

Hagia Sofia



A symbol of harmony, tolerance and peace Hagia Sophia, the Omayyad Mosque, as well as other important churches converted to mosques, grandiosely stand as a meeting point of world's religions throughout the centuries.

Where Is Hagia Sofia Located?

Hagia Sofia located at the heart of old Istanbul is considered the most important historic monument and the gem of Istanbul, having a special significance as Turkey's first mosque (and the model for many others).

The walls of Hagia Sophia represent a blend between Islamic arts and symbols of Christianity. Hagia Sophia was a Church (Christian cathedral) for almost 1,000 years, a Mosque for almost 500 and today is a museum.

It's about 1,200 years older than the Blue Mosque, 1,100 years older than St. Paul's Cathedral in London, 700 years older than Westminster Abbey, about 600 years older than Notre Dame de Paris, and at least 400 years older than the famous pyramid of El Castillo of Chichen Itza.



Which Emperor Built The Hagia Sofia Church?

The site upon which Hagia Sophia now stands was once the site of an ancient pagan temple, some remnants of which remain in the current structure — like the dolphin design on the column to the right.

Originally built by Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor, Hagia Sophia was a grand symbol of Christianity to the world. Constantine wanted to make Constantinople the New Rome with Hagia Sophia, known then as MegaleEkklesia (“Great Church”), the seat of Christianity.

Destroyed by fire in 532, the new Byzantine emperor, Justinian, decided that rather than simply recreate the original, he would commission something far more expansive.

Who Were The Hagia Sophia's Architects?

Architects, mathematicians, scholars, engineers, physicists, Isidore and Anthemius were tasked in 531 by Emperor Justinian with the construction of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople the capital of the Byzantine Empire, the holiest Greek orthodox church dedicated to God's wisdom.

Isidore and Anthemius represented the Greek architectural science. The shape of Hagia Sophia comes directly from the ancient Greek Stoa Basileios or Royal Stoa, where the people used to have gatherings. The sculptures, the mosaics and the art all reflect the glorious past of the Greek spirit.

Cathedrals typically take a long time to build. Notre Dame de Paris took about 80 years, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome about 120 years, and St. Paul's in London a comparatively brisk 35 years. Impressively, Hagia Sophia was completed within 5 years only, from 532 to 537. Considering the resources of 6th century and the size of the church, this is unbelievable speed.

What Is The Meaning Of Hagia Sofia?

It is known in Greek as Hagia Sophia, in Turkish as Aya Sofia, that means "divine wisdom."

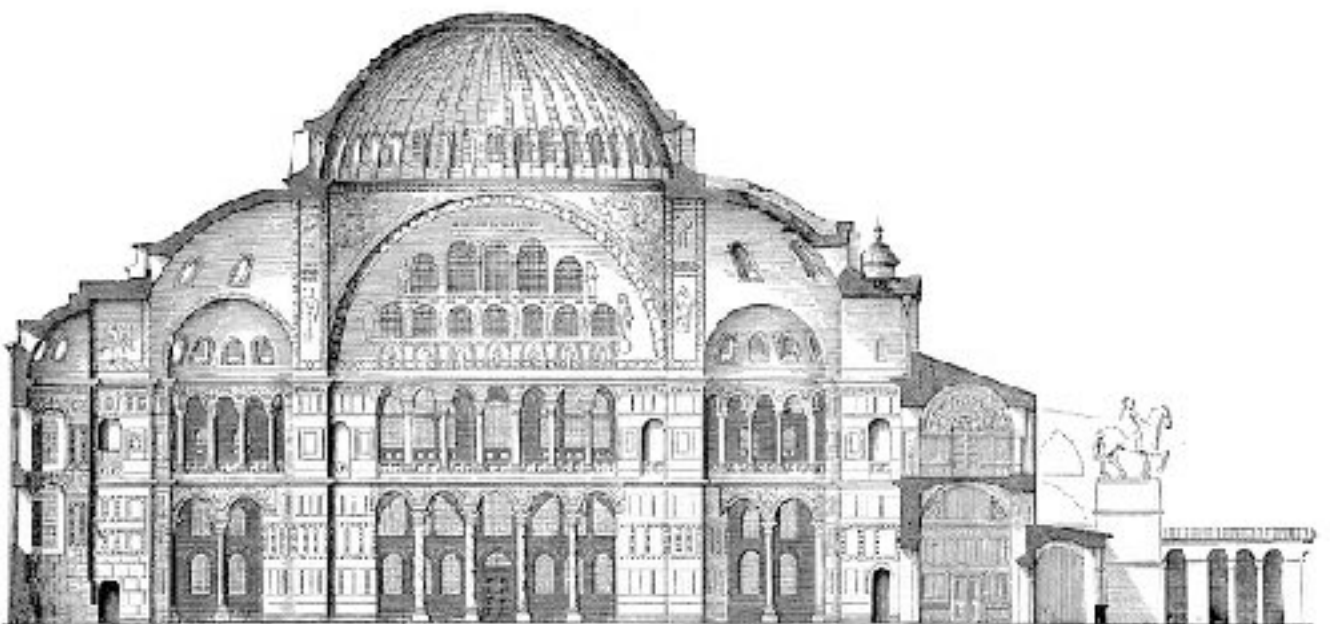


What Was The Original Purpose Of The Hagia Sophia?

Emperor Justinian built Hagia Sofia to consolidate his sovereignty. He wanted the Church to stand as a “symbol of glory for the Byzantine Empire and the largest Church of Christendom in the world, a Church that would be the greatest building erected to “the Glory of God,” even surpassing King Solomon temple in Jerusalem.

While the building itself made a statement of grandeur, the material used in constructing Justinian’s Church made an assertion of Christian dominance over paganism and political legitimization. Remnants from temples, columns, and stone were used from all over the empire. Columns were even imported from Rome, which became a visual affirmation of political legitimacy with the Empire. Spolia and pillars of ancient temples were also incorporated into the walls of the structure. Pillars and arches from the Temple of the Sun from Baalbek, famous Temple of Artemis from Ephesus, Delian Apollo of Minerva from Athens, and Temple of Cybele from Cyzicus were incorporated into the Church’s structure.

The pieces from pagan temples were incorporated into the Hagia Sophia as a means of incorporating cultural memory of its past and showing it now under the control and authority of the Christians; “a political statement of Christian hegemony.





When Did Hagia Sofia Become A Mosque?

May 29, 1453 CE, the Ottomans conquered Constantinople under Sultan Mehmet II. His first official act was to convert the Church of Hagia Sophia into a Mosque. With this conversion to a mosque, Muslim and Ottoman symbols, which can still be seen today, were added: a wooden minaret as well as a mihrab that faced Mecca and



minbar along with sacred relics and battle trophies. Much of the Christian original was left intact, which gave it a transitional appearance. Because of Islamic prohibition against graven images, the mosaics had to be removed. Since Mehmet's sense of history and art, he did not want them destroyed so they were covered over with plaster. Mehmet was determined on making a statement of conquest, but he wanted to respect the history and culture associated with the structure. Besides imitating Alexander, the Great in his appreciation of culture and history, Mehmet too had a "scholar's interest on historic authenticity".

Hagia Sofia As A Museum

In 1923, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk made the Hagia Sofia into a museum. As a museum, this structure remains a testimony to its past, Pagan, Christian and Muslim alike, standing to tell a story, in its structure and stones. Is considered the common heritage of the world, its walls representing a blend between Islamic arts and symbols of Christianity.

Symbols

Most of the Christian features were removed but many others are still there, together with some pagan symbols that we can often find in churches. This is because Christians have adopted and converted pagan symbols since the early times of its expansion.



The trident and the dolphins (above) are related to the God Neptune (or Poseidon in Greek) and the dolphins are always associated to this God as well as to the legend of Atlantis.



The iconography of Virgin Mary and Jesus come from the ancient Egyptian tradition: they are in fact the representation of Goddess Isis and Horus. The halo refers to the God Sun (Ra in ancient Egyptian mythology).



Another representation of tridents and dolphins, indicating some form of worship to Neptune/Poseidon and a reference to Atlantis.



On each column on the upper gallery there is a capital with monograms. This one in particular is unique – it represents the Ankh (the Egyptian key of life) and a Freemasonry symbol.



The symbol of the sun, right at the ceremony place

Just on the side of the ceremony place, the red circle in the decorations refers to the Sun or Solar Disc (Ra, in the Egyptian mythology).

Stone remains of the basilica ordered by Theodosius II, showing the Lamb of God. The twelve lambs, each symbolizing one of the twelve apostles, dating back to 415.

