the south aisle: Paul Silentiarius, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae* 580f, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), p. 85; indication of the empress's place on the gallery of the church: Evagrius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV.31, transl. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto ²1986), p. 79.
23. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, 1 (Leipzig 1883; repr. Hildesheim 1963), p. 443.
24. Cormack, R. – Hawkins, E.J.W., "The mosaics of Saint Sophia at Istanbul: the rooms above the southwest vestibule and ramp" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977) pp. 175-252; Mango, C., *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of Saint Sophia at Istanbul* (Washington DC 1962), pp. 38-39
25. On the mosaics that survived and were restored see Mango, C., *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of Saint Sophia at Istanbul* (Washington DC 1962); Teteriatnikov, N.B., *Mosaics of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul: The Fossati Restoration and the Work of the Byzantine Institute* (Washington DC 1998); Kleinbauer, W.E. – White, A. – Matthews, H., *Hagia Sophia* (London - Istanbul 2004).
26. Mainstone, R., *Hagia Sophia. Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London 1988), p. 248.

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Glossary :

	aisle The part of the naos of a church set off by the internal rows of piers or columns, namely by the structures supporting the roof.
	ambo The elevated pulpit used for preaching in the church nave.
	apse An arched structure or a semi-circular end of a wall. In byzantine architecture it means the semicircular, usually barrel-vaulted, niche at the east end of a basilica. The side aisles of a basilica may also end in an apse, but it is always in the central apse where the altar is placed. It was separated from the main church by a barrier, the templon, or the iconostasis. Its ground plan on the external side could be semicircular, rectangular or polygonal.
	atrium 1. Antiquity: The large, open space within a building, which is enveloped by colonnades. 2. Byzantium: The forecourt of a church in early Christian, Byzantine, and medieval architecture. It was usually surrounded by four porticoes (quadriporticus).
	basilica In ancient Roman architecture a large oblong type building used as hall of justice and public meeting place. The roman basilica served as a model for early Christian churches.
	bema The area at east end of the naos in Byzantine churches, containing the altar, also referred to as the presbtery or hierateion (sanctuary). In these area take place the Holy Eucharist.
	ciborium, -a, n (lat.) Domed construction or pyramidal structure, supported by four thin columns. Ciboria were usually erected over the altar, tombs of saints, fountains etc. inside of a church and in outdoor space.
	cross-in-square church Type of church in which four barrel-vaulted bays form a greek cross; the central square of their intersection is domed. The cross is inscribed into the square ground plan by means of four corner bays.



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	Deesis
Iconographic theme, an image of intercession for the salvation of the human race, which represents Jesus as the central figure, between the Virgin and St. John the Baptist	
	dome
A characteristic element of Byzantine architecture. The dome is a hemispherical vault on a circular wall (drum) usually pierced by windows. The domed church emerges in the Early Byzantine years and its various types gradually prevail, while they are expanded in the Balkans and in Russia.	
	entablature, the
The upper part of the classical order, that rests on the columns, it consists of the architrave, frieze and cornice.	
	exedra, the
1. Large semicircular niche-like structure with stone seats ranged around the walls, often outdoors or with a hemidome over. An exedra may also be expressed by a curved break in a colonnade, perhaps with a semi-circular seat. 2. The rectangular hall of the palaestra, open to the courtyard with columns at the front. The exedrae in gymnasium and palaestra could have served many functions. Usually a hall of such type was the Ephebeum.	
	gallery
The upper level of a house where the women resided. In ecclesiastical architecture it is the corridor above the aisles and narthex of a church, from where women attended the Liturgy. Originally (in the Byzantine period) the gallery, having a special entrance, was used exclusively by the emperor and the members of the royal family.	
	narthex
A portico or a rectangular entrance-hall, parallel with the west end of an early Christian basilica or church.	
	pendentive
Triangular surface used for the transition from the square base of the church to the hemispheric dome.	
	skeuophylakion
('Treasure house' or sacristy) A particular area or room in the churches for keeping vestments and the church furnishings, sacred vessel. Usually take place in the diakonikon, south (at right) from the central apse with the altar.	
	synthronon
Rows of built benches, arranged in a semicircular tier like a theatre, in the apse of a church. On these benches the clergy sat during Divine Liturgy. The bishop sat on the cathedra at the top of the synthronon.	
	tympanum (lunette)
(Rom., Byz.) The arched panel (lunette) inside an arch or an arcosolium.	
	vault
A semi-cylindrical roof.	

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Quotations

The first inauguration of the church of Hagia Sophia according to the Chronicon Paschale

Ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς συνόδου τῶν ἐπισκόπων οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ἡμέρας τοῦ ἐνθρονισθῆναι τὸν Εὐδόξιον ἐπίσκοπον Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τὰ ἐγκαίνια τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως ἐτελέσθη δι' ἐτῶν λδ' μικρῶ πρόσω ἀφ' οὗ θεμελίους κατεβάλετο Κωνσταντῖνος νικητής, σεβαστός. ἐγένετο δὲ καὶ τὰ ἐγκαίνια αὐτῆς ἐπὶ τῶν προκειμένων ὑπάτων πρὸ ις' καλανδῶν μαρτίων, ἥτις ἐστὶ μῆνος περὶ τοῦ ιδ'. εἰς τὰ ἐγκαίνια προσήγαγεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖος Αὐγουστος ἀναθέματα πολλά, κειμήλια χρυσᾶ καὶ ἀργυρᾶ μεγάλα καὶ διάλιθα χρυσοῦ ἀπλώματα τοῦ ἀγίου θυσιαστηρίου πολλά, ἔτι μὴν καὶ εἰς τὰς θύρας τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀμφίθυρα χρυσᾶ διάφορα καὶ εἰς τοὺς πυλεῶνας τοὺς ἕξω χρυσοῦ ποικίλα.

Chronicon Paschale, ed. L. Dindorf, 1 (CSHB, Bonn 1832), p. 544

The destruction of the Constantinian Hagia Sophia in 404

μετὰ δὲ τὸν ἄφατον καὶ δυσερμήνευτον ἐκείνον σκότον, φλῶξ ἀπὸ μέσου τοῦ θρόνου, ἐν ᾧ εἰώθει ὁ Ἰωάννης καθέζεσθαι, καθάπερ ἐν μέσῳ σώματι κειμένη καρδία τοῖς λοιποῖς ἐξηγεῖσθαι μέλεσι τὰ τοῦ Κυρίου λόγια, φανεῖσα ἐπεζήτει τὸν ὑποφήτην τοῦ λόγου· ὃν οὐχ εὐρούσα κατεβόσκετο τὴν σκευωρίαν. δεινῶς εἰρπεν διὰ τῶν ἀλύσεων ἐπὶ τὴν στέγην· ἔχεως δὲ δίκην τὴν γαστέρα φαγοῦσα, ἐπὶ νῶτον ἐφέρετο τῶν δωματίων τῆς ἐκκλησίας, “μισθὸν τῆς ἀδικίας” ὥσπερ τὴν ἐπὶ ταύτη ὠρισμένην δίκην ἀποδιδόντος Θεοῦ εἰς σωφρονισμόν καὶ νουθεσίαν τῶν οὐκ εἰδῶτων γε νουθετεῖσθαι <ἦ> διὰ τῆς ὀψεως τῶν τοιούτων θεηλάτων κακῶν.

P.R. Coleman-Norton, *Palladii dialogus de vita S. Joanni Chrysostomi* (Cambridge 1928), p. 62 [= *Patrologia Graeca* 47, col. 35-6]

The Justinianic Hagia Sophia after its second consecration in 562

Οὕτως ἀντολικάς μὲν ἐπ' ἀντυγας ὄμμα τανύσσας
θάμβος ἀειδίητον ἐσόψεαι. ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πάσαις
ἐκφύεται πολύκυκλον ὑπὲρ σκέπας οἶά τις ἄλλη (400)
ἀψὶς ἠερόφοιτος, ἀνευρύνουσα κεραίην
ἠέρι κολπωθεῖσαν, αἰσσει δ' ἄχρι καρῆνου
ἄχρι βαθυκνήμοιο καὶ ἀντυγος, ἥς κατὰ νῶτον
πυθμένας ἐρρίζωσε μέσου κόρυς ἄμβροτος οἴκου.
ὥς ἡ μὲν βαθύκολπος ἀνέσσεται ἠέρι κόγχη, (405)
ὑπόθεν ἀντέλλουσα μία, τρισσοῖσι δὲ κόλποις
νέρθεν ἐπεμβεβαυῖα· διατμηγεῖσα δὲ νῶτοις
πένταχα μοιρηθέντα δοχήϊα φωτὸς ἀνοίγει,
λεπταλέαις ὑάλοις κεκαλυμμένα, τῶν διὰ μέσσης
φαιδρὸν ἀπαστράπτουσα ῥοδόσφυρος ἔρχται ἠώς. (410)

Paul Silentiarius, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae* in *PG* 86.2, col. 2135

The originality of the plan of Hagia Sophia

The design had no close antecedents. It is made up of elements that were current at the time, but these elements, as far as we know, had



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not previously been put together in the same combination. Nor was St. Sophia imitated in the following centuries - that is, not until the Ottoman mosques of the sixteenth century. This uniqueness makes St. Sophia difficult to classify. It has been called a domed basilica because it has a longitudinal axis and rows of columns on either side of the nave, but such a designation does not sufficiently reflect the basic structural elements. According to another analysis, the design of St. Sophia was obtained by splitting Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in half and inserting the central dome between the two halves. It may make better sense to reverse this statement. For if we compare St. Sophia with the adjacent and contemporary church of St. Irene (abstracting, of course, the elements that were introduced into St. Irene in the eighth century), we can see that St. Irene has a better claim to being called a domed basilica, and that the singularity of St. Sophia lies precisely in the intercalation of the "two halves of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus."

C. Mango, *Byzantine Architecture* (London 1986), p. 61

The interior of Hagia Sophia

The design unfolds itself from the centre of the structure. Standing under the apex of the dome, the visitor begins to grasp the huge space. At first glance amorphous, it gradually falls into shapes and the shapes fall into place. From the vertical centre axis, space expands longitudinally into the huge niches to the east and west. It expands beyond, to the east into the forechoir and its apse, to the west into the entrance bay. From the niches, the space moves into the conchs that open diagonally on either side. It rises vertically into the main dome, gropes along its rim, sinks into the half-dome, widens and moves farther into the quarter spheres of the diagonal conchs. The sequence of spatial shapes develops both centrifugally around a middle axis and longitudinally from the entrance bay to the apse. The huge piers that support the arches of the main square and the subsidiary piers to the east and west are pushed aside into the aisles and galleries. In their place the eye encounters smooth, vertical planes; higher up rise the curved surfaces of arches, pendentives, domes and half-domes; and between the piers, two orders of arched colonnades open into aisles and galleries... Clearly articulated by this rhythm of threes, fives and sevens, and clearly disposed, the spatial units are, nevertheless, not clearly delimited. All expand beyond what seem to be their natural borders. The eye wanders beyond the centre square into aisles and galleries whose shapes cannot be grasped. The gaze of the viewer is drawn beyond the curved arcades in the conchs and into the outer bays; yet the overlapping of these arcades with the windows in the outer walls precludes a ready understanding of the relationship between ancillary and main spaces. Within the inner shell, both the spatial volumes and their sequence are all intelligible. But beyond this core, space remains enigmatic to the beholder who is restricted to the nave. The form and interplay of spatial shapes is first established, then denied. Indeed, none of those spatial shapes are contained by the enveloping solids, be they piers, straight or vaulted surfaces. The term solids - in this architecture at least - is a misnomer. The piers are massive enough if seen from the aisles; but they are not meant to be seen. Their bulk is denied by their marble sheathing. The column shafts are huge, measuring two and a half to three feet in diameter, but the colourful marble counters the feeling of massiveness.

Krautheimer R., *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (New Haven-London 1986, revised by R. Krautheimer and Sl. Ćurčić), p. 213-214.

Chronological Table

360: consecration of the Great Church in the reign of Constantius II

404: church damaged by fire during the riot that followed the banishment of the patriarch John Chrysostomos

415: consecration of Theodosius II's Hagia Sophia

532: cathedral burnt during the Nika Riot

537: inauguration of the new domed basilica built by Justinian I

558: the dome collapses, after the earthquake of 557

562: second consecration of the Justinianic church

565-577: works on the patriarchal palace under the patriarch John III Scholasticus



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667-669: Thomaites Hall added to the Patriarchate under Thomas II (or maybe under Thomas I, 607-610)

8th c: mosaics of Christ and saints damaged during Iconoclasm

790: Thomaites Hall damaged by fire and then reconstructed

later years of Michael III's reign (r. 842-867): beginning of the re-decoration of Hagia Sophia with figurative mosaics - the Virgin Mary with Child Christ and the Archangel Gabriel in the apse

after 869: [reign of Basil I (867-886)]: further mosaics added and the west semi-dome restored after the earthquake of 869 (perhaps the four flying buttresses on the west facade of the church also erected at that time)

10th c: new mosaics: Leo I (886-912) above the door leading from the inner narthex into the nave; Alexander (912-913) portrait on the north gallery and the Virgin Mary with Constantine and Justinian I in the south-west porch

989: dome damaged by the earthquake; repairs by the Armenian architect Trdat (work finished in 994)

1042 -1055: mosaic of Christ enthroned between the Emperor Constantine IX (1042-1055) and the Empress Zoe in the south gallery

under John II Comnenos (1118-1143): mosaic of the Emperor and his wife Irene flanking the Mother of God with Child Christ (on a side panel their son Alexios) in the south gallery

1203: Thomaites Hall burnt in the great fire preceding the capture of the city by the crusaders

1204: cathedral spoliated by the crusaders; Baldwin crowned emperor in Hagia Sophia

1205: Hagia Sophia becomes seat of the Latin patriarchate

1261: the Byzantines recapture Constantinople; Hagia Sophia equipped with a new liturgical furnishing (Deesis mosaic in the south gallery dates in the late 13th- or early 14th c)

1317: massive outer buttresses on the east side of the church; some of those on the south and north sides erected by the Emperor Andronicus II (1282-1328)

1346: part of the dome, eastern main arch and semi-dome collapse

1353: repairs of the damaged vaulting of the church finished by the *stratopedarches* Astras and Giovanni Peralta; re-decoration of the dome with the Pantocrator mosaic

1453: fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks; Hagia Sophia converted into a mosque by the Sultan Mehmet II (1421-1481); a medrese (religious school) erected near the mosque

before 1481: first (provisional) minaret erected on the top of a small staircase tower on the south-west corner of Hagia Sophia

Beyazit II (1481-1512): two minarets built, one of them damaged by the earthquake of 1509

1573: beginning of the reconstruction works by the architect Sinan; old minarets demolished and replaced by two new ones

1576: first of the sultan's mausolea to the south of the mosque finished for Selim II

under Murad III (1574-1595): two minarets added



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1618: Byzantine baptistery near the south-west porch of the mosque re-used as a mausoleum of the Sultan Mustafa I

under Ibrahim (1640-1648): ablution fountains built on the south-west corner of the mosque

1717: much of what remained from the Byzantine mosaics inside Hagia Sophia was covered

1738: library of Mahmut I built on the south side of the mosque

1739: şadırvan (fountain) erected in the south-west corner of the mosque precinct

1743: imaret (soup kitchen) built north of the mosque

1754, 1766 and 1802: Ayasofya mosque damaged by earthquakes

1847-1849: complex reconstruction of the building by the Swiss architects Gaspare and Guisepppe Fossati in the reign of Abdülmejid – Byzantine mosaics were uncovered and recorded before covered again with plaster; exterior painted with stripes simulating the alternation of brick and stone bands usual in Byzantine structures; building of the muvakkithane (lodging for a time-keeper at a mosque) and the new medrese; the first thorough architectural survey of Hagia Sophia by W. Salzenberg

1873: demolition of the last standing parts of the Justinianic atrium

1931: beginning of a systematic uncovering and restoration of the mosaics by the Byzantine Institute of America

1934-1935: Ayasofya mosque secularized; becomes a museum

1935: excavations in front of the west facade of Hagia Sophia by A.M. Schneider lead to the discovery of Theodosius II's propyleum and remains of the Justinianic atrium

1943: marble baptismal font found in the court between the Baptistery and the south aisle of Hagia Sophia

1980s: clearing of the Skeuophylakion and limited excavations immediately north of the north outer buttress of Hagia Sophia

1992-1999: restoration of the dome mosaics (project supported by UNESCO)

1993-late 1990s: removal of the modern exterior plaster on the south-west corner and partially also on the east facade

2000: restoration of the dome mosaics (project supported by World Monuments Fund)

2005-2007: restoration of the sultans' mausolea as well as of the Baptistery)