

Hagia Sophia: Meeting point of civilizations

Istanbul's most famous landmark, entwining the legacies of medieval Christianity, the Muslim Ottoman Empire, and Turkey's more recent secular past, is once again at the heart of a long-standing ideological and political battle

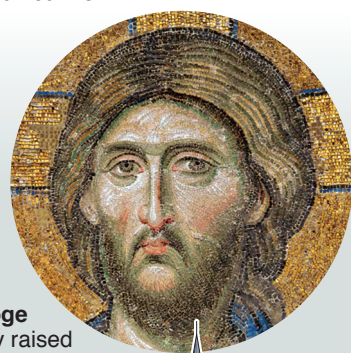


HAGIA SOPHIA (Holy Wisdom)

Masterpiece of Byzantine architecture. Three aisles separated by columns with galleries above. Windows below dome give impression canopy floats on air

Dome: Four triangular **pendentives** on marble piers allow 32m-wide circular structure to sit on square base, with two semi-domes for extra support

Mosaics
Surviving examples mostly date from 9th-13th centuries



Medallion

Sultan's Loge
18th century raised kiosk allowed sultans to pray without being seen

Mihrab
Niche indicating direction of Mecca. Located on site of former altar

Minarets
Added after Turkish conquest

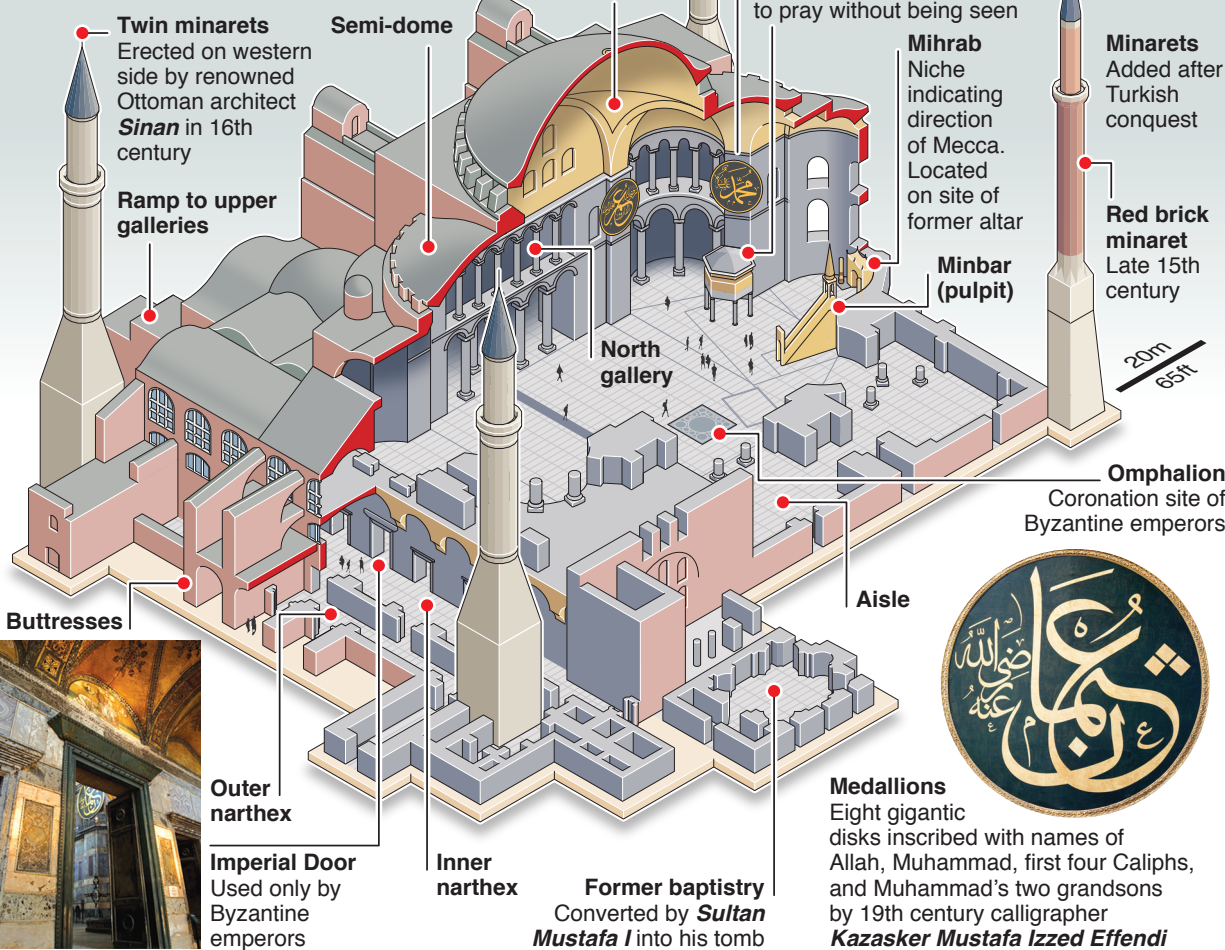
Red brick minaret
Late 15th century

Omphalion
Coronation site of Byzantine emperors



Medallions

Eight gigantic disks inscribed with names of Allah, Muhammad, first four Caliphs, and Muhammad's two grandsons by 19th century calligrapher **Kazasker Mustafa Izzed Effendi**



532-537: Hagia Sophia
built under direction of Byzantine emperor **Justinian I**, on site of earlier church

Designed by Greek architects **Anthemios of Tralles** and **Isidoros of Miletos**, skilled in geometry. It was world's largest cathedral for almost 1,000 years



1453: Converted to mosque (**Ayasofya Camii**) following Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. **Sultan Mehmed II** renames city Istanbul

Ottoman architects remove or plaster over Orthodox symbols inside and add minarets to structure



1934: Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder and first president of secular republic of Turkey, closes mosque and turns building into museum

2020: President Erdogan signs decree to convert Hagia Sophia into mosque after decision by Turkey's highest court, annulling museum status

